~~Containment~~ – lack & leadership in a Nepal firm (1)

What it is, what it means and how it can be supported in leadership

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Contents

A note to the reader

I invite you to make a conscious choice in epistemological lens when reading this. You may choose to read within a Western academic / Cartesian frame and perceive binaries and contradiction. You may choose towards a non-dualist perspective and perceive substance, an 'and/both' frame. You may choose both and also something different. The text may leave you feeling slightly uncomfortable and also still curious – the discussion is problematized.

Executive summary

~~Containment,~~ problematisation in a psychologically safe space, is proposed as a practice of leadership and its development. I work from multiple perspectives, Western and non-Western to develop the concept of ~~containment~~ and better understand what, how and why it may be in practice. The aim is to draw on philosophies, practice and understanding from many cultures, an 'and/both' approach, to avoid being limited by the hegemony of Western epistemologies. It's a reflexive journey

I explore the array of assumptions held in the practice and study of leadership, suggesting that the most helpful approach is to keep the question of what it is alight and energised. I use a P-Model, developed from Critical Leadership Studies scholars, to facilitate this. Development, specifically leadership development is critiqued, noting the paradox of spending vast sums on 'transformative' competency based programs that fail to create 'supermen' whilst showing a deep unwillingness to spend on inner growth. I apply the P-model to this to understand what might be happening aiming to shift the balance towards inner development e.g. negative capabilities *and also* impacts performance.

Epistemological (and ontological) plurality both underpins the study and also directs the direction of the methodology. Starting with a Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (after Charmaz) the study works with a Nepalese Multi-National Enterprise (MNE) engaging with participants in a series of different interventions. The initial rounds of coding generated many dark themes around power flows, vulnerability i.e. lack of ~~containment.~~ Reflecting on the impact my own state had I recoded for positives, presenting both to the participants as a strength-lack dialectic. I am now engaging with different thinkers to keep re-grounding the emerging constructs anticipating that new perspectives will result in fewer biases.

Initial themes highlight 'Place' (context), specifically transparent, fair structures, systems and enactment of these as a critical factor.

> ~~Containment?~~ Sufficiently confident and courageous to be open, to be fully connected, alive with not-knowing. Vulnerability. Being with and of the people and place, present in what has come before and in the 'what else' across and beyond our eco-system. Energised enough for momentum. Mature enough for holding, for reflexive (in)action. Purposeful, present and steadying. A perspective on leadership?

This study focuses on leadership and its development as a dynamic art of both positive and negative capabilities requiring attention to both extrinsic and intrinsic processes. The substantive area is a function of leadership that, for now, I refer to as ~~containment~~. The study challenges and also supports positions taken by both mainstream and Critical Leadership Studies and is not limited by Western philosophical constructs adopting an **'and/both'** approach. The intention is to ask useful questions and enable others to do the same. The study and this paper represent an academic, professional and personal journey in non-linear time and through multiple cultural spaces circling around core constructs of leadership and development with, I hope, sufficient insight and analysis to show academic rigour, but also leaving them problematized and therefore alive and current.
It is a starting point for useful conversations.

Flow

In this paper I lay out some essential underpinnings, we then move through an exploration of: leadership; development and leadership development, the three basic assumption areas on which the study is predicated. We parallel (in summary) the journey I have taken in wrestling with and critiquing these constructs and how my position on each has evolved (so far). I go on to share what I understand by ~~containment~~ as an aspect of leadership, potentially an essential aspect, and explain why I have placed it *sous rature* (under erasure).

The second part of the paper describes the primary research – investigation into ~~containment~~ in an organisational context, the rationale behind the methodology selected and a critical evaluation of it in use
Finally I discuss what has emerged so far, what questions this raises and what comes next for the study.

Epistemological pluralism (anarchism?) - underpinnings

Social construction - constructivism – the interconnectedness of everything
From positivist beginnings in the natural sciences I have been evolving in big and small step changes towards a constructivist position. Authors such as Latour (Latour, 1987) opened my eyes to re-positioning science as a belief system rather than the revelation of unquestionable truths; Friere (1970) captured the political, power dimensions of knowing and later Gergen's (2013) pragmatic social construction made sense without disappearing into absurdity. However it goes beyond that, towards a questioning of Western epistemologies and ontology (a cultural constructivism?) gained through decades of lived anthropological 'study' of other places I've been 'at home' in (Chaffer, 2016). In Buddhism one might say this is an acceptance of three of the four noble seals of Dharma: interconnectedness, impermanence and particularly that all contaminated emotions are suffering (we falsely divide the world into subject and objects and 'then continually grasp for things we think are separate from ourselves' O'Brien, B. 2017 from HH Dalai Lama)

This study has a constructivist tilt. It is as much a study of myself-in-the-world as it is of the world and themes which I am immersed in. The notion of a world divided into binaries is in itself quite strange: understanding is relational and contextualised. Objectivity just a perspective on and from the same interconnected,

interdependent whole: subject-object (*vis a vis* Buber's I-Thou[1], Taoism yin-yang) and, more fully, the transpersonal subject-object relationship and trans-environmental relationship of us-in-environment-and-time.

