Karen Ellis & Joe Simpson

Making Meaning Together

A Guide to
Collective Systemic Change

Meaningful Leadership in the 21st Century

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First published in 2019
By the Leadership Centre
49-51 East Road
London
N1 6AH

www.leadershipcentre.org.uk

Designed and typeset by Bang Communications

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ISBN 978-0-9931400-1-3

About the Authors

Karen Ellis & Joe Simpson

Karen Ellis

Karen Ellis has worked as a consultant in the fields of leadership and organisation development for 30 years, with a primary focus on the psychological aspects of change, strategy creation and collective action. She has always had a particular interest in how people make sense of their organisations and their roles and has worked as a coach, top team consultant, leadership trainer and change facilitator across over a hundred public, private and third sector organisations.

Over the last decade, her interest in 'meaning making' has drawn her increasingly into adult developmental psychology, communication theory, psychodynamic and existential theories of 'human be-ing', allowing her to shine new lights on 'what is going on around here' for her clients and colleagues. She has applied much of this theory-into-practice work with her colleagues at the Leadership Centre, who she has worked alongside for 12 years, initially as the knowledge development lead for Total Place and more recently as Programme Director for their flagship cross-sector senior leader programme, Future Vision.

Joe Simpson

Having read PPE at Oxford, Joe started his career in the voluntary sector, becoming Assistant Director of Community Service Volunteers. He worked in television for a number of years, heading up the ITV Telethon, working as Strategy Co-ordinator for BBC Worldwide, and was the Director of Programmes for the World Learning Network. He is also the former National Programme Director for the New Millennium Experience.

In parallel, Joe spent 16 years as a councillor in the London Borough of Islington. Joe's passion for and commitment to public service eventually led to him setting up the Leadership Centre in 2004. Originally directing its politics and partnerships work, he was responsible for the pioneering Civic Pride initiative encouraging confident, capable and ambitious political leadership.

As Centre Director, he now leads on the Leadership Centre's cross-public sector programmes, working closely with senior managerial and political representatives of central and local government, health bodies, chief constables, police and crime commissioners and senior figures in the private, voluntary and third sectors.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our many Leadership Centre colleagues for their insights and practices, from which we have learned and adapted over the years. Any misinterpretations remain solely ours. We would also like to thank all the participants in the Centre's 'Future Vision' programme. Much of our thinking has evolved through these programmes, where participants play a significant role in co-creating the programmes.

We would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of our editor, Seth Thévoz. His questioning and challenge has been critical in the evolution of the arguments we have made.

We also owe huge thanks to Marc Birch, and the team at Bang, who designed and page-set the final book to a punishing schedule.

This book is not meant to be "the final word", but is another stage in the development of an approach, and we would welcome feedback and challenge from readers.

For Joe: this book is dedicated to his wife Meg, for her encouragement, insights and reality checks.

For Karen: this book is dedicated to her father, Lester, for his endless support for her curiosity and her, often eccentric, meaning-making.

Introduction - leading as a social (rather than individual) activity

Joe Simpson and Karen Ellis

You are probably groaning at the thought of *another* book about leadership – airport lounges are heaving with endless, turgid management-speak on the topic – but we hope to convince you that this book is something quite different.

Firstly, it's not *just* about leaders or even leading *per se*; it's as much about how we collectively seek to go about changing the world we live in. People who are good at change and innovation understand their worlds, and the contexts and dynamics they work in. They understand people, and how people make sense of their lives. "Leading" makes up a pretty small part of that, compared to successfully exploring our way around the social, technical and psychological terrains involved.

Secondly, it's about what unites us in our efforts to make a difference, and it situates us in the world(s) we live in – an approach we take by looking at leadership and change through five different "domain lenses" (or perspectives). This focus on domains builds on systemic thinking – in fact, it builds on a whole range of disciplines, from psychology to sociology to economics – in trying to deepen our understanding of how to engage effectively with the wider world. These five domains are central to our arguments in the book:

- **Me** – how we relate to ourselves and the things that matter to us – in short, how we 'make meaning' of our lives;
- **Us** – how we *instinctively* bond with each other and form our groups and 'tribes', and 'make meaning' as collectives;
- **We** – how we *consciously* build a shared understanding and way of operating together;

- **Context** – the real world aspects of the situations we are living in, and the challenges we are facing;
- **Time** – understanding time, the effect of time on different cultural traditions, and the link between the past and the future;

Thirdly, the content of this books is based on years of practice and (ongoing) learning, by us, and by our colleagues at the Leadership Centre. The book arises out of a collaboration that has stretched back more than a decade. Joe and Karen have worked together on a variety of projects, both formal leadership development programmes (of which 'Future Vision' is our most high-profile example), and more place-based work. Both our formal programmes and our project work have been with senior public service leaders, who have all been grappling with the challenge of helping make a difference to people's lives. This book is therefore grounded in *practical experience*; and, in putting together the content of this book, we have benefitted greatly from the insights of many Leadership Centre colleagues (too many to all name, but you know who you are!), as well as hundreds of participants, leading in a diverse range of sectors and settings. A core practice in all our work is to never regard participants as passive "recipients", but as active contributors to thinking and practice.

It is probably worth knowing that, within the Leadership Centre family, we have not advocated "one truth"; but nor are we a randomly collected group. Let us use two metaphors to describe our approach with our fellow practitioners. Each 'artist' might mix his or her own colours, but we broadly constitute a "school", with a shared approach, based on a broadly shared world view (though with some vital differences). Each painting is distinctive, but collectively, you can see the connections. Or to paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous argument, collectively you can see the family resemblances, though no single characteristic is apparent in every work.[1]

Something else may strike you as we go along – most leadership books assume that leadership is a good thing. We remind readers here that "leadership" *per se* is not necessarily a good thing, as any number of studies of "great dictators" could attest. In the second half of the book, we then broaden our scope to look at the whole area of history, memory, traditions, systems, and how effective as well as poor (and even frankly evil) ways of leading have played out over time.

To give an example of sociological and psychological framings (and to tee up the reason for the title of the book), let us consider memory. And let's start with personal memory. This issue has received considerable attention from psychologists, psychiatrists and neurosurgeons. It has also had a parallel life, in being considered

[1] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).

by philosophers exploring personal identity. The issue has taken on even greater importance as dementia becomes such a critical issue. Whereas previous pushes were made to try and discover what was entailed in remembering ("What's happening in our brain?"), we are now equally concerned about what can be done to slow down (or even reverse) the loss of memory. Quite a lot has been learned, though in truth we are still in "black box" territory for much of the process. In the words of Antonio Damasio:

> We are not conscious of which memories we store, and which memories we do not: of how we store memories; of how we classify and organise them; of how we interrelate memories of varied sensory types, different topics, and emotional significance.[2]

In parallel, we have paid increasing attention to what has been called "collective memory" (the phrase of Maurice Halbwach, whose book of that name helped kickstart this interest), "social memory", "the invention of tradition" or "foundation or origin myths". But in contrast to individual memory, questions of collective memory have been more in the domain of sociology and history. One of the most influential books in this tradition was by the late Benedict Anderson, the theme of which is summarised in its title, *Imagined Communities* (an exploration of the growth of nationalism).[3]

From this second tradition we almost have history and memory, if not as different axes, at least in Jacques Le Goff's phrase "sometimes retreating and sometimes overflowing" in their relationships.[4] Of course, the old Russian saying is that memory is constant, and it's history that changes (a joke that makes sense when you remember the literal airbrushing out of previously important people from pictures, when they had fallen out of favour).

There is some recognition that there needs to be more interplay between these two streams of enquiry. Yet our purpose here is not so much to advocate that, but to highlight what both streams have in common – which is about what is remembered. The social psychiatrist Frederic Bartlett wrote *Remembering* in 1932, at the birth of modern cognitive science. His argument was that memories are not reproductive, but wholly constitutive: "remembering is not the re-exitation of innumerable fixed lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction

[2] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (London: Harcourt, 1999), p. 226.
[3] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (London: Verso, 2006; first pub. 1983).
[4] Jacques Le Goff (trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Clamen), *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia Unversity Press, 1994)., p. 54

of construction".[5] Bartlett was a cognitive scientist, not a sociologist, but sociologist would use pretty similar language to describe cultural memory. Oona Frawley for instance points out that "narrative is central to cultural memory".[6] We also need to add symbols (glass monuments), commemorations and other symbols.

To put this into the language we will use for both individuals and for communities, what is remembered and what is forgotten has to do with meaning-making (or sense-making) – of which more later in this book.

One final word, about our 'voice' through all this: anyone who's been involved in a Leadership Centre programme knows that we deliver things in very idiosyncratic – and different – styles. And so it is with this book. Each chapter has a 'lead' author, who did the first draft, and whose own 'voice' predominates, but each chapter has been a collaborative effort. Even if the names had not been credited, readers would quickly recognise who is the lead author of each chapter. Those primarily written by Joe have many more esoteric socio-political and anthropological references, whilst those primarily by Karen are grounded more in lessons from psychology and systemic group dynamics. In so writing, we recognise our personal histories; in writing together, we equally recognise the sterility of trying to reduce learning down to one academic domain as somehow being the 'only' core discipline.

As an illustration, the "Usness" chapter was written by Joe. The argument is primarily framed in evolutionary, social anthropology terms. Had Karen written the chapter, the argument about "Us" and "Them" might have been framed more about "In" groups and "Out" groups, with more references to social psychology. Instead of Michael Tomasello, there would be references to Henri Tajfel. But the argument would be broadly the same. Both the social anthropological and social psychology arguments are about *social identity*. Which argument has precedence is a bit like getting into the "chicken and egg" argument. That both routes lead to the same conclusion is evidence of the "stickiness" of the phenomenon.

And we're convinced that 'Usness' in particular is a very important phenomenon. We hope that we set out our case with clarity, lucidity, multidiscipliniarity – and a few jokes, too.

Karen Ellis
Joe Simpson
London, June 2019

[5] Frederic Bartlett, Remembering: *A Study in Experimental and Social Psychiatry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 121.
[6] Oona Frawley (ed.), *Memory Ireland, Volume 3: The Famine and the Troubles* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), p. 12.

SECTION 1

The problems with the paradigm

CHAPTER 1

Making sense of this book

Joe Simpson and Karen Ellis

Authors of any new book on leadership need to explain why there's any need for yet another publication. We think we have something distinctive to say in three key areas which are represented by the first three sections in this book. Firstly, we want to challenge the current paradigms and framing of organisations, leadership and change as they are described in the vast majority of the literature and managerial trainings. Secondly, we want to offer some new guiding metaphors and ideas for leading complex change which emphasize **social**, **systemic** and **meaning-making** factors. And we want to use historical stories and a broad range of theoretical disciplines as an antidote to the thin, partial late 20th century accounts of corporate leadership that prevail in most bookshops and MBAs.

At the end of the book, based on what has gone before, we offer five key Systemic Leadership Challenges which face anyone who is trying to lead systemic change in their local situations – regardless of role, seniority or organization. The challenges we have described are the result of a decade of observation of 'people making a difference' in public service, communities and networks and are the core of the Leadership Centre's approach to capability building and place-based systemic interventions. They could, as it happens, be framed as 'Systemic Leadership

Capabilities' but we are wary of starting a new cottage industry in leadership frameworks! We hope they will prove useful to anyone who is thinking about their own way of leading or influencing change as well as to those people who are helping others to develop in that arena.

The paragraphs below outline the flow of our arguments so that you can guide yourself to the sections that are of most interest to you.

Section 1 – The problems with the paradigm

Our first aim is to (briefly) run through critiques of two outdated, creaky and contested, but still highly dominant paradigms, which are being reinforced daily through our managerial and organizational practices:

- the rational and individualistic descriptions of 'effective leadership'
- the machine metaphor of organizing and change.

Obviously, a critique in itself is not much use unless you offer some alternatives so, in each Chapter. we then move on to describe some of the ideas which are being put forward by those thinkers and practitioners who are making attempts to overthrow the paradigms. The challenges to the 'machine metaphor' are generally gaining more steam in organisations and communities (at least outside corporate settings) but still have relatively little traction in larger public sector institutions.

The challenge to the 'effective leadership' paradigm are much further behind. What is modelled and taught to aspiring 'change actors' is still a version of, at best, a twentieth Century managerial view which focuses on vision setting, planning, 'engaging' 'stakeholders' and programmatic implementation. Here, we use a range of systemic, anthropological, cultural and psychological ideas about to frame leading in a way which encompasses human sociality, personal and collective meaning-making and attention to the cultural context.

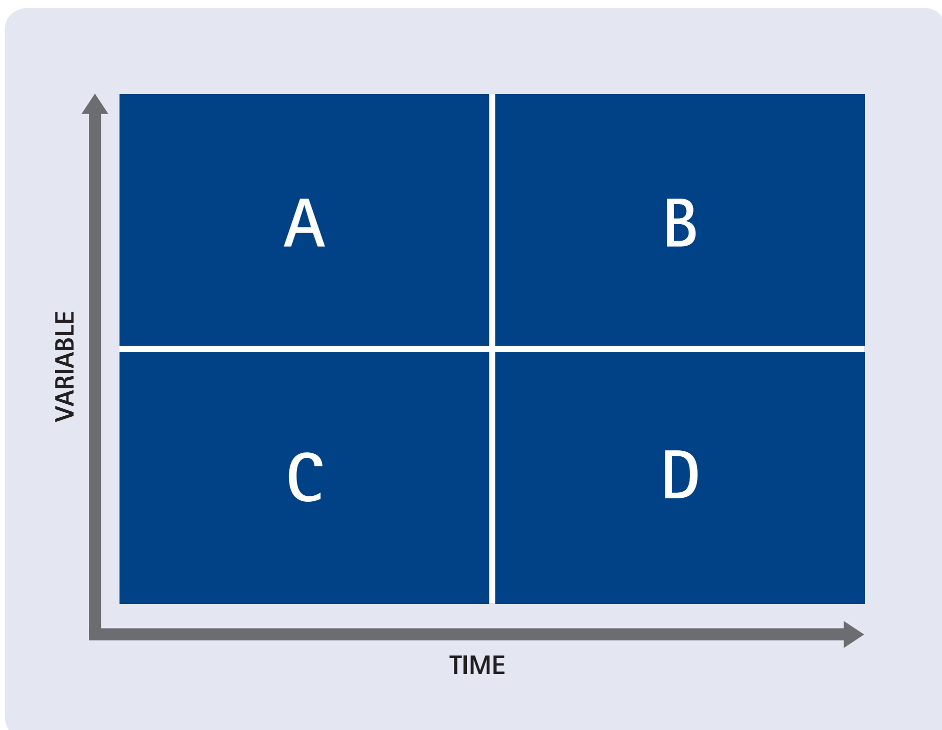
Section 2 – Leading change as a social, meaning-making, situated activity

Our second section begins by focussing on three of the Leadership Centre's key 'domains of meaning-making' – 'Me', 'Us' and 'We' – the human aspects that have to be taken into account whenever we are tackling complex, shifting, ambiguous issues or trying to find a way forward in an uncomfortable or challenged context. We start at the individual level, (Me) and then tackle the newest and most complex idea at the heart of our argument – the positive and negative aspects of 'Usness. We then go on to describe how change actors can go about creating a conscious

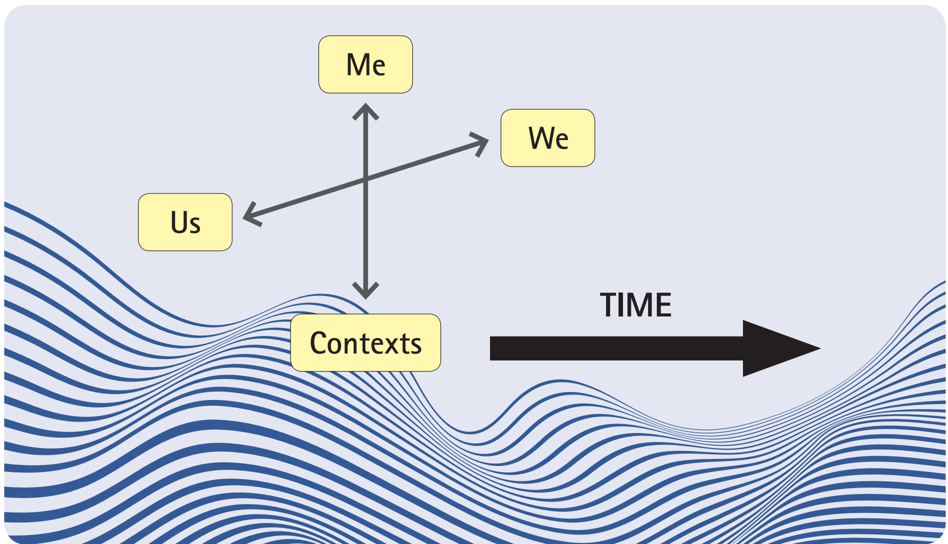
'We' – a coalition of the willing – which can become a new source of collective and more conscious meaning-making,

- 'Me' frames the idea of 'meaning-making' to describe how each of us uniquely understands and acts into our world and then discusses how meaning-making develops (or fails to do so) over our adult lives
- 'Us' looks at an approach to collective identity as rooted in evolutional factors as intellectual ones, which is unique and distinctive to humans
- 'We' describes the steps that we can take to build collective will and action around a key issue or situation and points to some useful models for making sense of 'how we are in groups'

In recognition of the non-linearity of what we are trying to address, we have *not* developed what be described as the classic four-box model which is the fallback of most consultants. Had we advocated such a solution, our scheme would look like this:



Instead, we use the following to describe our approach:



In this representation, no domain is sacrosanct – each "boundary" is fluid, and is both shaped by (as well as helping shape) the other three. Moreover, the shape evolves over time. Leadership of change is not a separate activity of individuals, it is a process located with people in contexts over time.

Before we go on to describe the three domains at the core of this book, it is worth saying a few words about what we mean by 'Contexts'. The 'Context' is the situation in which we are trying to enact change by our leadership –whether we are tackling a wicked problem, a complex issue, an organizational culture or a service delivery process. 'Contexts' are made up of both concrete and abstract 'things' (houses, recycling plants, rulebooks, IT systems, commonly held norms etc), real or reified objects which we seek to act on when we are trying to make something different. Depending on the change we want to see, a 'Context' may be solely in the world of ideas (eg 'Our Leadership Capability Framework), solely in the concrete world (eg the number of potholes on our residential roads) or a mix (eg the delivery model for our Sustainability and Transformation Plan – which includes, hospital sites, job roles, financial negotiations etc). At the most macro level, the 'Context' could be what gets described as a 'System' (a problematic term as we shall later discover) or even a whole city or community but it could also be as small (but complex) as 'the challenge of ensuring regular hot meals for elderly isolated individuals in this village'.

In most change efforts (and in most 'managing change' literature), the object of the change ('the problem') is held as paramount. We need to define the issue, analyse the problems, set a strategy, design a vision, plan a programme and implement the activities (or some arrangement of those activities). The lived reality, cognitive biases, emotional preferences, interpersonal norms and other aspects which pertain to the **people** trying to do all this (or, worse, having it done to them) are generally totally neglected – unless, or until, they start to 'resist' the change that is being so helpfully done to them. There are some notable exceptions of course, those technologies which put actual humans rather than abstractions at the centre of the change work – for example, social movement ideas, large and inclusive group conversations such as hackathons, the best of design-led approaches. But these are the exception, rather than the norm.

So, the task of understanding 'Me', 'We' and 'Us' in relation to the 'Context' we are trying to change is at the core of the rest of this section. We do this by focusing on three key assumptions:

- That humans are, at heart, highly social and co-operative mammals rather than self-motivated, individualistic 'Econs'
- That humans are 'meaning-making' beings and that 'meaning-making' is profoundly subjective and situated in our life experience
- That all meaning-making is a combination of individual thought and collective norms so the basic 'meaning-making-unit' is the collective or 'Us' (or ('Us's' at play in the situation.

As you would expect in any book about leadership, we do address what is required of the individual actor who is hoping to help change happen – the "Me" in our model. Leadership involves a personal journey of development – so far so good, but what 'map' of development should we use, given the systemic approach we are trying to take? In our thinking here, we have drawn on the ideas of 'adult constructivist development' or 'vertical development'. On our leadership programmes, typically we are working with very bright committed people who have already achieved a lot within the organization where they work. Their challenge now is to collaborate with others over whom they have no formal authority, tackling issues which have no obvious or agreed solution. The skills that make you professionally competent are not necessarily those which help you operate in more complex uncertain environments. Instead, the developmental path at this point is to address your own 'meaning making' – looking at your internal assumptions, biases and

beliefs and getting familiar with your own patterns of emotional response in complex, high stakes situations.

Our third dimension is "Us" or usness (and the inevitable corollary "them"). A lot of current literature reflects on identity questions (the rise of identity politics etc). We find much of this framing unhelpful. We do so for three reasons. First, let's remember Amartya Sen's great critique of identity

> In our normal lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups- we belong to them all. The same person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theatre lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space with whom it is extremely urgent to talk (preferably in English)

We have identities not one identity- but we do have strong Usness instincts. Joe's loyalty as a fan at his team's football ground is a different one to that when he attends a political rally for the party he supports. But in each case there is an "Us", or a tribal effect. (And note our emotions tend to be amplified when we watch the match or listen to speeches with other members of the same tribe than when watching or listening alone at home).

Secondly, tribal loyalties can evolve and be developed. They are not givens that cannot be changed. To give as an illustration when Joe arrived in London in the 1970s, being a Londoner had very particular connotations (being a Cockney, even more precise ones). Today, many Londoners have not even been born in the United Kingdom, let alone London – yet happily self-identify as Londoners.

The third point to stress is the downside - "Us" and "Them". Londoners can sometimes be slightly patronising to people "from the sticks", whilst people from outside London can feel resentful of what they sometimes regard as the smugness of London. Much of this is banter, but our case studies (the American South and Nazi Germany) illustrate the darker side of this.

The final dimension focuses on the "We". The Leadership Centre has a long track record of top team development and on 'enabling' work with 'coalitions of the willing' in Places and communities who are trying to make a difference in their contexts. The standard take on such work is often that it is about getting alignment

of vision. We go on a different journey, talking about the power of creative interaction, indeed creative tension. Just as individuals need vertical development for their leadership journey to succeed, so we focus on how groups and wider collectives (both formal and informal) can spark off each other. In this Chapter, we build on ideas of community building, social movements and design thinking to consider how creative conversations can shift stuck ideas and allow new solutions to emerge.

Section 3 – Conversations with history, politics and ethics

Once we have laid out the core of our arguments, we go on apply the ideas in preceding chapters to actual historical events which demonstrate particular aspects of leadership and very large scale change.

- 'The Dark Side of Leadership – A Conversation with Horror' – which is a much-needed riposte to the all-too-common idea that "all leadership is good". The reader might be surprised to hear that a Leadership Centre argues against leadership; but the "all we need is more leadership" line of argument has been at the core of some of the worst horrors in human history.
- 'A conversation with history' – taking a series of examples around the American Civil War and its long-term impact on memory and culture, Joe looks at how these themes and ideas have mapped out across history.
- '1940: Wendell and Winston' - looks at leadership in 1940 through the all-too-familiar story of Winston Churchill, but contrasted with the parallel career and decisions of a long-forgotten leader, Republican presidential nominee and businessman Wendell Willkie.
- 'The Politics of Poetry' - looks at how these cultural issues play out in the present day, with one of the more unexpected forms of (accidental?) poetry, the tweets of President Donald Trump.

Finally, we go on to add a further key domain – Time – to our model, as a way of showing how historical context drives and changes meaning over time, and this is explored in 'Time, Gentlemen, Time'.

Section 4 – Challenges for leading systemically

The last section of this book seeks, as ever to address the 'So what?' and 'Now what' of all this. Our main contention is that, given we need to change our conception of what leading means in a complex, dynamic, networked world, we need to change our view of what makes for capability in enacting systemic change. So, we go on to describe and test five core challenges which can help form a 'map' for making sense of leading change or making a difference in any sphere of activity:

- Exploring contexts
- Convening conversations
- Narrating meaning
- Fostering innovation
- Personal (or collective) governance

These challenges face our community leaders, social entrepreneurs, movement builders and front-line workers, just as much as they face senior executives or managers with 'change', 'partnership' or 'transformation' in their titles. They also face any group which is trying to galvanise change or make a difference in a particular place or for any key issue, so we have written about the ideas at both the group and individual level.

We use the phrase *Exploring contexts* to flag up that in complex situations there is no one correct direction of travel. Rather, different players will each be evolving their own journeys, and over time those journeys will adapt to the changing circumstances (and the fact that every other player will have adapted to a greater or lesser extent). In contrast much conventional leadership literature talks about vision, direction and 'engagement', almost as if the task of the leader is to get stray cats walking to a straight line. As a one-line summary, *Exploring contexts* addresses the *where are we?* question.

A core theme of our work is to remind leaders that they cannot lead alone, the 'We' and the 'Us' are vital. *Convening conversations* is our language about building collaborative endeavour through effective small and large scale group 'talkings-together'. Let us dwell on the word conversation. When someone says they had a really good conversation, what they normally mean is that at least one person in that conversation learned something they did not know beforehand. How often can any of us say this in our normal meetings, workshops, interviews and focus groups? Then let us consider how we manage our bigger, more controversial conversations. A decade ago a lot of commentators were enthusiastic about the potential of social

media to change things (remember the "Arab spring"), today we worry more about the echo chamber effect (most dramatically illustrated by the parallel conversations of Leavers and Remainers). In summary, *Convening conversations* addresses the *who are we?* question.

Narrating meaning addresses the *why bother?* question. We talk about shared stories, another way of describing this is to say that collaboration often means at minimum some reiteration of the why to create a sense of shared purpose. More expansively, *Narrating meaning* often requires **changing** meanings – surfacing unhelpful suppositions or frames and shifting perceptions by shifting language (from recipients to citizens, from services to rights etc etc) This means that, as leaders, we have to recognise the huge power of languaging to change people's felt realities and to realise that we are always working directly with 'meaning-making' and subjective understanding (including our own), whether we like it or not.

Our fourth challenge concerns *Fostering innovation*. Not everything needs to be innovated continuously. Where we need innovation is when something is not working, or no longer working as well as it did. We now have a third dimension of this challenge, which is where we have sectors with a continuous level of innovation or disruption. Take phones, Nokia and then Blackberry were dominant, only to be swept aside by Apple. Clay Christensen has become famous of the father of the argument about digital disruption, noting how difficult it is for market leaders to remain innovative (we will in a decade's time whether Apple becomes an even more dramatic example of this trend). Let's be clear, we don't think it is the job of change leaders to **do** all the innovating (that takes us way back to the individual genius idea), their job is to create environments where innovation can happen, to promote failure as a learning process and to help others develop key skills of problem definition, creative thinking and experimentation. Put another way, *Fostering innovation* addresses the *how do we change it?* question.

The fifth and final challenge covers a set of more individual characteristics which we have summarised under the slightly unusual heading of *Personal governance*. We are all familiar with the idea of corporate governance – the checks and balances that we introduce into institutions and initiatives to make sure they stay on the rails and deliver what we have set them up to do. But how do we do those things as individuals? How do make sure we are adaptable without being wishy-washy, resilient without toughing things out ethical without being self-righteous and sufficiently self-protective without being defensive or cowardly. In short, how do we be people we would want to be led by ?. We know that here is a lot in the

mainstream leadership literature which nods in this direction but a good deal of it is exhortatory or idealistic (talk of authenticity, personal purpose, courage etc) and some of which simply fails to take into account the very real dangers of standing up against an orthodoxy or a prevailing tide. *Personal governance* as a capability covers those elements that ensure an individual or group is able to stand the high heat of leading change without burning (see the box below). To stick with our summaries, we can call this the *why me?* question.

Four ways to burn...

The heroic leader image has a long tail. We still hark after leaders who *burn brightly*. When we ask people who they admire as leaders they often quote heroic leaders, Mandela for instance. However when we ask them how would they describe the bosses they have had, quite often there is a wry smile and a nervous laugh before they describe someone less inspiring. We are not confusing leadership with being a boss, but asking about their boss is a good shorthand way to initiate a conversation about leadership. A similar result shows up when you ask people to talk about political or other public leaders – individuals who burn bright for a moment in time because they surf on a particular zeitgeist and then seem to die away as opinions shift or they cease to fit the mood of the times. These people fail to *adapt* as times change and lose credibility as a result.

When we then have that conversation three other descriptions. First we have those who *burn out*. Of course there are people who literally burn out. Leading change is not without personal costs. But taking a wider perspective what is more common is to see people who have achieved change at one time, or in one place, but who subsequently fail to build on that success, or fail to repeat that success. If you step back to try and see a wider picture quite often they have turned out to be one trick ponies. In other words they attempted to repeat their success by doing the things they "knew" worked, only to find they did not work. Leadership is an art not a technical skill, so applying "best practice" to leadership is as unsuccessful as applying best practice solutions to complex problems.

As individuals we know we each develop preferred ways of doing things. We are creatures of habit. Without attention to our own personal governance

we fail to notice when those preferences, or habits becomes defaults.

Then there are leaders who burn. Much of leadership literature somehow assumes that leadership is good ("what we need to solve this issue is leadership"). The Acton phrase about power corrupts, but absolute power corrupts absolutely is well known. Even better is Lincoln's phrase "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character give him power". We use the phrase ethical decision making, which is slightly different to the current craze for "authentic" leadership. Two comments on authenticity, Tom Hanks is one of the greatest actors alive. In every role he comes across as authentic. So the same person in film can be the heterosexual romantic male lead in Sleepless in Seattle (1993), the gay lawyer with AIDS in *Philadelphia* (1993), the eponymous *Forrest Gump* (1994) and Sheriff Woody in *Toy Story* (1996).

Or to give another example lets consider Obama. There were phenomenal expectations about what Obama might achieve in his terms, but by the end of his second term some previous supporters felt he had not achieved all that he might have done. Now if you consider why the answer may be that he remained the slightly aloof Harvard academic that he was, and never descended to the glad-handing ways of some of his predecessors (think Clinton, or LBJ). We think he would have benefited from some of that glad-handing, but we do respect that his decision making was more ethical than that or either Clinton or Johnson.

Burning brightly, burning out and burning are three possibilities but there is a fourth *being burnt*. One of the attributes of living systems is that there are strong instinct patterns to sustain what already exists. To a stable system, change makers are trouble makers. Personal resilience is therefore vital.

And finally, as our conclusion, we go on to test both our five challenges and our four-plus-one domains against several examples, most notably in fiction (Shakespeare's *Henry V*), and in real life (Abraham Lincoln).

CHAPTER 2

Descartes' second error – or the journey to a systemic lens

Joe Simpson and Karen Ellis

When we discussed the correct name for the fourth dimension of our model, we knew we wanted to describe something about the 'reality' in which events unfold and where we are trying to make the changes to our lives that we desire. We had many debates over the last few months about whether the fourth domain should be called 'Worlds', 'Contexts', 'Systems' or even 'The System' and we got ourselves in some entertaining loops in the process. As we tried to unpick each of those descriptors, we finally realized that the problem is that all of those collective words can be interpreted at three different 'logical levels'–

- the concrete world we live in
- the abstract world of our concepts and reified ideas
- the over-arching 'meaning-making' processes that we are using to discern and imagine either of those worlds

These meaning-making processes are variously known as world-views, paradigms, traditions, ways-of-living and action logics, depending on the discipline you are described them from. So, before we go ahead and look at the dominant 'paradigms' from which leadership and organisations/change are discussed, we probably ought

to describe briefly these 'meta-frames' about how our concepts relate to reality in the first place.

We find that the most useful, non-jargon term to describe all of the meta-frames is the term 'map'. Most of us can accept that we have our own individual mental maps of reality at a variety of different levels, some of which are shared by others (societal and cultural maps) and some of which are more idiosyncratic (family or personal experience maps). For example, if we take the idea of 'getting married', each one of us will have a complex set of meanings and concepts associated with that phrase which are made up of, for example, memories, preferences, processes-for-getting-stuff-done, values etc. And every one of us will have a different map.

In the rest of this Chapter, we will briefly describe these three levels of lived reality and the overarching ideas of paradigms and traditions, before we go on in the next two sections to look at the particular maps which are of interest here.

Mapping reality – three different 'Worlds'

Firstly, there is the physical world in which things happen (*concrete reality*). We are increasingly aware of the impact that physical changes to our environment can have on other species (global warming, changes in habitat, biodiversity loss etc), but sometimes we fail to recognise the impact of concrete on ourselves and on our meaning-making. For instance, Galveston in Texas is now associated with a song made famous by the late Glen Campbell, composed by Jimmy Webb. Webb wrote the song sitting on the beach in Galveston. At the turn of the twentieth century, Galveston had been the thriving, economic hub of Texas, but the hurricane and flooding of 1901 devastated the place. Instead of Galveston, Houston became Texas's boom town.

Or for a more elaborate example, consider the Mississippi river as one of the key arteries of the South and the Midwest. It's a brute of a river, with frequently massive surges of water downstream, and two human responses to regular flooding took turns in being the preferred solution. One was to remove the many meanders that tended to evolve in the lower Mississippi (thus allowing a quicker discharge to the sea). The second was to build higher levees (hence the famous line in Don McClean's 'American Pie': "I drove the Chevy to the levy, but the levy was dry"). In truth, this was not an either/or, both were necessary, and there would still be years where the banks would overflow. This being the American South, the question of *where* the water would overflow had clear racial connotations. The answer was that a then-predominantly-white New Orleans would be saved, and instead the land of

predominantly black sharecroppers would be flooded. That flooding prompted a sea-change in the rate of black emigration. That emigration mainly followed the route north created by the river, resulting in the large African-American community in South Chicago.

A second use of "worlds" refers to the collections of abstract concepts and interactions - for example, the technological and economic conditions at play in any given context. Here again, there are several simple illustrations. Across much of Europe and America there has been a resurgence of populism in the last decade. That resurgence has happened whilst their economies have still not fully recovered from the financial crash of 2008.[1] You do not have to advocate a fully "economic determinist" view to acknowledge that this is not merely a coincidence. Or if we return to the American South and those cotton plantations., in 1793, Eli Whitney invented the modern cotton gin. This simple piece of technology revolutionised the American cotton trade, making it massively more profitable. As a consequence, there was a massive increase in the number of slaves involved in cotton production. Quite a lot of this involved further internal migration, as slaves were sold from the Upper South to be moved (via the Mississippi) to work in the Deep South. Out of this came a phrase now with a much more general meaning. Being "sold down the river" literally meant being sold to be transferred down the Mississippi for exploitation in cotton production. Long after the formal abolition of slavery you can still see today the impact. Democrat-voting counties in the South are overwhelmingly concentrated along the river and in the arc of the band of cretaceous rocks which provided the most fertile cotton growing regions.