This is perhaps a pluralist epistemology (and sometimes, when I'm feeling overwhelmed by the gendered, colonialist hegemony of academia as a self-perceived universal truth or way, verging on Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism (Feyerabend, 1993)

'Proper' academics at this point often situate their study within a field. Whilst I can say that aspects of the literature review and perspectives in conversations with bright thinkers, come from Leadership Studies, Critical Leadership Studies, Philosophy, Psychodynamics, Organisational Development, Anthropology, Evolutionary Psychodynamics, Sociology, Psychology and even Radical Embodied Cognitive Science, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and more I'm not sure I am able to or want to say with any confidence within which 'field' this study sits. The categorisation process seems to be an anathema to what is essentially the stuff of human relationships with each other and the world, and not specifically framed in one context or another. The closest fits would be something akin to *post-Critical Leadership Studies* and perhaps *Leadership Psychodynamics.*

Exploring the key assumptions – context

Globally Leadership Development (LD) is a multi-billion dollar industry (Ardichvilli 2016, Feser et al 2017). It doesn't deliver on its promises (Gurjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014; Kaiser & Curphy, 2013; Sinar et al, 2015 in Ardichvili 2016), yet continues to attract ever increasing numbers of firms and individuals seeking organisational and personal transformation.
We've seen the little old man, but rather disturbingly continue to believe in Oz.
What's going on?
Why and how is this phantasy sustained?

In this section we take a look behind the 'curtain', questioning the assumptions held in: leadership, development and leadership development, in an attempt to understand the chimera and why it is so powerfully enticing. The aim is to move towards a leadership development that works).

Leadership
What is leadership?
At the start of this journey I became to some degree obsessed with trying to understand what leadership means, what it is. Driven by feelings of foolishness that I really couldn't grasp or articulate one of the core areas of my study I spent many months reading, critiquing, discussing everything I could on leadership, leaders and leading. I trawled historical papers, attempted to capture and comprehend all of the many leadership collocations (strong, sustainable, relational, servant, critical - the list is almost endless), learned a lot about different ideas, about different case studies, theorised about leader identities and even came up with my own working definition[2] (Chaffer, J 2016 blog) but was never fully satisfied. I was not alone. The question still reverberates around academia (for example, International Studying Leadership conference, Dec 2016) and the lack of '*an*' answer is apparently a major contributor to the failure of LDPs (Kaiser & Curphy, 2013).

Leadership seems to be all things to all people. Everything from the near-deity like Heroes of the Great Man tribe (pick any of the 'how to be a great leader' books, HBR /Forbes-style articles, TED talks etc. *a la* Walsh, Sinek, Jobs, Kotter, North's erstwhile '*authentiques*[3]' and even Sandberg's masculinised leaners) where

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[1] http://www.iep.utm.edu/buber/
[2] Leadership as agency (empowered, encultured decision making and action) with recognition (from self, from others)
[3] Reference to Marcel Pagnol's Jean de Florette who goes to the countryside in search of 'authenticity' ('Je suis venu ici pour cultiver l'authentique') only to be cheated by his local collaborators in their lust for money and land. The duplicity

leadership is contained in one all-mighty leader, to leaderships as practice (e.g. Raelin, J 2016), process (e.g. Tourish, D. et al 2014), as fundamentally about power and control (e.g. Alevesson, M; Collinson, D. multiple publications), a social construct (e.g. Grint, K 2005) or merely an 'empty signifier' of language that has little grounding in 'reality' (Kelly, 2014 in Kempster 2016).

Perhaps I was/ we were asking the wrong question?

Stepping out of the frame
I returned to my roots and found insight in evolutionary leadership theories. Theories and practice from psychology-psychodynamics also added depth and challenge. Finally going beyond Western thinking and delving into both etic and emic investigations into aboriginal, indigenous peoples and leadership; and semi-immersion with various Asian theologies. These three different lenses enabled a step back from the intimacy of the discourse within largely organisationally anchored fields. A change in perspective. A suspicion that academia was just talking to itself about itself creating 'unrelenting triviality' (Tourish, 2015 p137-8), specifically that the two Western leadership fields[4] are as co-dependent as light and shade. A growing uneasiness that the ontology of dissecting, categorising and decontextualizing in pursuit of 'knowledge' is a poor fit for an inherently relational, context-situated entity. Were the social sciences *acting up* to meet big brother natural sciences expectations, and in so doing, missing the trick? Was the West taking the (very) long way round to what has been understood, if differently articulated, in other cultures for an age?

Seduction
In a microcosm of processes running in the wider academic, professional worlds I realised I had also been seduced by the glamour of the leadership and unwittingly bought in to a competitive, mass myth creation process: find the 'answer' to leadership, find the 'answer' to … life? Despite knowing the extent of its cultural bias (Nesbitt, 2003) had I also become a victim of the Fundamental/ Leadership Attribution Error (Hackman, 2002), placing leaders *at cause* for life's highs and lows?

I've come to the conclusion it's not the question that is wrong. What might be 'wrong' (or just less useful, albeit lucrative) is spending a great deal of time actively pursuing the 'solution', the one truth to rule them all.

Problematisation
The act of questioning, the *problematisation* of leadership, is where the potentiality lays. That is to say, the quiet holding of the slippery undefinedness of leadership as something that we don't fully understand. *This* invites us to keep questioning and exploring, *this* has usefulness in the generative process of becoming, of 'development'. Being comfortable staying with the uncomfortableness of the not-knowing and not abandoning the problem nor entering the goal-driven race to solution (and subsequent dereliction of the very-thing-we-were-seeking to 'the past' and to acceptance): *this* has energy and potentiality.