Finally, to the meta-level we are interested here - a third use of the word "Worlds" refers to one's own world-views, and the more general (consensus agreement) ways of understanding what is going on. Sticking with the Deep South we can see how the views of rich southerners became increasingly radicalized as the profits from cotton increased. Indeed, we will argue that far from the secession of the Confederacy in the American Civil War being some defensive manoeuvre, the world view of the Deep South through the 1850s was one focused on a massive extension of the slave trade.

Different disciplines have different ways of describing these meta-maps – worldviews and paradigms are 'things we see through', whereas traditions and

[1] For two very different takes on this, see Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Pelican, 2018); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

action logics are more like 'things we act by' (a bit more like software programmes than maps, perhaps, although these authors would hate that analogy!). Regardless of which set of ideas you prefer, the main point to grasp is that our paradigms or traditions shape, drive and constrain our individual 'meaning-making' as we relate to the situations we are in.

To give another example, consider the evolution of agriculture, We know that we have farmed for, at most, 12,000 years – and agriculture only really took off 9,000 years ago. We also know that Mesopotamia was critical in that story. That reflected physical realities, like the ability to cultivate the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates. We also saw the first city-state emerge then – which was not a coincidence. The anthropologist and political scientist James C. Scott has pointed out the connection: One great advantage of agriculture for rulers was that it was easy to tax, because grain was easy to count. It was the interplay of our three world senses that started the first agricultural revolution.

The centrality of meaning-making in our meta-maps

This term, 'meaning-making' might sound unusual or a bit esoteric to many of you but it is simply a technical term for what we all know – that is, that each of us has our own unique way of making sense of the world, based on our background, cultural context, personality etc. Confusingly, most of the 'human' disciplines (sociology, anthropology, psychology, neuroscience etc) have their own language and ideas for looking at meaning-making and it is described in a whole range of different ways. We have used the term 'meaning-making' as it does what it says on the tin and is rather more accessible than other terms like 'constructionism', constructivism' or 'semiotics'!

As a short aside, along with her core discipline of adult constructivist development, Karen uses the term 'sense-making' for the gathering of data about the world ('facts' if you like) and 'meaning-making' for the personal way of interpreting that data in relation to what is important to us ('valuing' if you like). For example, we might sense the same data in a situation ('These figures show that we are having a dip in our responsiveness to emergency calls') but make different meanings of that data, based on our roles and the salience of the data to us ('Our new team is taking a while to bed in', 'The new processes aren't working' or 'Oh crap, the boss is going to **kill** me'). In contrast Joe takes a very different view of the fact/value divide (one of those philosophical debates which excites some but bewilders others). More generally, this separation between 'sense-making' and 'meaning-making' is not held across all disciplines so you may see either term being used in the literatures.

Depending on which discipline you come from, the 'background', always acting, less-conscious ideas and images which frame aspects of personal meaning-making are variously known as world-views, paradigms, traditions, ways-of-living or action logics, to name but a few. All these terms refer to the fact that our day-to-day ways of making sense of our world and what is happening to us is 'always already' framed by key biases, assumptions, emotional tones etc which are running in the background of our cognitive functions and which drive our idiosyncratic and various interpretations of 'what is going on around here'.

Before we go ahead and look at the dominant 'paradigms' from which leadership and organisations/change are discussed, we probably ought to describe briefly two key 'meta-frames' about how our concepts relate to reality in the first place. This won't be an extensive, academic treatise, just a quick run through some of the key thinkers and ideas to give you a feel for some alternative ways of looking at how we look at things.

World-views and paradigms – ways of seeing and organising

Any human endeavor is only as effective as the paradigms which drive the framing of key issues and the meaning-making of the 'players' In order to understand why this is the case, we must understand how dominant paradigms maintain their dominance by exploring what Capra calls "epistemic science".[2] Thomas Kuhn is the most well-known historian of science. Famously Kuhn championed a more relativistic perspective on scientific theory. In particular, he argued that paradigms were created, and judgements were made within the paradigm. Awkward "facts" which might be seen as "disproving" dominant theory were explained as being "anomalies", to which answers had yet to be found.

As a young philosophy student in the 1960s and 1970s, Joe followed the debates between Kuhn and his most illustrious opponent, Karl Popper. Within the strict confines of analysis of the philosophy of scientific history, we thought Popper gave as good as he got, but in the wider sphere, Kuhn was deemed the outright "winner". The language of "paradigms" leaped out of science, and entered wider parlance. Kuhn also came to represent the relativistic twist in general thought. To accept Kuhn's most important insight it is not necessary to be an absolute relativist, merely to acknowledge that historically virtually no dominant theory passes the test of time without the least significant revision.[3]

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[2] Fritjof Capra, *Belonging to the Universe* (London: Penguin, 1992).
[3] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; rev. 2012).

Traditions and ways-of-living, and conceiving the worlds within which we act

The philosopher Thomas Nagel has written about *The View from Nowhere*.[4] When we talk about a great view, we are as dependent on where we are as what we are looking at. Think of the times on a journey when you have told your children to look out the window because of the view, only to find that by the time they have decided to listen to you, you have moved to some ravine and the major thing that can be seen is an electricity line. Nagel's point is that *perspective requires being located*. Nagel's project has been to try and reconcile individual perspective and objective reality. How well he succeeds is not our concern here. Instead, let us just consider this at a more communal level.

Here, we run into the line of philosophical thinking commonly described as communitarianism. Principal advocates of this are normally taken to be philosophers such as Charles Taylor, Michael Sandal and Alasdair MacIntyre (though being the contrarian that he is, MacIntyre denounces communitarianism, and denies the association). What communitarians argue is that we need to place people's ideas and values within the context which they are living. Arguing that does not necessarily mean being a relativist (as evidence of this, both Taylor and MacIntyre are practicing Catholics, a religion hardly associated with relativism!). In perhaps the most famous section from *After Virtue* MacIntyre writes:

> Man in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their authorship. I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself part?"[5]

Taylor writes of *Modern Social Imaginaries*, moral "concept-works" if you like.[6] He does this to frame how we make moral decisions, but we can equally extend the idea to encompass how we make any type of decision. Taylor's focus is not on theory but "the way in which ordinary people "imagine" their social surrounding", and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories

[4] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
[6] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003).

and legends."[7] In making this argument, Taylor is not being anti- theoretical. Indeed for someone who has been a leading player in philosophy for nearly 70 years, that would be strange. Rather, he is talking about how ideas manifest themselves. Keynes made the same point in a rather different way when he pointed out

> Practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.[8]

In *The Language Animal*, Taylor puts this in an even wider framework. There he looks at an "enframing" theory of language, where language is "designative-instrumental" representing reality, and contrasts it with a more "constitutive" which "gives us a picture of language as making possible new purposes, new levels of behavior, new meanings and hence is not explicable within a framework picture of human life conceived without language".[9] Put simply, where Kuhn's relativism is, if we are honest, rather pessimistic, Taylor and the communitarians offer the possibility of change for the better.

We can delineate these three dimensions – but they also interact. To take an example, the existence of oil in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries pre-dates homo sapiens. It was only in the nineteenth century that the presence of oil became significant as our technology could then utilise it; and it was only in the mid-twentieth century that the full extent of oil reserves in the Middle East became apparent. Similarly, to understand Iraq today, we need to comprehend geo-political contexts, but also key issues of religious grouping (Shia/Sunni in particular), and also ethnicity (Kurds and Arabs). We also set time delays, and in the Churchillian phrase recently popularised by Robert Gildea, can have "Empires of the Mind", when the active existence of the imperial mindset continues long after the physical empire itself has ceased.[10]

Constructs and action-logics

Developmental psychologists and linguists have a third set of ideas which come more directly from a neuro-biological understanding of how language-driven

[7] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 172-3.
[8] John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), p. 383.
[9] Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[10] Robert Gildea, *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

minds make sense of their worlds. Those of our representations of reality that are captured in our words and articulatable ideas are described as our 'constructs' – they construct (much of) our very experience of the world. And, our constructs may map more or less well on to the reality we are part of. Theorists in communication theory, who base much of their work on the thinking of Gregory Bateson, who we will meet again in Chapter 3, believe that many psychological disorders and difficulties are to do with problems of outdated or ill-fitting constructs. This is true at both the individual and the collective level. For example, if we 'know' that 'all authority figures are trying to kill me' and we live in a reasonably well-ordered democracy, other people are likely to define us as somewhat mad. If, however, we are heretics in a fundamentalist religious state, our construct might, of course, be entirely accurate.

At the macro-level, in the adult development theories we will come across later, collections of constructs are thought to fit together into over-arching 'action logics' – cohesive and self-perpetuating 'meaning-making-machines' that drive our thinking and acting in a relatively unconscious way. Think of the analogy of a phone operating system (OS) and its related apps – action-logics are like the OS and your own particular constructs are like the apps. As you will imagine from the analogy, the latter are much easier to change than the former. However, in Chapter 3, we will meet some theories which aim to point at how action logics change over the course of our lives (or fail to do so) and how we might actively choose to develop our meaning-making in order to bring us closer to an accurate map of the complex and shifting reality we now live in.

So what do 'maps' have to do with leading systemic change?

The use of 'world-view' or 'paradigm' tends to appeal to those who come from a scientific or psychological background (like Karen), whereas the meta-maps of 'traditions' or 'ways-of-living' suit those who are steeped in philosophical or sociological thought (like Joe). And people with a psychological bent like action logics!

So why does this rather theoretical discussion matter in a book about leadership and change? Well, because, at the very root of 'Usness' is the phenomenon of shared (or non-shared) maps of reality. In situations of human contest, conflict and dis-ease, the issue is usually not that **we are disagreeing within the same map** but that we **are using different maps**. At the simple level, this might be the difference between a hospital considering a group of people as 'frail elderly' and the people themselves considering themselves as 'competent older people who

need quite a lot of help'. This is not dancing on the head of a pin – it is at the root of a great deal of current discord (Leavers and Remainers), exclusion (Mind your privilege) and intransigent, stuck problems (The lived experience of families sometimes described as 'chaotic').

To bring alive this notion of contested worldviews, let us consider Ireland and Northern Ireland, particularly through the lens as to how the events of 1916 are viewed. This is not to argue that 1916 is *the* defining issue, but rather that how 1916 is remembered so clearly reveals the different worldviews, or maps which underpin attitudes. In the memorable phrase of Maurice Halbwachs, we need to consider the "social frameworks of memory."[11] This raises the question of what is remembered, and what is forgotten. Others have expressed similar ideas – the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard talked of "social amnesia", while Ian McBride has written extensively about history and memory in Modern Ireland. He writes "For national communities, as for individuals, there can be no sense of identity without remembering." But he then argues that, "memory has a history of its own."[12]

Let's first look at this assertion from a nationalist perspective. Ireland's Easter Rising of 1916 has come to symbolise nationalist aspiration, and is seen as the defining event in the road to Irish independence. The rising started on Easter Monday (a day of no particular religious significance, although admittedly, the original intention had been to start the rising on the Sunday). In truth, the rising was badly planned, poorly executed, and it lacked much public support. Those three realities do not feature much in the resulting "origin myth." Instead, the standard story took hold, not least because of the British reaction. The subsequent executions (in truth, not that many) played into the whole Easter story, that from death comes life.

In fact, there *were* a large number of Irish deaths during Easter week. But the majority of those deaths were not in Dublin. 488 people died during the rebellion – but 582 Irishmen suffered a probably grimmer death, being gassed in a German army attack at Hullock in French Flanders. They were members of the 16th (Irish) Division. The Division suffered a further 200 casualties in the weeks that followed, before being transferred to the Somme that August. The division was overwhelmingly Catholic and nationalist. John Redmond, the Nationalist leader, had nearly secured Home Rule when War broke out. Redmond was clear that Irishmen should fight in the war, to prove their loyalty – and thereby secure Home Rule once the war was over. But Redmond became a forgotten man, along with the 582 forgotten men.

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[11] Maurice Halbwachs (ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser), *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[12] Ian McBride, 'Introduction', in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

How the Rising is remembered (celebrated) has varied over time. In 1966, the 50th anniversary celebrations had a rather militaristic tone. The 2016 celebrations were the largest ever organised in Ireland.

Now let us consider the year 1916 from the perspective of Protestants in Northern Ireland, particularly those from Presbyterian traditions (remember, the DUP was founded by Ian Paisley Sr, who was initially famous as the head of a small Presbyterian church). For them, the defining event of 1916 happened some months later – the first day of the Battle of the Somme. What is forgotten in most English accounts of the Somme was that the heavy lifting on day one was undertaken by the 36th Ulster Division – a predominantly Protestant body. That first day of the battle was, of course, the worst day in terms of casualties in the history of the British Army; but there were over 2,000 fatalities amongst the Irish soldiers involved. Somme commemorations still feature in Northern Ireland life, with the additional dimension of Protestant memory that while "they" were dying, some Catholics had been in collusion with the Germans in the rising.

Consider now the British (particularly the English) take. Two things stand out. Firstly, we have the "small island/ big island" dimension. In other words, the smaller island took more notice of what was happening in the bigger island than the bigger island did of the smaller one. If you read the voluminous accounted go there first world war, you find that the Uprising features as an irritant, not as an existential threat. Indeed, the mishandling of events *after* the rebellion suggests lack of attention, not too much attention. But secondly, the Somme resonates, and has a long term impact – yet the Northern Irish/Protestant dimension does not. Instead, it impacted in two important ways, which show up in other parts of the story which we will tell later, about the 1930s and 1940s. The Somme contributed significantly to a "futility of war" mood, or the "Lions led by donkeys" thesis that took hold and helped underpin the whole pro-appeasement mood. But it also profoundly affected Winston Churchill, whose very marked reluctance to engage in a second front in World War II can be traced back to the tragedy that was the Somme.

Now let's bring in a further perspective to the 1916 example. The Americans have seen themselves as key facilitators that helped broker peace in World War I. The Somme dimension simply does not resonate in that memory (the Americans did not join the war until 1917). But we also see a further example of memory and forgetting. The Americans are very conscious of the importance of Irish connections in their national story; or to be precise, they are very conscious of this every St Patricks Day. However, the Ireland they remember is the Ireland of President

Kennedy (rural, Catholic and southern) and not the Ireland of President Andrew Jackson (Ulster Protestant). Meanwhile, Ulster Protestants remember that Dealer avoided execution in 1916 because of his American roots.

When our four frames for 1916 overlap, no one of them single-handedly frames the debate around attitudes to 1916; but the different worldviews that attitudes to 1916 helps explain just why progress is so difficult, and why just demanding that the participants be more rational is so counterproductive.

If we want to enact changes among groups of people with very different 'maps' of reality, we have to have ways of discovering those maps (including our own) and of finding both the differences and common ground between them. And, as this is a book about leading and about change, we will start with looking at the problems with our current, commonly-held maps for maps for each of those important constructs. So we have now taken a look at what we mean by a 'map' or paradigm; let's go on to look at some of the problems with our current shared maps of 'leadership' and 'change' in organisations – the problems that our emphasis on shared meaning-making is trying to address.

The problem with the paradigms: Leadership

At the Leadership Centre, we contend that the current paradigm of leadership, as it is described and taught in most business schools, leadership programmes and in the literature is well past its sell-by-date. In this chapter, we will try to create some contrast between the dominant paradigm of the last forty years of the leadership 'industry' and some of the newer, contradictory and more critical voices which focus less on 'leadership' per se and more on how change really happens in human systems.

At the moment, these voices have barely impinged on the mainstream of leadership writing or on our organisational leadership programmes, capability frameworks or executive search and selection criteria. As a result, all of these sub-industries can be fairly accused of partiality, exclusionary practices and an astounding failure to deliver on the promise of the outstanding leaders who can save us (or our profit margins). This is as true in public service or third sector organisations, with the exception that the attempt in those organisations to 'value diversity' and create more inclusive organisations are a little further on – at least in the talk, if not the walk.

Six symptoms of an outdated worldview

Let us get polemic and polarized for a moment. In our view, it is valid to say that, in modern Western organisations and the globalized business or institutions that come out of that tradition, the majority of leadership 'product' (books, articles, blog pages, frameworks and trainings) is driven by a single paradigm – a broadly ahistoric, hierarchical, capitalist, culturally Anglo-american paradigm at that! This viewpoint is steeped in:

- A timeless, placeless definition of what 'effective leadership' looks like
- Individualism, and the importance of 'the person who leads'
- Linear causality as a map for understanding and tackling complex problems
- The illusion of objectivity as a valid possibility
- The assumption that meaning is a given, not something that is made
- The belief that effective leadership is always 'good' and leads to good outcomes (at least for my organization, nation or tribe).

In contrast, the quieter, less mainstream voices that are of more interest to us here, have different assumptions about the world. While the different schools and thinkers that we pull together in this book would not, in any way, consider themselves to share a single viewpoint, we think there is some common ground. Almost every originator we refer to would hold one or more of the following views:

- **Human action is always situated in a specific time and place** so the best way to lead change is driven by the context, not the agency of the actors
- **Human understanding is always subjective** so it is futile to try to find 'the one true view' which tells the reality of our situation (although we can reach 'agreement for now' among the relevant people involved)
- **Humans are radically social beings** so change in human societies, communities and organisations is only ever accomplished by collectives and groups, not individuals
- **Humans are 'meaning-making' beings, whose 'action logics' are driven by their life experience** so assuming that we all live in the same world and appealing to a single rationale for action will never work.
- **Complex human problems are not amendable to straightforward programmatic solutions** so the traditional vision/plan/do/review approach of most change efforts falls at the first hurdle, however many metrics we use to try to keep things on track

- **Humans are susceptible to unconscious needs and anxieties which can be played on** so leaders and followers need to pay persistent attention to the ethics of what we are up to here

Like any paradigm, the dominant belief system at the heart of the leadership industry cannot be viewed head on (it is what we see **through** rather than what we see). However, we can point to some of the symptoms of the worldview and start to speculate about how some antidote ideas might work. Joe will go ahead and outline each of these contrasts briefly below and the following *n* chapters expand on the ideas in more detail. Once we have explained our arguments about why the current paradigm needs a radical overhaul, we will go ahead to draw on a variety of lessons

Symptom 1 – The absence of context

In most of the work on leadership, there is a long-standing contrast between those who focus on individual *agency*, and others who focus on *context*. The most extreme advocates of agency were those nineteenth century proponents of the "great man" theories of leadership, most famously Thomas Carlyle. The title of one of his books summarises his stance: *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*.[13] The iteration of this great man stance was Heroic Leadership. Use of that language signified one important development. On most weekday mornings, Joe tries to walk his youngest daughter to her primary school, as she just starts out her life. By contrast, in December 2018, Simcha Rotem died at the age of 94. He was the last surviving fighter in the Warsaw Uprising. Towards the end of the uprising, Rotem had escaped outside the ghetto – but he re-entered the ghetto to lead a troop of men to safety through the sewers whilst the Germans tried to kill all those remaining. We call what Joe does "parenting", and what Rotem did "heroic leadership". Yet both are stories of escorting people on a journey. What differentiates them are the circumstances - Rotem's situation and that of the people he was assisting were clearly far more dangerous than Joe's – so "heroic leadership" descriptions require context, and understanding of what sort of problem we are facing. When we think about the 'heroic' descriptions of corporate executives and their (well-paid) travails to use their positional authority to rethink and restructure their organisations, we might question whether we are making a bit of a category error in calling that leadership at all (as opposed to effective managerial practice).

[13] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: James Fraser, 1841)

The next iterations of leadership writing continued to assume that there were generalisable, context-independent factors that made ‘great leaders’ great. The first focus drew on “trait” theory. This was the argument that we need to understand different personality types in order to understand why some people were effective leaders and some weren't.[14] In contrast, there then came an emphasis on “leadership behaviours”. The modern equivalent of both are those endless books advocating the five, six or seven key skills you need to learn (by buying the book that outlines those attributes, of course).[15]

Against ‘context-free’ descriptions of what leading looks like are those who take a more structuralist stance when considering how change really happens. The most famous articulation of that stance was perhaps through Marxism; but there are structuralists to whom the tag “Marxist” could not be further from the truth – Talcott Parsons, for instance.[16] We try and steer a course through this.

Adapting the “physician, heal thyself” mantra in this book, we take the simple proposition that if you want to change others, you had better be prepared to try and change yourself, too – so the ‘Me’ is important. But we also advocate that change is not a timeless, placeless phenomenon. In summary, we argue for what we might call “situated leadership” – this is discussed in detail later.

Symptom 2 – The rationality trap

We certainly believe, like the structuralists, that leading relates intimately with its context. However, we don't reject the need to look as well at the capabilities and qualities of those who seek to lead. A second dynamic in leadership theory concerns rationality without consideration of the unconscious forces that drive our behavior and the ethical need to be aware of those forces. Many of the “great men” theorists put a big emphasis on the use of power (history books about how King X defeated King Y etc). In the last century, the modern version – something we might describe as “leadership as described by management consultants” – puts much more emphasis on rationality. It is not that the consultants thought everyone was rational. But rather that, like classical economists, they argued that using the assumption made sense. In the same way that Daniel Kahneman and the behavioural economists gave a wake-up call to classical economists' complacency, so the

[14] This emerged from *Ibid*.

[15] These books usually depend on some niche cult of personality – as an example of this (and the utterly short shelf-life of such books, consider Julia Birkinshaw and Stuart Crainer, Leadership the *Sven-Goran Eriksson Way: How to Turn Your Team into Winners* (London: Capstone, 2002), and Wess Roberts and Bill Ross, *Make It So: Leadership Lessons from Star Trek: The Next Generation* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995). Neither is particularly recommended.

[16] Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1951); Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils (eds), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951).

psychological-behavioural twist has entered leadership thinking.[17] However, we do not subscribe to some flimsy relativism which says there is no way of finding any truth value. Instead, rather like Herbert Simon, we would subscribe to a notion of "bounded rationality".[18]

Simon articulated that idea in a book written nearly 80 years ago, *Administrative Behaviour, and its subtitle, A Study of Decision-Making Process in Administrative Organisations*, would hardly be the choice of any modern publisher for a book on leadership. Referencing such a title is, however, a prompt for this book for another reason.

Symptom 3 – The missing 'others'

A third dynamic concerns how theorists and writers consider "the others". Too many leadership books focus only on the leader, only referring to those 'being led' as in need of motivation or of 'engagement' in the 'vision' and 'direction' set by the leader. But, as more recent writers such as Barbara Kellerman, as well as Keith Grint and Clare Holt point out, we need to focus as much on *followership* as on leadership.[19] The most long-running programme on BBC Radio 4 is *Desert Island Discs*. Each week, a prominent celebrity chooses eight pieces of music that they would take with them if they were stranded on an island. Towards the end of the programme, they are always asked what they would do on the island. The answers vary. Some say they would try gardening, others cooking, or writing, or trying to play music (they are allowed one luxury item, so they can have an instrument on which to learn, should that be their choice). The one answer *never* given is "Becoming a better leader", and that is for one simple reason: leadership involves other people. It is a *social*, not an intellectual construct. We therefore focus as much on the activities and wishes of the others as we do on any leader.

Keith Grint has a wonderful trick to get people to move beyond their list of attributes a good leader should have. Faced with a new group of students, he would ask them to shout out the key attributes (traits, behaviours, etc) a leader should have. After the usual initial diffidence, the suggestions come in thick and fast. In no time at all, the screen/board is full of virtues and skills. Keith checks that people are happy with the list, and there is general consent. Keith then asks if anyone has ever met someone who has all these attributes. We then get either an

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[17] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

[18] Herbert Simon, *Administrative Behaviour: A Study of Decision-Making Process in Administrative Organisations*, 4th ed. (New York, Free Press, 1997).

[19] Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2008); Keith Grint and Clare Holt, *Followership in the NHS* (London: King's Fund, 2011).

embarrassed mutter or a long, protracted silence from the audience. Keith then asks how would we describe someone who had all these attributes. After a pause, someone will usually say either "God", or "A saint". Joe has cheerily and shamelessly stolen Keith Grint's approach. Our favourite response to the question was one participant who said he had never met anyone with all the attributes, but he came on the course in the hope of meeting one!

Kellerman's response has been to put the emphasis on followership.[20] She starts her book (with the same title) with a wonderful Bertolt Brecht quote:

> Young Alexander conquered India
> He alone?
> Caesar beat the Gauls.
> Was there not even a cook in the army?
> Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
> Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?[21]

The Kellerman argument, put simply, is that there is no leadership without followership.[22] The corollary therefore should also hold (there is no followership without leadership). However, what evolutionary anthropology shows us is that as a species, we are highly pro-social (the "Usness" effect) so we do tend to follow each other even when there is no dedicated 'leader'. That pro-social tendency predates any notions of leadership, and is deeply engrained within human nature. In this, we are not unique, as the study of any number of animals (such as flocks of birds) show. This is not to decry "followership", merely to point out that it is a sub-set of a wider argument.

A more expansive emphasis on this 'pro-social' aspect of our groupish nature has been to emphasise identity, or tribal attributes of groups or human collectives. The literature about this comes both from psychology, social psychology and social anthropology. All the evidence indicates we have biases towards in-group formation, generally at the expense of an out-group. The argument then goes that leadership involves identity creation. In this book we have we have located the "identity leadership" agenda within the wider Usness context – people can and do maintain multiple, overlapping identities and it is very simplistic (if not insulting) to think that leaders somehow confer identities on 'their people'. We try and move both

[20] Kellerman, *Followership* (2010).
[21] Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 1.
[22] *Ibid*.

these dynamics on. Rather than talking purely about followership or identity, we talk about both "We-ness" and "Usness". How these two concepts unfold, we describe in chapters 3 and 4.

Symptom 4 – The invisibility of 'meaning-making'

We are all, these days, pretty aware that different people have different worldviews, based on things like their life experience, cultural socialization, career histories and personalities – to name but a few factors. However, according to one new field of individual psychology, there is another factor at play in worldview creation which is related to the person's 'stage' of meaning-making. This field - 'adult constructivist development' (also known colloquially as 'vertical' development) looks at the process of increasing complexity and sophistication of thinking, feeling and acting over the normal adult life span. These internal shifts in 'meaning-making' result in increasing flexibility, adaptability, 'reality-orientation', systemic action and resilience. People who are 'later' in their development are more able to process greater levels of complexity without getting stuck or collapsing into group-think than people who are 'earlier'.

Most mainstream leadership training and writing is completely oblivious to the idea of meaning-making in general and the process of adult development in particular. We go into the various theories and theorists in this field in far more detail in Chapter 3. For now, it is just necessary to say that people need to be led in a way that suits their stage of development (or their 'action logic' in the words of Bill Torbert) and, just as importantly, leaders can only lead in a way that fits with their **own** action logic. So, a major mismatch in stage between leader and (the majority of followers) will make for an exceedingly bumpy ride!

Symptom 5 – The ubiquity of 'programmitis'

In the same way that we all like to regard ourselves (if not always others) as rational, so our ideas about leadership and change often assume that the human world follows the logical or "scientific" rules of linear causality – if you do X, then Y will happen. Fortunately, this is often the case – if there were no predictability, then none of us would travel by plane or train. Extending that idea, most people in senior public service roles have been promoted precisely because they have been very good at dealing with **complicated** issues - issues which have many moving parts but which are known and occur repeatedly in time - for example, reducing budgetary spend, installing a new IT system or restructuring and organisation.

However, when these linear approaches are used to try to tackle issues that are genuinely **complex**, multi-faceted and contested (eg tackling childhood obesity, reducing inequality or dealing with racial hatred), normal managerial processes become less effective for reasons we will explore in the next section. The temptation for leaders and stakeholders is then simply to work harder and with more and more diligence, reapplying tried and trusted solutions, way past the point where they no longer work. Indeed, the very solutions they apply seem, of their own accord, to simply create further, more intractable, problems themselves. Paul Watzlawick describes this phenomenon with dark humour in his book *Ultra-Solutions*.[23]

On other occasions, our problem-solving efforts start to fail, simply because we are now working at a different scale. Science is full of illustrations of where some sort of "rule" works in a particular place or time; but at scale and over time, we get feedback loops and unintended consequences (this is called 'emergence' in the systems theories). As an example, it is unclear to us as individuals why, if we fall ill, we should not use antibiotics. It is equally clear to us that at scale, we need to reduce our use of such antibiotics.

The literature about these different 'non-linear' challenges (using any of the 'systems', 'complexity' or 'systemic' badges) is significant. When we and our colleagues are working in complex situations with our clients, we often reference the Cynefin model by Dave Snowden (described later in this chapter), as perhaps our favourite way of describing the types of challenges they are facing. In the language of the Cynefin model, we are dealing with "complex situations" when we think of social issues at large scale. But equally, we could describe them as "wicked issues", a phrase now often associated with Keith Grint – although the phrase predates Grint. A third way of describing this area is through Ronald Heifetz's contrast between "technical challenges", and "adaptive challenges" (also elaborated later on).

Given our interest in this type of emergent, intractable, sticky issue, at The Leadership Centre, we work with systemic, rather than 'Taylorism' (Frederick, rather than Charles) managerial approaches to making change happen, based on theories from the fields of systems thinking, complexity or social practice. Later on in this book, we will outline a range of those systemic approaches to describe how leaders and problem owners might address their own complex community or organisational problems or when they are facing social issues at a large scale.

[23] Paul Watzlawick, *Ultra-Solutions: How to Fail Most Successfully* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980).

Symptom 6 – The 'good' of good leadership

Far too much of the contemporary leadership literature is over-hyped, and indeed has an almost moral tone. Leadership is now seen not just as important (we need it to "solve" problems), leaders must also be good. Now, we are in favour of leaders *trying* to be good, and *doing* good, but we should not try and rewrite history. There are several examples we feature (at the risk of invoking Godwin's Law, we will draw extensively on 1930s Germany, as an excellent illustration of several key points), which are not periods anyone would want to relive, but understanding how *bad* things happen can be instructive. Indeed, failing to notice when *bad* things are happening can be disastrous. In the immortal words of the German pastor and theologian Martin Neimoller:

> First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out –
> Because I was not a socialist.
> Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out –
> Because I was not a trades unionist.
> Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –
> Because I was not a Jew.

So this book is not just for those who aspire to leadership but also for those who wish to resist bad or unethical leadership in the name of change and 'progress' or, indeed the name of 'making [insert country here] great again'. Now we have described six symptoms of an outdated leadership paradigm and some indications of new ways to address them, let's move on to the broader problem of how we currently conceive the process of human change, whether organisational, community or social.

The problem with the paradigms: Organising, organisations and human change

It is commonplace to say that "Context matters." How leaders act should reflect what sort of environment they are working in, and what sort of challenges they are facing. So we need to ensure that our instinctive thoughts and action chime with how the world actually works, and that any theory of change we are working to is in keeping with that. Unfortunately, those of us who work in cross-organisational contexts, with communities or with citizens are often using theories of change which are based on very limited maps of organizing and organisations without necessarily realizing that. Worse, if we come from a managerial background, we

might even be tempted to apply models of change that come from an organizational setting (such as OD or programmatic interventions) to real world community issues. Those of you who are familiar with some of the regeneration initiatives of the 1990s and 2000s will remember the way that local people often felt that they had to don professional habits and language simply to get stuff done for their neighbourhood. This professionalization of citizenhood generally did no-one any good, despite some of the great overall outcomes for some communities.

We are all familiar with the repeated cycles of well-meaning initiatives that make no difference, restructures that just move the deckchairs and the rising disillusionment about any possibility of improvement (aka the 'BOHICA' problem – Bend Over Here, It Comes Again). It is not that are intentions are poor, that our competence is low or that the others are 'resistant' to change, it is just that the commonly used 'map' is now almost worse than useless. This chapter is an attempt to outline some of the newer maps that different 'schools' of organisational change are trying to introduce and to compare and contrast those maps with each other and with the dominant rationalist/managerial paradigm. We are not claiming that it is more than a very quick canter but hopefully it will whet your appetite to discover more!

The dominant paradigm – rationalism, objectivism and the machine metaphor

René Descartes is most famously remembered for his dictum, "I think therefore I am", his attempt to prove consciousness.[24] As a strategy (doubting everything until you discover the one thing you know) it was important in the development of rationalist thinking. However, as Ryle famously described it, the "ghost in the machine" was a deeply problematic concept.[25] Here we need not focus on the mind/brain "divide" but the second aspect of the ambition, namely a rationalist view of the world. Though his initial aim failed to survive critical analysis, his wider ambition of the rationalist view, has found many more adherents.

Applied to leadership and management theory, this approach perhaps hit its apex with Taylorism and scientific management.[26] The original Taylorism perspective has been overturned, but instead we have had the massive growth of the management consultancy business, with a model which says that if you have a problem, you should hire some bright people, and they will think through a solution to the problem you had, and then you can implement the solution (usually by hiring

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[24] René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (Paris, 1637).
[25] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949).
[26] Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper, 1911).

the same consultants to help you do that, because implementation too needs bright thinkers).

The newer version of Taylorism is not to be completely discounted. Michael Barber was one of the most effective civil servants in the Blair Government. His Delivery Unit was not without impact, but his greatest achievement was in education. Barber demonstrated that by real focus it was possible to drive up educational achievement. His book *Instruction to Deliver* is thus a manual for aspirant modern Taylorists – or as we describe it, public service is now in danger of being overrun by the "Barberiens".[27]

Challenges to the 'machine metaphor

Here at the Leadership Centre, we have been consistent critics of this approach, arguing instead for more systemic ideas about human change, drawing on ideas from, for example, complexity theory, prompts from complex adaptive systems, social movement theory and approaches based in design thinking. A theory of change which comes from a systemic perspective places attention on connections and dynamics rather than on the entities, abstractions and linear causality beloved of the dominant rationalist paradigm. In *All Systems Go*, Joe summarised the case for this perspective.[28] On this view, most of the major challenges we face as societies or communities are not technical ones, where expertise is key. Rather, they are the 'adaptive' issues, described by Ron Heifetz, who we come back to later in this chapter. Adaptive challenges, particularly if they involve other people, (and they almost always do!), are complex evolving issues, where an understanding of aspects such as emergence, feedback loops, networks of connections and tipping points are critical.

We are not alone in making this move towards a critic of hierarchical, chain-of-command organising. In American military circles the phrase VUCA is now common place, standing for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. For students of military thinking the debate between VUCA advocates and those believing in more traditional military strategies ("shock and awe" comes to mind) is fascinating. Of course, applied exclusively, neither approach works, but that an organisation usually referenced as an example of hierarchy and rationalist perspective actually is thinking in this way is instructive. One of the key books which helped in this evolution was written by John Nagl.[29] He subtitled the book *Learning to Eat Soup*

[27] Michael Barber, Instruction to Deliver: *Fighting to Transform Britain's Public Services* (London: Methuen, 2008).
[28] Joe Simpson, *All Systems Go! Leadership in a Complex World* (London: Leadership Centre, 2014).
[29] John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (New York: Praeger, 2002).

with a Knife (a phrase from T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, about his World War One experiences in Arabia).[30] The phrase rather encapsulates a key element of systems thinking – change is rather messy and never goes as you planned. Fred Kaplan has written a book about the evolution of this thinking, *The Insurgents*, making the point that it was not only necessary to challenge conventional thinking when dealing with the new warfare, but to succeed in that challenge it was necessary to use unconventional tactics.[31] As an aside, the book is worth a read for another reason. Both the "heroes" of the book (Generals Stan McChrystal and David Petraeus) turn out to be rather complex and ultimately flawed characters, a reminder that leaders are human.

The systemic paradigm: two (then three) schools of thinking

Probably the biggest and best known challenges to the dominant paradigm come from the various schools described as 'systems' approaches or 'complexity' approaches. So, to make sure we cover a broad church, we now explore a range of frames of thinking which can be described as giving a systemic understanding of human change and how it really happens (as opposed to the straightforward 'Vision/Strategy/Plan/Implement' view of managerial leadership). As we explore different disciplines (such as philosophy, biology, mathematics, sociology, social anthropology), we find a range of new ways to understand how we make sense of complex evolving situations.

In doing this, we are exploring two parallel questions. The first concerns theories of change, in which several paradigms are explored, and the second concerns sense-making frameworks. If we were in a rationalist/logical framework, we might then look for some underlying theory which would underpin each of those arguments. Instead, we would suggest we consider each of these approaches as partial solutions which, nevertheless include some common themes which we try to pull out later on.

To put it another way, if you are looking at any complex context (let's say the biological makeup of an island), there is not a "correct" starting point. Depending on your interest or location, you might start differently to one of your colleagues. Each of the approaches described below are starting points, reflecting particular disciplines. In describing these different approaches, we are not suggesting that every advocate of any of these would necessarily agree with all the other approaches.

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[30] T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Privately published, 1926).
[31] Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Polt to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

Indeed, in some cases, we see some friction, as some believe theirs is the one "true" cause, so we get intra-family disputes about who is "purest".

Complex adaptive or living systems approaches
Let's start with "living systems" thinking with its core metaphors of ecosystems, co-evolution and life processes. Much of this thinking grew out of biology, and related life sciences (although economics may be an even better illustration, and to which we will return later). One of the key founder figures of systems thinking is Fritjof Capra. With Pier Luigi Luisi he has written *The Systems View of Life*.[32] There, they began to list some of the key characteristics of the switch from a linear causality model to a more systemic view, namely

shift of perspective from the parts to the whole
inherently multidisciplinary
from objects to relationship
from measuring to mapping
from quantities to qualities
from structures to processes
from objective to epistemic science
from Cartesian certainty to approximate knowledge

If you look at the 'from' characteristics in the list above, you will begin to get clear about how current approaches to organizational management and change are still very held by the old paradigm. How much time do we and our colleagues spend debating and obsessing about measurement, quantification and structures, even when, in our heart of hearts, we know it is all rather futile?

Two of the key figures in the development of 'complex adaptive systems' approaches are Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. Both biologists, they build the connections to argue for the biological roots of human understanding. Of their books, perhaps *The Tree of Knowledge* has been the one with greatest impact in developing this argument. Put simply what biology shows us is the interconnectedness of life. Key in their language is the concept of autopoiesis. This brings in self-referencing rather than external observation as critical. Systems become capable of reproducing and maintaining themselves, and, importantly, setting their own boundaries.[33] This insight helps us understand why it is often so

[32] Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[33] Humberto Maturana and Francisco Vareta, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Life* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

difficult to change things (social systems try to be self-sustaining and to maintain important identities unchanged). Another key systems thinker is Niklas Luhmann, the German social scientist.[34] Luhmann's systems journey was originally along the lines of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons (a theory of action) but evolved much more into a theory of communication.

Systems thinking and cybernetics – a second school

Confusingly, when many managers talk about a 'systems' view of change, they are more likely to be referring to approaches that come out of another school of organizational change, that of 'systems thinking'. 'Systems thinking' as a phrase has moved a long way into the mainstream of public service and even corporate life now, but, rather than using 'living systems' ideas, what is usually meant is the use of tools and techniques from a sub-school of thought, based on cybernetics and originated, in the main, by Ross Ashby[35] and Stafford Beer[36]. This school emphasizes tools and techniques such as network and dynamic mapping, understanding of homeostasis and feedback loops as well as more psychological aspects which pay attention to the underlying assumptions which hold a 'system' in place. The key popularizer of this school during the 1990s was Peter Senge. Senge's excellent synthesis of cybernetics and cognitive theory (especially the idea of 'mental models'), 'The Fifth Discipline'[37], started a new wave of thinking, applied in many organisations under the banner of 'The Learning Organisation'.

The literature on both schools of systems ideas is substantial, some of the most significant texts in the 'living systems' branch being co-written by one of our colleagues, Myron Rogers[38], and in the cybernetics branch by Peter Senge. Our purpose here is not to delve into the richness of the thinking but to flag up these two 'systems' approaches as a key theories of change.

Complexity-based approaches

Systems thinking has a sister: complexity theory. However, this is a story of family feuds. The origins of complexity thinking lie more in mathematics, and is closely associated with the Santa Fe Institute, whilst living systems theory often references biology. Many of the leading lights of complexity science have a grounding in mathematics. Mix modern mathematics (with concepts of uncertainty rather than

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[34] Niklas Luhmann, *Essays on Self-Reference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
[35] Ashby W. Ross, *An Introduction to Cybernetics* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1956).
[36] Stafford Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organisations* (Chichester: Wiley, 1985).
[37] Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990).
[38] Margaret Wheatley and Myron Rogers, *A Simpler Way* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

certainty at its core) with network science and you get the flourishing dynamic models of complexity science. Stuart Kaufman[39], Robert Axelrod[40] and, more recently, Dave Snowden[41] (whose Cynefin framework we will return to later) are some of the key thinkers who apply complexity ideas to organisations and organizing.

For a long time, Joe has thought that economics and economic systems are the best illustrations of living systems (in the way that they challenge conventional economic thinking), but of course it is from complexity science that some of the most robust challenges to neo-classical economics has come. Certainly, post the 2007 crash, the dynamic uncertainty of complexity theory at least gives a theoretical framework to explain what happened, or to answer the question the Queen famously asked about why no economist anticipated the crash.

So both these twin sisters (systems and complexity) help us understand interconnectivity and networks in one language, relationships in another. However there is another, more estranged sister, best associated with the thinking of Ralph Stacey, who refers to his ideas under the banner of 'complex responsive processes' to emphasise his attention on dynamic interactions rather than the ideas of bounded systems and identities. Stacey is an economist by (original) training, and he initially became a strong advocate for adaptive systems thinking. In the terminology used here, we should see Stacey as articulating a version complexity thinking. Indeed, with his Matrix he even codified that approach. But over time, Stacey began to see this as just a new management mantra.

In recent times, Stacey has put much more emphasis on relationships, social/cultural practices and power as the key elements of human change and stasis.[42] Stacey, and his long-time collaborator, Patricia Shaw[43] are less interested in applying new metaphors and analogies to organizing and change and more interested in how the real-time conversations between people create or block the possibility of change. Stacey draws on Norbert Elias' idea of 'enabling constraints' to discuss how we, as humans, create norms and ideas which both constrain the range of our possible actions but, paradoxically, also allow us to **act together** to make new things happen. Both Stacey and Shaw are also particularly interested in

[39] Stuart Kauffman, *At Home in the Universe: The Search for Laws of Self-Organisation and Complexity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
[40] Robert Axelrod, *The Complexity of Cooperation: Agent-Based Models of Competition and Collaboration* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).
[41] David Snowden, *Liberating Knowledge* (London: Caspian, 1999).
[42] Ralph D. Stacey, *Complex Responsive Processes in Organisations: Learning and Knowledge Creation* (London: Routledge, 2001).
[43] Patricia Shaw, *Changing Conversations in Organisations: A Complexity Approach to Change* (London: Routledge, 2002).

the dynamics of power, inclusion/exclusion processes in groups and organisations and in the interplay of competition/co-operation between different players. Their approach is pragmatic, focused on the actual organizing themes at play and on drawing out contested ideas to allow stuck conversations to move on. And, perhaps most importantly, Stacey continually emphasizes that the leader or intervenor is **never** outside the situation, able to bring an objective or perspective-free 'reality' to bear – there is no 'view from nowhere' and our solutions are always informed by our frames.

Differences and similarities between the schools

In debates between "the three sisters", it sometimes sounds like an argument as to who are the ugly ones, and which one is Cinderella. Instead, we think all three have different strengths. Living systems thinking really brings out relationships and language, plus the core interconnectivity of any ecosystem, including human-dominated ones. Complexity models really show the dynamic and ultimately unpredictable nature of systems, with particular focus on discontinuities and tipping points whilst Stacey rightly challenges both about the downgrading of natural psychology, power and power systems as crucial aspects of social change, especially in hierarchical and exclusionary interactions.

In summary, while there are, of course, significant differences between the schools touched on above, most systems/complexity based approaches follow Capra in contrasting from the linear rational view of organizing in five main areas. Practitioners with these influences tend to focus on:

- interactions rather than components by considering **networks** as key organizing principles
- dynamic rather than static representations by identifying cohering **patterns** across time
- nested ways of ordering rather than simple hierarchies, leading to the phenomenon of **emergence**
- non-linear rather than linear causality, which give rise to sudden 'phase transitions' or, colloquially, **tipping points**
- subjective rather than objective understandings of reality, leading to an attention to **frames of reference**.

Later on, in Chapter 11, when we consider our range of systemic challenges, you will see that the thinking there is strongly influenced by these factors, as is much of our practice and use of guiding 'technologies' for change, some of which we refer to at the end of this chapter.

Lastly, let us illustrate the disagreements by returning to economics. Taylorism and rationality fits well with the neo-classical take on economics, which does not argue that every single one of us is always rational. Rather, the classical take is that as long as we have free markets (i.e. where no one can have monopolistic power), then we can assume that through the wisdom of the masses/free markets, we can maximise outcomes. Joe's take on Keynes (rather than Keynesianism) is that we do not have perfect information, and so there is no guaranteed stability. Instead, we need government to provide stabilisers (essentially a systems thinking perspective from the cybernetic focus on homeostatic mechanisms and control of runaway feedback loops). Meanwhile, Marxist economics in particular stresses collective power relations as being key to understanding underlying trends.

The sociological dimension

Social practice theory

As an alternative to the systemic approaches that come from science and mathematics, let's now turn to one of the sociological contributions to this way of working – social practice theory. Social practice has a number of parents and, depending on which parent you decide you would like to resemble, you can have a different take on the theory. However, two key influences are the French theorist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and the Austrian-Jewish philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein's approach is more illuminating). Of current sociologists Theodore Schatki is perhaps the most prominent advocate. Social practices thinking aims to find a middle ground between a strong individualistic frame and a heavily structural one. By focusing on actual practices this highlights both technologies and skills. The great mantra of Wittgenstein's later work was to focus on *use*. In social practice theory, this insight is expressed in more complicated ways. Here is the take of Elizabeth Shove, Mike Pantzar and Matt Watson:

> We begin our analysis of the dynamics of social practice with two deceptively simple propositions. The first is that social practices consist of elements that are integrated when practices are enacted. The second is that practices emerge, persist and disappear as links between their defining elements are made and broken.[44]

[44] Elizabeth Shove, Mike Pantzar and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How it Changes* (London: SAGE, 2012), p. 21.

Meanwhile, in Schatzki's phrase, practices define the "horizon of intelligibility." [45]

To give an illustration of how this thinking helps, let us consider motor cars. In the early days of the car the vast majority of cars were in cities, and the main technology was the electric car. It was Ford who really made the dramatic push into use of petrol. But that use created the new paradigm of cars enabling people in the country to connect (or for urban dwellers to explore the countryside). Now, when 100 years later we want to encourage people to switch back to electric cars what social practice theory reminds us it is not enough just to make the technological offer, we have to understand the practices (how cars are used).

There is one drawback, social practice theorists act (in language we will explain below) much like an enclave. The initiation rite is the commitment never to use comprehensible language if it is at all possible to create a jargon full collection of words not in common currency.

If we pull back a bit from the detailed arguments of the social practice theorists to take a wider perspective, we see the similarities between their field and ethnography. Originally associated with anthropological practice and detailed study of traditional societies, it now more often describes the insights that come from really extended understanding of how people lead their lives.

Ethnography

Ethnography grew out of social anthropology. Essentially, it looks at a society or activity from the perspective of the participant. As such, it was an important move on from earlier perspectives which viewed activities of native peoples as somehow being just "primitive". The modern use, however, is not restricted to looking at other societies, but to helping us better understand what's going on between groups of people within our society. More generally, social anthropology can now be seen as focusing on modern and not just traditional societies, a move in which Mary Douglas played a key role (of whom more later).

Robert Caro is our leading biographer, and someone focused on understanding power. But his insights come from a really detailed understanding of the circumstances surrounding particular events. Caro has been working on the biography of Lyndon Baines Johnson since 1976. To date, he has published four volumes. To the slight concern of his fans, he has taken a detour to write the book *Working* (the concern is that he is now 83, and as he acknowledges, time is

[45] See Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

ticking).[46] The book justifies the detour. One illustration makes the point (and also connects to two other themes in the biography – LBJ himself, and the 1930s). When he began writing, Caro was not welcomed by the Johnson family, nor their neighbours. That did not deter him, but a lot of his early interviews did not illuminate in the way he hoped. He recognised that to neighbours of Johnson, he just looked like another visiting journalist (and a rather late one, at that). Of course, a lot of journalists had visited the Johnson hometown when he was President, so Caro did not even get the opportunity of being the first to call. Eventually, he persuaded his wife that they should relocate from New York City to the Texas Hill Country, where they spent three years of their life. Johnson died at the comparatively early age of 64, so many of his contemporaries were still alive, and were still living exactly where they grew up.

Over time, Caro's conversations became based on higher levels of trust and understanding. Those three years translated into one chapter in a single book. But the insights he learned permeated all the subsequent volumes. In particular, one story resonated with him. A woman asked him whether he any idea what it was like to have to carry full buckets of water from the well to the house, several times a day (a house might use 80 gallons in a day). What she remembered about LBJ was that he was the person who changed all that. He delivered electrification for over 200,000 people in the Hill Country. That intervention radically changed social practice. That change sustained Johnson's electoral base. In Chapter 8 we feature the consequences of another electrification scheme of that era, the Tennessee Valley Authority. Wendell Willkie saw this in narrow economic terms, whilst FDR saw the wider picture.

The second insight concerned LBJ himself. His early life was one of abject poverty. Moreover, Caro eventually discovered the truth from LBJ's brother that family life had not been ideal. LBJ regarded his father as a bit of a dreamer – especially when his father repurchased the old family farm, only to lose it again because it was just not viable. Johnson's ruthlessness can be traced back to his school years (he even rigged the school elections). But all this helps illuminate his pretty poor relationship with the Kennedy brothers, whom he regarded as rich kids who never had to lift a finger in their lives. They meanwhile saw themselves as a family who had raised themselves from nowhere, and looked down on Johnson as the vulgar newcomer.

[46] Robert A. Caro, *Working* (London: Bodley Head, 2019).

These insights are critical if we are to evolve our sense-making, and meaning-making, capacities, so as to include the *context* of where people come from, and where activities take place.

Cultural Theory

Returning to the broader models, to explain enclaves, and to complete our tour of insights, let us now refer to what is now called cultural theory (though originally described as Grid and Group). The most prominent advocate of this is the late Mary Douglas, though its roots come from Durkheim (a heritage Douglas fully acknowledged). Douglas was a great collaborator, and her intellectual companions cover a wide spectrum of views. Early in her career she worked closely with the Marxist Basil Bernstein, whilst later she worked with Aaron Wildavsky, who was well to the right in American political thinking.

Because of the range of collaboration (and because Douglas's views also evolved) there is not a definitive version of the theory, but our take goes as follows. Douglas saw the world through the perspective of four different perspectives; hierarchist, individualist, egalitarian, and fatalist (see diagram in Chapter 4 for further elaboration on this).

In different versions of her thinking the emphasis of otherwise on the isolate varied. More importantly there is also two ways of looking at the four blocks. One is to consider this as a way of considering how people group, so some of us are more comfortable with hierarchy than others. (Douglas personally believed that hierarchy was undervalued, an attitude that distinguished her from many colleagues in the 1960s.) Collaborators such as Michael Thompson, or modern advocates of her work such as Matthew Taylor at the RSA, are certainly in this camp. However, Joe agrees with Perri 6 that Douglas herself was more interested in another perspective, best summarised by the title of one of her key books "How Institutions think". (In Karen's language, we could talk at organisational action logics.)

So if different types of organisational settings lead to different mindsets we have a challenge- what seems obvious to one does not make sense to another. Douglas is not arguing that there is a correct answer- instead what she postulates is that each has inadequacies as well as strengths, and we have therefore a dynamic model where tot much of one approach is dysfunctional- yet to sustain all four we need "clumsy solutions".

There is a further twist. Another Douglas collaborator is Steve Rayner. Rayner's early work focused on some in British terms "revolutionary" groups in the 80s- in Douglas language classic enclaves. What Rayner noticed was not just the internal self-referencing, but that the time horizons were different. The enclave had the focus on the "now" (overturn of the social order was always only one step away). Hierarchies, on the other hand, often lack any word as urgent as "tomorrow".

Cultural theory and the four domains

When we get the interaction between the different types of institutional thinking, a dialogue of the deaf is not difficult. Perri 6 brilliantly uses the example of the Cuban Missile Crisis to demonstrate this. In *Explaining Political Judgement*, Perri shows the different institutional mindsets of the main participants (the USA, Russia and Cuba). In his words, "Castro misread both the Soviet and the US governments as much as they misread each other and both misunderstood the Cuban leadership." For Perri the American approach to the crisis can often be best described as a market. Kennedy had learned the lesson of the Bay of Pigs fiasco (where he had allowed himself to be seduced by the US military). So throughout the crisis he tried to keep different options in play. Castro and his colleagues can best be considered as an enclave (they really were content for a world war to start) whilst the Russian military were very hierarchical, and Khrushchev is best considered as being isolated.[47]

The crisis is certainly the scariest period in post war history and the nearest we have been to nuclear destruction. It is also one of the most documented periods in our history, written about by historians, political scientists as well as leadership and change theorists all trying to make sense of what happened and to account for how it was resolved. So let's conclude this example with a brief resume of how our model squares with an understanding of what happened.

Let's start with the Me. There is a pretty clear consensus that the leader that ultimately best understood the challenge was Kennedy. There is perhaps less consensus as to which Kennedy should get this accolade (in different accounts it is JFK, in others Bobby gets lead billing). What we do know however is that the Kennedy's worst foreign policy venture was the Bay of Pigs fiasco (the earlier attempted invasion of Cuba). Both Kennedys learned from that experience and consciously ensured reflection not just action. In our language we can see some linear development in the lead personnel.

[47] Perri 6, *Explaining Political Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Next, consider the We. The Bay of Pigs was a scary example of American groupthink. During the missile crisis the American military leadership was as gung-ho ho as ever. (It was not accidental that "Bombs away with Curtis Lemay" became a tagline when LeMay ran as vice president on the George Wallace ticket in 1968.). Kennedy ensured not just reflection, but insisted that teams worked up counter proposals (with people often being asked to work on proposals they did not necessarily support). In our language, Kennedy used all the insights that Kantor describes in looking at different positions.

As for the Us/Them dynamic, what was critical was that Kennedy was very careful with the rhetoric. He knew he had to be seen to be "strong", but Kennedy ensured that he did not make the tension too binary. In particular he knew that Khrushchev could not face humiliation. He was therefore open to backroom deals. Whilst in securing the final deal both Russia and the US reneged on partners (Cuba and Turkey).

Whilst what Perri 6 brings out is how, in the early stages in particular, each side completely misunderstood how the other would respond. In essence, it was as much good fortune as good leadership that we survived.

Practical applications to systemic change

All of this talk of schools and theories can make these new paradigms seem very inaccessible. The messy, disorganised, sometimes academically inpenetrable fields are currently unable (or unwilling) to define their meta-themes, or make it easy to understand and allow non-practitioners 'in'. This means that it is tempting to align to one 'school', claim that it is the best for everything and then 'look over the fence' at the other guys to see if they have any better toys! Or, give up in despair and fall back into our familiar (but stuck) programmatic, exclusionary, 'we know what you need best' approaches because at least that will get some stuff done on the ground.

Luckily, the field of practice is further ahead in some ways – even if it is rather eclectic and a bit prone to 'mine is better than yours' thinking. At the moment, there are a huge range of approaches out there which might claim to be 'systemic' in nature – even if they don't even use the word 'system' in their discourse. These approaches all emphasise connectedness, networks, natural human interaction and the diagnosis of actual lived dynamics over reductive, hierarchical, role-bound and programmatic interventions.

The list below gives examples of some of the systemic approaches The Leadership Centre uses in its development programmes and work on the ground with people solving problems in places:

- Some (but not all) design thinking approaches (especially ethnography, open hackathons, creativity building tools)
- Social movement ideas (especially narrative building, inclusive convening etc)
- Constellations, process work, radical dialogue and other embodied, non-rational technologies (for helping large groups problem identify issues, deal with conflict and power dynamics and work towards personal empowerment and emancipation)
- Some (but not all) diagnostic ideas from cybernetic systems thinking (eg complex situation diagnosis, mapping of actors and multiple causality of issues, understanding of feedback loops)
- Some (but not all) ideas from complexity theory/complex responsive process thinking (especially very large group feedback processes, thematic conversations, dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, co-operation/competition).

Fortunately, each of these approaches has a range of highly practical tools and practices (and a few useful guiding metaphors here and there) but each is also clouded in jargon, prone to 'territory grabbing' and professionalisation etc. Many of the original founders of these types of ideas would be horrified to hear that, but it is the case! The list above is our own, very partial list as we are sure there are a whole range of other 'technologies' out there which come from other cultures, ideologies and peoples which we are totally unaware of. We will give examples of how many of these technologies can be used to address the five systemic challenges in Chapter 11.

Horses for Courses : Fitting your paradigm to the problem at hand

To summarise our argument, we have three significant paradigms of change (Taylorist/Rationalist, Systems/Complexity and Identity/Power). So far, so good. Many of us would agree that many of the ideas of the systemic and sociological approaches seem both useful and practical in helping us face into our most complex community and organizational challenges. But, as yet, for most managers and (especially) organizational leaders, they are a minority sport (not least because of the bewildering jargon and sub-sub-school disagreement at play).

Advocates of each of the above options try to argue the overriding importance of their approach. In our switch to a more systemic lens we are recognizing that, viewed through time, and viewed through the different perspectives that different groups have (also through time) means we need to evolve and adapt as we try to attempt change.

The relevance to this for leadership is the reminder that even well-supported and intuitively appealing argument rarely wins when arguing for change, if that change is outside the dominant way of thinking (be that within an organisation, or more generally within a society). So, while some people have a perspective on the systemic perspective, others don't even know it exists and still others think it is over-complexification of matters which would be best sorted out if we kept it simple, stupid.

So, let us explore where each of these paradigms works and does not work. There are a variety of ways to consider complex issues whether societal, community or organizational and we will look at two of the most useful sets of ideas – adaptive vs technical challenges and the Cynefin situation analysis for guiding decision making.

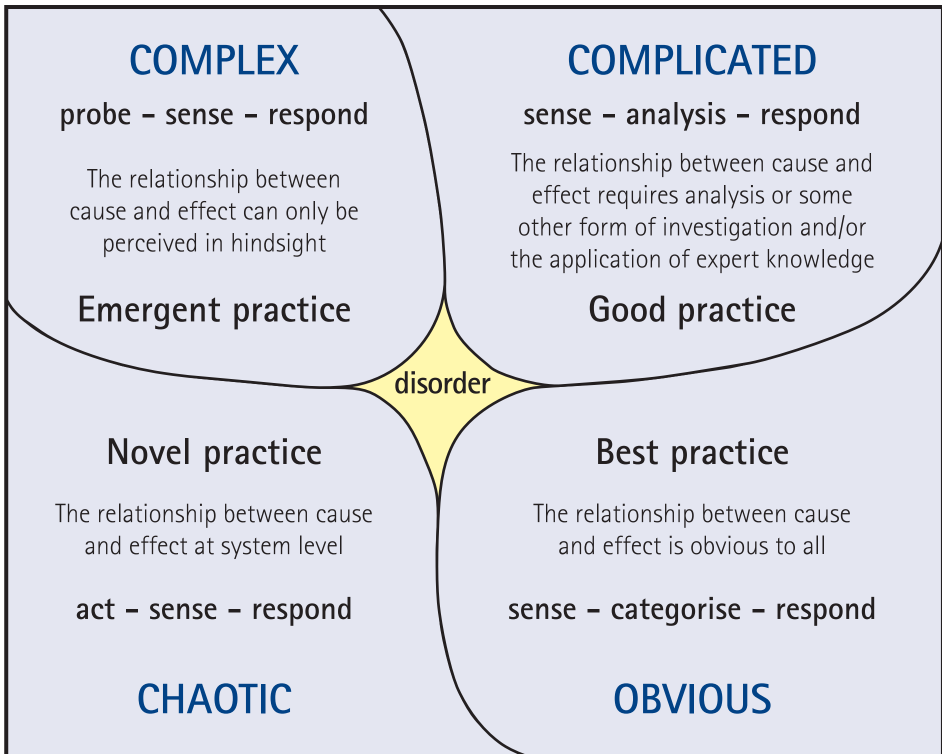
Facing up to adaptive challenges

First, Ron Heifetz and adaptive challenges. Heifetz contrasts adaptive and technical challenges. To illustrate his distinction in a shorthand manner, Heifetz started his career as a surgeon, before then becoming a psychiatrist and then a professor at Harvard. As a surgeon he describes his role as get patient, knock patient out, fix patient, wake patient up, then send patient home. As a psychiatrist he noticed that approach did not work. Medicine is a brilliant example of the interplay between Taylorism and Systems perspective. Surgery in particular often focuses more towards the former, whilst psychiatry is grounded within a more systemic perspective. Yet even with the former the surgeon needs to ask the question why is surgery needed. Asking that question often requires a more systemic answer. Breaking our legs falling off a bike may be seen as a technical problem. Broken bones after a fall might, on the other hand, indicate some other issues such as bone cancer.

Dealing with complex situations

Our second theorist is Dave Snowden and the Cynefin framework, which he devised in 1999[48].

Cynefin Framework, by David Snowden



Again, it is easy to see the read through. For both simple and complicated situations, Taylorism has value . For complex situations and when chaos reigns, it is disastrous as it gives a false sense of certainty, whilst systemic perspectives helped leaders understand how they might start to address the challenge.

But what of the Stacey challenge? Remember Stacey saw himself initially as advancing the complexity thesis rather than its twin sister living systems. Joe's take would be that we should regard Stacey as arguing for a human systems approach, not one so routed in biology (or rather confining biology to be another twin sister).

[48] David Snowden, 'A Leader's Framework for Decision Making', *Harvard Business Review.* 85:11 (December 2007), pp. 68-76.

We can make this argument drawing on Luhmann, but also on our list of meaning-makers/ sense makers (Kuhn, the Communitarians etc). As we have also referenced, Luhmann evolved his thinking to be one about communication. Two of his key books are called "Trust" and "Power", so he too was grappling with the same challenges as Stacey.

And drawing on our sense makers, with their take on identity and power, we get another perspective. Social systems are social constructs with shelf life, but that does not mean they are immutable to change. Social systems evolve through Me, We and Us. Sometimes power is used to help develop or sustain systems (think Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia). Sometimes identity can also be used. The Nazis always used hard power against their enemies (the attacks on the left and on Jews predated their ascent to power) but the Nazis also used soft power well. There was no significant revolt against the Nazis within Germany, and until virtually the end of the War most Germans really did feel they needed to defend Germany ("us") against aggressors ("them" particularly the Russians). The cleverness of the Nazis was their use of influence to sustain the identity (and the myth of national self-defence rather than aggression).

With this perspective we can see our Context frame not as some completely separate fourth dimension but a summary of the interaction of the other dimensions, in a world with time lags and competing frames.

Another way to distinguish when you can be Taylorist and when you need a different lens is to ask the question 'Can my challenge be addressed within our existing "boundaries" (however tightly or loosely conceived), or do those boundaries have to be reimagined?' If we need to evolve to another 'social imaginary' then we can see that we are dealing with two Taylorisms - the scientific management of Frederick Taylor or the communitarianism and social imaginaries of Charles Taylor.

Now if our challenge is better framed within the latter, the insights that our sense-makers and our systemic thinkers bring are as follows:

1. If you try and change the social imaginary purely through "logic" you will fail. Stories trump facts (as Trump so clearly demonstrated). In Kuhn's language the paradigm can accommodate a lot of "difficult" facts before the paradigm is undermined. In systems language there is a strong self-preservation instinct.

2. It is delusional for the change maker to assume he or she is completely outside the system or social imaginary. You cannot have the view from nowhere.
3. We need to evolve the phrase "the hard stuff is the soft stuff" or rework the phrase "culture eats strategy for breakfast". What this argument suggests is that change makers need to focus on the evolution of the stories and the symbols so allowing a different sort of sense-making.

SECTION 2

Leading change as a social, meaning-making, situated activity

CHAPTER 3

Understanding 'Me' – the development of individual meaning making

Karen Ellis

In our exploration of meaning-making as a crucial element of systemic leadership, it might seem that this chapter is about the simplest element – the individual. However, as you might start to discern when you come to our 'Us chapter, even the common modern Western idea of 'the individual' as a separate actor is rather problematic. For now, let's assume that we can learn useful things about leading systemically by considering the **meaning-making capacities** of the individuals (including you!) who are trying to make leadership 'moves' in a systemic (rather than pure organizational) context.

Please note, immediately, that we are **not** talking here about 'The Leader', i.e. the individual who may have been given a role identity of 'The System Leader' in any given change attempt or enterprise, nor solely about those people who have some given sense of role authority by virtue of being 'senior' in an organization or elected by a political or membership group. We are talking about anyone who is attempting to make a 'change move' in a systemic context – from the party leader who is trying to lead a country into a new role or identity in the world to the estate mum who has decided to set up a hot food kitchen to help children learn to cook (and get a decent dinner at the same time).

What does systemic leadership involve? While one of these 'system roles' described above might look rather bigger than the other, both require similar kinds of activities, including:

- Painting a broad-brush sense of a different possible future[1]
- Collaborating with others to 'fill in the detail' – making sure they have a stake in designing their future
- Inspiring and enrolling others to add their weight and actions to move towards that future
- Creating a climate to make sure new ideas thrive as the system shifts to a new footing – supporting others to 'fail fast and often' as the learning builds
- Organizing activities and tasks to make practical changes
- Supporting and encouraging people when times get tough and they are ground down by the need for persistent effort
- Continually circling back to the original 'possible future' to make sure either that we are not going too far off track or that our learning has shown us that we need to adapt our sense of that future after all.

Effective systemic leaders are people who, consciously or unconsciously, recognize the need for all of these activities. While, of course, they do not do all of it themselves (knowing that 'those who do the work do the change')[2] is a vital part of systemic leadership, they do the bits they are good at and find others who are good at the rest. As is often the case, to understand the importance of each of these processes and activities, it is worth considering what happens when someone who is trying to lead a systemic change neglects or misfires on one of them:

- The possible future may miss some key elements which are important to other people (e.g. a societal vision which only reflects the values of the indigenous population)
- The 'leader's vision' may be too monolithic, created in their own image and without any sense of what others could have contributed
- The narrative for change may be weak, may lack heart, or may simply be a bit 'meh'

[1] See Senge's inter-related Fifth Discipline perspective, which highlighted the importance of learning organisations, in which employees feel engaged and committed to their organisation's vision. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Random House, 1990, rev. 2006).

[2] Myron Rogers, quoted in John Atkinson, 'Myron's Maxims', *Heart of the Art* (2016), https://www.heartoftheart.org/?p=1196.

- The culture may be one to punish 'failures', spraying out blame, or 'forcing failure underground', resulting in NewSpeak narratives about how such-and-such an initiative 'worked really', when no change has been experienced by people within the group
- The change process may rely too strongly on delegation of responsibilities and traditional programme management disciplines, ignoring the fact that leaders often need to attend to small-but-important actions which symbolize the change as well as overseeing the social, as well as the technocratic elements
- The leader may be too far from the ground, failing to 'get on the dancefloor' often enough and so have no sense of how people are really doing or whether anything is really shifting for them
- The original 'vision' may be held too tightly and fail to adapt to new circumstances (the global corporates who are still avoiding the reality of Chinese dominance in digital innovation) or learning may not be incorporated iteratively as the change proceeds.

We suspect that many of you who work in the public service may have smiled ruefully at one or more of the bullets above – recent attempts to change major institutions (let alone cross-organisational change) are littered with some of the misfires listed above. But hopefully you will have also thought of one or two examples of systemic changes which did work (large or small) and you may be beginning to recognize how some of the activities we describe were led by one or more effective systemic 'movers'.

Systemic movers and their capacities

When we think about people who seem able to make these 'systemic' moves, our leadership language often fails. As we described in Chapter 2, much of what is described in the leadership literature (and which is crystallised in organizational capability models or assessments) is based on the idea of the heroic single leader in a stable organizational hierarchy with the role authority to command or instruct others in the line.[3] Leaders are asked to create a vision, set a direction, engage others in that direction and 'performance manage' the implementation. While many of us recognize that this kind of unilateral authoritarian approach is failing. even within a fixed accountability structure, mostly what is happening within organisations is that the descriptions of leaders are simply being softened slightly. 'New leadership' descriptions and frameworks abound with terms like empowerment,

[3] Barbara Kellerman, *The End of Leadership* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2012).

inclusion and diversity – all valiant attempts to emphasise a more collegiate approach but nowhere near a genuine sense of the collective. As one of Karen's corporate learning and development colleagues said recently. 'I still can't sell co-creation as a leadership activity'!