Reflexive inaction
Simpson, French & Harvey's (2002) extrapolation of Keat's 'negative capabilities' into a leadership practice they call 'reflexive inaction' explicitly discusses the ability to stay in the discomfort of unknowing i.e. holding with a problem. Grint's 2005 paper, whilst making no mention of Simpson et al's model, also asserts that leadership that ''is often constituted as indecisiveness" may be the most appropriate response to complex, 'intractable' 'Wicked' problems. He claims that such 'Wicked' problems require leadership that stays with the problem, that respects there may be no solution as such, but that movement to 'better' is possible and is likely to come

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hinges on a play on words as they indeed cultivate their 'authentiques' (carnations) and Jean dies. I reference this as a metaphor for the double standards and double meanings around 'authenticity' and 'authentic leadership'
[4] Mainstream leadership and Critical Leadership Studies

through drawing multiple sources of expertise into a problematized space and purposely holding with the problem in an aroma of creativity and innovation.

My proposition is that both creation and holding of a space that is 'safe' (contained) and the ability to bring people to and hold them in a process of problematisation (in that space) are practices of leadership, and that such practices are highly relevant, if not essential, to leadership in our volatile, unstable, complex and ambiguous world of increasingly Wicked problems (Chaffer, J 2017 [blog]). There is therefore an imperative to understand how to develop such practices for the betterment of leadership.

At a loss for a name I have (temporarily) called the combination of processes of problematisation and psychological safety ~~containment~~.[5] The placing of ~~containment~~ *sous rature* (under erasure, from Heidegger), signifies the problematisation inherent in the word and also in my attempt so far to grasp and articulate this state or process.

Of note: Heidegger also intended the *sous rature* to represent *both* presence *and* absence in the text. Thus the *sous rature* also keeps in the mind the underpinning approach of this study: the dialectic *and/ both* positions found for example, in the Tao, the Vedic tradition, Jain' Syādvāda[6], Nagarjuna's middle way (all of which, by the way, also guide us to question everything, even their own existence) *and also* Western epistemologies.

Critiquing leadership: the P model

Critical Leadership Studies, as noted above, takes a critical approach to hegemonic, essentialist leadership and leader studies. It's founded in a "concern to examine leadership power dynamics" (Collinson, 2011, p181.) and goes about this with a diverse array of approaches and "an eclectic set of premises, frameworks and ideas" (*ibid.).* As discussed above leadership-CLS seem to have become a little stuck in their co-dependent positions, however CLS has also produced some useful and interesting perspectives. In 2013 Keith Grint introduced a typology of leadership: 'Leadership as….. Position, Person, Results and Process. Later Brad Jackson (2017, amended the Results to Performance and reconfigured the idea from typology to a set of lenses with which to interrogate leadership. He also added Purpose (also purposefulness) and, drawing from human geography and Maori traditions, Place. Place represents location, locale, sense of place (after Agnew, 1987 in Jackson, 2017). I would also add group field, shared space (e.g. ba 場) and echoes of what came before (cynefin in Welsh, *turangawaewae* in Maori).

In this study I've used the 'P's to enable useful questioning and the holding open of a critical, enquiring mind-set around leadership and leadership development: they provide a framework for the problematized space. It is a gateway into different ways of thinking around leadership – to open up thinking, to add flavour.

I've taken the liberty of adding three other lenses: Power (power dynamics) as a fundamental critiquing point whatever the epistemology/ ontology; Practice - what we do, how we bring others with us, as a consistent approach founded in artfulness, attributes and attitudes and, lastly, Problematisation – potentially also a fundamental, a base approach to all the other leadership 'P's.

This is visualised in the diagram below, aiming to show how I see evolutionary processes, other cultures ways-of-being, psychology, leadership and other Western schools connecting around the leadership problem.

For my investigation the 'P' gateway helps maintain the *and/both* perspective – it encourages a focus on similarities between the epistemologies, ontologies and possibly also methodological approach. If nothing else it provides an accessible *bridging language* between the various lenses and fields.

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[5] At this stage of the study I still hold open the question the relationship between safe space and problematisation. There are multiple possibilities (cause-effect; parts of a greater whole etc)
[6] Many sidedness, multiple perspectives