Part of the problem is that we currently lack a leadership 'detection system' that allows us to even notice the fact that **some people do leading differently**. These are the people that, in our language, have rather different internal **capacities** from many other adults. Karen's research over the last five years across the field of adult development has lead her to identify four specific capacities which help people cope with a VUCA world and allow them to manage the complexity of a systemic change. These are the capacities for:

- understanding themselves (and especially their own stuck points, biases and blindspots),
- making sense of complex situations as data comes in thick and fast
- playing with ideas and different options in a very open and collegiate way
- genuinely understanding the subjective experience of others.

As these people develop their capacities further, they (usually unconsciously) test them against reality by trying to lead change in organisations, communities or (real, not virtual) social networks. When the rubber of their meaning hits the road of reality, they start to develop some recognizable leadership **capabilities** which help them guide others to solve wicked issues, respond to complex and ambiguous situations and gradually shift to a more adaptive stance which allows them to respond more quickly and 'learn the way forward'.

These are the people that we all experience as 'systemic movers', people who make a difference in the environments they operate in – big or small, elaborate or simple. You will all have met some, sometimes in quite unlikely places and you may well even be one yourself! We will describe our take on the key challenges of systemic leadership and how they might drive capability development later in this book (in Chapter 11) so you can contrast them with your own (or your organisation's) ways of assessing leadership capability.

Identifying and cultivating systemic movers

How do we find these 'systemic movers', learn from them and make sure we amplify their effects? It doesn't seem at the moment that our usual processes for identifying talent or electing politicians are very good at distinguishing them! Those of us who work closely with the body of theory called 'adult constructivist development' think

that we have an angle on a leadership 'detection system' which has been comparatively neglected in the modern West (although it relates quite strongly to ancient wisdom traditions which are more familiar to our colleagues from Eastern and Middle-Eastern backgrounds).

Importantly, it is our contention that this difference in ability to 'be the difference that makes the difference' (and, therefore, to lead systemically) has nothing to do with style, with gender, with personality or with skills or intellect. It is to do with the fact that the underlying **sense-making** and **meaning-making capacities** that certain people have developed as adults give them more 'room for manoeuvre' than those of us who still rely on cultural norms and expectations and on our previous experience and expertise to guide our actions. In the jargon of 'adult development', these individuals are described as 'post-conventional' – not unconventional. They have moved beyond their 'socially constructed' way of seeing the world into a much more curious and actively learning approach where they are able to see each new situation as a genuinely new situation and each new person as having the potential to offer a unique relationship for them to learn from. In Daniel Kahneman's 'thinking fast and slow' terms,[4] they are more conscious of, and adept at, using 'Thinking 2' to respond to novelty and complexity, rather than unthinkingly falling back on familiar routines, norms and rules-of-thumb.

The 'getting of wisdom' – the development of sense-making and meaning-making in adults[5]

So what, specifically, is that is different about people who find it easier to work in a systemic way? Well, in colloquial terms, we might describe them as 'a bit wise', 'more of a grown-up', 'having good judgement', but these terms are often very vague and each of us will have different images of what 'wise' means. If you ask them about their own development as an adult, people tend say, "I have no idea what you mean by adult development"; but they almost always understand the idea when they are asked to consider people that they consider as having good judgement or as being wise. People know about seeking out advice from people who are wiser than them, and how frustrating it can be to be given advice by people less wise than them — though they may not realise that until they've asked for the advice! If you say to them, "Think about a group you work with, and about

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[4] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Turtleback Books, 2013).

[5] You may remember from Chapter 2 that, Karen uses the term 'sense-making' for the gathering of data about the world ('facts' if you like) and 'meaning-making' for the personal way of interpreting that data in relation to what is important to us ('valuing' if you like).

how some people make a bigger contribution to new thinking or action than others", that conveys itself very easily. There is a "folk understanding" of development, even when people don't know the underlying literature — nobody's surprised by this way of seeing things once their attention is drawn to it.

Fortunately, we can take heart in the burgeoning fields of wisdom studies and adult developmental research (if not the burgeoning of actual wisdom in modern Western democracies!). What can this research tell us about 'the differences that make the difference' when it comes to wise judgement and leading in complexity? As you will be aware, there is a long traditional of research into human wisdom (about 4000 years, starting in China, as is often the case!) and the ancient Greeks did an awful lot of it, whether before Socrates or after. However, in modern Western times there are two key threads of research which, as is often the case, don't really talk to each other!

One thread comes from the more educational/life-span domains of psychological research and includes investigations of the experience-related changes in people's ability to use judgment, studies into meta-cognition[6] (thinking about your thinking) and discussion of the broader emotional and social aspects of wisdom development. Much of the thinking in this area is summarized in the 'Berlin Wisdom Paradigm'[7] which describes human processes for deciding important but radically uncertain matters – rather relevant in the sorts of complex situations we have been looking at in the book so far.

The other thread (which we will draw on more here) comes out of the initial work on child development, begun by Piaget[8], cognitive psychology (especially ideas around language constructions[9] and cognitive complexity),[10] anthropology[11] and psycho-social development.[12] As you can tell from this wide range of domains, it is quite surprising that there is any agreement at all! However, this overall field of 'adult constructivist development' draws on all of these bases to hypothesise a surprisingly coherent, convergently-evolved sense of a 'staged' process of adult development across the life span.

[6] M. P. Follett, 'Management as a Profession', In H. C. Metcalf (ed.), *Business Management as a Profession* (London, 1927), pp. 73-87, reprinted in J. T. Samaras (ed.), *Management Applications: Exercises, Cases and Readings* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), pp. 12-19.
[7] Paul B. Baltes, *Lifespan Development and the Brain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[8] Jean Piaget and Barbet Inhelder, *Memory and Intelligence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).
[9] Jane Loevinger, 'The meaning and measurement of ego development', *American Psychologist*, 21 (3), pp. 195-206.
[10] Elliott Jaques and Katherine Cason, *Human Capability: A Study of Individual Capability and its Application* (New York: Cason Hall, 1994).
[11] Christopher C. Cowan and Natasha Todorovic (eds), *The Never-Ending Quest: Clare W. Graves Examines Human Nature*, 2nd ed. (New York: ECLET Publishing, 2005).
[12] Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).

The different theories with constructivist development differ in both their naming and describing of the stages, but they converge remarkably in their overall summary of the process of increasing complexity and sophistication of thinking, feeling and acting. While 'stage' does not directly correlate with age, each person, as they develop, has to have had a wide range of different experiences to learn from and, ideally to have extended their ability to 'learn to learn' in the process. So, on the whole, we see more late stage people in their 40s and 50s than we do in their 20s and 30s. However, even this rule of thumb seems to be breaking down as more 'children of post-conventional parents' grow into adulthood (even if they do pass through a snowflake stage!) and as some of us in later middle age may simply get stuck in a conventional world-view that has operated as a winning formula throughout our adult lives.

The good news is that adult constructivist development tells us that our sense-making and meaning-making capacities in a variety of complex arenas continue to develop from early adulthood – we don't stop developing unless we get 'stuck' (more on this later). You can observe this yourself in the current players on the world stage. We strongly notice adults who are not in the norm in relation to their stage/age relationship, i.e. Donald Trump, or Silvio Berlusconi, are examples of leaders who seem to be operating from an earlier stage of development — looking at them, we instinctively know that there's something different about them. Just listening to them, we know that there's something out of kilter with other national leaders like of Angela Merkel or Justin Trudeau. That's not to say that a leader like Silvio Berlusconi isn't incredibly clever, he's very clever indeed in a particular sort of way — however, some aspect of his psycho-social development seems to be off key or 'younger' than the rest of him. So even people who know nothing about development, can still recognise differences in development.

To take a more everyday example, if you think about the times you have had a difficult problem at work, and have needed to turn to someone for some dispassionate advice, rather than just a shoulder to cry on, it's likely that you have been instinctively moving towards people who are at a more complex stage of development to yourself. We tend to find that people in "earlier" stages of development than ourselves may be sympathetic or to offer lots of advice, but somehow what they offer as advice won't be very helpful. Just imagine how effective it would be to ask a teenage relative for advice about your marriage? Having said that, there is often huge value in their very different point of view! If you can apply it to your own personal situation via your **own** developmental filters, of course.

As you can see from the examples above, people may be at different stages in their overall development but they may also have different aspects of their functioning at different stages To start to elucidate how a Merkel differs from a Trump, we can think about three key elements of individual meaning-making:

- the interpersonal dimension – how we relate to others, our ability to genuinely attempt to understand each person we meet, to interact with them in a healthy way, free of blindspots, prejudice, power plays or historical psychological patterns
- the personal dimension – how we relate to ourselves, our ability to be fair and kind to ourselves, to challenge ourselves when necessary, to be aware of our biases and our psychological quirks and to pay attention to our feelings and manage them in a healthy way
- conceptual dimension – how we relate to the world of facts, opinions, concepts and beliefs, our ability to play with ideas, to recognize our own underlying assumptions, to develop coherent trains of thought and to be creative in our work.

Obviously, at one level, all of these elements interlink (you are whole person with whole responses to whole situations) but as you think 'developmentally' you can start to imagine how someone might have a function or part-function that is lagging behind or leaping ahead of their development. For example, you probably all know at least one young adult who is incredibly bright about abstract ideas but who has no idea how to manage herself in socially stressful situations. Or the middle-aged man who still does not have a clue about his impact on people from very different background to his own – inadvertently insulting the values they are loyal to or simply patronizing them. Each of these individuals has an 'interpersonal trailing edge' or stuck place – and you will notice that we tend to be rather more forgiving of the younger player – the older one 'should have got it by now'. But stuckness is stuckness, regardless of age – if someone has not had the experiences to learn from or some wise guidance (or importantly, the systemic feedback which tells them that they need to shift), there is no more likelihood that the older person will move on than there is for the younger one. In fact, it may be even harder – we can genuinely become 'stuck in our ways' as we get older although there is good evidence that at least a third of us definitely don't!

Importantly, you don't have to be interested in your own development to develop (although it definitely helps to speed the process up!). Anyone who is a good learner and who is able to reflect in a neutral way about their experiences will

develop naturally **unless their environment is anti-learning**. It is an interesting question about whether the increased emphasis in organisations on 'being with the programme', 'on the bus', 'aligned' etc is actually damaging this natural process of questioning, experimenting and reflecting, especially for time-poor, overburdening, 24/7 online people.

Consciously developing systemic capacities

But, if we **are** interested in developing our systemic capacities, how might we go about that? A good summary of the range of adult development theories and how they might apply in the modern workplace can be found in a paper from the Center for Creative Leadership which also covers the key references.[13] Torbert and Rooke[14] have also done much to promote the ideas in an organizational leadership setting, as have Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey[15] with Jennifer Garvey Berger[16] doing some excellent work on practical approaches to development in the workplace.

However, in Karen's view, the use of global 'stage' ideas in all of these applications still hampers their utility for each of us as learners who might want to extend our capacities so we can make more of a difference to our own lives, the lives of others and to our shared worlds. So, over the last five years, she has been doing some comparative research across a wide range of these writers as well as, with colleagues and interested clients, applying the ideas in organizational settings. As Karen reviewed the developmental research, certain underlying 'capacities of meaning-making' kept showing up again and again – perhaps under different wordings and often with different emphases but consistently across all the sub-theories, four elements showed through. As a result, she has identified a set of four 'developable capacities of meaning-making' which each link back to the work of half a dozen of the core theorists in the ACD field. A summary of the literature can be found in the article Karen recently co-authored with Julie Allen and Mike Vessey for MDV.[17]

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[13] Nick Petrie, *The How-To of Vertical Leadership Development, Part 2: 30 Experts, 3 Conditions and 15 Approaches* (New York: Center for Creative Leadership, 2015), https://www.ccl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/verticalLeadersPart2.pdf.

[14] David Rooke and William R. Torbert, 'Seven Transformations of Leadership', *Harvard Business Review* (April 2005).

[15] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome it and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

[16] Jennifer Garvey Berger, *Changing on the Job: Developing Leaders for a Complex World* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011); Jennifer Garvey Berger and Keith Johnston, *Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

[17] Karen Ellis, Julie Alle and Mike Vessey, *What in the World is Going On? Mapping Vertical and VUCA Beyond the Bandwagon* (London: MDV Consulting, 2017).

The four 'developable' capacities are outlined in the table below and expanded in the following sections.

Inner Capacity	Perspective Shifting	Opposable Thinking	Complexity Handing	Self-noticing
Description	Capacity to take a variety of perspectives on a given situation. Observer and Witness positions	Capacity for relativistic and dialectical thinking without losing own place. 'The Wise Mind'	Capacity to manage multiple paths of thinking and perceiving, link ideas, create new concepts	Capacity to 'get outside' ('have') own internal assumptions, drivers, patterns and preferences
Systemic Leadership Impact	Supports relational skills, respect for conflicting points of view, bringing diversity together	Supports flexibility of thinking, openness to new ideas, resolution of dilemmas & conflict	Supports creativity, innovation and complex situation diagnosis	Supports self-awareness, ethics, resilience, trustworthiness and self disclosure

Perspective shifting – viewing the world from different positions

Over our lifespans, from early adulthood onwards, we become increasingly able to "de-centre" our perspective – to first unconsciously, and then consciously, shift our point of view to encompass more and more possible readings of the situation. This ability to 'perspective shift' is not only the skill of 'multiple perspective taking' which is finally being recognized as an important aspect of leadership behavior. It is also our ability (or lack of ability) to take a perspective on **ourselves** - to stand back and view our cherished beliefs and values to see if they are still fit-for-purpose or to look at our current 'state' and see how we are really doing, emotionally, mentally or even physically. Our range of possible perspective shifts increases as we develop and, at later stages of development, we can use this capacity at will as the situation demands. Earlier in our lives, of course, this capacity may be less under conscious control but we may still be aware when we are 'not ourselves', 'out of kilter' or 'being pulled around by other people's views' – all colloquial terms for the loss of our own perspective. We may also say that we are

'trying to see her point of view', 'understand where you are coming from' etc. – again, ordinary language for making a perspective shift.

The gaining of new perspectives
So how does this capacity for perspective shifting grow across the lifespan? Obviously, when we are very small babies we do not really have a perspective on our world at all. We are simply a bundle of impulses (hunger, discomfort, sometimes fear, sometimes comfort) which are, all being well, appropriately responded to by our loving caregivers. Gradually we start to develop a sense of a 'me' – first a physical me ("ah – this pink wiggly thing is attached to me, so it must be my graspy-thing" (hand, once we start to understand words!). This 'me' then moves on in leaps and bounds as we develop language and can start to describe things about me and my needs ("me tired").

A little later, usually around the time we become more mobile and competent at making stuff happen, we start to describe ourselves as an 'I' – a 'subject' who can act in our own right – ("I go get teddy"). This huge developmental achievement - to identify first a 'me' and then an 'I' – is known as **'first person perspective'** in the jargon. All being well, this first position develops into a healthy sense of self which provides a solid foundation for all that follows. Unfortunately, in quite a lot of families – even apparently normal ones – this first position is not appropriately responded to by our parents, which can cause a developmental 'gap' which may play out much later in adult life in the form or various difficulties such as full-blown personality issues or as depression or anxiety. Luckily, for most of us, we get a 'good enough' grounding and can move on from a fairly stable sense of self to the next stage.

Once we move on from very 'I-dominated' toddler, we are increasingly able to imagine that others have different perspectives ("Mummy is tired", "my friend wants to play with this toy too"). We start to see the value of sharing with others, being kind, paying attention to friends when they are upset. We start to take **'second person perspective'**. As older children and teenagers, we are practicing balancing our perspective with that of others – standing up for our own positions, negotiating, compromising, choosing whether to yield or stand firm. Of course, many adults still struggle with this area, especially when the other person is important or dear to us. But, hopefully, by the time we reach young adulthood, we can be flexible in our perspectives, recognizing when a relationship is important enough to us that we may need to 'give in' from time to time or when we really do need to stick to our guns. Again, this is a significant developmental achievement

and, for many adults (up to 25%), this is where development draws to a halt – caught in this balancing act between self and other, sometimes in quite a painful oscillation, at others with a happy compromise.

For the rest of us, as this capacity to see the world from the viewpoint of the other consolidates, we gradually start to be able to recognize and work with a **'third person perspective'** - an 'Observer' perspective as it is sometimes called. We can 'stand outside ourselves' to view, initially, our behaviour and its impact on others, later, our own traits, beliefs and values. This is the point where feedback from others becomes vitally useful in our development and where we get interested in personality typologies, uncovering our values, examining our beliefs etc. We can also begin to view our relationships from a more external perspective and start to take actions to improve the relationship, rather than just convince the other person of our views. Over time, some adults are able to use this capacity to become a more neutral observer of others (rather than judging them as 'good/like me' or 'not like me'). This is where we start to develop the skill of 'taking multiple perspectives' – we will still tend to judge a perspective as 'good/bad', 'right/wrong', 'correct/flawed' if it differs too wildly from our own but our attachment to changing the other person's point of view at all costs drops away. We can 'agree to differ' and still value the relationship for its other qualities.

Even further on, at the later stages of adult development, reached by around 25% of the population, we become able to observe our *observers*, and so to notice how our subjective experience shifts over time. We start to notice that 'today, I seem to be judging myself quite harshly', 'I am seeing myself getting caught in that trap again' – one 'I' is seeing another 'I' in action. The capacity for reflection **on ourselves** starts to show up here and can become really fascinating. We become more and more aware of the subtle shifts in our internal world and, crucially, start to recognize that other people may have the same experience of themselves! So, this **'fourth person perspective'** lets us understand in much more depth the subjective experience of others, and why it differs from our own – usually leading to a sudden increase in tolerance of difference and valuing of diverse experiences.

During the early growth of this fourth person perspective, we are still most comfortable with people whose values and perspectives are closer to our own – too much difference can be hard to bear when we are becoming so much more sensitive to experience. It is only later that we can tolerate even the most extreme differences in others (e.g. people whose beliefs and values are anathema to us), and even value them for the information they provide about the situation as a whole. The recent

polarised and polarising debates about Brexit and the Trump presidency show just how hard this ability to tolerate the views of others is, even for people who are quite a long way along in their development. The crucial thing that eventually dawns on us is that we don't have to **agree** with someone's beliefs to **honour** the subjective experience that has caused those beliefs to develop in them. This later stage capacity is described as the 'Witness' capacity in some literature – it comprises the ability to notice our experience and that of others in an accepting and open way without simply becoming passive in the face of difference and conflict.

Perspective shifting and systemic leadership
In terms of leadership, the capacity for perspective shifting is vital in determining our flexibility in relating to others vs the degree of rigidity with which we hold our beliefs and values. At the earlier stages, we simply *cannot understand* that other people have a different point of view. Later, we observe that they *have* a different point of view, but depending on whether we agree with them or not, they're either right or wrong in that view. Then we begin to understand that it's *useful* to have different points of view. But even then, when we come across people we strongly disagree with or don't share values with, we're still not very keen to include them in a dialogue. Finally, a stage of "systemic maturity" arrives: we begin to understand how everybody's subjective viewpoint is true for them, and valid for them; and in some way it's related to our own viewpoint — even if it's very different. Used well and skillfully, this latest stage can herald a sudden increase in collective creativity as the leader is able to model this tolerance of difference (even extreme difference) in the service of coming up with a way of life that works for all players. If we think about great political leaders like John F. Kennedy, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, this if often the capacity that we most recognise them for.

Self-noticing – from 'being had by' to 'having' our personal experience

As we'll see when we come to the 'We' chapter, the personal and interpersonal functions are fairly closely linked in most people (though there are some exceptions). They tend to track together, as our sense of "Ourselves" is linked to our sense of "Others". In fact, we often relate to ourselves and others in broadly similar ways (eg the critical person with the strong inner critic or the nurturer who really wants to be looked after himself). The developmental 'project' as an adult is to notice more and more of who we are, what matters to us, what our habitual patterns of thinking and feeling are and, crucially for leaders, the things about ourselves and our thinking that we find hard to notice. There has been a lot of attention in the

management literature about unconscious biases in discrimination, lack of creativity in thinking, the impact of the unaware leader on people around them, etc. In our view, all of this comes back to the inability to critically reflect on ourselves and our way of operating, failing to apply the same productive analysis to ourselves that we do automatically to others around us.

Self-noticing – building our sense of our self

The development of our 'self-noticing' capacity is, in some ways, more unique to the individual than the perspective shifting capacity and is strongly influenced by childhood developmental gaps or missing support in even the most 'normal' of homes. We notice what we have been 'trained' to notice about ourselves and, by definition, we simply don't see the elements which we are blind to – often biases and assumptions that affect the way we operate in the conceptual domain too.

Despite these unique differences, Robert Kegan reminds us that there is a fairly predictable trajectory of movement in the formation of our ideas and our likely emotional responses to situations. Our meaning making shifts between focus on ourselves as an individual and focus on our social milieu (family, school, peer group, work group, society etc) in an oscillating way.[18] You will see from the descriptions below that this capacity has some links with the perspective shifting process described above. However, the emphasis here is on the clarity with which we can become aware of our own internal world and how that awareness affects our actions in the outer world.

The developmental 'project' as an adult is to notice more and more of who we are, what matters to us, what our habitual patterns of thinking and feeling are and, crucially for leaders, the things about ourselves and our thinking that we find hard to notice. There has been a lot of attention in the management literature about unconscious biases in discrimination, lack of creativity in thinking, the impact of the unaware leader on people around them, etc. In our view, all of this comes back to the inability to critically reflect on ourselves and our way of operating, failing to apply the same productive analysis to ourselves that we do automatically to others around us.

Without going right into child developmental theory, we can briefly look at how our 'sense of ourself' is built in the first place. In early childhood, our path tends to go in one of two ways. We are either brought up in a way where our sense of self is validated by our parents and people around us, or, frankly, we are not. In the former

[18] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982).

case, we become good at understanding what we think, and how we feel about things (i.e. having a good awareness of ourselves and of what is important to us). Most importantly, this awareness gives us a clear understanding of what we want, both in immediate situations, and our life as a whole. Some children, however, for various reasons, come out of childhood with a far shakier sense of themselves, for all the reasons that one might suspect (i.e. from direct insults and abuse that have marked them at an early age, to much more subtle criticisms, or lack of validation. In some cases, the developmental issue is created by a strong sense of parental need for the child to merge with the parent's own identity). These children find it much less easy to be aware of what *they* think, feel and want, than to be aware of others' thoughts, feelings and desires. In Kegan's terms, this childhood developmental stage is called the **'Self-sovereign'** stage but this rather overlooks the second possibility where the self is more 'merged' with the significant others in the child's life.

So, as we move out of our childhood, our "developmental project" may be *to loosen our sense of ourself*, and to take the needs and wishes of others far more into account; or it may be the exact opposite, and to start "toughening up" our boundaries, and to get a better understanding of our own inner world, becoming less sensitive to the needs of others. Historically, these two tendencies have been seen to be somewhat gender-linked. Yet this is no longer a valid assumption. There are plenty of men who learned as children to overly prioritise the needs of others; and there are plenty of women who were 'trained' by their parents to be very clear about what they want from the world, and what they are prepared to give back – sometimes without any flexibility on either count!

Regardless of which start we have come from, as we develop, we gradually and inevitably get inducted into our local social norms. This means that we start to be influenced in our sense of our identity by all of the groups to which we belong — not just our family, but our peers groups at school, our clubs and sports teams, our university and first work colleagues, etc. When we're younger, we tend to take on wholesale the views and behaviours of any groups that we join, if only to gain acceptance, to the extent that we don't even notice that we're doing it (in other words, we become 'socialised' in the group, the way that we were originally 'socialised' by our family – this stage is, unsurprisingly, called **'Socialised'** by Kegan!). We start to unconsciously operate using thinking and feeling 'norms' that are created by the groups of which we are part – you can recognize this for yourself if you have ever moved to a country with a very different culture to that of your country-of-origin. Only then do some of the 'habits of mind' of your own socialisation become apparent – before that, they were the water in which you swam in...

Even as teenagers, we start to notice, and may become conflicted by, the subtle differences between *our* experience and preferences and what is expected of us by others in the group. For example, the members of my football team may be prone to bullying the younger members of the team; and because we have younger siblings myself, we may find this distasteful. As we get older, the differences between us and our groups may be more of values, professional opinion, or ideologies, and sometimes the differences grow to be so stark that we feel the need to leave the group and join a new one.

If we start are one of the 40% or so of adults to develop out of the 'Socialised' and towards Kegan's **'Self-authoring'** stage, we also become progressively better at negotiating the differences between ourselves and others. We can decide whether the benefits of being part of the group outweigh the conflicts it creates in us; and we can even decide to change some of the aspects of the group's ways of operating, to make it more congruent with our own preferences. This allows us to be *in* groups, without being *of* them, so we can notice the differences between ourselves and others and get progressively better at noticing "groupishness" or "group think", when they arise. This 'Self authoring form of mind' is a high level of personal sophistication which is not often attained – even though many of us may think we are independent of the groups in which we operate, we are often surprised, on reflection, by the feeling of 'I wasn't myself' in that group and by realizing we have unconsciously taken on a group norm which is not natural to us at all.

This is not to say that tensions between the needs of our 'home groups' and our own preference are not an ongoing tension in most of our lives: most of us have groups we're deeply attached to — not least our own families — and we can have excruciating divergences when disagreements become too hard to bear. And all of us, even those who are pretty "independent", sometimes need help, or at least need to be reminded of who we are by the people who we care about. So, the need to belong to "the group", and the need to differ from it, with the tensions therein, is always a lifelong conversation.

At the later stages of maturity, once this sense of 'Self authoring' is well established, we're able to belong to *multiple* groups, to be able to fluctuate how "in" and "out" we are at any given time, and to negotiate conflicts within ourselves fluently — and we are able to do this without making anyone "wrong". Because our identity is no longer so tied to the *group's* opinion of us, we also become much less prone to the negative aspects of "Usness" that Joe describes in Chapter 4. For example, we notice when the group's *stated* values don't match with the actuality. We notice when we are deliberately or inadvertently excluding others

from the group. And we notice unhealthy imbalances within the group; for example, with certain people dominating the conversation, or exerting inappropriate influence in other ways.

Self-noticing and systemic leadership
So, why is this capacity to 'self author' so important in leadership? As you can see from the descriptions above, this is the capacity that allows us to be 'in' but not 'of' the group. We notice when our in-group is behaving unhelpfully to other groups or individuals who do not 'belong', who are not part of our tribe. We can also notice when part of the group's thinking is stuck and challenge that thinking without becoming strident or oppositional. Once we are 'in but not of', we can become genuinely facilitative in all the groups in which we operate, becoming known as a person who makes a difference to the overall quality of the conversation when we are in the room.

And, crucially, for our cognitive flexibility, once we start to recognize that many of our ideas and patterns of operating were socialized into us, we can pay attention to those ideas, to the values and beliefs we hold tightly to and try to determine where those beliefs and values came from. In Kegan's terms, we start to notice the patterns and ideas that we are 'had by' (are subject to) and those that we 'have' (hold as object). For example, we may be 'had by' our role as daughter-to-a-strict-father, who tends to (unconsciously) see male colleagues as potential threats to our independence or we may recognize this pattern ('have' it) and notice when it is playing out inappropriately with someone who is genuinely trying to support our growth. Or we might be 'had by' a belief in religious tolerance and so be caught by an internal conflict over the use of sharia law in our local community, rather than being able to examine ('have') this core belief to see if it really should take priority in decision-making in this situation. This does not make us wishy-washy, passive or chamaeleon-like. On the contrary, having a comprehensive understanding of our own beliefs, values and ideas, allows us both to question them when necessary but also to categorically choose them and stand for them in an authentic way when the situation demands it.

Opposable thinking – moving beyond polarization and resolvable dilemmas

When we think about conceptual development in adults — beyond raw IQ — two key elements of cognition come into play. The first is the ability to handle complexity – the multiple types and sources of 'data' that come at us every day – quantitative performance data, financial information, opinions, social dynamics, power

dynamics, relational tone etc etc. This capacity will somewhat inform our ability to notice and work with our "Usness" and also our ability to work with and across systems — for reasons that will be elaborated upon in the next section.

However, equally important is the ability to process ideas by using what is technically known as "dialectical thinking", or in Roger Martin's term, "opposable thinking."[19] Martin's more catchy phrase relates the mind to the thumb; and it points out that the ability to compare ideas which are seemingly in opposition allow us to 'grasp' concepts in a way which avoids us getting caught in false polarisations. At its most sophisticated level, we can use opposites and dilemmas to gain a better understanding of a subject that we are paying attention to. Importantly, we can also avoid getting unconsciously polarized against others who have conflicting or contesting opinions and values to our own. This ability work with ideas in a way which avoids getting stuck with outdated or inappropriate beliefs or concepts is also sometimes described as "flexibility of thinking" or 'fluid thinking', and is contrasted with the cliché of "black-and-white thinking" that we tend to notice in younger adults, or in older adults who have become very rigid in their belief systems and points of view.

"Black-and-white thinking" has now become an insult in organisations, but should more strictly be thought of as "black or white thinking" This contrast refers to the inability to see the validity of a more nuanced position or belief from the one we hold ourself — if it deviates at all from how we think, then it must be the opposite of our thinking. This is partly reinforced by the traditional debating style of our ways of discourse in the U.S.A. and northern Europe,[20] and is relatively unfamiliar in cultures which have a more dialecticalic understanding of the world — something that's particularly true of the Chinese way of thought, built as it is on Taoist principles. If you've ever spent any time in China, you will know that debate and direct opposition is frowned upon, as a highly unproductive form of conversation. I'll leave it to you to decide which is the better approach when we are tackling complex issues!

Opposable thinking – getting more fluid

Again, tracking development through the lifespan, any of you who have teenage children will know how *absolutely right* they insist they are about pretty much everything, and how *absolutely wrong* their parents are on everything. This sense of

[19] Roger L. Martin, *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press, 2007).

[20] Traditional, oppositional debating owes its 'lines drawn' format to parliamentary debating; which in turn owes its format due to the English parliament originally meeting in churches and chapels, with seats lined up along long, thin buildings. As so often, our surroundings can help mould our outlook — sometimes, for generations to come.

"rightness" is partly formed out of a need to assert independence at a stage of life when we're moving out into the world away from our family base. But it is also the evidence of a mind beginning to know its own views, and the gradual shifting away from simply taking on the views of important people around us. At this stage, many teenagers get very into a particular subject, which they will research in great depth – even if it is only make-up or football – and so the opinions in that area will be quite well-formed. But other beliefs and opinions may be more knee-jerk, informed more by their direct peers (and, more recently, social media) than by any depth of thought.

When we enter the workplace, this is quite often the stage of development we are at, and a lot of the rewards of early careers come from having strong points of view, "knowing your stuff", and being able to advocate from our own position. In some professions where depth of knowledge or specialization is vital to our skills – say, being a research scientist, actuary or barrister – this continues to be what is required for much of the time. But in other professions, as we move into more managerial or client-related roles, we, hopefully, develop the ability to start to accept other ideas which differ from our own, and to balance competing belief systems, and that capacity becomes increasingly important as we manage more and more people. At this point, if we are unable to take on new ideas, we start to get described as "narrow", "blinkered", or "inflexible" – which can be a terrible shock for some professionals, who have until then built their career on *knowing* the "right" answers.

Development away from this '**positivistic**' mode of thinking begins when (or if!) we start to realise that some of our most cherished opinions are not true, and to accept that some of our beliefs held may not actually stand up against the evidence. At this point, all being well, we become far more interested in inquiring into our ideas, and all the underlying assumptions that we're making. We might start to notice our biases. We may even become aware that some of the things we strongly support, we actually support because they're self-serving rather than true. For example, we might fight strongly for decentralisation and autonomy in our organisation, until we move into a headquarters role; at which point, suddenly centralising seems like a much better idea! We begin to notice our "convenient truths", to paraphrase Al Gore.

Later on, as our thinking becomes more '**relativistic**', we also start to notice how useful it is to *genuinely* explore contradictory ideas. Sometimes, that is simply to strengthen our own argument – for example, understanding an opposing political ideology in order to refute it. But sometimes, we choose to work with others of

different ideologies, to work towards a win:win negotiated solution, where we are as interested in the other group's needs as those of our own 'side'. Allowing ourselves to question our ideas is quite a significant "ask" of maturity. On the whole, humans enjoy certainty, and as the world becomes less certain and more ambiguous, the tightness of holding onto one's beliefs can be comforting: the current in many countries' recent politics reinforces this view. The danger of competing ideas becoming conflicting ideologies, around which we polarise, seems to be becoming more present than at any time in recent history (the last 60 years or so) — that's our own view, anyway. Although 'relativism' in its pure sense has a bad name, due to the more extreme models of postmodern thought,[21] it should be obvious to any systemic player that being able to recognise your own positions as "true to your own life experience", compared to being "absolutely true", is vital in diverse societies, and on a global playing field.

Finally, some adults seem to move further beyond this relativistic approach to reach the most mature stage of reliable **dialectical thinking**. As this capacity develops, we start to become able to see opposing positions or values as simply two extreme elements of a larger whole, and we start to get much more interested in how "whole belief systems" hang together. We become less interested in 'solving' the dilemmas that we face, or in finding consensus in conflict, and more interested in looking at the *structure* of the thinking that got us here in the first place.

Many dilemmas are dissolved (rather than resolved) by individuals realising that they have created a "false opposition", and then stepping outside the polarity that they have created. Our classic example of this is the tightrope we walk between intimacy and separation in our closest relationships — until we finally realise that in order to be genuinely intimate, we have to have sufficient *separation* from each other to create difference; that we can only be separate in the context of a relationship, to be intimate enough to negotiate the distances. Sometimes, however, there is a genuine dilemma of choice – eg should we give our Heads of Department more autonomy in managing their budgets or do we need to enhance central control? In this case, rather than getting stuck in a fixed position, an effective dialectical leader would look at each situation as it arises and work with colleagues to determine what criteria to use to decide which manager should be given more autonomy and in which cases. Such a nuanced position can be described as 'unfair' or 'inequitable' but it may nevertheless, be the most effective at this point in time.

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[21] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

This capacity, therefore is the very source of 'situated' leadership – the capability to consider the texture of each context and allow decision making to alter where the context demands.

Opposable thinking and systemic leadership

In his book, Martin outlines the many important benefits of opposable thinking to leadership – greater levels of cognitive creativity, more skilled negotiating, more effective large scale collaboration to name but a few. However, according to the theory, very few adults — even highly educated adults in managerial positions — are able to hold a dialectical approach on matters that are important to them (as opposed to intellectually interesting puzzles). It's thought to be around 10%. The norm is far more towards the polarisation of opinion, dogmatism around beliefs, and at best, "agreeing to differ" about the things that matter to us. From this description, we hope that it's easy to see how rigid belief systems support "Usness", and how the negative manipulation of "Usness" is often created by emphasising the importance of our way of thinking, our ideas, our preferences, our gods. Any fundamentalism, whether a religious, political or social pressure group, will reinforce itself by trying to exclude opposing ideas, heresies, and alternative voices. While they may come from the best intentions, the "no-platform" campaigns which regularly crop up in student unions are a good example of this process in action.

Effective dialectical thinkers, however, realise that many dilemmas are dissolved (rather than resolved) by individuals realising that they have created a "false opposition", and then stepping outside the polarity that they have created. Our classic example of this is the tightrope we walk between intimacy and separation in our closest relationships — until we finally realise that in order to be genuinely intimate, we have to have sufficient *separation* from each other to create difference; that we can only be separate in the context of a relationship, to be intimate enough to negotiate the distances. Sometimes, however, there is a genuine dilemma of choice – eg should we give our Heads of Department more autonomy in managing their budgets or do we need to enhance central control? In this case, rather than getting stuck in a fixed position, an effective dialectical leader would look at each situation as it arises and work with colleagues to determine what criteria to use to decide which manager should be given more autonomy and in which cases. Such a nuanced position can be described as 'unfair' or 'inequitable' but it may nevertheless, be the most effective at this point in time. This capacity, therefore is the very source of 'situated' leadership – the capability to consider the texture of each context and allow decision making to alter where the context demands.

Complexity handling

In terms of operating in our social world, "complexity-handling" may not seem like the most vital of the developable capacities. However, in terms of systemic leadership, it is often the 'rate-limiting' capacity, in terms of the leader's ability to manage the wide variety of situations that they have to handle. The more different types of information we're able to incorporate in our thinking process — and the more we're able to hold parallel lines of argument in our heads — the more likely we are to be able to reflect on the complexity of the situation in which we're trying to find a way forward.

The complexity-handling capacity is a little more linked to IQ than the other capacities, but there is no direct correlation. In fact, many people with very high IQs are more attracted to the *complicated* rather than the *complex* – they enjoy difficult technical puzzles, which guarantee at least one 'right' solution, if dealt with skillfully enough. However, in our experience, this capacity is eminently developable — whilst some people are *naturally* good at holding vast reserves of different information in their mind at different times, others can learn the ability. We can all increase our ability to process complexity by making sure that we spend enough time working on genuinely complex problems, without leaping to over simplification or what is called, in the jargon, 'premature foreclosure'. So-called metacognitive skills, such as reflection on action (or later, reflection *in* action), carefully attending to our biases and assumptions, and noticing the logical flaws and/or lack of creativity in our thinking, are all engines which support the development of "complexity-handling.[17]

Complexity handling – holding multiple aspects in mind

The development of the capacity for complexity-handling was most carefully studied by Elliott Jaques and his collaborator Kathryn Cason. The pair interviewed a wide range of managers and staff members across a number of organisations and, using a specific protocol, gathered information about how those individuals organized their thinking.[22] Their detailed taxonomy bears a lot of study but, grossly simplifying here, the critical element in complexity handling can be observed by noticing how people organize their ideas ('conceptual chaining' in the jargon). Some people simply declare ideas without any attempt to link them together – 'I think X. I think Y and I think Z.) Others are able to sum up their thinking and

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[22] Elliottt Jaques and Kathryn Cason, *Human Capability: A Study of Individual Potential and its Application* (New York: Cason Hall, 1994).

come to a more comprehensive answer (I think X and Y but not Z, so in conclusion, I decide M). Still others can do what is called 'single path processing' (If A is true, I think X and Y, but if B is true, I think Z. So in the case of A, I decide M and in the case of B I decide N). The final, and most complex, conceptual process is 'parallel path processing' (If A is true, then M, if B is true, the N – however, as A is influencing B at this time, we need to take both possibilities into account and do P!). You should, hopefully, be able to see how this last processing capacity links back to some of the dialectical thinking capacities we described earlier.

So far, so technical and so what? Well, if we are able to both channel and link our thought processes, then we are able to take far more factors into consideration when we are using our judgement – especially in situations where the facts are unclear, and the possible interpretations are myriad. For example, when planning a change to a service or a charitable mission, we might take into account the needs of the people affected, the requirements of good governance, and the ethics of changing the social system of the place in which we are operating, as well as the usual organisational and financial imperatives. And, if we are sufficiently complex thinkers, we do this relatively automatically – we don't actually go through all the steps out aloud, but we **can** unpack our thinking if asked to. In fact, the best way to check whether someone's apparently complex thinking is their own (or is just received wisdom), is to ask them to do exactly that!

This can all sound *highly* educationally elitist. Are we saying that the best systemic leaders are people for whom constructing complex arguments is a great sport? Definitely not! Complex thinking is evident in many people who have left formal education early, and who have chosen to exercise their good judgement as parents, volunteers, readers, crafts people or faith leaders. The question is more about **how** they know what they know, not **what** is it that they know. Complex thinkers include different types of data (e.g. emotional and social data), and often have a highly practical bent (just think about the genius mechanic who can identify exactly where in your car that 'boink' sound is coming from, without even turning on the engine). Sometimes, the results of their 'pattern detecting' process is called intuition or inspiration, whereas it is really just a masterful grip on relevant data.

Complexity handling and systemic leadership

David Snowden's Cynefin framework, outlined in Chapter 2, gives a fantastic set of guidelines for analysing situations, so that we can start to notice both the type of issue that is confronting us, and the ways in which we might choose to lead through it. In situations which are *genuinely* complex, rather than technically complicated,

this ability to handle the complexity of reality, without oversimplifying, falling back on inappropriate rules of thumb, or simply bracketing out disconfirmatory information, is *crucial* for clear-eyed leadership.

In the "social context reality" which we are focusing on here, our ability to handle complexity of processing is supported by the related ability to "double channel" our attention. So, for example, can we pay attention to both the content of a conversation, and to the dynamics in the room? That is to say, to our own position, and assessment of the position of others — to the preferences and the needs of this group in front of us, versus what is required by the wider context as a whole? System movers who can double-channel their attention make great facilitators, yes; but they are also great members of groups – the people who can notice 'what we are up to' in the heat of a challenging conversation, not just in the coffee queue afterwards.

It should also be easy to see that if someone is locked into one channel of thinking, or if they cannot take relevant data into consideration because of an unaware bias, then it is *highly likely* that they will be blind to any "Usness" (or "Usnesses") that may be operating on them. They will be susceptible to "group think" (because they cannot take other factors into account), unaware of their own dogmatism — and will find it difficult to shift position, or to imagine other possible futures, even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the present isn't working. We will leave it to you to consider whether any of those descriptions bear any resemblance to current social and political events...

Conclusion

There may be a lot of new content in the chapter for you but we hope that, by bringing together a distillation of adult developmental theory with our in work observation of people who work well at a systemic level, we have started to shine a useful light on some of those hard-to-describe qualities that we recognise in the wise mover. Those of you who are familiar with Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky's notions of adaptive leadership (as referenced in Chapter 2) will also hear some chords chiming, we hope. Some other newer models of leadership shift towards this domain, while many are still stuck with the heroic idea of the vision-setting, people-engaging, performance-managing leader. We are not knocking those models (although they are remarkably non-inclusive in their most extreme manifestations) – straightforward directive, inspiring organisational still has its place, especially at difficult moments. However, it is our contention that it is necessary but not sufficient; and if overplayed, it can directly obstruct

systemic change as in-group dogma, as 'sticking to our guns' gets in the way of productive dialogue.

If you are interested in learning more about the ideas in this chapter, do head for the works referred to, or just contact Karen – she is happy to bore for England on any of the above. If you want to learn more about the four meaning-making capacities, you can find more in a book Karen has co-authored with Richard Boston which is intended as a practical manual for managers and leaders who are seeking to develop these capacities with their people.[23] *As we said above, the five Systemic Leadership Capabilities are 'work in progress' at the Leadership Centre – we are looking for allies and fellow travelers who might be keen on working on them with us to create practical tools and development assets for systemic movers and other leaders. If you would like to join us, please get in touch!*

[23] Richard Boston and Karen Ellis, *Upgrade: Building Your Capacity for Complexity* (London: LeaderSpace, 2019).

CHAPTER 4[1]

Usness

Joe Simpson

Introduction: The Distinctiveness & Importance of Usness

Recent years have seen an explosion in the literature around behaviour change, and particularly the field of behavioural economics. For all the breadth of this field, attention has tended to focused on "nudge" strategies, literally nudging individuals towards different choices.[2] Yet as a community builds up around "nudge" strategies, we often find these sorts of interventions can be successful for one-off changes (pension enrollment being a good example), but evidence about sustained change is less forthcoming – consider, for instance, the recent case of Sainsbury's supermarkets, who previously had ambitious "nudge" targets which had to be entirely abandoned.[3] Instead of focusing on "nudge", we believe that behavioural economists could pave the way to far more ambitious and far-reaching results if they take the "usness" effect into account.

The behaviour constituting 'usness' is not – in itself – a new concept, but it is presented and contextualised in a new way here. We would define it as group collective behaviour, in which *homo sapiens* unconsciously as much as consciously

[1] We would like to express our thanks to the editors of the journal *Social Business* for permission to reproduce this chapter, an early variant of which previously appeared as a commentary article in the journal.

[2] Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[3] Rebecca Smithers, 'Sainsbury's Drops Bid to Halve Household Food Waste', *Guardian*, 8 March 2017, p, 13.

adapt to shared ways of doing and thinking, based on shared narratives around shared experiences, embodying values of parochial altruism. It has its underpinnings in human behaviour, cognition, thought, identity, and above all, cooperation. Beginning from an evolutionary perspective, the concept is grounded in a range of disciplines, including philosophy, economics, and the social sciences. Through exploring these dimensions, we can explore the *unconscious as well as conscious* influences that underpin usness.

Indeed, I would go further: that there is very limited traction of "change" in the absence of understanding "usness"; particularly the evolutionary origins of usness in shared human cooperation, language and thinking; the behavioural dimension of usness. Moreover, usness relates to "nudge" with three shared building blocks: cooperation, language and thinking. By exploring the interaction of usness with several existing frameworks, including social network theory, and Mary Douglas's 'Grid-Group', and how the shared narratives of usness affect group speaking and group thinking, we can understand the applicability of the usness dimension to behaviour change.

Change resistance: a challenge

Consider Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey on resistance to change. In *Immunity to Change*, they set out just why it is that we as humans are so resistant to change.[4] (Think of your last New Year's Resolutions list…) They frame this not just around personal immunity, but around organisational immunity, and specifically, why most "organisational change" programmes fail. They deny that theories which change past a certain age are difficult. Instead, they postulate a four-box model, which they show the reader how to work though.

Fig. 1 – Kegan and Laskow Lahey's "Immunity X-Ray"

Commitment (improvement goal)	Doing/not doing instead	Hidden competing commitments	Big assumptions
…	…	…	…

Source: Kegan and Laskow Lahey (2009).

[4] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome it and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

My purpose here is not to analyse the efficacy of the Kegan and Laskow model (though we have personally found it a very productive tool to use when working with groups of leaders who have been seeking to drive change), but to concentrate on the last box – "big assumptions". Their argument is that we often "rationally" agree with a change, and may indeed be *very keen* to see that change. Why the change doesn't happen is often because we do not delve deeply enough into the subconscious "big assumptions" we have. The model uses a psychological lens, and their focus is also an organisational one – but the ensuing examples are of often quite personal, subconscious shared ways of remembering the world we inhabit. we believe that a failure to comprehend the 'usness' dimension is a major factor in this recurring problem, on both an individual and organisational level.

Evolutionary origins of usness

"Usness" is predicated upon three attributes that humans inherently share: cooperation, language and thinking. *Homo sapiens* have existed for around 200,000 years (and were preceded by other species of hominini stretching back perhaps 1.8 million years). For most of our history, we were hunter-gatherers. The move to agriculture started really quite recently – certainly no more than 12,000 years ago, and only gaining real acceleration in the last 9,000 years.

Even considering only *homo sapiens* among the *hominini*, hunter-gatherer patterns account for perhaps 95% of our existence – so the relevance of these patterns is considerable. Understanding how we operated as hunter-gatherers therefore gives us some insight into our collective DNA, and the behaviour that flows from it. That we trace these attributes is not disputed – though *how* they were transmitted cross-generationally remains contested space.

Cooperation

Our survival technique was the evolution of cooperative behaviour. Again, *how* this happened remains contested. But certain facts about hunter-gatherer groups are clearly established. They were more commonplace than single-family groups. The genetic data we have suggests that they existed in groups of significant size, of changing composition. The question then arises, if our genes are "selfish", how we evolved into cooperative human beings? Bowles and Gintis[5] argue that the simple development of in-group hostile behaviour to non-cooperators was critical, and that punishment for non-cooperation enabled group norms of "parochial altruism",

[5] Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and its Evolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

of the kind which underpins usness. More generally, Michael Tomasello argues that unlike our nearest relatives, we have some sense of shared intentionality.[6] Tomasello also argues that it was through cooperative strategies that language evolved.[7] And language will form a key component of my argument.

Before we look at the "language" dimension, it is worth acknowledging the impact of "parochial altruism", a key part of usness, and an area on which philosophers have long had much to say.[8] Parochial altruism, as identified by Bernhard, Fischbacher and Fehr, is an established normative behaviour regulating human cooperation and the social order, as noted among different groups.[9] It is a contested term, yet across differing interpretations, it is broadly accepted that the sharing of characteristics can predispose groups towards altruistic behaviours.[10]

Jane Jacobs' distinguishes between hunter-gatherers and agriculture, as a metaphor for the difference between business and government, arguing that hunters essentially depended on *trust* to operate.[11] In simple terms, you need to feel confident that the arrow will be aimed at the hunted animal, and not at you. But in agriculture, there is a significant delay between the work done (planting seeds, nurturing animals), and the pay-off. Jacobs famously described someone visiting a town they had never visited before, going into a building they had never previously entered, giving cash to someone they had never met, and asking that person to make sure that it was sent to someone she had never met, living in a place she had never visited. We call that the modern banking system. She contrasted this with how public messages became unscrambled as they had been disseminated. This 'trust' argument illustrated her core argument about a cooperative species; while her description of government is perhaps a reminder of how difficult it is to have trust as the basic building block of public service.[12]

Also of huge relevance is the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. Specifically, MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* reflects on that core question of moral philosophy, which is why the reader should be altruistic and caring for others.[13] At the age of

[6] Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014); Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Morality* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[7] Michael Tomasello, *Why We Cooperate: Based on the 2008 Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Stanford* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009).
[8] Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (New York: Penguin, 2013).
[9] H. Bernhard, U. Fischbacher and E. Fehr, 'Parochial Altruism in Humans', *Nature*, 442 (24 August 2006), pp. 912-915.
[10] J.-K. Choi and S. Bowles, 'The Coevolution of Parochial Altruism and War', *Science*, 318: 5850 (26 October 2007), pp. 636-640; T. Yamagishi and N. Mifune, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 7 (February 2016), pp. 39-43.
[11] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); Jane Jacobs, *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992).
[12] *Ibid*.
[13] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999).

70, he noted that most of the great philosophy texts were written by men in the prime of life (addressing the question, "Why should I now be altruistic?"), admitting that when he himself was younger, he failed to take much account of our human condition. As a species, we are born very dependent: even Victorian mine-owners could not find ways to exploit people aged under seven. Similarly, towards the end of our lives, we become, at best, less productive; and we typically develop some significant dependency. MacIntyre famously denounced "communitarianism", yet there is much overlap between MacIntyre's corpus, and that of the leading communitarians. In particular, MacIntyre stresses understanding tradition; not in some "Burkean" sense, but as a vibrant contextualised way of thinking – or in my language, within "us" perspectives.

Moving on from a philosophical perspective, the work of social anthropologist Robin Dunbar is equally relevant in how we see "usness". Dunbar's most famous thesis is about the social brain, and meaningful human interaction. Popularised as "Dunbar's Number", we find that 150 is around the maximum number of people that humans can significantly interact with.[14] This seems to have been the case across cultures and eras. It has influenced many social groupings, without their even knowing the theoretical argument. Recently, Dunbar has revisited this question in the age of social media, when we find "influencers" who have millions of "followers". However, when we search for *significant* interaction (i.e. two-way interaction, not just one-way broadcast), we find that Dunbar's argument still holds true. What "Dunbar's Number" shows is that within a larger group, humans were not only able to operate, they were able to operate with a shared awareness, leading to shared understanding.

One final point about the importance of "usness" and cooperation considers the *lack* of it. The best indicator of an early death is social isolation.[15] Isolation is not a disease in the medical sense. Yet if we are social animals, then we only thrive with social contact. Social contact does not necessitate usness – but usness can be a vital element of it.

Language

In invoking Tomasello, we have touched upon the evolution and use of human language. This has a noticeable effect on the framing of the conscious and unconscious behaviour which marks out usness. We find that communication

[14] Robin I. M. Dunbar, 'Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates'. *Journal of Human Evolution*. 22:6 (June, 1992), pp. 469–493.

[15] A. Steptoe, A. Shankar, P. Demakakos and J. Wardle, 'Social Isolation, Loneliness, and All-Cause Mortality in Older Men and Women', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110:15 (2013), pp. 5795-5801.

among humans is at a qualitatively distinctive level. This is not to belittle communication by or between other species. To give two recent examples, cod have differing accents off the coasts of Newfoundland and Norway; and recent research has shown how trees communicate with one another.[16] Yet despite protracted efforts to get our nearest animal relatives to communicate with anything approaching even primitive human speech, the results have been unimpressive. As the title of Noam Chomsky's latest book reminds us, the question remains *Why Only Us*?[17]

Chomsky's arguments are a good place to start. We want to draw upon three recurring themes throughout Chomsky's work. First is his assault on 'behaviourism', found in his long-standing demolition of the work of B.F. Skinner. Quite how behaviourism got the traction it did in post-war America is perhaps an illustration of the "group think" thesis that we think is the enemy of any kind of change. Chomsky's lengthy dispute with Skinner, which started with his 1959 review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*, brought him to wider prominence.[18] In that review, Chomsky conceptually challenged the notion that language is merely a learned behaviour. Yet all the many subsequent attempts to get chimpanzees to "learn" some basic languages merely underlined Chomsky's core argument, in querying behaviourism. The language underpinning usness remains a characteristic distinctive to *homini*.

The second Chomsky thesis we wish to draw upon is about how language evolved – it is not merely enough to observe that *homini* use language, but that language itself continually evolves. It might be better perhaps to refer to Chomski's *theses* rather than his thesis, for his arguments have also evolved over time. Deep structure, and universal grammar, were prominent features of earlier arguments, whilst in *Why Only Us*, Chomsky and the computer scientist Robert Berwick advocated an "hierarchical structure required for human language syntax, namely Merge".[19]

Chomsky's work on the evolution of linguistics has not been without its critics, and recent years have seen two major assaults on his work which are relevant here, and which need to be addressed if Chomsky's work is to be cited in support of usness. Firstly, there was that of the late Tom Wolfe (as remembered for his novels and perennial white suits as for his philosophical contributions), who argued that

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[16] Greta Keenan, 'This Fish Has a Love Song, and it Sounds Like a Windshield Wiper', *New Scientist*, 7 September 2016, https://www.newscientist.com/article/2104958-this-fish-has-a-love-song-and-it-sounds-like-a-windshield-wiper/, accessed 14 June 2019; Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate – Discoveries from a Secret World* (London: Greystone Books, 2016).

[17] Robert C. Berwick and Noam Chomsky, *Why Only Us: Language and Evolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016).

[18] Noam Chomsky, 'A Review of B.F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior', *Language*, 35:1 (1959), pp. 26-58.

[19] Berwick and Chomsky, *Why Only Us* (2016).

Charles Darwin was a charlatan, that real credit for his achievements is due to Alfred Wallace, and who dismisses Chomsky as little more than a Darwinite.[20] we have two problems with Wolfe's core thesis. First, Chomsky already acknowledges the importance of Wallace. And second, the detailed Chomsky thesis has a decidedly un-Darwinian twist, in that rather than advocating continuing evolution, Chomsky advocates that language evolution happened over a remarkably short period of time (a key piece of evidence for Chomsky being that despite humans emigrating from the eastern Africa to the rest of the world, the language habit is present in every human society). This rapid linguistic evolution is, if anything, further support for the uniqueness of the characteristics defining usness.

More idiosyncratic was Chris Knight's attempt, *Decoding Chomsky*, in which Knight positioned himself to the left of Chomsky.[21] Knight invoked Tomasello's theories, specifically how Tomasello argued that the flow is more from cooperation to language. Which way the flow goes is an important question.[22] As Elizabeth Spelke summarised, we have two proposed accounts: "language as a product of uniquely human social interactions versus language as the source of those interactions."[23] Behind these two versions are different accounts of the origins of 'shared intentionality'. Spelke writes of a "species specific combinatorial capacity expressed in language." This debate will continue. As is set out below (most clearly in Figure 2), these are not binary choices, but are part of an iterative process developing, where each flow reinforces the other rather than being unidirectional, consistent with our knowledge of the evolution of living systems. The iterative evolution of language is therefore a key underpinning of usness.

Thinking

Let us therefore turn to what we regard as Chomsky's third key argument: that the real importance of language is not its use in communication, but its importance in enabling *conscious, organised thought*. Tomasello endorses this part of Chomsky's argument, arguing that spoken communication actually evolved out of physical communication. Tomasello also points out that for many key communications, our expressions are much more effective in communicating. To take Charles Taylor's example, if we say in a sincere voice, "Of course there were Weapons of Mass Destruction", that is a clear statement of something we believe to be true. But if we

[20] Tom Wolfe, *The Kingdom of Speech* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016).
[21] Chris Knight, *Decoding Chomsky: Science and Revolutionary Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).
[22] Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (2014).
[23] Elizabeth Spelke, 'Initial Knowledge: Six Suggestions', *Cognition*, 50 (1994), pp. 431-445.

say the same sentence, with the same tone, but have our fingers pointed to our head and have them circling, we are asserting that only stupid people would believe such a claim.[24] To give another example, hunter-gatherers often communicate with signals, so as not to alert prey.

In the field of evolution, verbal communication with others undoubtedly enhanced communication – but it was not a prerequisite to communicating. Instead, consider the balance of time each person spends speaking and thinking. Even the most loquacious individual spends only a fraction of their day speaking. (For one thing, they need to sleep!) Pertinently, Tomasello suggests that the connections between languages might be better explained by describing the *common purposes* to which we as humans use language. Accordingly, our thought processes are influenced by the language we use. If we drop the need to defend the second Chomsky thesis, we can better explore (in the title of Taylor's book) *The Language Animal*.[25] Here we still can draw on social anthropologists, linguists, psychologists and others; but now we can also draw on the wide range of philosophers who have looked at language — ergo the relevance of my approach in defining usness, heavily grounded in philosophy. For those of us who rebelled against the purely linguistic turn of Oxbridge philosophy after the war, we can now draw down insights that have real relevance to understanding how we live.

I want to highlight two particular arguments from Ludwig Wittgenstein which flow from this.[26] Firstly, his "Private Language" argument: that we cannot construct language without social interaction. Language is socially constructed — which is not to say we cannot have private words that only have meaning for us (like *Citizen Kane's* "Rosebud"),[27] but we can only construct those private words by using a public language. Secondly, we have language "games" – the *meaning* of words is socially constructed. Quine's famous example states that if we visit a culture we know nothing about, and a rabbit runs past, and a native utters, "Gavagai", it might mean "rabbit" – but it might not; we simply do not know. Language is, "a social art. In acquiring it we have to depend entirely on intersubjectively available clues as to what to say and when."[28]

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[24] Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), pp. 243-271.
[27] *Citizen Kane* (1941), dir. Orson Welles.
[28] William Van Orman Quine, *Word & Object*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960), p. 1.

Equally relevant is another key philosopher of language, John Searle, whose *Speech Acts* argued that meaning is located within context and use – for instance, "I do" can have a far more flippant, everyday meaning than it does in a marriage ceremony, depending on the context in which it is said.[29]

Yet Tomasello counters that what distinguishes human communication from that of other great primates is narrative.[30] Here let me quote perhaps the best known section of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, on the subject of narrative:

> man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"[31]

So connecting Chomsky's insight about the importance of thinking, with MacIntyre's argument about the social practices that frame language, our speech and our thought are framed by our world view. Consider Daniel Dennett's pithy observation, "Vacations are not in the ontology of a polar bear, but snow is, and so are seals."[32] Accordingly, stories (or in MacIntyre's language, "narratives") matter. Stories not only encapsulate a world view, but they serve to create a sense of usness, particularly in how they are told, and what they reflect.

Human Behaviour and Usness

Philosophers are not alone in describing different facets of usness. The importance of the philosophical perspective is underlined if compared with what a more psychologically driven insight can offer on usness. We want to refer to the work of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky; we cite them because of their impact on social science and economics in particular. Kahneman and Tversky effectively assert that the stereotype of an absent-minded professor turns out to not only be true, but a profound insight.[33] Furthermore, the title of Kahneman's influential book summarises his argument about *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, and how our brain has two modes. System 1 (thinking fast) is our default position, whilst system 2 (thinking slow) is

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[29] John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 32.
[30] Tomasello, *Why We Cooperate* (2009), p. 343.
[31] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985), p. 216.
[32] Daniel C. Dennett, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017).
[33] Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Prospect Theory: Analysis of Decision under Risk'. *Econometrica*, 47:2 (1979), pp. 263–292.

less frequently used. System 2 thinking is much more exhausting (in Kahneman's language, we are lazy). System 2 thinking involves concentrating, so we concentrate (thinking, looking, hearing, smelling, tasting), but we concentrate on one or two things to the detriment of others. Kahneman also highlights various biases that seem to feature from this mode, such as loss-aversion, and discounting the future.[34] In economics, this was seen as bursting the bubble of the rationalist self-interest framework, which seems core to classical economics – in the words of Axel Leijonhufvud, a world about "Life Among the Econ."[35]

But if we revert to looking at this in evolutionary terms, this argument seems rather different. When our ancestors operated in hostile environments, they needed to use their full range of senses. Without a guaranteed supply of food, limiting the use of "system 2" thinking also made sense, for the brain (though only a very small part of our body) uses up a very large volume of calories. So in evolutionary terms, "system 1" thinking was helpful to survival.

Translating this into more modern terminology, we would argue that our default strategy is "sense-making" rather than "sense-proving". This was outlined in one of the most noted illustrations from Kahneman and Tversky's work showing our "irrational behaviour", the famous "Linda problem":

> Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.[36]

They then asked groups of students (including statisticians) one question: to what degree does Linda resemble the typical member of each of a series of classes? Eight choices were possible, two of which were "Linda is a bank teller", and "Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement". The second option is a subset of the first – and so could *never* be more probable than the first. Yet consistently more respondents suggested the second option than the first. Instead of proving irrationality, Gerd Gigerenzer proposed one slight change: reframing the question as, "To how many of 100 people who are like Linda do the following statements apply?" With that clue, the penny dropped that this was a statistical

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[34] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).
[35] Axel Leijonhufvud, 'Life Among the Econ', *Western Economic Journal*, 11:3 (September, 1973), p. 327.
[36] Kahneman and Tversky (1979), p. 1174.

question, triggering many respondents' sense-checking faculties.[37] As with language and thinking, it is the uncomprehending as well as comprehending inclination towards usness which shows itself here; with implications for behavioural economics, and more specifically, 'Nudge'.

Significance for Nudge

Kahneman and Tversky's work has inspired work by numerous economists, most notably behavioural economist Richard Thaler. Yet despite the growing prominence of behavioural economics – which is now estimated to make up a quarter of all economics scholarship – the practical applications proposed in books such as *Nudge* sit primarily within a microeconomic, not a macroeconomic, framing. Much of the work around behavioural economics has been highly innovative – but has not developed at scale. Perhaps the most successful example of "Nudge" has been auto-enrolment in pension schemes (essentially, one-off action by individuals).

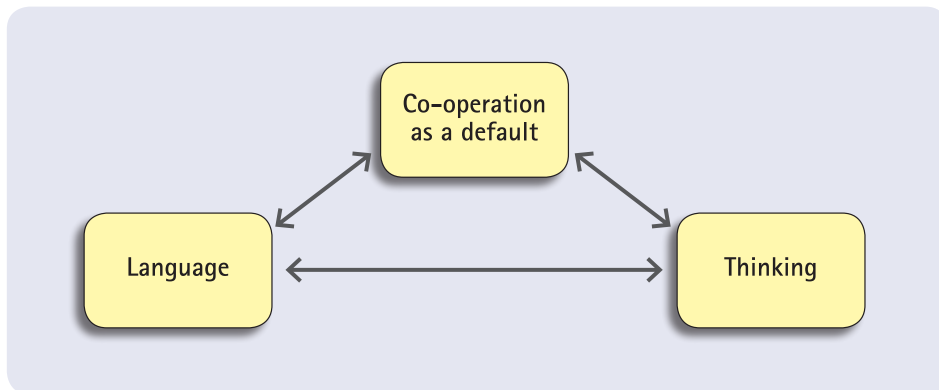
Instead, it is more useful to reread the *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* by one of the foremost macroeconomists. What Keynes wrote about were expectations, subjective factors, and psychological factors – he saw them all as key ingredients in "psychological law."[38] Keynes was no trained psychologist (indeed, he did not train as an economist either), and his psychology arguments are perhaps more intuitive than detailed. Yet if we follow Hyman Minsky, we see Keynes's impact. Following our "sense-making" strategies as social learners, we learn from others. Minsky highlights two twists that arose: the classical assumption of equilibrium turns out to be vacuous (we do not pick up the clues to rectify our way out of a slump); and when things are going well, we don't learn when to stop. Hence the so-called "Minsky moment" – the "bust" starts at the very height of the "boom", as in 2008.[39] In other words, the importance of Kahneman's work is not in microeconomics, but macroeconomics: it's about group behaviour. This marks out Kahneman as a rarity among behavioural economists, in a field dominated by microeconomists.

[37] Gerd Gigerenzer, 'The Bounded Rationality of Probablistic Mental Models', in K. I. Manktelow and D. E. Over (eds), *Rationality: Psychological and Philosophical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 284-313.

[38] John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), p. 26.

[39] Alessandro Vercelli, 'A Perspective on Minsky Moments: The Core of the Financial Instability Hypothesis in Light of the Subprime Crisis'. Working Paper. Annandale-on-Hudson, New York: Levi Economics Institute (2009), http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/wp_579.pdf, accessed 17 June 2019.

Fig. 2 – Three Key Building Blocks



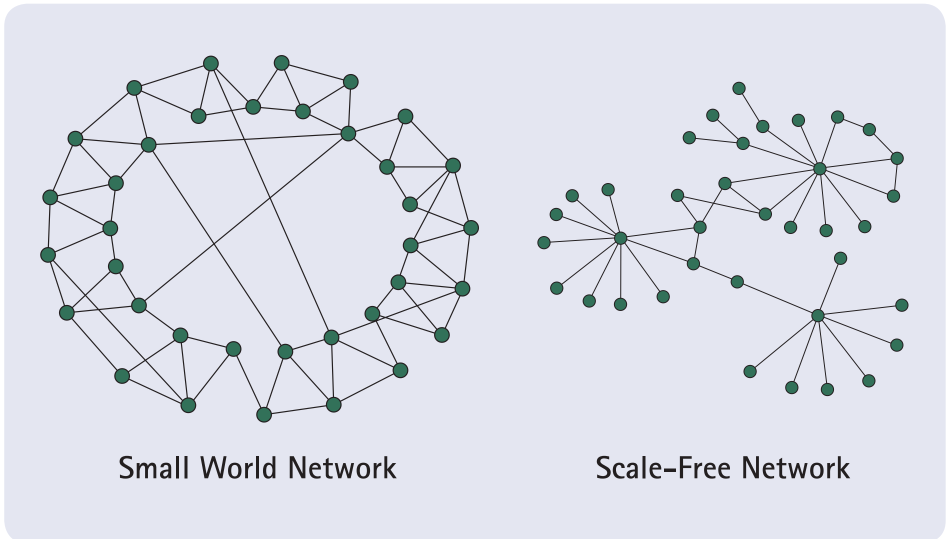
So to draw the argument together using the above three building blocks (cooperation as a default, language and thinking), we find that there is an iterative process between these three. There are significant arguments unresolved about the direction of the flow. (For example, does cooperation lead to language, or language lead to cooperation?) Insofar as we have evidence, we think the argument would suggest two-way flows between the three building blocks, rather than some arrow of time. *The iterations between these three factors are what characterise the unconscious as much as conscious adaptation that is indicative of usness*. Having identified this relationship, it is worth now turning to the shared stories and shared experiences which underpin this, including practical illustrations.

Before coming to some practical applications, we need to bring in two more theoretical frameworks about the construction of usness. The first is about the nature of social groupings. Here, we wish to highlight two simple constructs, described in both network theory and in social theory, in the latter case most prominently by Robert Putnam.[40]

[40] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

In network theory, this is about the difference between small-world networks, and scale-free networks. The following diagram visually describes the difference:

Fig. 3 – A comparison of the differing structures of Small World Networks versus Scale Free Networks



Both networks have their own characteristics. They have in common that most nodes are unlikely to be connected to all the others, but they differ considerably in distribution. Small world networks are structured like tightly-bound local communities, so that most nodes are likely to be linked to most other (though not necessarily all) adjacent nodes.[41] Scale-free networks are differently structured, following a "power law" distribution, with a relatively small number of 'nodes' being focal points in bridging together much more widely dispersed nodes. They may be less firmly bonded together than small world networks, but they connect far more dispersed communities. Small world networks often reflect geographical (think of a small village), whilst scale-free networks were first defined through observing modes of online engagement (think of the users of an online *Star Trek* fan forum, logging in from around the world. Then again, maybe don't…).[42]

[41] Duncan J. Watts and Steven H. Strogatz, 'Collective Dynamics of 'Small-World' Networks', *Nature*, 393 (June 4, 1998), pp. 440–442.
[42] Albert-Laszlo Barabási and Réka Albert, 'Emergence of Scaling in Random Networks'. *Science*, 286 (15 October 1999), pp. 509–512.