Lenses of leadership (from CLS)
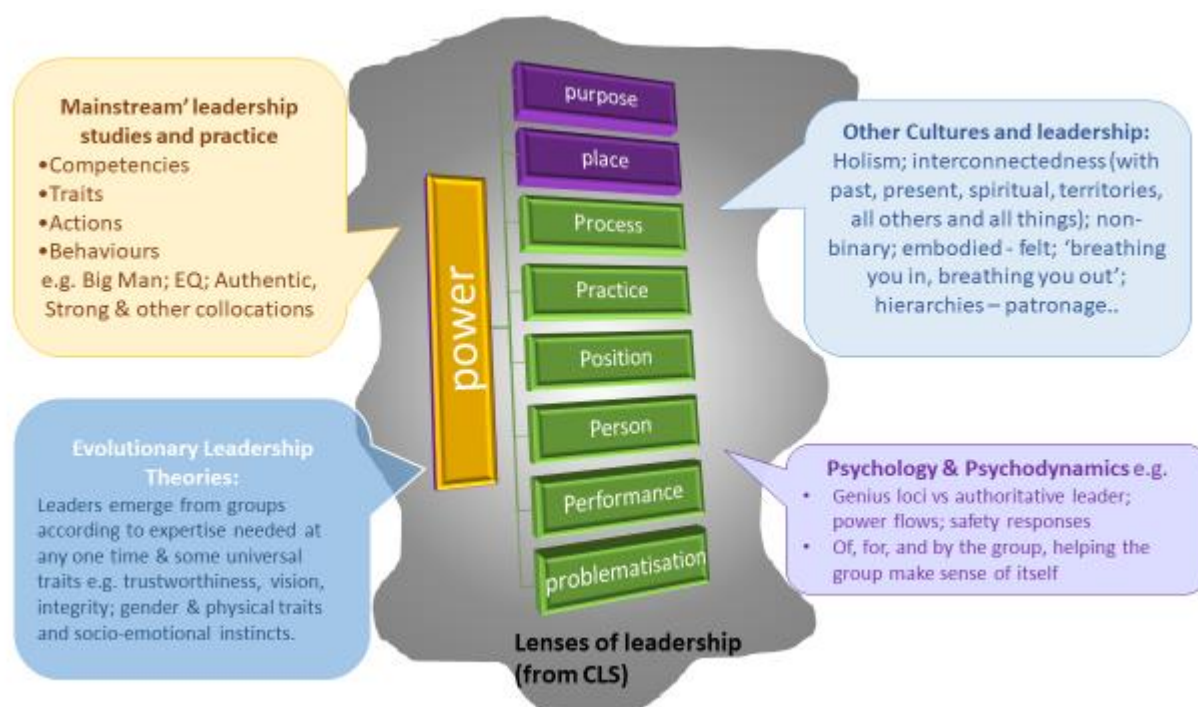
In summary, the problem of leadership is intrinsic to both the discussion on leadership, and also an essential facet of possibly a core leadership practice, ~~containment.~~

Development and Leadership Development

As a development professional working globally from a wide pedagogical toolkit and academic grounding the question of 'development' is something I live, breathe and continue to explore as part of my personal and professional journey. I've therefore chosen not to explicitly explore 'development' at this stage in the study.

My current position on development is that different pedagogies have their different place, and that, as with leadership, a key aspect of the art of development (of self, of others) is being able to deploy the right approach at the right time – place, its situatedness. It's about liberation from unhelpful, no longer useful; challenge and support to step courageously, curiously forward; gathering new stuff (knowledge, skills, capabilities, tactics, qualities…..) and the self-other-situation knowledge to apply the 'stuff' effectively. Development comes in many forms, often where it's least expected. The trick, in my experience, is keeping the choices alive and responding honestly to what is real, what is actual with, within or in spite of clients' demands, program schedules and other factors. Some examples: release from oppression came via a twist on highly didactic teaching-learning in post-conflict E Africa so flipping Freire on its pedagogical head (Chaffer, J 2006); creating a spark through mindful practice in within the very regulated framework an MBA context (Ralphs, N 2016); coaching walks where the power of place is key; lectures for the knowledge hungry; reading, reflecting, writing; radicalised experiential learning (Lemmey, R 2017) – they all have their time and place.

My bias is towards the facilitated experiential, reflexive process for group type, external (transferred- learnt) development, and a mindful, engaged, disciplined approach to internal development (what Petrie (2014) calls vertical processes). Whatever the context or process my approach is strongly informed by my value position around power, equality, courage and trust summed up in some short 'reminders': respect all, fear none; ask not tell, we are all brilliantly different and equal etc.

~~Containment~~ – a core leadership process? Jo Chaffer 2017, Lancaster University

The development 'gap'

Whilst I have made a conscious choice not to explore the development aspect of leadership development there seems to be a similar, possibly unconscious bias in the leadership development literature. Relatively (to the size of the industry and the interest in LD) there's a resounding lack of study and critique of the pedagogical approach, format etc of leadership development.

What research there is seems to be largely in the organisational context and originates in Human Resource studies and CLS. Scholars in these fields have started to question how we stimulate development, for example how we teach leadership (Collinson, D. & Tourish, D., 2015 proof copy) and to propose innovative approaches e.g. mindsets for experiential learning (Heslin & Keating, 2016 and more generally Hezlett, 2016); mindfulness (Ralph, N 2015); action learning (Volz-Peacock et al 2016) etc.

Leadership development – what's out there and why

Globally the vast majority of leadership development offers (or programs, LDPs) focus on competency, capability and skills development (Day, 2014).

Such LDPs appear to fall into roughly two camps[7]: those that focus on technical skills and techniques for example around strategy and visioning and actually should more properly be called Organisational Development or Organisational Change programmes. In the other, rapidly growing camp, are those LDPs whose competency and capability enhancement promises to bring about transformational change from mere mortal manager to superhuman leader (Day, 2014). The former may be disguised as the latter and the actual delivery may be a mix of both OD and Superman content.

Why the fixation with competencies, capabilities and skills?

Firstly, metrics. Common to many other development programmes (and more widely, education and youth work) there is a well-justified critique that we teach / train / develop only what we can (easily) measure. Metrics, such as quantitative self-scoring 'tests' that 'prove' improvement are easy to generate for competency based courses. People seem to like both completing them and believing them (it did work! My money was well spent!). They're even known as 'happy sheets'. The LDP then becomes self-justifying and 'successful'.

However it is far less easy to 'prove' the relevance of programme content and outcomes to leadership. It's also notoriously difficult to transfer decontextualized 'development' back into the leadership (work) place, let alone measure it.

Secondly, transformation sells.

If transformation maybe not to superhero, but at least towards being a 'better' self is the selling point and, as so many people are buying, we can assume it is also the desire of millions of aspirant or actual leaders. The implication, or sometimes the direct assertion, that the Superman program will transform one's character, traits and even identity is worrisome. Aside from the ethical issues this raises, the notion that such deep aspects could be affected by such relatively superficial training schemes is, to my mind, a nonsense[8]. But clearly they sell, and to some of the smartest people![9] Why do we expect to be able to shortcut our way to greatness? Do we secretly hope a little of the magic essence of the leadership gurus will leak into us? Just 'unleash the leader in you'[10], right?

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[7] There are of course leadership development offers that fall outside of the 'measurable = successful' bracket, such as Sutherland and Jelinek's arts based program (2015), but these are relative rarities in the global offer

[8] It's a view I intend to evidence later in the study.

[9] Leadership development was worth over $50bn globally last year according to McKinsey (Feser et al, 2017)

[10] 'Unleash the leader in you' produced 15,200,000 Google hits

As Wendell Berry notes in 'A Remarkable Man' we spend decades of our lives and thousands of dollars educating (and developing) people but "not a dime on character" (Berry, W 1975 p26). Yet character is what we value, what we remember, what we seem to want from leaders, in leadership. We want maturity, great decision-making, integrity, trustworthiness etc but we don't want to pay for it. We want the practical wisdom, but we don't want to do the hard work or enter into long, uncertain, un-measurable processes with non-linear development. We continue to invest billions in quick (and quicker) fixes, doing what we've always done, despite the ample evidence (ref) from the fields of education, youth work and others that 'formal' education, short, sharp experiential outdoor courses, blended work based learning or any other contextualised / decontextualized, outcomes based programme, course type development pedagogies don't actually give us what we want. But we continue to kid ourselves.

Investment in self-development seems to be legitimised in very few professions or practice areas[11]. Returning to the P gateway, could it be because such internal programs don't have a tangible link to the most visible leadership aspects of Position and Performance?

My proposal is to create a reasoned argument for, and in future work, a working model of practice with appropriately consumable narrative for internal self-transformation as a leadership development model that also impacts performance and supports leadership through position. The *and/both* approach.
The first step in this process is the investigation into containment as a practice (?) that resonates with most, if not all of the P lenses of leadership.

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[11] Examples I have found to date and that I intend to look towards to help substantiate the valuing of vertical development in terms of cash and time are: the therapeutic professions; spiritual practitioners; the arts and possibly also philosophy.

~~Containment~~ an exploration

What is containment? The term comes from psychology and psychotherapy originally and refers to the safety, the space transpersonal space that the client(s) and therapist operate in. In this context the responsibility for containing lies with the therapist.

Many years of global practice lead me to believe that what happens with leadership and groups, and maybe even organisations, is more than just safety. I also noticed: the transformative 'big steps' formed through the transpersonal space of groups 'in flow'; the physicality of the energised force-field of sitting across the boundaries of comfort/discomfort with direction / from purpose, and equally the physical-emotional intensity of 'holding' the space

~~Containment~~ may require leadership (individual, distributed, collective) that is purposeful, predicated around the creation of place, maintains a problematized state working with multiple processes such as noticing, calibrating, motivating etc ideally in an ebbing and flowing power dynamic. It's very much about the quality, character of the people involved (agency) and should also be a soft contributor to long term, sustained performance.
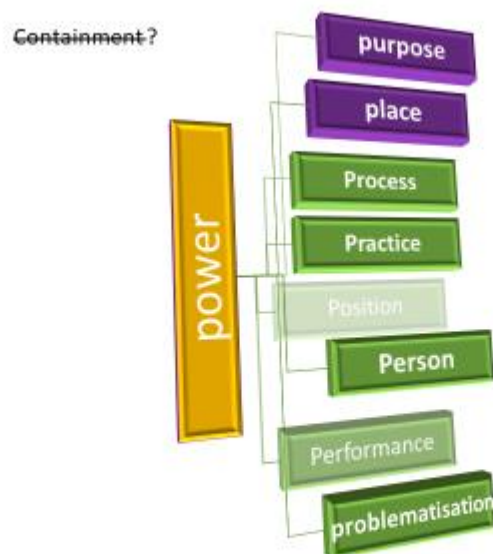
Perspectives contributing towards the concept of ~~containment~~

Through incidental and directed readings and conversations I draw together the following informative perspectives on what may / may not contribute to ~~containment~~ as a leadership process:

From Buber: the intersubjective, the world of relations 'melting of the 'between''

From Correale: the felt 'atmosphere' + historical 'residue' of the group

From Ringer: this metaphor has the facilitator (leader) as egg shell and group as egg. And their relative importance for stability / safety as the egg 'cooks'.