These ideas can be seen as a reflection of trends also identified by Putnam. Perhaps most famous for *Bowling Alone*, an account of the decline of social capital seen through the prism of social groupings such as bowling leagues, Putnam distinguishes two types of social capital: Bridging Capital, and Bonding Capital.[43] To take a Putnam example, imagine the captain of one a bowling team. The bowling captain's friend is captain of a local chess team, and they organise a highly successful event, bringing both teams together for an evening (it is left to the readers' imagination as to what activity would have created such success). In this scenario, the captains have provided the bridging capital connecting the two groups. Now imagine a second scenario: the bowling team's sporting performance has been poor that season, so a night out is organised. Again, it turns out to be successful. That has built bonding capital; such capital exists where a social group is homogenous, lending itself to tighter bonds. In the real world, within our social groupings, both effects occur, alongside counter-effects. Without the captain's intervention in scenario two, several players were thinking of leaving the team – after all, it's demoralising being in a losing team. Quite how these forces play out in the real world depends on the respective strengths of these forces. If we have too much bridging capital, with no bonding capital, then that can lead to dissipation. If we have too much bonding capital, with no bridging capital, then that can lead to an "echo chamber" effect. Put in terms of usness, without bonding capital, we have no building block. Without bridging capital, we have a sect.

My second construct is about the way groupings of people have been formulated, and it further illustrates the interdisciplinarity of usness. We want to highlight four such approaches:

1. **Socio-economic**
   This formulation is central to many traditions (Marxism and socialism in particular). For much of the twentieth century, it was a clear predictor of voting habits in Britain, and is still influential in today's polling, giving a minimum ABCDE demographic breakdown (or in consumer research, among more elaborate models, such as MOSAIC).

2. **Identity**
   There are many ways of looking at identity: race, nationality, locality, religion, sex, age, generation, culture, etc. As one illustration of the changing dynamic, whereas historically, class was the best indicator of voting habits in UK elections, today demographic profile is an even more emphatic predictor.

[43] Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (2000), pp. 22-4, 357-63.

3. **Psychological framing**

Personally, we find the "Prospector/Pioneer/Settler" framing of Dade and Higgins' Values Modes model quite useful, not least because the headline titles allow users to quickly grasp what might be the core viewpoint of each group.[44] The power of this can be illustrated in the 2016 UK European Union referendum result: the single strongest correlation to how people voted was their attitude to an issue which did not feature at all in the campaign: the death penalty. Socially conservative settlers were both pro-death penalty and anti-European (Kaufmann, 2016). The importance of psychological framing can similarly be seen in the election of Donald Trump, and in the work of Cambridge Analytica.[45]

Values modes can be rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It basically divides people into three clusters:

Prospectors: They are very status- and achievement-driven, and like visible illustrations of achievement. In past years, these would have been people who would buy their car on the 1st August (the date of a new letter on the numberplate). Today, they queue up to buy the latest Apple iPhone. (Think Del-Boy from *Only Fools and Horses*.)

Settlers: They are more socially conservative and security-conscious, and are less optimistic about the future. They are likely to have a smaller number of acquaintances. Ask them to save the world, and they will think you are barmy. But they do believe that everyone should take pride in their street. (Alf Garnett from '*Till Death Do Us Part* is an extreme caricature of the group.)

Pioneers: By contrast, they tend to be motivated by self-realisation. They are optimistic about the future, and are usually quite relaxed about diversity and complexity. (Since we're on a roll in invoking TV representations, picture Tom Baker's portrayal as *Doctor Who*.)

As a quick shorthand, you can broadly think of the British public as dividing into thirds of each, although their distribution is not equal across society. Pioneers are significantly more represented amongst public service workers, for example.

[44] Pat Dade and Les Higgins, 'Values Modes' (1973).
[45] Jamie Doward and Alice Gibbs, 'Did Cambridge Analytica Influence the Brexit Vote and the U.S. Election?', *Guardian*, 4 March 2017, pp. 8.

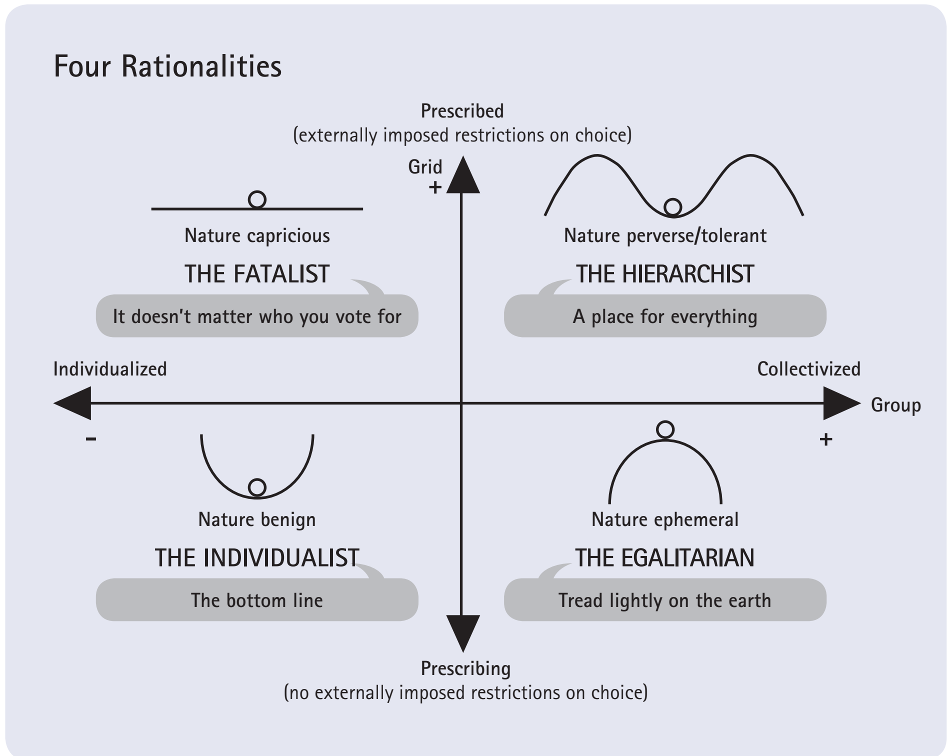
There are three things to note about this model. When Joe describes this to audiences of public sector workers, they are normally quite happy to be described as pioneers – until he points out to them the tendency of pioneers to be somewhat patronising in the way they describe their work. Secondly, failing to understand *other* motivations can have disastrous consequences. Before and after the 2016 EU referendum, 'Remain' messages remained exclusively in either Prospector language ("You will be poorer"), or Pioneer language ("Voting 'Leave' is quasi-racist") – and so actually fuelled Prospector anger ("Elites looking down at voters"). Thirdly, as a simple way of understanding political strategies, New Labour strongly favoured Prospectors, Blue Labour focussed on Settlers, and Corbyn's Labour strongly clustered around Pioneers, until it ran into its European contradictions.

4. Grid and Group

Mary Douglas was a key figure in the reframing of anthropology. Querying the pre-existing paradigm of what "we" (westerners) could know about "them" ("primitive natives"), Douglas instead asked what could we learn about ourselves by considering indigenous societies (so creating a more embraceable concept around "us").

The number of dimensions in the Douglas framing has changed over time (at various points being 3, 4 or 5), and even the language to describe it has changed (from "grid and group" to "cultural theory"). However, for our purposes, the "classic" grid and group formulation is adequate.

Fig. 4 – Mary Douglas's 'Grid-Group' of Four Rationalities, as Rendered by Schwarz & Thompson



Source: Schwarz & Thompson (1990), p. 7.

Here, the ball represents the *status quo*, and the black line represents the (presumed) resilience of the environment, rendering four different world views. With the sharply differing contexts involved, conversation *between* the differing world views is comparable to a conversation between different languages; picture, for instance, a conversation on immigration between a 'Tea Party' Republican and a liberal Democrat — it is likely to provoke sharply differing responses on either side, due to differing values sets underpinning rationalities. (There is also some overlap between three of the Douglas types (individualist/egalitarian/hierarchist) and the "Prospector/Pioneer/Settler" frame.)

Flowing from these four frames, we want to make three points.

Firstly, these are not immoveable or eternal constructs. Religious identity in most of Europe is much weaker than it was, say, four hundred years ago; while in other parts of the world, religious identity has taken on *increased* importance. As such, the contexts of usness differ considerably in different communities.

Secondly, many of these are social constructs. Consider national identities – in Benedict Anderson's memorable phrase, they are "imagined communities."[46] "Imagined" does not mean imaginary, it means socially constructed. For instance, one might think the resurgent Scottish National Party winning a majority of Scottish Westminster seats at the last two British general elections points to some deeply-rooted yearning for Scottish independence, but only one political party has ever won a majority of the vote in a general election in Scotland: the Conservative and Unionist Party in 1955. This sits ill at ease with Scotland's independence narrative, showing how constructed or imagined communities (in this case, the common portrayal of Scotland as a hotbed of separatism) do not always aid as a guide to usness.

Thirdly, what frames an electoral win is disputed space — something keenly appreciated by politicians seeking votes, who routinely engage with manifestations of usness. Put another way, the core challenge to politicians is to be able to reframe their pitch to widen those who are engaged by it (and ideally, to deepen their engagement). The SNP's original "core vote" came from strongly Protestant areas, predominantly rural areas and small towns in north-east Scotland (many of which switched to the Conservatives in the 2017 general election), whilst Labour was always associated with "Red Clydeside", where the bulk of the urban Irish Catholic vote was concentrated. The effectiveness of the SNP's operation was to turn those latter areas from Labour and pro-union to strongly voting for independence. In this case, the prevailing narratives of usness have been turned on their head.

In arguing that we should try to utilise "the power of us", we have to acknowledge the downside – the "them" issue. So we need to find the "bridging capital", and to reframe arguments to grow the "us".

[46] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 2006).

Group Thinking

The "us" effect can be observed in our thinking, in our speaking and in our acting – and in so doing, build up compelling narratives that propogate the "buy in" for an "us" effect. Compelling narratives matter in binding groups together,[47] and in so doing, can help sustain usness.

Illustrations can be found in civil wars – events of great emotional and narrative resonance, as in Ireland or Spain. Here we will draw on the American Civil War. The sequencing is clear: the first military action was undertaken by a pre-emptive strike by the pro-slavery South, with worsening slave conditions in the short term before the South's military collapse, followed by decades of Reconstruction. Yet consider the cultural depictions of the Civil War 150 years on. Left-wing singer Joan Baez found no contradiction in having as a core part of her repertoire, "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down". Most Civil War films have as their baseline a plucky South. Charles Reagan Wilson identified "The Lost Cause" of the old South as a "civil religion."[48] As Karen Cox comments, "an entire culture emerged to embrace the Confederacy and its heroes" (Cox, 2008, p. 175). As Cox writes,

> Confederate defeat in historical memory was remembered as a loss, but in strictly military terms. Otherwise, the reality of defeat was swiftly replaced with the myths of The Lost Cause... Defeat was recast as the victory of values and manifested itself in both southern popular culture and American popular culture.[49]

So how did a war about slavery produce this? Here we need to consider the narrative of "The Lost Cause" and its modern version, "States' Rights". Evidently, the rebellion was to protect an old way of life against an all-powerful national state.

To understand how that new story emerged, let's focus on Virginia, a key state in the war. Washington, the capital of the Union, was at Virginia's northern perimeter, whilst the Confederacy's capital was Richmond, the state capital. After the Civil War, both sides in Virginia wanted to tell their story, and to make sure the dead were remembered. More than 600,000 soldiers lost their lives in the Civil War.

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[47] Marshall Ganz, 'What Is Public Narrative: Self, Us & Now'. Working Paper (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2008), https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/30760283, accessed 16 June 2019.

[48] Charles Reagan Wilson, 'The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion, 1865-1920', *Journal of Southern History,* 46:2 (May, 1980), pp. 219–238.

[49] Karen L. Cox, 'Confederate Defeat and Cultural Expressions of Memory, 1877-1940', in j. Macleod (ed.), *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 192.

An equivalent proportion of America's population today would be six million. For the Union, this drive was led by veterans. They succeeded, in that Memorial Day was established to commemorate those who fought. But in time, those veterans died. Memorial Day continues as one of the few American public holidays, but its meaning is mostly forgotten, and it is now just a holiday. The old Confederacy's followers had a different purpose. In Virginia, this was led in significant part by women, with many of the leading women being the wives of slaveowners. Female emancipation was still far away, but they were therefore able to make a more explicitly political pitch than their male counterparts could do – politics remained a male domain, so what women did could not possibly be seen as political.[50] Usness in the Deep South, post-Civil War, therefore had very different meanings depending on cultural contexts and prevailing narratives, and military defeat by the South did not equate with a defeat of ideas.

A second example of this phenomenon can be found in the aftermath of another epoch-defining conflict, World War II. Consider most popular cultural depictions of Nazism and we typically see a stereotype of "German army good, SS/Nazis bad", in everything from James Mason's portrayal of Rommel in *The Desert Fox* (1951), to '*Allo 'Allo!* (1982-92). This narrative was borne of a combination of the Holocaust, and the Cold War having quickly changed the dynamics of central Europe. The immediate post-war German response to this was that a "We could not possibly have known" storyline emerged, the most extreme version of this being an insistence that there was no documentary proof of Hitler having known of the Holocaust (based on Hitler not having attended the Wannsee conference in 1942). However, we now have abundant research, and the evidence accumulated by centres such as Yad Vashem is quite clear, even if open to differing interpretations around nuance. A young Ian Kershaw famously wrote, "the road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference",[51] and subsequently strengthened the term to "moral indifference."[52]

Yet in considering such "moral indifference" in the population at the time, let us factor in some of the numbers involved. The German army of World War II murdered soldiers and civilians alike, killing 12 million non-combatants.[53] The greatest number of these were Jews, and the greatest number of Jewish deaths were in the death

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[50] Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead But not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

[51] Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria*, 1933-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 277.

[52] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans and the Final Solution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 7.

[53] Timothy Snyder, 'Hitler vs. Stalin: Who Killed More?', *New York Review of Books*, 10 March 2011, p. 36.

camps. (Auschwitz alone accounting for the murder of one million Jews.) However, the fate of many Eastern European Jews was not in death camps, but deaths through mass shootings. Timothy Snyder's analysis indicates at least two million died in such shootings.[54] Crucially, such mass shootings required not just large groups of people being corralled together (requiring significant numbers of soldiers and police to achieve this), they also require large numbers of soldiers and police to do the shooting. The knowledge of this was widespread amongst the soldiers and police – and their families. As Stargardt writes, the Holocaust was a matter of "public conversation" amongst German citizens.[55] So instead of the narrative of "German army good, SS/Nazis bad", the truth was closer to "German army amoral and ruthless, SS/Nazis even worse". The truth was wholly at odds with the binding narrative; as with the Civil War, it is a sense of "usness" around a community — in both cases vanquished — which has allowed a prevailing narrative to shift.

Now in giving these examples of "group think" around the Civil War and World War II, we are describing what could be called "group unthink", or group forgetfulness. We do not contend that in the above examples, every person consciously mapped out these thoughts. To take the Nazi example, the National Socialists had two weapons throughout: violence and propaganda (although the recent study by Ohler suggests that a further major factor was the extensive use of methamphetamine, both as a widespread means of population control, and in enhancing performance among soldiers).[56] Once in power they could use state violence; but to gain power, they needed alignment with more traditional right-wing groupings. "Volk" was therefore a central notion for them. They oscillated between an "us" pitch (Volk, the German peoples, the Aryan race) and a "them" pitch (the Jews).

The post-war narrative of "good Nazis" who were free of culpability held for a long time. The Cold War dynamics meant that occupying Allied armies quickly became first lines of defence. The Adenauer government even had one ex-Nazi, Theodor Orberländer, as a minister until 1960. The first major challenge to the myth came in 1968. Across Europe, there were student protests, and in Germany this took a particularly violent twist with the Baader-Meinhof Gang (Red Army Faction), who saw a direct connection between contemporary German society and the Nazis. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas describes the events of 1968 as 58ers and 68ers – the 58ers were people of his generation, who understood what it was like to be

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[54] Timothy Snyder, *Blood Lands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Bodley Head, 2010).
[55] Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation Under Arms, 1939-45* (London: Bodley Head, 2015).
[56] Norman Ohler, *Blitzed: Drugs in Nazi Germany* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

brought up during the war. The 68ers were born after the war.[57] In other words, they were not part of the "us". Their willingness to embrace change was thus less constrained by prevailing narratives than among the older "us".

Group Speaking

The usness effect can also be expressed in our speech. Early Anglo-Saxon texts give a sense of how people spoke in different times. Change in our speech patterns may now be happening even faster. We cited above how American Civil War narratives changed; but we now also know *how* those narratives were told has changed – we know how that generation spoke, because they made some of the earliest vocal recordings. Since the late nineteenth century, we have been able to listen to key recordings.

Perhaps the two most famous Presidential Inauguration speeches in American history were those of Franklin Delano Roosevelt ("The only thing we have to fear is fear itself") and John F. Kennedy ("Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country"). Millions of words have been written about the content and impact of both speeches. Yet as important as the content and impact was the *tone* of such speeches. Both speeches were delivered in accents of their time. Both speakers were from rich, elite families – yet both spoke with accents that have since evolved, leaving the original recordings now sounding archaic, only a few decades later.

If you look at *homo sapiens* more widely, we have developed a tremendous variety of languages and accents between generations, at an immensely faster pace than physical mutations, which take perhaps a minimum of 12,000 years. Our language evolution is such that we are the only species on Earth who communicate, but who cannot guarantee that our communications can be understood. Such language variations take place at quite small groupings of "us".

We learn tone and dialect from within groups. Yet the "group effect" can crowd out other effects – Joe was born in the North East of England and retains his accent, but now lives in north London. He rather naively assumed that his children would copy his accent. They didn't. To illustrate how the meanings of words evolve, compare and contrast how "gay", "wicked" and "cool" among my children's generation now have completely different meanings for young people in the twenty-first century compared their use in the nineteenth. Or consider how in the 1980s, at a moment of raised Cold War tensions, President Reagan argued that we could not trust the

[57] Richard Vinen, *The Long '68: Radical Protest and its Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

Russians because they had no word for "détente" in their language.[58] Thus the linguistic context of usness, with shared group languages, accents and dialects, often plays a major part in determining the reach — and limits — of usness communities.

Towards a Conclusion: Group acting, and using the power of us

What we have argued so far is that usness is a key influence on our beliefs and behaviours. It is innate to humans, to such a degree that a failure to factor it in can lead to a failure with change management, particularly in the area of behaviour change. Conversely, as some of my examples show, with a greater sense of usness, we might exploit the potential in the field of behaviour change to do good, and we might also limit the potential to do harm. In framing this, we are arguing to regard usness as one of the key forms of action. This is working within the Mary Douglas "grid and group" framework, so that usness (collective behaviour), authority (be it professional, technical or hierarchical), and competition (economic efficiency) are three different ways of working – each resonating more with different groups, and groupings of people, but each also more effective in different circumstances (it is better for instance, that complex engines are designed by engineers, than by communes). Douglas's modelling reflected what Talcott Parsons described: that markets can be found "requisitioning through the direct application of political power" (authority, particularly the state) and "non-political solidarities" (communities or usness).[59]

Smoking provides a strong example of the applicability of usness to action around behaviour change. The number of smokers in the UK has declined dramatically in recent decades, particularly amongst middle class men. In *Connected*, Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler demonstrated that the best way of knowing whether or not someone smokes is finding out whether or not the friends of their friends smoke (Christakis & Flower, 2009, p. 116). In other words, the usness effect does not require someone to even know those who are indirectly influencing them. Sandy Pentland, in *Social Physics*, gives similar illustrations, looking at network effects (Pentland, 2014), which can be seen as patterns of usness, reflecting the normative group characteristics. Yet that same usness also demonstrates part of the residual difficulty in getting more smokers to quit: visit any office building, and outside the entrance is a crowd of smokers drawn from all floors and all departments – the most potent viral network in the organisation. Unlike most of the workforce, who know who works in their own department or their floor but who do not necessarily have a wider network, the smokers have something in common – their addiction.

[58] Martin Amis, *Experience* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), p. 58.
[59] Talcott Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 507.

They also become the gossip transmission system of the organisation, passing stories about their floor or department to others on different floors or departments. They have, in effect, created their own social network. Usness effects are therefore not a simple one-way lever which can be pulled.

The social movements within such networks can therefore be seen within the context of a more general frame of movement: collective impact. To appropriate a Daniel Dunnett phrase, there is also "competence without comprehension" in social movement. For Marshall Ganz, this is about three key stools: I (why this matters to me), Us (why what matters to me matters also matters to you), and Now (there is a choice, which way will you turn).[60] One of the more obvious examples of mobilising "us" with such techniques was Barack Obama's 2008 "Yes We Can" election campaign based on mobilisation. Obama built a team of supporters who would vote for him. He turned voters into donors, and donors into activists. He used connection and connectivity effectively. Key swing voters, such as older Jewish American voters in Florida, were canvassed by younger Jewish Americans (often calling from New York). Obama's operation was built on the lessons he had learned as a community organiser in the Saul Alinsky community action movement, and from what he had learned from Marshall Ganz in developing public narrative.

We can also see how social movement can be incorporated into a broader systems leadership perspective. Systems leadership is an evolving field in which collaborative leadership is built up around the shared goals, among different organisations at different levels.[61] To illustrate this, consider cycling in the London Borough of Hackney. Hackney is the only London borough where more people cycle than drive. That development cannot be attributed to one cause, but it does show how the state can "crowd in" communal effects. Consider some of the players in this behaviour shift. The state (the Council and London Mayor) use their power to restrict speed limits, since the borough is a 20 mile-per-hour zone. They also invest heavily in cycle paths. The borough is heavily zoned, with high parking charges. Demographic changes have brought younger professionals into the borough, often bringing "green" attitudes with them, and an enthusiasm to cycle because of their age and fitness (us power). As cyclists, they have developed a strong sense of being cyclists, and in so doing, they have become an important source of lobbying. Market forces have also played a role: The demand for cycles has created a significant infrastructure of cycle shops spread throughout the borough. A single cyclist

[60] Ganz, '*Public Narrative*' (2008).
[61] Sue Goss, *Systems Leadership: A View from the Bridge*. (London: Office for Public Management, 2016).

against a large lorry remains an intimidating experience, but Hackney at "rush hour" now consists of packs of cyclists who regroup at each set of traffic lights. That has changed the power dynamic between motorist and cyclist. All this encourages more people to take up cycling. That increase in cycling numbers provides a *de facto* authorising environment for further public investment in more and better-defined cycle routes. So authority, the market, demographics, and the "us" effect reinforce the impact of each other rather than crowd out each other.

If crowding in is the way to positively use usness, extending out is the way to avoid the disbenefits. The risk for usness is that it becomes binary – "us" versus "them". Consider the quotation from Amartya Sen's Identity and Violence,already referred to earlier in this book, about people having a multitude of overlapping identities.[62] For Sen, the solution is a multitude of "us". In reconciling this, Nancy Rosenblum looks not for "big" changes, but how small-scale ordinary connections matter.[63] Or to use Robert Putnam's language, we need "social bridging" as much as "social bonding."[64] What all three worry about are those small-scale changes that lead to more parallel lives. The presence or absence of these can markedly affect usness.

Despite widespread interest in the applicability of behaviour change to public policy, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the philosophical underpinnings that tell us much about human nature – and therefore the people whose behaviour we are seeking to change. *Homo sapiens* exhibit a number of distinct characteristics, and it is one of these, usness, which marks us out as unique, in cooperating to a remarkable degree, both instinctively and intellectually, in language and in thought. Only through developing a deeper understanding of usness and its implications and underpinnings can behaviour change initiatives stand a greater chance of success, particularly at the macro rather than the micro level, in working with human nature rather than against it. Numerous philosophers have long grasped this, and a deeper understanding of this dimension could immeasurably benefit the development of the wider behaviour change community, including behavioural economists, and those engaged in social marketing, social practice, policy makers, public health and so forth. In setting out how usness interacts with other factors – particularly with the use of Mary Douglas's uniquely helpful framing – We hope we have set out something of the implications for group think, group speaking, and group action. This is particularly true if behaviour change is to be carried out at scale, where the role of social movements in usness is key.

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[62] Amrtya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), pp. xii-xiii.
[63] Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016).
[64] Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (2000).

CHAPTER 5

Making a 'We' - the collective leadership of change

Karen Ellis

You are probably wondering by now why we seem to have two chapters (4 and 5) about the collective social system and why we have decided to create a distinction between a sense of 'Us' and the creation of a 'We'. In terms of our ideas about 'making meaning together', as Joe outlined in the preceding chapter, we are aiming to contrast the idea of 'Usness' as a relatively unconscious tendency to identify ourselves with (or sometimes, in reaction to) the groups around us; whereas a 'We' can be considered as a consciously-created fluid grouping of people, brought together for a specific purpose. This purpose might be as far-ranging as setting up a new strategic cross-organisational network (eg the UK NHS Strategic Transformation Partnerships) or as tactical as a start-and-close group set up by a local community to tackle an outbreak of anti-social behaviour.

In this terminology, 'We' are actors in making change happen in a collective way. But on occasion, the various 'Us'es' within or around a collective may actually inadvertently or deliberately *avoid* change, as a threat to the sense of Usness which is so valued by members. You only have to look at significant change efforts in organisations which are made up of distinct professional tribes, to see how important an over-arching sense of 'We' (who are 'all in it together') is in combatting parochialism, special-pleading or stone-walling by professions, who feel that they

have something to lose in the new world. But there is also a more pressing reason for considering how to create (and participate) wider 'substance-of-we-feeling' as Doris Lessing calls it in her *Shikasta* series of novels.[1]

Using 'We' to combat the negatives of 'Usness'

In the preceding'Us' chapter, Joe talked about the wide range of less-than-conscious beliefs, habits and personal identities that support a sense of 'Us' across communities, organisations and interest groups. He referred to the danger of what we call 'them-ification' – the all-too-human tendency to build Usness by identifying, focusing or even spuriously creating a common enemy. The foundations of most prejudice, conflict and interpersonal hatreds can be found in the projective process of pushing all disliked qualities and behaviours onto the people who are 'not like us', by virtue of their skin colour, creed, gender or ideology. The world stage at this point in history is possibly more obviously populated by the tribes of 'Us-es' than it has been since the middle of the last century – and there are far more tribes now than there were then. Some of us believe that, as a species, this desire to create a sense of an exclusionary 'Us' may, after all, be the end of us all (as well as the rest of the charismatic mega-fauna at the same time)...

Leaving 'extinction event' musings aside, the issues of exclusionary Us-es affects us all much nearer to home. As people who are trying to make leadership moves in a systemic context, we are often heartened by the support of the people who identify themselves with us, who join our bid to form an 'Us', and who go out and spread the word on our behalf. And, of course, we forget to notice that the growing 'Us' can push people with different views, beliefs, needs or mindsets to one side, sometimes leading to dangerous group-think in the 'Us' as they start to combat the new 'Them' – those who are 'not engaged', 'not on the bus', 'not with the programme.' Sometimes the 'Them' feel like they need to resort to sabotage, to by-standing, or simply (in that peculiarly British fashion) to waiting for it all to blow over, as this new-fangled 'system leader' moves on and we all revert to business as usual.

Our contention, therefore, is that progress on wicked issues — and the ability to collaborate across systems — is enhanced by a degree of "Usness", but damaged by *too much* "Usness"; so there's a "Goldilocks" principle. If you are attempting to lead systemically, you need to walk that tightrope. That means avoiding the "bear traps" (no Goldilocks pun intended) of exclusivity and dogma on the one hand, and of total relativism and false consensus on the other.

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[1] Doris Lessing, *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979).

Separating the 'I' from the 'We' – the psychological impact of groupishness

But this balancing of 'Usness' is way more tricky than it sounds at first sight as a psychological level – as well as for the anthropological and social reasons Joe referred to in Chapter 4. In sensing ourselves for the first time, our very first sense is an "Us" — not a "Me". So even when we are considering what makes up "Me", we actually have to start with an "Us". The *interpersonal* comes before the *intrapsychic*; or in layman's terms, the "We" and the "Us" comes first. A common 'Western' fallacy — or at any rate, a US/European one, not even a 'Western' one — is that you are independently created as an "I". But the "I" comes later.

This is not at all to deny the individual elements of personality, temperament and other core aspects of how we make making in our worlds. Some things are innate: Introversion and extroversion are innate, while some people are more organised by emotional or intellectual realities. There are some things about your thinking processes that are innate — some people are more linear, some people are more associative, some people are more organised by their emotional realities, some people are more organised by their intellectual realities. It seems like those things tend to persist.

However, we would contend that a great deal of your construction of yourself, your identity, your relationships, even the way you engage with ideas, has been informed by your interpersonal interactions. So a simple example of that is the child who is told they're no good at languages at school, and then only at the age of 45 do they go to Spain, and after hanging around the country for three weeks, they realise they can speak Spanish — because they just learn in a different way they were told to learn. But that person will have had a self-belief about the way they could learn languages, it will have changed what they did for a living, they will have never put themselves in a position where they might speak other languages, and it will probably have changed how they think about themselves as global citizen.

As Joe pointed out in Chapter 4, as humans, we're constantly oscillating between our connectedness with the groups of which we're part (starting with our families, but then our peer groups at school, our professional tribes, and so on), and our sense of our own independence — whether that's independent thinking, or independent feeling. That's a lifelong conversation with oneself.

How skillfully we have that internal conversation relates to our stage development as described in Chapter 3. In particular, our capacities to perspective shift and to self-notice will drive how conscious we are of the effect of our "Usnesses" on our

thinking, feeling and acting. For Karen, that's where the two things link: "Usness", and the development of "Me".

Scholarly debate about degree to which our meaning-making is social via individual depends a good deal which school you attach yourself to. The difference between social constructionism[2] and development psychology — is that the social constructionists think that our meaning-making is, in the main (or even entirely), socially constructed, while the individual developmentalists (who call themselves, confusingly, **'constructivists'**[3]) think that thought processes are largely created within individuals largely separate from our social realm— and of course, the truth is that it's both. As approaches, they will nod to each other — but tend to see each other in isolation, arguing that when push comes to shove, *they* are more important. Ironically, it's a real "Us" and "Them" scenario. And the degree to which we are independent and interdependent varies from person to person both due to psychological and to developmental reasons. However, with conscious effort and immersion in effective collective practices, we can all start to separate our own meaning-making from the Usness around us to some degree and then, hopefully gain some useful perspective on the way to creating a greater 'We'.

Consciously creating an inclusive 'We'

When we talk about engaging in the domain of 'We' in this book, what we mean is the conscious effort to develop relationships between ourselves and the individuals/ groups who **differ** from us in their opinions, values and beliefs, as well as our more obvious fellow travelers. We believe that is only by engaging in 'We-making' as a conscious practice that we will solve some of our most pressing societal problems and will begin to work with conflict *creatively* rather than *destructively*; to increase our sense of coherence in amidst uniqueness and difference. The idea behind "We-making" is that we work to keep the boundaries of our groupings porous, allowing more and more people to join into a wider "We" – even, and especially, those who disagree with us. To do this, we need to both address some of the instinctive human psychology around relationships and groupishness, as well as to create meanings that are broad enough for people to be able to relate to, and that are interesting enough to commit to.

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[2] Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. The theory centres on the notion that meanings are developed in coordination with others rather than separately within each individual.
[3] Constructivism is an 'epistemological' theory – based on observation and scientific study – about how people learn. It says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences.

That's a lofty aim. So what might be some of the individual and collective practices that help us to walk that tightrope? Our contention is that we need:

- Self-awareness of our own very personal needs as a group member and how we might, legitimately or illegitimately go about meeting those needs.
- Learning processes that will help us to become more aware of our different positions, loyalties and requirements.
- Conversational practices that will help us to discuss those differences, particularly if there is conflict, or if there are high-stakes issues at hand.
- Dilemma exploring approaches for at least *temporary* resolution or decision-making, so that we can shift into action, rather than endlessly talking about "the stuff that might make us feel better", which invariably means that precious little gets done.
- Collective creative thinking approaches that allow us to explore issues and innovate solutions together in an open and experimental way.

We'll come back to some of our own favourite models and practices for supporting 'We-making' in a bit. However, we'll first take a quick diversion into some of the earlier theoretical work on groupishness and touch briefly on 'dialogue' as a method for supporting group development.

Building a new 'We' – understanding people-in-groups

The psychological understanding of how people operate *in groups* is, to date, comparatively thin compared with the vast range of schools of personal or individual psychology. The 'relational' schools of psychology and psychotherapy (and even interpersonal neurobiology!) have made great strides in the last 15 or so years; but the group field has been comparatively left behind after some seminal work by Wilfred Bion, Gregory Bateson and the dialogue work of David Bohm and colleagues (with some notable exceptions that we will point to later).[4] It was Bion who first identified the idea of the 'working group', where the members were able, through a process of disclosure and dialogue, to overcome the overwhelming dynamics of fight/flight, pairing or dependence on the leader. These simple but highly recognisable dynamics, which Bion called 'Basic Assumption' functioning, were first noted in intentionally therapeutic groups, but all of us will have been part of groups where these unhelpful dynamics have decimated the ability of the group to actually get any real work done.

[4] Wilfred Bion, *Experiences in Groups, and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961); Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemiology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

Gregory Bateson used his polymathic work across fields as wide-ranging as anthropology, animal communication and cybernetics to build a theory of human interaction, which focused on interpersonal behaviours. He identified specific sets of 'moves' by the players in a group (or between groups) which were either symmetrical (such as competition or rivalry) or complementary (dominance/submission; nurturance/dependence; exhibitionism/spectatorship). Symmetrical 'plays' tended to lead to conflict or schism, complementary ones to stability and stagnation.

While both Bion's and Bateson's ideas are straightforward to grasp on the surface, the undoubted genius and depth of their work is not often referred to in group settings outside psychotherapy – which is a great shame. As a leader or facilitator in a systemic setting, some awareness of these possible dynamics is *hugely helpful* – simply spotting them at play and, if possible, pointing them out can shift a stuck dynamic into one where actual work can get done.

Dialogue as a 'We-making' skill

Fortunately for those of us working in systems, many more people are familiar with the theory and practice of dialogue which came out of the ideas of David Bohm (the polymathic physicist – there is a theme here!). Dialogical practices are often taught and used as a way of constructively engaging as a group, or across groups.[5] However, in our work, we note that dialogue is easier to *talk about* than to do; or what organisations call dialogue is often really debate, or else just wishy-washy talking-around. There are many excellent practices for dialogue, building on the work of Bill Isaacs, David Kantor and other writers which we will not repeat here. However, key to all of the work on dialogue, when practiced well, is the ability among members to **suspend**, at least temporarily, our own needs, opinions and habits in service of the movement of the conversation. But this is much more difficult than it sounds – and this is where we return to our own personal psychology to help us, as leaders, to become more aware of our own tendencies, so that we are indeed able to suspend them when they get in the way of our ability to work well in dialogue.

So, there is a substantial body of practice on dialogue skills, which are crucial components of any highly-functioning group. However, we also recognize that many groups are way off from this lofty way of operating, and even a healthy debate is far from easily available. Try to teach a group dialogue skills when it is still unable to shift far beyond superficial politeness or what Mark Gerzon colourfully calls "verbal brawling" is futile[6] – quite apart from the issue that it takes a certain

[5] David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
[6] Mark Gerzon, *Leading Through Conflict: How Successful Leaders Transform Differences into Opportunities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 2006), pp. 145-6, 159, 230, 256.

level of adult development to be able to be aware of, and then suspend, those tricky needs, habits and biases. And dialogue is always slow to build – we often simply don't feel we have the time to get personal, and to understand each other's need at an individual level and build the trust needed for each of us to open up about what is *really* going on. Whether this is actually true – or just a sophisticated form of avoidance – is open to debate, and colleagues who are adept at helping groups build dialogue would say that any attempt is better than none.

Getting started on 'We-making' skills

In our practice, we have learned that even without devoting the considerable time and effort needed to building dialogue skills in a group, there are a few key models and practices which can help groups to start to build their 'substance of we-feeling', right from the very start. The ones we return to time and again are:

- The FIRO-B profile which helps individuals understand their own interpersonal needs and how they affect their behavior in groups
- Bert Hellinger's 'Four Orders' which help a group understand when significant collective requirements are in or out of balance
- David Kantor's 'Four Player Mode;' which helps group members understand and compare their patterns of conversation and typical actions
- A range of approaches for dealing with conflict and difference in groups from David Campbell, Charles Hampden-Turner and Roger Martin, among others
- Techniques based on design thinking approaches to help with group creativity and innovation.

We outline each of these key technologies very briefly below as a set of prompts and a way of pointing to resources which can help you with the formation of your own systemic 'We'. Each idea has a vast body of work attached to it, which we can no more than skim here but hopefully we will give you a taste of the best of what is out there in the group development realm.

FIRO-B – Understanding what we need from the group

We'll come on to some the collective practices later in this chapter and when we address our five Systemic Leadership Challenges in Chapter 11 but, as is often the case as leaders, we need to start with ourselves – the 'I' that is attempting to create the 'We'. At a psychological level, no matter how good our intentions or how masterful our interpersonal skills, if our personal needs or aversions are unmanaged in a group setting, they will 'leak out' and dilute or destroy the conscious approaches

that we are taking. We all know people who describe themselves as 'good in groups' (or 'facilitative' or 'people people') who, unbeknownst to themselves, are clearly acting out of personal unmet emotional needs in any setting where there is more than one other person. Unflattering tendencies like rivalry, competition, exhibitionism, attention-seeking, smothering, and dominating are all visible in the most seemingly neutral or professional settings – and, just maybe, we too can cause people to roll their eyes when they see us wading into a debate with our well-worn point **again**. Not a pleasant thought!

How skillfully we operate in groups relates to our early development, and to the needs that may or may not have been met in our earliest group setting – the family. As you can imagine, there is a huge body of theory about how early child development feeds into our behaviour and thinking and feeling patterns as adults (character analysis, attachment theory, object relations theory to name but a few).[7] Many of these theories have at least some relational aspect but few are easily applicable in the more complex interaction patterns that show up in multi-person groups.

So without straying too far into the realms of psychodynamic pathology, it's probably easiest if we focus on the Firo-B — a psychological map which shows how important the elements of inclusion, control and affection are to you.[8] In twentieth century approaches to human psychology, the Firo-B was one of the first psychological instruments which looked at the interpersonal rather than intra-personal. The ideas were created and developed by William Schultz, who was asked by the US Navy to find out what made a team successful in the high stakes environment of a nuclear submarine. He analysed what made people good at spending three to six months underwater, versus what made them less good at it. The Firo-B tool, which is based on his ideas, is a very well-known, mainstream instrument. What it says is, "These are your key interpersonal needs. How warm a relationship do you need? And how much control do you need over your own environment? How much do you need to be included?" Simplistically, people who have high scores on all of those needs tend to want to be strongly bonded to a group, and to have quite high desires to shape the behavior of others; while people with low needs on this scale couldn't give a monkey's, frankly.

[7] Mary D. Salter Ainsworth, 'Object Relations, Dependency, and Attachment: A Theoretical Review of the Infant-Mother Relationship', *Child Development*, 40 (1969) pp. 969-1025.
[8] William C. Schultz, *FIRO: A Three Dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958).

The Firo-B model

	Inclusion	Control	Affection
Expressed	Makes an effort to include others in activities. Tries to belong, through joining social groups, to be with other people as much as possible.	Tries to exert control and influence over things. Enjoys organizing things, and directing others.	Makes an effort to grow close to people. Comfortable with expressing personal feelings. Tries to be supportive of other people.
Wanted	Wants to be included by others in group activities, and to be invited to share in a sense of belonging. Enjoys being noticed by others.	Feels most comfortable working in clearly-defined situations, with clear expectations.	Wants others to act warmly towards them. Enjoys having others share their emotions, which further encourages their own efforts.

Adapted from the work of William Schultz.

Whatever our Firo-B profile, we all have a tendency either towards groupishness or towards avoiding groupishness, based on a number of factors, including personality, interpersonal needs like those described by Schultz, our childhood experiences, our parents' preferences, our own family position and schooling, plus a variety of combinations and interactions. It ends up making quite a complex mix. Some people (like Karen) like to be "Boundary Dwellers", with both a foot in and a foot out — these are people who typically, when push comes to shove, prefer to be outside rather than in. Others of us have a natural default to prefer to remain involved in a group, even when things get pretty tough for the group, as well as a needing to shape the future of that group – think of hardened political party activists, or pressure group volunteers. None of these tendencies are "right" or "wrong". The most important thing is to have a spectrum, of people inside and outside, and of every shade in between. People inside create cohesion, and can get stuff done in groups, while people outside spot flaws, and can see the fallibility of groupishness and of group think. And all of us, as we develop, start to gain flexibility, to be able to do more than one of these at a time. We start to be able to choose

whether you're going to be groupish or not groupish or a boundary-dweller, rather than just being driven by your own life tendencies. So that's what you gain with development: the ability to become adaptable, and to notice your own tendencies and controvert them.

Hellinger Constellations – Understanding what the group needs from us

One approach to understanding and working with human social systems, which we have often adapted in our work with places, is the 'Constellations' approach, developed by the family systems therapist Bert Hellinger.[9] Hellinger is a controversial figure, but his ideas and work are having an increasing influence on how the more 'under the surface' issues which cause organisational difficulties are approached, and his 'systemic principles' are gaining wide attention by helping us think better about those hidden dynamics. Hellinger was interested in understanding how hidden factors influence the different roles and functions in family and groups. He developed a set of principles to describe how those factors affect the interaction of people interact with each other, their relationships and the dynamics between them. These hidden influences are described by Hellinger as 'The Four Orders':

- **Respect for loyalties and history:** Respect is the most important principle (what is, must be allowed to be)
- **Right to belong:** Everyone in the system has a right to his or her place
- **Fair exchange:** There must be a balance of giving and taking between individuals, between individuals and the system and between different parts of the system.
- **Honouring of place:** The system requires that certain priorities and **orders** of precedence should be observed. These include length of service, specialist skills, qualification, functional hierarchy, competence and having particular stakes in the system.

If you think of a group that you have worked in, which has worked well, and then contrast it with one where there was no real work done at all, you may be able to see how each group supported or contravened one or more of these orders.

In terms of **loyalties** and history, it is easy to see how what's happened in the past, what's happening in the present, and thoughts of what might happen in the future,

[9] Bert Hellinger, Gunthard Weber and Hunter Beaumont, *Love's Hidden Symmetry: What Makes Love Work in Relationships* (Phoenix, Arizona: Zeig, Tucker and Theisen, 1998).

all affect how people think and feel – and so it affects everything that they do in the group. Inevitably, people feel a sense of loyalty to the past, to past colleagues, leaders, traditions – and when something happens that inadvertently challenges (or insults) those traditions or that loyalty, there are usually negative responses.

When it comes to **belonging**, the degree to which someone *feels* they belong influences their thoughts, feelings and actions; and that's not just about individuals – groups like to feel that they belong to a wider network, too. A sense of belonging makes people feel as if they are a part of something – a sense of belonging evokes emotion, and it makes people care. What that means is that when something happens that threatens that sense of belonging or causes a separation, this can create energy, to repair the issue through positive emotion, or it produces negative feeling and emotion that impacts negatively on performance and relationships within the organisation.

The order of **fair exchange** refers to the felt sense of reciprocity - the 'give and take' in all relationships and between different processes and places. This isn't just about services, skills, and knowledge, it's also about the give and take of respect, trust, courtesy, etc. Exchange is what gives the 'balance' in relationship – the right balance of give-and-take matters. Sometimes, and especially at the start of new relationships between people and groups, it is hard to find this natural balance, and both parties find they are drawn by their consciences to continuously try to redress the balance. Sometimes that will work, and both parties feel that they have had equal measure of both; but sometimes the cycle continues... and that's a very damaging pattern, that has to be broken.

The last of the 'Four Orders' is that of **Place** – every person and every group in a system has a sense of how they fit in, in relation to everyone else. The 'right place' is about the right blend of role and function, and getting that right really matters. Groups don't always fit people into the place best suited to them, and that causes problems; because if someone's not in the right place, not only do they feel that, but the rest of the organisation feels it too, and that affects every single interaction between them...which affects emotion... which impacts on other interactions. Just one person being out of place can impact on the whole feeling of what's going on across the system.

It is important to emphasise that (in spite of Hellinger's language of 'Four Orders') these **Systemic Principles** are not "laws" or "rules", because systems can ignore them and continue to operate: they are more like engineering principles which, if not followed, will put stress on the machine. Where Systemic Principles

are observed, the group seems to operate more smoothly and comfortably; there is a sense of relaxation as they are acknowledged, and everything goes to its right place. So, if we aspire to facilitate the work of the groups to which we belong, having an awareness of these Orders can help us spot quickly when one is being contravened and allow us to bring that issue to the awareness of others so that we can, collectively, decide what to do about it.

David Kantor – Understanding individual group action tendencies

Our own personal practices for participating in and facilitating group conversations are central to systemic leadership; and knowing your own preferences and biases in how you interact in a group setting, is key. We strongly recommend David Kantor's group behaviour profiling tool, to get a sense of how you might show up in a group conversation.[10] David Kantor started his career working with families. Based on his learning from that, he has developed quite a sophisticated model looking at the dynamics of group interaction. Here, we just want to highlight the first level of that model – which Kantor describes as Mover/Opposer/Follower/Bystander. Kantor argues that we will always see these four positions, and what we need to know is what is our individual preference (and can we try to ensure we do not just adopt that stance unconsciously). Secondly once we understand that, how can we "read the room" to understand what is going on.

Even if we prefer not to be profiled, we can gain an awareness of Kantor's model to make some hypotheses about our own tendencies. Taking the braver step of being open about our hypotheses, and asking our trusted colleagues to give us feedback on how we might be operating, is a good place to start.

Working with difference - conflict, dilemmas and competing ideas

One of the key things we have learned in our work with organisations, communities and large groups is the need for healthy conflict and open competition of views and ideas – consensus and group think kill creativity and destroy adaptiveness. But many of us have learned to shy quickly away from conflict and discord because our experience has been of unhealthy rather than healthy versions. We should say here that we are fully in favour of *well-managed* conflict in groups, seeing it as a genuinely creative rather than destructive force; however the key here is "well-managed".

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[10] David Kantor, 'Kantor Behavioural Profile', *Kantor Institute*, https://www.kantorinstitute.com/instruments.

It is unhelpful that there is a confusion in the language of the literature, between *conflict* as an interpersonal form of aggression and the reality and inevitability of *conflicting ideas* (or beliefs of values) in a group setting. Obviously, the one can lead to the other, but we all know that it's unhelpful to bracket all differences as conflict, and sometimes there's an ideas war. (Think of how Foucault inverted Clausewitz's most famous saying, insisting that "Politics is war by other means")[11]. Obviously, if the issues within a newly forming 'We' are more around inter-personal conflict or are about important issues of inequity and power vs powerlessness in the system, those critical dynamics need to be handled immediately and with considerable sensitivity – often by a trained external facilitator. When differences in view descend into personality clashes, or power games, etc, little is to be gained. Many writers such as Thomas Killlman have written well on the role of conflict in organisations,[12] and there is a wide literature in the field of international relations in this area. What we would say is that suppressed (or avoided) conflict is always destructive, because it leads to phenomena like (so-called) 'change resistance' — which tends to be the powerless stymying the powerful — as well as sabotage, and the endless cycling that goes on in many systems, simply because the genuine points of disagreement never reach the surface of the conversation.

Returning to our theme of competing ideas, rather than more critical types of conflict, we find the work of Barry Johnson, and earlier, Charles Hampden Turner, on polarities and dilemmas to be particularly useful.[13] Johnson has developed an excellent tool called "polarity management", for helping groups uncover and elucidate opposing views, and for working with them to maximise the benefits of both ends of the spectrum, and to mitigate the risks. For example, with a polarity management approach, imagine a public sector organisation where the executive team are polarising between the necessity to "stick to the knitting" and keep within financial constraints, versus the long-term benefits (both financially and in service terms), of experimentation and innovation. This is often felt at a genuine dilemma, particularly in terms of management attention. In this case, a polarity management approach would help the advocates of innovation understand the value of the "steady state" emphasis, and to think about how the riskiness of their approach

[11] Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collége de France, 1975-76* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).
[12] Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, *Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (Tuxedo, New York: Xicom, 1974).
[13] Barry Johnson, P*olarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (London: HRD Press, 2014); Charles Hampden-Turner, *Charting the Corporate Mind: From Dilemma to Strategy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

might appear to people who also have the long-term survival of the organisation and its mission at heart. On the other hand, the advocates of stability might begin to see how a "safe-to-fail" approach to small experiments could start to change the basis on which services interact with the citizen; and also start to notice how their bosses might lead to risk-aversion which causes the organisation to become irrelevant, even if the organisation's ongoing existence remains stable – such as the position of UK local government in recent years.

One of the key benefits of Johnson's approach is that it helps groups to agree action strategies, without them having to agree which end of the spectrum they're going to have to act from. While some people might find the approach helps them shift the message in their conversation, they understand that it's still valid, and doesn't prevent them from edging forward on a number of fronts. If groups find a polarity management approach intriguing, they can then often move on to the more sophisticated approach to dilemmas designed by Charles Hampden-Turner in his brilliant book 'Charting the Corporate Mind'. Hampden-Turner shows us how we can he reframes dilemmas by using a cybernetic approach as an *enabling* constraint.[14] The ends of the apparent dilemma create a bounded decision space, setting outside limits on options but leaving a space for alternative navigations over time – 'tacking' across the space, if you will. We find a good example in the early stages of John F. Kennedy responding to the Cuban Missile Crisis. With very few known facts, a lot of Kennedy's earlier discussions were framed in terms of analogies with the 1938 Munich crisis, and the need to avoid appeasement, and so early actions were taken on that basis. Later on, as Kennedy's administration grew more familiar with the distinctive needs of the crisis, they were able to move on to more bespoke solutions, less grounded in analogies.[15] A viable bounded space allows you to do things within that space, with boundaries set by agreement – this means the group can take a variety of different actions to see what works, again without having to agree that one end of the dilemma is 'right' and the other 'wrong' allowing the group to de-polarise. All of these dilemmas are false dilemmas in the end. The anarchists and the statists are on either side, and the state stops saying which is more important — it sets out where they would go *too far*, but it deems

[14] Hampden-Turner, *Charting the Corporate Mind* (1990).
[15] Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow (eds), *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997).

that anything else is okay. The debate goes on, bounded around what is too far, rather than around what is best, or even what is alright. It's a cognitive trick — but it works. You're not changing the structure, but the argument process is different, and that produces different outcomes.[16]

Design thinking - decision-making and innovation in complexity and uncertainty for complex times

If we go back to our capacities in the "Me" chapter, and think about what we've described as the most "mature" (or latest) version of each capacity, one of the things which characterises the most effective system movers is that they understand that in a complex situation, there is never one 'right' answer for all time. There is often, however, one somewhat better (or less worse) answer for the current moment. This very situated (or contingent) way of operating can be very unpopular with followers, as leaders will sometimes be described as unreadable, or will be prone to make u-turns, or will contradict themselves over a period of time. But we would contend that this adaptive approach is not simple indecisiveness – at any given moment, a leader who is genuinely 'tacking' in response to changes in the situation will be able to give a convincing and cogent argument to what has given the directional shift. We realise that this highly responsive, situation-aware form of leadership is not popular in the current orthodoxy, where leaders are expected to set an uncompromising purpose and vision, and to stick to it, regardless of whether they are leading their organisation off a cliff or into a mire. However, we think that in a multi-organisational context, the ability to read the runes, understand what to push and what not to push, and to take decision which are vital in this moment, is the most adaptive style.

So what does that mean for decision-making is a group setting? In this way of operating, decisions are always up for revisiting when circumstances change. Obviously, this sort of relativism does not sit well with traditional methods of meetings, minutes and recorded decisions – and no more can it under the existing paradigms, for those meetings which are intended as governance settings or used for testing accountabilities in a formal sense. At this moment in history, there are

[16] If you are interested in working with how dilemmas at an organisational systemic level can improve creativity in organisations, then it's worth looking at David Campbell, *Taking Positions in the Organisation* (London: Routledge, 2006), which lays out some of the psychological foundations, or Charles Hampdon-Turner's work, particularly the seminal Hampden-Turner, *Charting the Corporate Mind* (1990).

legitimate questions about whether even our governance approaches are really 'fit for purpose' in our fast-shifting and ambiguous work settings, but we will leave those debates aside for now until our next book! Regardless of how we work together in those more formal structures, a significant problem arises when we 'port' those meeting practices and techniques into forums which are intended to be exploratory, creative or inspire new actions – our systemic groupings in other words.

We find here that practices borrowed from the worlds of design thinking, large-group interventions, and the 'hackathons' beloved of digital spaces, are far more useful here. All of these approaches use a 'learning the way forward' mindset – decisions are contingent on the next set of new data, interventions are designed to be iterative and 'safe-to-fail and effective feedback loops are paramount. If you think about some of the current buzzwords in corporate environments, such as the real meaning of "able working" or "agile practices", or even better, the "scrum team methods" in digital or design thinking approaches, all of these are based on iterative, learning-rich processes, rather than our more common change methods — which involve high levels of planning, lengthy and complex design, and multiple points of failure.

While you don't need to be an expert in any of these approaches, some familiarity with the tools and mindsets used by masterful design thinkers and their complexity colleagues will be a huge help to your systemic activities. There are many useful resources out there, about design thinking as a field of knowledge, and about working with complexity and 'wicked issues'.[17] In our leadership development work at the Leadership Centre, we focus increasingly on teaching the basics of these skills to leaders, not so they can become designers themselves, but so that they can be more aware of how they can create a better context, for increased creativity and adaptivity in their settings and for their people.

[17] Keith Grint, 'Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions: the Role of Leadership', *Clinical Leader*, 1:2 (December 2008)..

'We': a conclusion

What we've tried to do in this chapter is to introduce you to some helpful ideas and practices. We have used Doris Lessing's "substance of we feeling"[18] idea to guide us to think about talks of how we create a sense of a diverse 'We', which over-rides some of the more tribal instincts of 'Us' — which allows people to bridge the gaps between their relationships and their aspirations. This sort of work is never done, we're never as good at creating relational effectiveness as we are at inadvertently destroying it. But nevertheless, it's a noble endeavour. Doing this effectively means recognising that there's a base element of "Usness" — but we can move on from it by harnessing it, for positive goals. As is often the case, the basis for effective operating starts at home; and understanding ourselves, our preferences, our biases and our triggers is the start of the journey - which brings us, unsurprisingly back to "Me".

[18] Lessing, *Shikasta* (1979).

SECTION 3

Conversations with history, politics and ethics

CHAPTER 6

The dark side of leadership – a conversation with horror

Joe Simpson

A great deal of modern leadership mantra seems to regard "leadership" as a good thing. This has taken a number of forms. Traditionally, we have seen "leadership" as the solution to a problem. Think of the number of times you've read about speeches which urge *real* leadership, or better leadership, to get us out of a problem. Leadership may be necessary to help in the transformation of a problem, but whether that transformation is for the better is another matter. To give an illustration from the American Civil War, in 1864 Abraham Lincoln chose Andrew Jackson to be his running-mate in the forthcoming presidential elections. No-one would name Jackson as a good President, and many would share my view that he was a disastrous President.[1] But let us imagine ourselves as key advisers to Lincoln in that summer of 1864. If we had tried pointing out to Lincoln that making Johnson the Vice-President would make him only a heartbeat away from the presidency, we suspect that even then, Lincoln would still have made the same choice. Lincoln had no intention of being assassinated, but he had every intention of being

[1] Polls of American historians frequently name him as one of the worst Presidents in U.S. history.

re-elected. In the early summer of 1864, that seemed very difficult. Before the decisive military victories of the later summer, there was significant war weariness. Putting a "War Democrat" on the ticket to balance a Republican like Lincoln seemed like a smart move; a move of *great* leadership, we might say.

A variation of this is the increasing demand for authentic leadership. Again, this is often overplayed. Let us take the example of Barack Obama. In the 2008 primary campaign, Joe was a supporter of Hilary Clinton, so he was never part of the idealisation process of Obama as "The One". Precisely because of that distance, Joe was also not part of the subsequent criticism of him when he was not able to demonstrate that he could walk on water. Looking back, Joe now thinks that Obama achieved a lot, in very difficult circumstances. But if we ask the question, "What would he need to have done to achieve even more?", then my answer would be, "He could have been less authentic." The truth was that in spite of his easygoing image, he was – and remained – a slightly aloof, very bright Harvard academic. What would have helped would have been a certain amount of Clinton-style deal-making (and no one would describe Bill Clinton as an academic, nor someone incapable of lying).

A further version of this is that leadership requires people to be *good*. This can quite often take the form of saying that in the new environment, there is now an *additional* requirement that leaders be good, and that they be *seen* to be good. But as we will see with the story of Adolf Hitler, the evidence suggests that people first ask the question, "Did the leader deliver?"

In the annals of leadership literature, perhaps the most famous critic of this line of thinking was Machiavelli.[2] What Machiavelli actually argued for is often misunderstood. He was *not* arguing for immoral leadership, but was more articulating the circumstances in which a more amoral stance might be appropriate. It is not necessary, for my argument, to fully agree with Machiavelli, but we should at least reflect on some of his insights, which suggest that how a leader acts should reflect not just what is right, but also what will sustain their leadership (and so their ability to do good). To give one example of his argument, Machiavelli argues that if the ruler has to make decisions which will be painful for inhabitants, then it is better to make them quickly and at one go, whilst if there are decisions which have upsides better to make a whole series of decisions spread over time. If you want a modern-day equivalent of this, most sane governments aim to make all the tough decisions in the first year or so of coming to power, and then the positive

[2] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (Florence, 1531); Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Florence, 1532).

announcements are spread over the coming years. Even a doctor who needs to painfully tear a plaster off a patient does it in one quick go, rather than dragging it out.

But to show the gap between leadership and 'goodness' at its widest, let us now consider perhaps the most despicable period in modern human history: Hitler, the Nazis and the Jews. Lots of writers are reluctant to try and get under the skin of Hitler, for fear of being contaminated. Fortunately, our model does not require a full psychoanalytic treatment (though 'psychopath' would seem to me to be a suitable shorthand). Instead, we will focus here on what were the skills of Hitler and his colleagues.

But first, let us consider the 'grand theory' solutions sometimes peddled.

To parallel the 'great leader' thesis that used to be so common, we have had various 'Strong, evil leader' theses, that Hitler was somehow uniquely able to achieve power and then use it so ruthlessly. Like the original 'great leader' theses this does not stand up to much serious analysis. Let us take the most obvious example of horror – the Holocaust. When you look at the records that have been recovered, a point often emphasised by Holocaust deniers is that what is remarkable is that there is no evidence of Hitler signing any document authorising the Holocaust.[3] If we consider what is often regarded as the key conference planning the Holocaust, held at Wansee in January 1943, Hitler was not even there. This lack of documentary evidence has meant that each post-war generation seems to produce its own cohort of Holocaust deniers, but the weirdest group are those who claim that Hitler was somehow not in the loop.

This led to the second grand theory- The "German problem". The most famous articulation of this was perhaps *Hitler's Willing Executioners* by Daniel Goldhagen.[4] The arguments behind this approach suggested there was something in particular in German history and culture which meant that the Holocaust was possible. Different historians have given different explanations, some more cultural, and some more psychological, with some almost blaming German Jews for being successful. Of course, to understand what happened in the Holocaust, we need to understand what happened before – but again, this thesis does not stand up. Not least because it requires us to think of many of those Jews as somehow being stupid. The truth was that after World War I, there was an increase in the Jewish

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[3] See, for example, the claims of someone who has been proven in court to be a Holocaust denier, in David Irving, *Hitler's War* (London: Focal Point, 2001), p. xxvii.

[4] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

population in Germany, particularly in Berlin. The reason for that was that the Versailles Treaty had moved the eastern boundary of Germany westwards, and also redrawn the boundaries around East Prussia (then still part of Germany). Quite rationally, many Jews felt they would be safer in Germany than in either Poland or Russia, with their histories of Pogroms.

The third grand theory I will call "the Bloodlands", after the eponymous book by Timothy Snyder.[5] Snyder's thesis goes as follows. In the patch of land where most of the battles between Germany and Russia took place, at least 14 million people died, a minority of whom were killed in death camps. Of the deaths, the Nazis precipitated perhaps two-thirds, but the Russians were no slouches at death either.

Now this is good revisionist thinking, and a correct reminder that the much-touted 'western front' was not the real frontline in the war. But again, as a strong theory this does not wash. It is without doubt true that many more atrocities took place in the Eastern theatre of the war than the west – but atrocities were not unknown in the west, either. Moreover, as Snyder makes clear, the bulk of the Jews shot were Eastern European Jews (particularly Polish and Ukrainian Jews). The corollary was that the bulk of the Jews killed in the Concentration Camps were from the west. Their deaths may have been in the "Bloodlands", but they did not board their trains there.

Instead of these approaches, let us now consider how our five-dimensional dynamic model helps explain how this horror was possible.

First, let's start with Hitler himself. His rise to power was quite spectacular. In a comparatively short period, he succeeded to leadership of a small political party, took that party to national power, and established that national power as the greatest power in mainland Europe. Those achievements did not happen purely by accident (though as Napoleon famously remarked, if you want to succeed, you want lucky generals). If we can suspend our natural revulsion for a despicable human being, we can notice what particular skills he had that allowed him to cause so much harm.

Joseph Nye is one of the great foreign policy experts and theorists. He is most associated with an argument about the need to mix 'hard power' and 'soft power', to create 'intelligent power.'[6] In that context, he was arguing that America should not be too reliant on 'hard power' only. However, that argument can applies to

[5] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
[6] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

individuals as well as to states. You can make a pretty good argument that Hitler was the first modern political leader to successfully combine both.

This sense of combining 'hard' and 'soft' power was core to the rise of the Nazis. The Nazis first shared any sort of formal power following the state elections in 1931. Hitler demand two portfolios as a price of Nazi participation- those two ministries were the interior (i.e. the police) and that for education and culture – both 'hard' and 'soft' power.

Hitler always liked 'hard' power. Even when he was Chancellor, one of his favourite forms of relaxation was to return to Munich and hang out with his old friends in cafes. Or to put it more plainly, he liked hanging out with thugs. So we don't need to dwell on his use of 'hard' power. But instead of describing him as a 'charismatic' leader, we think it much more informative to describe him as a leader who used 'soft' power effectively. Personally, we believe he was a skilled orator, but much more importantly, as both a nationalist and a former soldier, Hitler also understood the importance of wider symbols (the salute, the flag, the rallies, etc.) to people. Albert Speer is often described as Hitler's architect. After the war, Speer himself tried to trivialize his role saying he was just a bureaucrat. In truth, he was an ambitious zealot, who was also a brilliant designer, whose legacy is still felt today, in the theatre of politics. If you look at any modern-day party conference or convention in any modern democracy, a big investment in stages and sets is now a common part of the territory – but the bar was set by Speer. Similarly, Hitler saw the political advantages in hosting the 1936 Olympics. We may remember them for Jesse Owens and his achievement in winning three gold medals, but Germans at the time took home a different message, and remembered that Germany topped the medals table. Again, today we can see how not-very-nice political powers are prepared to invest (both legally and illegally) to host the Olympic games. But the showcase for maximising political impact, at home and abroad, remains 1936. And even our image of the games is bound up with the Nazi legacy – while the ancient Greeks had occasionally used a static fire pit, the modern Olympic torch is entirely a Nazi invention of Joseph Goebbels; as Leni Riefenstahl showed in the opening of her propaganda documentary Olympia (1938), it was intended to show the literal passing of the torch from the ancient Greeks to the modern 'supermen' of Nazi Germany. The Nazis, therefore, understood images, and their images have lived on, even decades after 'denazification'.

If the effective mix of 'hard' and 'soft' power was key to the rise of Hitler, it was also the failure to sustain it that was key to his downfall. From 1941 onwards, Hitler simply ran out of options to project 'soft' power. Internationally he had

picked fights with everyone he could, including countries he did not need to fight at that stage of the war (firstly, the U.S.S.R., and then the U.S.A.), whilst domestically, he retreated from domestic politics, leaving Goebbels to run the propaganda machine. Indeed, after 1941, Hitler made just two public speeches – one in 1942, the other his clipped, abbreviated final radio broadcast in 1945. All the while, his hubris had deceived him to believe he was the supreme wartime commander with infallible instincts.

A good analogy for Hitler's frame of mind can be seen through the medium of cinema. This is not as esoteric as it sounds – Hitler was a massive film fan, and before that, a lifelong aficionado of the music-dramas of Richard Wagner, which were conceived of as visual dramas the audience would immerse themselves in, with the orchestra hidden from the audience so as to not distract from the goings-on on stage – in essence, cinema before cinema existed. Even though the Nazis massively centralized and censored all cinema in Germany, for the first eight years of the Third Reich, propaganda cinema actually made up relatively little of the Nazis' cinema output. This contradicts the popular perception of Nazi audiences lapping up hours of Riefenstahl documentaries on Nazi rallies. Instead, Nazi cinema from 1933-41 focused on escapist drama, and romantic comedies. Yet the 1940s saw a ratcheting-up of ambitiousness in Nazi cinema, instigated by Goebbels, with state-sponsored directors like Veit Harlan producing ever-louder, ever more ambitious patriotic epics laced with propaganda messages. The irony was that they were so ambitious, that by the time the tub-thumping battle epic *Kohlberg* was ready for release in early 1945, the war was already lost, and the few screenings were dangerous affairs to attend, full of shelling. All the while, the Fuhrer retreated to his country home or his various bunkers, brooding as he watched a succession of fluffy, escapist dramas like *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935). The fantasy had become overwhelming, so that it was impossible to realise at the cinema, and led an increasingly drug-dependent Hitler to stop engaging with reality.

Turning to the 'we', the senior Nazi team certainly had more than its fair share of screwballs, but it would be intellectually misleading to describe the whole team as failures. However let us start the 'we' story before World War II. Hitler became Chancellor having technically lost an election. The Nazis were the largest party, but that did not mean Hitler had to become Chancellor.

Two things enabled this. Firstly, the Communists in the Reichstag were equally as committed to a non-democratic solution as were the Nazis. Having placed themselves outside the political mainstream, they opened the door.

But even more importantly, Hitler's colleagues frankly underrated him.

Hindenburg was President, based on his popularity as head of the German army during World War I. Frankly, he was never able to take Hitler, whom he called "the Bohemian Corporal", seriously. Franz von Papen had been Chancellor, but agreed to become Vice-Chancellor in the new parliament, thinking he could swiftly outmanoeuvre Hitler. Schleicher had originally succeed von Papen as Chancellor and again thought he was the cleverest in the pack, only also to lose out.

This pattern of underestimating Hitler continued, time and again. He was able to pull the wool over the eyes of Lloyd George in 1936, and to get the better of Chamberlain in 1938. Looking at these incidents, we see a pattern. On the way up, Hitler was, in Kantor's terms, excellent at adopting different positions. In Chapter 5, we will return to his rather more limited repertoire in the decline and defeat.

The senior Nazi team was not totally talentless. Goebbels was a good example. In the early part of his career he was certainly a kind of 'Sorcerers apprentice', but he increasingly became a master of propaganda, with an acute sense as to how best to sustain the Nazi machine, as all objective evidence pointed in another direction. He was also an excellent wordsmith. Take the phrase "iron curtain"- in British memory best associated with Churchill and his famous 1946 speech in Fulton, Missouri, but in fact devised by Goebbels as he tried to reposition the war as 'west' against 'east'. As already indicated, Albert Speer was no mere architect, but a figure of increasing importance as the war developed. Over time, Hermann Goering became a bloated and irrelevant figure, the worse for wear for his levels of drug misuse (stemming from morphine originally used to reduce the pain resulting from an air crash), but his original status was different – that of a World War I air ace and great (living) hero.

The senior Nazi team thus had strengths as well as pretty obvious weaknesses (leaving aside that they were all clearly as disturbed as Hitler, in one way or another). In his rise to power Hitler, used those weaknesses well. The Nazis were focused on collecting as much information as possible about public attitudes. One thing became clear very quickly once they were in power. Attitudes towards Hitler were much more positive than attitudes towards the Nazis in general. "If only he knew" was almost the public perception. Hitler had developed the persona of a man devoted to his country, working incessantly for the benefit of the Germans. People somehow thought it was not his fault when others got out of hand.