From Trivers: the subconscious socio-moral emotions affecting indiv and group behaviours

From Bion, W: 'automatic' group of feelings, power (cf the work group)

From Rogers, Jaspers et al: time of uncertainty (creative / destructive)

From Neri, C: the relational space containing subject-object of group, its preciousness

From Nagarjuna: presencing our emotions w/out attachment

From French, Harvey & Simpson: adapting Keats work in being comfortable in un-knowing; consciously not acting

From Kitaro / Nonaka: intersubjective space often for knowledge creation

From Evans & Sinclair: aboriginal arts leadership though being of the earth, of its history, spirits and nature

From Welsh: the legacy of past (people, experience) held in a place

From Brown; from Thinking School: emotions and behaviours arising thru 'lack' of safety

Diagram labels: The egg shell and the egg · Group field · Primitive group · Syncretic sociality · I-Thou · Intersubjective space held sacred · Reciprocal altruism · Breathing you in – breathing you out · liminality · Negative capabilities / reflexive inaction · Ba場 · Cynefin · vulnerability · Holding - territories

Methodology: a starting point

After in-depth consideration of Action Research, Critical Social Theory and other qualitative methodologies I landed on Charmaz' Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (CGTM) as a way in to starting the face to face aspect of the study. The highly structured approach seemed an 'easy' set of instructions to follow, it seemed to qualify with what I figured was expected of 'proper researchers' and Charmaz' eloquent refute of Glasers' somewhat dogmatic views that researchers should not be 'forcing GTM' (Glaser, 1992 in Bryant & Charmaz, 2010) i.e. should be unreflexive, empty of theory and by inference also empty of experience) allayed many of my qualms around getting back into tired binaries, leaky positivism and imitations of natural science. The abductive approach correlated with my lived experience and Susan Leigh Star's moving piece bringing a feminine voice that allowed for emotions into CGTM (Leigh Star, 2010) finally tipped the scales.
Not wanting to be perceived as lazy (Suddaby, 2006) I read all I could on the Method and created a research plan that was as close to clean CGTM as I could make it. The substantive area was ~~containment,~~ I stopped reading and started the conversations.

What has happened so far, where, with whom (a summary)

I gained permission from the Director and Board of a large (10,000+ employees) S Asian MNE that I'd been working with for the past 5 years. I chose this scenario because a) I already knew the organisation and people

well enough to be able to get a 'read' on situations; b) they trusted me and gave me access all areas; c) I specifically did not want to work in a Western organisation, needing to maintain the discomfort of being in an a-cultural position and to inform the field with something other than N American[12] sourced narrative. On a pragmatic note they were the first to respond and I wanted to get going.

On Nepal

Bhande on the road to Pokhara – an example of the lack of law enforcement and ability of the state to maintain order / manage conflict. A child was killed in an RTA, the women of the house (proper bullies, well-practiced in blockades!) block the road (main artery E-W for whole country) holding up approx. 6,000 vehicles for 12 hours in attempt to force the truck driver to return and pay up. It's not about justice it's about money. The police, APF and army attend to watch. Meantime I walked past a fresh corpse of a motorcyclist caught in the mayhem – an accident, ignored as he wasn't a '*tulo manche'* (big man) and had no villagers to act for him. There is no intervention by the state, no punishment, no reprisal. It's up to the family and their extended clan / hoodlums.

Decades of monarchist oppression and 15 years of bloody brutal civil war where Maoists and army alike tortured abducted and murdered without retribution have left many Nepalese apathetic and resigned to being screwed over. 'K*e garne'* (what to do) is the most commonly used phrase after Namaste.

Step One: interviews and observations
My participant group were sourced from the group's largest company, the staff of the HQ. They include Business Heads (reporting directly to the Board), senior managers and the HQ based teams. We agreed a mix of interviews, observation and participation in office life for a period of a month (May 17) as the first phase.

To date I have transcribed interviews, with associated memos, reflexive notes (on my experience of the interview, how my state of mind was and other influences) reflexive memos (on the experience of the methodology and critical analysis) for 10 individuals and two group interviews; I have extensive notes and memos on observations from just hanging out in various spaces in the head office and also from attending team meetings (6). Finally I have notes, memos and reflections on training sessions and meetings I ran and of my interviews and observations with the Director.

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[12] I need to check the references but it's widely acknowledged that most High IF journals generally only publish articles based on research carried out in N America.

I coded these as I went along, where possible reviewing, sensing and coding as close to write up as possible, then repeating the process several times more as I accumulated more experiences.

Interviews were carried out mostly in English, with some Nepalese. Meetings ran in a mix of Nepalese, Hindi and English with participants switching fluidly between languages to find the most effective phrases. My comprehension of Nepali is good, Hindi less so. In these times I tuned in to the non-verbal communication, leaned-in to the group skin and transcribed these noticings into text. This turned out to be an incredibly rich medium and a liberation, a turning point to finally step back from what was said and focus on what was actually happening. It felt courageous to leave the interview words behind. I realised I'd been carrying a deep tension – intuiting (but hiding from knowing) that the non-verbal was where the power flows were happening, that the medium functions *as* part of the communication (McLuhan, 1977 in Neri, 1998), but too hemmed in by what I thought was the 'proper' CGTM and its predilection with (spoken) words. The second aspect to the fear of stepping into where I know I calibrate best, into the unconscious-conscious, was my fear of 'being overwhelmed' (Ringer, 2002). As Ringer notes part of elegant facilitation (in this case facilitation of research) is retaining the ability 'to stay in touch with our inner selves'. At that point I realised I was quite vulnerable to the dark forces flowing and very aware that I may be overwhelmed by them – I had no personal containment.

The themes that emerged from the first round were dark. Power and its use to maintain fear, status and to keep packs (groups) at bay. Some of the themes emerging:
- Patronage – be like me – heroes with superpowers (don't shake it up)
- What you see is not what you get – duplicity throughout
- Knowledge is power (keeping ahead – withholding)
- Family – gangs – othering – loyalty (noticeably Indian – Nepali)
- Interaction – communication (control, surveillance, bubbles of chatter)
- Vulnerability – fear – insecurity
- Leaders are fearful (heads of the main verticals – not the owners)
- Teams are relatively strong
- Individuals are vulnerable, isolated
- Numbers rule – bow to the number (paper and people … insignificant)

I'm very aware that my state of mind[13] at the time, my rawness, was probably as much a co-constructor of the themes through my biases. It's possible I was projecting my turmoil onto the situation, it's equally possible that by integrating into the firm's syncretic sociality (Neri, 1998) I became a funnel or repository for the dark forces and feelings extant across the teams.

Nevertheless power flows, lack of psychological safety and lack of purposefulness as a result of others' withholding (or drip feeding) knowledge to maintain authority, patchy focus and a very short term / here and now (non-strategic) approach to challenges and opportunities were prevalent processes.
It seemed what I was noticing was **lack** of containment.
Questions raised – is it only possible to know containment by its absence[14]? Is this situation typical for Nepal, for this sector or is there something particular to this firm?

Step Two: Checking in – three reviews and next steps by the participants
I saw that as the co-creator of the emergent 'theory' I had become enveloped in the darkness of my own situation and that this had almost certainly influenced the research. It was not helpful to happily continue along a pathway of 'progress', I had to keep the research problematised and check in again. As an agentic

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[13] I had been assaulted, triggering a severe episode of depression
[14] Ref Brene Brown who was in search communication, but found only its absence and switched focus to vulnerability

individual I had a choice. I saw Mara[15] and named him. Knowing that darkness cannot exist without light, and also aware that I had to report back to the company, I re-interpreted the darkness as 'lack' and used lack to re-code for strengths. An example is shown in the slide below:
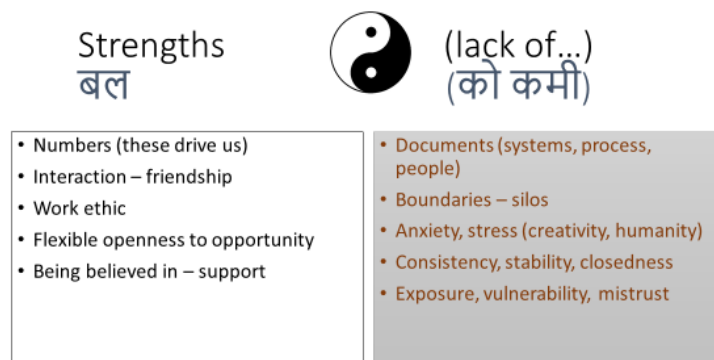
The check-in with the company team was a multi-step process, first reviewing with the Director to gain permission, second meeting (May) with 35 members of the senior team running a short presentation of the findings and facilitating a check-in (is this true for you?) and then adapted Appreciative Inquiry process starting with Dream. We asked, based on our strengths what's the best possible CoAA there could be?
Each of the 5 working groups presented their outputs creating a 'wall of dreams' and participants then voted for their top three action areas. I collated the results and emailed them back to them for reference
In the second meeting (July) we re-reviewed the outputs of Dream and voted again, this time for the most achievable as well as the most desirable aims. Three areas stood out and the teams then created smart goals from these.
The areas that were most important to them centred on better internal relationships, fairness, transparency, trust and recognition (and protection) through better HR systems, new structures and informal processes.

Questions on CGTM – how many times must I recode and from how many perspectives / states of mind in order to have themes emerge that are not entirely of my own making? Even with the greatest possible focus on criticality am I conjuring whatever I wish (subconsciously) to appear, in order to support the abductive steps of theorising? Or is the coding, reflecting, critiquing cycle just a provocation for a theory generation and not actually grounded at all?
I realise I am losing faith in the methodology and also the notion that research at this level should be a solitary affair.

New reflections on the investigation – emergent methodology? Post analyses?
Recently discovering Adams St Pierre's (2014) interpretation of Derrida in dismissing the binary of material/ linguistic of face to face and text brings relief to what felt a lonely confused place where there seemed no sense in the separation of knowing-from-reading and knowing-from-experience whether designed (research set up) or stumbled-through (life, practice). Her articulation of the paradox of valuing face to face investigation over the written word (literature review), yet only being able to 'make real' the face to face through conversion to text that is then processed, reviewed and reified as 'literature' confirms for me the non-sense of this corrupted hermeneutic circle. In this investigation I give discussions, experiences, reading, observations, reflexions, emotions, atmosphere, the non-verbal, aroma even, the same weighting. *Presence* does not

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[15] Buddhist stories tell of Mara, the personification of temptation and distraction, approaching the Buddha. Each time Mara approached, the Buddha simply said, "Mara, I see you," and Mara fled. Because the Buddha knew Mara thoroughly, his act of clear seeing was effective in bringing freedom. Mara represents the choice to stop being subsumed by emotions but go into them mindfully to use them to best effect.

prioritise *past* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/90 in Adams St Pierre, *ibid*). They form a unique combination of ingredients in the creation of something original, evidenced and hopefully a useful contribution to knowledge and practice.

Adding to this is the dilemma of creating and doing 'data', and processing this with coding, and other positivist concepts through a methodology defining itself as constructivist and from a place of epistemological pluralism. It jars.

I suspect I may have been working with what Adams St Pierre calls post-analyses i.e. 'begin with the epistemological and ontological commitments of the analysis", the theory, and let the methodology emerge (Adams St Pierre, 2014 p.10).

Hence I shifted away from re-coding. Returning to epistemological commitments to *and/both*, to pluralism and egality I sought ~~containment~~: to bring in expertise and hold them with me in an energised space to further explore the 'problem' (the emerging themes, their relevance and 'validity', the biases), setting the scene for an abductive group process – a kind of 'lived' literature review.

> *There's a story (told by Nepalese) about how society works:*
> *"A science teacher left his lab for the weekend. He'd forgotten about two tall beakers sitting on the science bench. Each beaker contained four frogs, one lot from India, the other Nepalese. On realising their situation the Indian frogs got very excited – they could escape! The first frog sat square in the tube, the second climbed on his back. He jumped up and down for a bit but couldn't get near the top and a way out so reached down to give the third frog a pull up. With a little help, frog number three clambered up. He jumped up and down for a bit but still couldn't reach the top of the beaker. He got himself in balance then called down to the fourth frog who with lots of assistance from the others eventually got onto the top of the pile. He jumped high, cleared the beaker and landed safely on the bench. The Indian frogs whooped for joy as their mate hopped hiss way to freedom.*
> *The Nepalese frogs also wanted to escape. They also started to build a frog tower and soon there was just the fourth frog to climb up. The third frog paused for a moment. As frog number four started to haul himself up frog 3 reached down and kicked him off. Frog four was startled but he tried again. Again the other frogs kicked him back. They laughed and laughed at the poor hapless frog, kicking and slapping him for being such an idiot. None of the Nepalese frogs escaped."*

Step Three: Checking in – for cultural bias

Aware that what I perceived as lack of containment might be etic projections i.e. those of a foreigner to the Nepalese culture I set up a meeting with Nepalese and Western friends working in/ founders of Nepalese organisations to talk them through what had emerged and check-in on their reactions. Was this normal for Nepal, for the private sector?

No structure, no systems, no (fair) consequences

Our discussions moved through what we saw as the dark side of Nepalese society – the underlying certainty that people will screw you over at some point whatever your nationality and that Nepalese society will celebrate the aggressor and humiliate the victim. That there is virtually no state enforcement of any of the laws that might protect the victim, seek punitive action or recompense. That the best way to avoid becoming a victim or to punish, revenge or gain any sort of 'justice' for a grievance is to use family and friends networks. In many ways the organisation is a microcosm of the Nepalese state in terms of its lawlessness, spurts of mob rule, nepotism in the form of protection-seeking from a powerful few. Ke garne? (see Appendix 2)

We also noted that the type of situation and behaviours witnessed at CoAA are more typical of 'traditional' business and societal structures; and more typical of Indian business than of Nepalese. This raised questions about what might be happening for modern firms, for example a start-up from urban Nepalese youth.

What has good – what it might mean

As a group (including the Business Heads) the CoAA people were courageous, named a few elephants in the room and were insightful, visionary and power-full in their approach. Yes, the working space we co-created in the meeting room was ~~contained~~, was energised and safe – but this wasn't the only ~~containment~~ at work.

Reflecting and reviewing it seemed that the employees had been keeping the problem-state alive, they'd been living with the challenges, vulnerability and uncertainty of the 'business-as-normal' company state but maintaining a degree of hope, of ingenuity to make change (many of the ideas that emerged in the meetings were evidently not new but had been mulled over for some time). When together, when united (physically, psychodynamically) it seemed they were running a kind of backgrounded ~~containment.~~ They are purposeful (they know they want change) but lack the 'how to' and power through authority to make decisions and act. The notion of group is very loose, defined largely by what they are not, hence the group field, the ~~containment~~ if it does actually exist, seems quite thin. However it holds potential to become more.

The people outside of this ~~contained~~ state, the people (feeling) showing vulnerability and exposure were the leaders by position. The 'leaders' have position, authoritative power, to drive performance. Some have followers who seek knowledge (guru-disciple model) and protection. Notably they have no visible structure such as a leadership team, to unite them, but instead have a 'smokers' club where allegiances are formed (and broken).

The study organisation has very few systems and processes, notably a gaping hole around HR systems. Certainly this lack of transparent, fair, less personalised organisational functions that both protect rights and people and also mete out warranted justice seem to be a factor in keeping ~~containment~~ thin and isolating some.

In summary, at this point in the research the emergent theory is that for ~~containment~~ to operate at one level, at the supporting level (society, organisational) there needs to be a form of structure, systems and processes that establish stability and some sense of fair-play. Place therefore, in this case the Nepalese social / values context, is critical. It's the 'leaders' (position) who lack ~~containment~~ (power, performance), and sometimes the teams (staff) who have it. They (teams) hold the key to performance through their own application of process (and the perceived threat of their own subversive processes). Is this where leadership flows?

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