Hitler ruthlessly exploited this misperception. For instance, after Kristallnacht's public reaction indicated some shock, and Hitler ordered a step back in the aggressive policies. Later on, when news started to percolate through about the

extermination of people with disabilities, Hitler again ordered some restraint.

Of course, we know this persona was a total fraud. Hitler was not the ever-working Fuhrer he was portrayed, but was pretty bone-idle; and far from these events happening without his knowledge, they were done at his instigation.

Let us now focus on the "Us". The hard truth is that for the early part of his Chancellorship, Hitler remained very popular amongst Germans. Even when the war started to turn, there was no public outcry against Hitler. Towards the end of World War I, we know that the German army suffered a tremendous loss of morale, and desertion became a serious problem. Yet until the very final few weeks of World War II, there was nothing on this scale. Even then, the issue was not so much desertion, but the attempt by Germans at all levels in the army to try and ensure that they surrendered to the British or Americans rather than the Russians. 1944/45 was the year of greatest slaughter of Germans and Russians, but that slaughter was only possible by the continuing enrollment in the army, mainly by very young members of the Hitler Youth (whose lack of training made it even more likely they would die).

Hitler had managed to develop a strong sense of nationhood, and he used the sense of threat of being surrounded, to make Germans think they had to keep on fighting. He combined this with a ruthless use of 'hard' power, to denude conquered territories of their resources, to sustain native Germans. That strategy was failing by 1944, but that meant the Nazis doubled their efforts. To see the effects of this, consider the field of anthropometrics (or in layman's terms, measuring the healthiness of a population by how tall they are). The average height of Dutch men is the tallest in the world, but there is one exception: These are the descendants of people born in 1944/45. To try and sustain home food supplies, the Germans basically starved the Dutch. Public health experts calculate that so severe was the effect, that it will take 100 years for the effect to be worked through.

Coming now to the context in which Hitler was able to succeed, one hard fact stands out. The rise of the Nazis was heavily dependent on economic challenge. The early start was correlated with the economic stagnation following the end of World War I, and particularly the unprecedented economic inflation of 1923. (The year the Nazis attempted their botched 'Munich Putsch'.) When the German economy started to recover, the Nazi rise stalled. Though they remained a strong physical force, electorally they were marginalized through most of the rest of the 1920s. It was only after the crash of October 1929 (and the more drastic decline in 1931) that the Nazis gained any electoral momentum.

So far, this could be described as within a predictable pattern, by the old, old story whereby extremist populism is strongly correlated with economic stagnation. However, that alone does not explain the particular nature of the Nazi success. Instead, what we need to recognise is that other cultural, and 'meaning-making' forces were in play, which the Nazis successfully exploited. Let us illustrate two in particular.

Firstly, there is the general rise of nationalism. The specific act which triggered the sequence of events leading to World War I had been the assassination by a Serbian nationalist of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, whilst the direct consequence of the Treaty of Versailles and the other peace treaties was the creation of many small, independent European nations replacing previous empires (most notably the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, but Russia and Germany also had their borders altered by the post-war peace treaties).

Hitler was not, in the normal sense of the word, a nationalist. He was a racist (in both the pejorative sense, and in the literal sense, in being guided by beliefs about racial supremacy). He championed the coming together of Germanic peoples. Germans were dispersed across many parts of central and eastern Europe. German-speaking Austria had indeed been part of the Holy Roman Empire and then the German Confederation until comparatively recently. The process of German 'unification' overseen by Bismarck in the 1860s and 1870s was essentially one of conquest of German-speaking territories around Germany, so Hitler was tapping into a well-established, popular mainstream vein of public opinion with some of his objectives. Hitler's policies were popular with Germans, within and without Germany. And others could sympathise with what they thought were more "normal" nationalist ambitions.

Secondly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Social Darwinism was a pretty mainstream ideology, among left and right alike, across much of Europe. The adaptation of one interpretation of Darwinism ("survival of the fittest") was coupled with a view that one could grade races by their levels of development. This fitted easily with simple European notions of racism (Europeans regarding themselves as the most developed). Such notions were not restricted to right-wing thinking.[7] One German manifestation of this was the German Society for Sociocrimonology. The basis of this popular society was that there were hereditary indicators of criminality. As such, you might expect that with the rise of the Nazis

[7] George Watson, *The Lost Literature of Socialism* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2000).

membership of the body would increase. In fact it halved. With the Nazis in power, Jews, social democrats, and other "undesirables" were forced to resign their membership. We are not arguing that Social Darwinism led inevitably to Auschwitz, any more than nationalism inevitably led to racism, but that in a climate in which these were common, too many assumed that Nazi ideology was just pushing the boundaries, until it was realised too late just how radical a programme they represented. The Nazis were able to conduct so many horrific scientific experiments, because so many skilled, qualified doctors bought into the ideology.

Some of the most well-known incidences of Nazi doctors were truly horrific human beings (Josef Mengele being a prime example). However, let us consider the case of Hans Asperger. We now associate him with the syndrome that bears his name, and with advances in the understanding of autism. His work proved to be critical in reframing our appreciation of the issue (although that new understanding only developed in the 1980s, when his work was reappraised). Asperger was right-wing, and also a Catholic. He never joined the Nazi Party, even though he believed that this failure to join harmed his career progression during the Nazi regime. He was a Eugenicist, and 'racial hygiene' was a key, central tenet in his beliefs.

What we now know is that the institution in which he worked sent many young people to their deaths. Asperger persuaded himself that he was an opponent of the Nazis, and many would see his diagnosis as an improvement to older notions of autism. (Others would see him as, in fact, continuing a false stereotype.) I certainly do not want to absolve Asperger. The best one can say of him is that he was morally compromised; although 'morally complicit' is probably nearer the truth.

Yet he and others persuaded themselves they were not evil. Part of that explanation was that the Nazis also had a more positive way of spinning this. Richard Evans points out:

> It was a Nazi epidemiologist who first established the link between smoking and lung cancer, establishing a government agency to combat tobacco consumption in June 1939. Party and government agencies pursued bans on carcinogenic substances like asbestos and dangerous pesticides and food colouring agents. Already in 1938 the airforce had banned smoking on its premises, to be followed by other workplace smoking bans imposed by the post office and the offices of the Nazi party itself, in April 1939. Books,

> pamphlets and posters warned of the dangers of smoking, and pointed out repeatedly that Hitler had never put a pipe, cigar or cigarette to his lips. Nor did he imbibe alcohol, and the Nazis were equally active in combatting excessive consumption of beer, wines and spirits.[8]

In pointing this out, we are not trying to absolve Asperger or others, but to try and understand how such people, who were so learned and enlightened and forward-thinking in some ways, still managed to persuade themselves they were doing good when being complicit in the Nazi regime.

The logical end of these racial eugenics was in the death camps. The first such camps were for people with disabilities (the T4 camps), which were wound down just as the mass slaughter of Jews was starting to escalate. The stoppage was because of a hostile public reaction. Quite how the Holocaust evolved has been subject to much historic analysis. The "cumulative radicalisation" thesis was originally proposed by Mommsen, but now advocated by others, such as Sir Ian Kershaw, without necessarily fully adopting his "weak dictator" thesis.[9] We think this gets nearest some understanding of why the momentum developed. Put another way, this is an argument for a *systemic* perspective, and not just an 'evil man' explanation.

Lincoln and Hitler compared

For much of this book, my arguments rest on case studies of two leaders, one more obviously 'good' (Abraham Lincoln) and set up in opposition to 'bad' (a rogue state founded on slavery), and one obviously 'bad' (Adolf Hitler), but both impossible to ignore or dismiss out of hand. If we begin by contrasting the two, we can draw some further conclusions which help sustain our argument.

Again, let us consider our four dimensions. First let us consider the 'Me'. Neither Lincoln nor Hitler were obvious "born" leaders. Prior to winning the 1860 presidential nomination, Lincoln's career would have qualified for no more than a footnote in a present-day history book of that time. His one term as a Congressman was notable for its lack of impact, whilst his then only other real claim to fame was to have lost

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[8] Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939: How the Nazis on Over the Hearts and Minds of a Nation* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 463.

[9] Hans Mommsen, *Beamtentum im Dritten Reich: Mit ausgewählten Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Beamtenpolitik* (Bonn: Deutsche Verlagsanst, 1966); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*,1889-1936: *Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1999); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*,1936-45: *Nemesis* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

a Senatorial fight with Douglas. As for Hitler, a failed artist, four years of warfare got him promoted to the unglamorous status of a Corporal.

But both men learned. Lincoln's years as a circuit lawyer allowed him to develop his oratorical skills, whilst Hitler had more of a crash-course in the heady beer-hall politics of Munich after World War I. Yet once they gained power, the differences between them became stark. Lincoln continued on a learning course. In our terms, his 'linear development' was evident. Hitler, however, became more and more hubristic. By the end, he was clearly living in a fantasy world, deploying armies that simply did not exist, and retreating into self-justification, cinema, cocaine eyedrops, and Wagner.

It was not just that Hitler's personal development was in reverse. When we consider the "we", again we see a difference. In his rise to power, Hitler was ruthless, but certainly had a repertoire of approaches. As noted, at key points, he successfully outmanoeuvred powerful people, who assumed they would outsmart him. The key event which turned out to mark his rise was probably the failed putsch in 1923, which was masterminded by Eric Luddendorf, Hindenburg's chief of staff, who had been the most powerful man in Germany by the end of the war. Yet he was outsmarted by the former Corporal to become the 'poster boy' of the revolt.

Contrast this with Hitler's performance when in power. In Douglas's language, he became an isolate. In Kantor's terms, his default position was that of a 'bystander', coupled with occasional erratic 'mover' stances. Nazi government was a mixture of overlapping incompetence, and increasingly stupid military decisions. For Lincoln, the reverse was the case. As President, he had his "team of rivals" within his cabinet, but weak military leadership.[10] But from 1863 onwards, the balance of leadership skills tilted towards the Union. It was not just General Grant, but also the evolving genius of Sherman and Sheridan – while the "total war" strategy of Grant was decisive. Lee might have been the best technical military leader, but the relentlessness of the "total war" strategy gradually but surely strangled the Confederacy.

Putting it another way, throughout the Civil War, Lincoln had to confront challenges, both from within his own Republican Party, and from both 'war' and 'peace' Democrats. His election in 1864 was in doubt right until the fall of Atlanta. Such constant scrutiny and challenge did not detract from Lincoln's leadership, and arguably forced him to remain sharper. Hitler, however, never faced any serious internal challenge. He faced sporadic assassination attempts, but no internal Nazi

[10] Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).

challenge. The plots that came closest to success, like the infamous 6th July 1944 plot, were organized by 'outsider' groups Hitler was never particularly close to, like the old Prussian military aristocracy. Indeed, the two other 'great dictators' of the 20th century were Stalin and Mao, who were both ruthless in party control – and with reason. In power, Hitler never faced the kind of internal challenge that these other dictators faced. Even in the last weeks of the war, when defeat being inevitable, and with those closest to him (such as Goering, Goebbels and Himmler) all recognising the inevitability of defeat, there was no collusion to seek to overthrow him. Lives were lost, minute by minute, because of a failure by the 'we' to call the leadership into question, and to subject it to any kind of scrutiny.

As for 'usness', the contrast is stark. The story of Lincoln is of someone who continued to push the boundaries of who made up the 'us'. His initial, short-term focus was to unite Republicans behind him, to win his party's nomination. Once nominated, he proceeded to widen his demographic (if not his geographic base) during the election. Once the Civil War was underway, he reached out to 'war' Democrats (even to the point of nominating a 'war' Democrat as his Vice-President in 1864). He then slowly strove to extend 'usness', to include black people. And as Grant's surrender terms demonstrated, Lincoln then aimed to focus on reincorporating Southern rebels within the Union fold.

For Hitler, the reverse was the case. His racism absolutely limited his ability to extend his coalition. The 1939 Molotov-Von Ribbentrop Pact was a masterclass in cynical coalition-building (by both Hitler and Stalin). But for Hitler, that was only a temporary fix, and invasion followed in 1941. That lesson was not lost by Hitler's other partners, such as Italy and Romania. They realised that alliances were, for Hitler, merely marriages of (temporary) convenience; and when the fortunes of war changed, it was they who decided to jump ship.

Interestingly, the only real strategy the Germans played to try and sustain the alliances was to try and force their partners to be 'active' partners in the murder of the Jews, believing that would lock them in.

Finally, let us consider three other lessons from the context in which these events took place. Both support some key 'systemic' perspectives. Firstly, one of our own current-day systems maxims is that "Systems tend to sustain, until such time that radical change is possible."[11] The career of Ulysses S. Grant (and to a lesser extent, the careers of both Sherman and Sheridan) demonstrate this. Without the

[11] One of 'Myron's Maxims', from our colleague, the systems leadership thinker and practitioner Myron Rogers.

Civil War, Grant would never have become head of the Union army. He volunteered in 1861, having been forced to resign a from the army only a few years earlier because of his drink problems. He was able to get senior role because recruitment was being done at a state level, and not through normal army channels. Yet barely two years later, he was heading up the whole army. In peacetime, no such route would have been possible.

Secondly, one of our maxims is that "The way you do the change is the change you get."[12] Let us use that maxim to consider both cases. By the end of the Civil War, Lincoln's ambition was no longer just military victory, but emancipation. His assassination so soon into his second term meant that we will never know whether he would have achieved the second objective. But we now from the surrender terms that Lincoln was not proposing retaliatory actions. His successor, the calamitous President Andrew Johnson, originally played 'tough guy', but almost immediately rowed back from this stance. Grant attempted to reinvigorate the process of Reconstruction in the South; but the effectively drawn election of 1876 brought that whole process to a stop. What diehard Southern Confederates knew by then was that the North had lost its appetite for change, and slowly, the disenfranchisement of Southern blacks was reinstated. It was nearly a century later before meaningful new civil rights legislation was finally introduced.

As for the parallels with Germany, the contrast between World War I and World War II is revealing. After WWI, President Woodrow Wilson realised that Versailles should not just be a military treaty. Instead he aimed for a new world order, with the League of Nations a cornerstone of that order. As we now know, he failed to steer this through Congress, and in the absence of any 'buy-in' at home, instead we got American isolationism. In effect, old truths applied. Germany was now rendered weak, but Hitler's message to Germans was effectively "We only get strength by being strong." Now contrast this with 1945. The original peace terms were, in many senses, tougher than in 1919. Not only was East Prussia lost to Russia, but Germany tilted westwards, and Poland was expanded. The subsequent movement of Germans was greater than the migration of any national group seen in World War II itself. This could have been a recipe for a rerun of the 1920s (and certainly, far-right attitudes did not disappear overnight). Yet instead, in 1948 Europe got the Marshall Plan. For the Americans, this may have been 'enlightened self-interest' – but at least it was enlightened.

[12] Again, this is another of 'Myron's Maxims'.

My final observation about this context/systems lens, and how it plays out with the dark side of leadership, is that it is not just the "objective" facts which matter. Indeed, it often doesn't matter at all. What counts is t*he stories that were told about those facts*.

Consider the Civil War and the evolution of the "lost cause" myth. The South's standard narrative was that the Confederacy was only fighting to sustain an old way of life, based around the ancient doctrine of states' rights. Bolstered by the apparent righteousness of this story, the South fought valiantly, but in the end was overwhelmed when massively outnumbered by Ulysses S. Grant's forces. Along the way, Robert E. Lee became seen as the great leader, and Grant as the butcher.

Every single element of this myth is, well, a myth.

The Confederacy was about slavery. Far from advocating states' rights, the 'old' South had been a key advocate of a powerful federal government in many respects (in particular a strong military, and a strong federal enforcement of property rights in terms of returning slaves to their "rightful" owners). And if Lee *was* finally heavily outnumbered, that was because in the last weeks of the war, Confederate desertions were running at astronomic levels. Yet each of these potent myths became orthodoxy, if not with professional historians, at least with a great many American citizens.

To sustain these myths, a lot of inconvenient facts were overturned. For example, this version required Grant to be portrayed as a ruthless and universally-loathed butcher. In fact, Grant was so popular that he was twice elected as President (and was nearly elected to a third term in 1880). Indeed, shortly before his death, he remained so popular that nearly half a million copies of his two-volume autobiography were sold.[13]

Hitler too was a great myth-maker. To begin with, he embellished his own war story. In his own (highly dubious) account, he was radicalised by four years in the trenches.[14] In fact, almost immediately, he became a divisional runner (so whilst having to regularly visit the trenches, he was actually based at divisional headquarters). And far from being radicalized by this, such were his views that he stayed in the Bavarian army after the war – even when the state government was controlled by the left. If his antisemitism had been formed by then (which is possible – or indeed, it may have been formed *before* the war), it certainly was not apparent to the Jewish colleague who was key in securing him the Iron Cross. As for his moustache, we might now regard it as comical; but in fact, for much of the war he wore a long, droopy moustache, and short moustaches were a public health

[13] Craig E. Miller, "'Give the Book to Clemens'", *American History* (April 1999) 34:1, pp. 40-6.
[14] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Jaico, 2007 [first pub. 1925]).

precaution by the German military to reduce disease in the trenches. Keeping the moustache was his way of signaling his comradeship with millions of German troops.

Hitler then went out of his way to denounce Versailles. Without doubt the treaty came as a shock to many Germans – but the terms of the treaty were much less harsh to the German population than the German government had imposed a year earlier, in the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Russia. In fact, "the German General Staff had formulated extraordinary harsh terms that shocked even the German negotiator."[15] On his rise to power, Hitler then did everything he could to undermine the Weimar Republic, legally and illegally, and the story took hold of a hapless government. But the facts do not really support that perceived story. Certainly, the period of stagflation was a disaster, but the truth is that the German economy recovered from that period. It was only the subsequent crashes of 1929 and 1931 that brought catastrophe. Germany was hardly alone in that challenge – virtually every major western economy nosedived. But no other state received such an internal undermining. The combined effect of the Nazis and the Communists destabilised the Republic by the mix of fake news and tough violence.

Conclusion

We certainly do not wish to argue that Hitler was a 'good' leader. For one thing, he was sometimes a *terrible* leader, disregarding expert advice, and retreating into an insular, fantasy world – qualities that contributed to the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany. But that defeat came at a great toll, the world over. And Hitler didn't come to threaten the entire world, and effect some of the worst atrocities in human history, just by being constantly ineffectual. In his rise to power, he had demonstrated many characteristics of effective leadership – the importance of how a leader presents themselves with a compelling story of who they are and what they stand for ('I'); a strong understanding of the power of myths, images, and of whom they appeal to, and how they motivate a base (the 'we'); an instinct for tapping into deeply-rooted cultural traditions ('us'); as well as effective deployment of both 'hard' and 'soft' power. Some of his leadership characteristics even bear comparison with Lincoln, who most people would agree was one of 'the good guys'. Purely from a leadership point of view, Hitler did much that was 'right' here – and he was a monster.

The lesson, then, is that just calling for "more leadership" is not enough. "More leadership" can be a deeply damaging, destructive doctrine. *What that leadership is put towards is just as important.* And this underlines how leadership is an art, not a science.

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[15] Spencer Tucker, *The Encyclopaedia of World War I: A Political, Social and Military History* (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2005), p. 225.

CHAPTER 7

A conversation with history

Joe Simpson

Theories about leadership have a challenge trying to produce rigorous evidence. Like much of social science we cannot create the random control trials that physical sciences so trumpet. Moreover "leadership" is only one element of the factors that help influence outcomes. To give an illustration better military leadership would not have helped Poland defeat the combined effort of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. Faced with this problem many leadership books do leadership almost by anecdote, using illustrations that support whatever argument the author is advocating. This particular approach has been particularly prevalent in business leadership texts (with the rather unfortunate consequence that second or third editions of such books often feature companies whose "success" is no longer so apparent).

Instead, we will try a conversation with history, using a well-documented period to explore two issues, first how well does our approach chime with what we know about the period. Secondly what can we learn from the period that might inform present day leaders face 21st century challenges.

The major example we will use is Abraham Lincoln and the American Civil War. The American appetite for studies of the Civil War mirrors the British appetite for books about World War One. However, whilst 100 years on from the latter there is

still significant disagreement about who should be blamed for the outbreak of that war, about the American Civil War there is a greater academic consensus (even if, as we shall explore, there is a much wider range of popular interpretations).

Our model focuses on the evolution of the four domains (Me/We/Us/The world) and the interconnections between them over time. So, let us in turn consider each domain, starting with the Me domain.

A pretty consistent feature of most recent academic leadership literature has been to challenge the "great man" thesis that was so prevalent (and often still features in the autobiographies of those who consider themselves to be "great men"- and yes, it is usually men who so consider themselves).[1] But it is equally wrong to deny individual agency. Put at its minimum we can all cite examples where poor leadership had terrible consequences.

The argument we will make is that as you progress through your leadership career, it is likely that the nature of the challenges you will face become more complex, and less easily addressed by simple linear approaches. Most of us get promoted because we have demonstrated technical abilities in dealing with the technical challenges we face. But in those new roles, technical expertise alone will not be enough. If we are doomed to keep functioning on a purely technical level as we get promoted, we are doomed to repeat the Peter Principle.[2] So, in line with those new challenges, we need to progress through some leadership development framework. We will outline such a framework. In summary, we are making *three* claims: Firstly, leadership skills are learned, not innate. Secondly, those skills can be learned throughout our lives, they do not have to be front-end-loaded. Thirdly, we articulate our own view about what such a framework might be.

Lincoln turns out to be a pretty good role model for our argument. Along with George Washington, Lincoln is rightly regarded as the greatest of American presidents. He is also a pin-up boy for the "log cabin president" – proof of the "American dream". But let us dig somewhat deeper.

Lincoln came from a poor background, his family moving from Kentucky to Illinois when he was young. The first volume of Sidney Blumenthal's (still to be

[1] Examples of 'Great Man' biography are dominated by biographies of leaders such as Churchill. Reagan, and Napoleon – the latter still being the record-holder for having the most biographies ever written about him. Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013) provides a welcome feminist challenge to this, with an emphasis on Great Women – but does not challenge this overall focus on great individuals holding dominant leadership roles.

[2] The Peter Principle argues that people are promoted for their past performance in a previous role, and rise through the ranks of an organisation until they reach a level when they are no longer competent – see Lawrence J. Peter and Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle* (New York: William Morrow, 1969).

completed) Lincoln biography is called "Self-made man".[3] It's the story of his early years and early adulthood (as well as being a brilliant history of the age). Blumenthal's pitch was that for Lincoln to become a great statesman, he had to first become a great politician. That he would become a great politician was not immediately evident. Lincoln was a middle-ranking Whig, in a Democrat-dominated state. Illinois was "a northern state without a north". Chicago was yet to be established; instead there was the federal Fort Dearborn. Many of its residents, like Lincoln, were from Kentucky; but unlike, Lincoln they retained pro-slavery sentiments. Lincoln served but one two-year term in the U.S. House of Representatives (not returning to Washington again until his inauguration as President). Had Lincoln not become President, he would have made the footnotes of academic books about the period, but little more.

There was a reason for this. Frankly, the assessment of his peers was right. The only way the young Lincoln stood out from the crowd was due to his height. The 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates gave him some national profile, but it was Douglas who was returned to the U.S. Senate. In comparing them, this was a real-life illustration of the "tortoise and the hare" race. For most of his political career, Douglas did not even have Lincoln in his slipstream.

But Lincoln benefited from always being underrated. For Lincoln was a learner. He learned from his mistakes, and we see the emergence of a canny politician as he navigates Illinois Whig politics. By the 1850s, he is still not yet the change-maker; he was, for instance, still loyal to the Whigs, even when it was clear that the party had haemorrhaged nationally over slavery. Joining the new Republican Party, he was fairly middle-of-the-road on the issue of slavery (in fact, that lack of a strong position enabled him to "sneak through the middle", to secure the Republican presidential nomination in 1860).

Lincoln became not just a great statesman, but also a great orator. His debates with Douglas gave those skills national attention. His Gettysburg address is perhaps his most famous speech, though some would argue that his second inaugural address was his greatest. But here again, this was a learned skill. At the beginning of his career, he would best be described as a "sledger", good for the knockabout stuff of local public meetings, but scarcely a man who could reframe history. Nonetheless, that early experience as a "sledger" stood him in good stead.

[3] Sidney Blumenthal, *A Self-Made Man, 1809-1849: The Political Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016).

That change came through hard work. For much of his adult career, Lincoln combined politics with the law. As a lawyer on the central circuit, he and colleagues would literally travel from town to town across the states. By day, he learned the art of always thinking of the jury (the public) and trying to influence how they thought. By night, a teetotaller (not a phrase he himself would use to describe himself, lest he might lose some of his audience), it was Lincoln who entertained his colleagues – by telling them stories. So literally day by day and night by night, he learned his craft.

Shelby Foote was perhaps the most eminent southern civil war historian of the last century. One of the key commentators in the seminal Ken Burns documentary series *The Civil War*, Foote gave a brilliant description of Lincoln: "He could remove himself from himself as if he was looking at himself".[4]

Lincoln's position on slavery toughened over time. As an adult, he was always opposed to it in principle – but his strategy for dealing with it evolved. In part, this was due to the influence of others (not least Frederick Douglass). But what we see from 1858 onwards is Lincoln never adopting a "pack position" but always adopting a position which would move the debate on. In other words, he was operating on the edge of the possible. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky describe leadership as "an improvisational art." You may be guided by an overarching vision, clear values, and a strategic plan, but what you actually do from moment to moment cannot be scripted."[5] Lincoln is a brilliant real exemplification of that. The great tragedy of American history is that his assassination having come immediately after Robert E. Lee's surrender meant that we would never discover what that might mean for post-war reconstruction.

'We' in history

It is now pretty commonplace to recognise that real change involves more than one individual. For the whole of its existence, the Leadership Centre has placed great emphasis on "top team" work. A lot has been written about the importance of some shared vision – and that is certainly important. Indeed, one of Lincoln's most well-known speeches ("a house divided against itself cannot stand") is about this theme. But in that eternal phrase from Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, "up to a point, Lord Copper."[6] There are two points we should acknowledge. Firstly, a common

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[4] *The Civil War* (PBS, 1990), dir. Ken Burns, Episode 1.
[5] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, 'A Survival Guide for Leaders', *Harvard Business Review*, June 2002.
[6] Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1938).

purpose may be good, but "group think" is not. On that slippery slope, we see a great many organisations fail to continue to reinvent themselves. Secondly, in real life, we always have tensions between individuals.

David Kantor started his career working with families. Based on his learning from that, he has developed quite a sophisticated model looking at the dynamics of group interaction. Here, we just want to highlight the first level of that model – which Kantor describes as Mover/Opposer/Follower/Bystander. Kantor argues that we will always see these four positions, and what we need to know is what is our individual preference (and can we try to ensure we do not just adopt that stance unconsciously). Secondly once we understand that how can we "read the room" to understand what is going on.

So, let's look at Lincoln and his senior colleagues (his cabinet, and his senior generals in particular). Fortunately, another Lincoln biographer has written focussing on this: *Team of Rivals* by Doris Kearns Goodwin.[7] In 2009, on becoming president, another Illinois politician gave the book to his incoming cabinet.

To summarise the key chain of events: Lincoln was an outsider in the race for the Republican nomination. Most of his rivals had much higher national profiles than him. They had also a great deal more political and executive experience than this one-term Congressman from the mid-West. They also consistently underrated him. Once Lincoln had won the election, his response was to invite his rivals to take senior positions in his administration. Their response was not always one of gratitude, but to continue to underrate him and to consider how best to position themselves to run in 1864 (hence the title of Doris Kearns Goodwin's book). Nor did this seem particularly far-fetched, at a time of great instability: the last occasion on which a sitting president had stood for a second term was in 1840, and the last time a sitting president had won re-election was 1832. On the key issue of slavery, Lincoln's cabinet held a full range of opinions. The cabinet also represented different geographical power bases, each with slightly different agendas. Lincoln's job was to keep trying to align interests (to "read the room"). He also had to balance party interests with military strategy (an issue to which we will return).

Lincoln also had to understand when he was to be the driver (the mover, in Kantor's language), and when he had to be the opposer. This was perhaps best exemplified by his relationship with his leading generals. American presidents also serve as the commander-in-chief of their armed forces – a precedent set by

[7] Dorothy Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Washington. Yet few presidents have any experience of warfare and the military. (In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, only one President – Eisenhower – has had a background as a general.) Understanding what role the president should play at any time was therefore difficult. Lincoln knew he did not know how to fight a military battle (that did not mean he would not suggest military strategies), but he did know what outcomes he wanted. Through the Civil War, Lincoln went through a series of generals, realising when it was time to remove them (the time to be the opposer). Until the appointment of Ulysses Simpson Grant, he was less successful in choosing the right successor (or in being the mover). Interestingly, in the case of Grant, Lincoln had never even met him before he made the decision to appoint him. Sometimes, Lincoln would be the follower – the strategy regarding Fort Sumter which heralded the start of the war was devised by Secretary of State William H. Seward (one of his presidential rivals).

The relationship with Grant proved to be successful, despite numerous challenges. Lincoln even gave cover to Grant when the latter was criticised (for instance, after one of his drinking binges, or for the relatively high casualties entailed in his relentless pursuit of Lee's forces). Meanwhile, Grant equally recognised the importance of giving Lincoln cover in the run-up to the 1864 elections, by focusing on ensuring a major victory in advance of those elections. Both assumed multiple roles, at different times, to deepen their professional relationship – and deliver better leadership and outcomes.

'Us/Usness' and history

As before, we will argue for the importance of "Us/Usness" – whilst recognising the corollary of "Them". We will argue that this is a core human characteristic which has been critical to the development of homo sapiens. Public policy often finds it difficult utilising the power of usness, but successful politicians, at least when campaigning, know it is key to their success. One way of describing politicians is that they are "entrepreneurs in identity". In an age of sharpening identity politics, this lens has never been more relevant.

More Americans died in the Civil War than the total number of Americans who died in every war from 1776 to Vietnam.[8] In this, the American Civil War was, like most civil wars, much more brutal than most conventional wars. Even the title "Civil War" is contested. Historically unsuccessful internal wars tend to be described

[8] 'Civil War Casualties', *American Battlefield Trust*, https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/civil-war-casualties, accessed 5 June 2019.

as rebellions, successful ones as revolutions (think 1688, 1789 and 1917). Just as the English Civil War of the 1640s is now seen as a series of Civil Wars across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, so the Americans increasingly see their conflicts in different terms, i.e. several American historians now see 1776-83 as the War of Independence (though in truth a significant number of North Americans fought *against* independence).

So with the Civil War, Confederates argued that this was a war between two sovereign nations (portraying the Union as the aggressor), whilst the Union attempted to assert they had seen off a Southern rebellion from within. Looking at history, the title "civil war" seems to stick, even though the end of formal fighting did not herald the end of division. Two alternative illustrations of this, closer to home, are the English Civil War until the Restoration in 1660, and the Irish Civil War of the 1910s, where less than a decade later, the Sinn Fein leader Éamon de Valera became the Irish Prime Minister. As we will subsequently see, military defeat did not end Southern enmity, and instead we it fuelled the "Lost Cause" myth, and segregation.

One of the reasons why civil wars are so vicious is because they are wars of identity, about what constitutes "Us". A pretty simple way of describing why the Confederates lost is because they lacked a greater "Us". In the "Lost Cause" myth, this is described as a plucky-and-brave South, being beaten by the numerically superior North, and a superior general (Lee) being beaten by an inferior one (Grant) who was prepared to sacrifice thousands of Northern men to exploit that numerical supremacy. Yet when it is put another way, we get a different story. Before the Civil War, the South had already created a "Them" – some four million black slaves. They had no particular love of the North, but while many in the North detested slavery, in reality, the North tolerated that Southern practice, "for the sake of the Union". Indeed, on many of the key issues before the war, from the creation of Texas, to the Dred Scott case, the South emerged enhanced. Only with the election of Lincoln did the South suffer a serious setback. In the words of Allan Nevins:

> The South, as a whole, in 1846–61 was not moving toward emancipation but away from it. It was not relaxing the laws which guarded the system but reinforcing them. It was not ameliorating slavery, but making it harsher and more implacable. The South was further from a just solution of the slavery problem in 1830 than it had been in 1789. It was further from tenable solution in 1860 than it had been in 1830.[9]

[9] Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln, Volume I: Douglas, Buchanan, and Party Chaos*, 1857-1859 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1950), p. 468.

Even then, Lincoln stood on a platform, not of abolishing slavery, but of stopping its further expansion. In response, the South decided to define a new "Us": white Southerners – which by implication, classified both Northerners and black Southerners as "Them". It was a Southern decision to stack the odds against themselves. Indeed, it is difficult to see how slavery could have been abolished at the time, except for through the actions of the South.

Although there were significant numbers of Northerners who were horrified by slavery before the war, comparatively few were sufficiently incensed about the issue to contemplate any serious action that would seriously undermine it. Yet when civil war broke out, Northern recruitment reached tremendous levels. The South's challenge thus provoked a much stronger sense of Union identity in the North, and provoked a numbers game the South simply could not win. How this played out is something we will return to shortly. Meanwhile, it is worth commenting on how the administration went about mobilising troops. In the call for military volunteers after the attack on Fort Sumter, Lincoln asked Northern state Governors to help with the mobilisation. What occurred was not a generic military mobilisation, but one which built on other layers of Usness, with companies created by township, or even from some large employers (something the British also did in the first two years of World War I, prior to conscription). As an example,in 1861 Grant joined up to his local state militia in Illinois.

The context (a systemic lens)

At the Leadership Centre, we have been advocates of systems leadership. There are two things we want to stress at this point. Firstly, we say *systemic*, by which we are describing *systems* (plural) and not a system (singular). A single system may be complicated. It may even be complex. But it has boundaries. *Systems*, however, overlap and evolve (as well as cross-fertilise). With a systemic lens, there is no "correct" starting place, as there is no central node. And we prefer 'systemic' to 'systems', because just as there is no absolute boundary, so there is no year zero. Secondly, complex systems have lots of feedback loops, as well as self-correcting mechanisms. They thus do not follow a predictable, direct path of action. There is no "arrow of time" which means that B always follows A. Looking back at events, we see patterns, and we can subsequently see how B (or C) followed A – but in the wonderful phrase of Niels Bohr, "Prediction is difficult especially when it involves the future."[10]

[10] Quoted in Donald E. Simanek and John Holden, *Science Askew: A Light-Hearted Look at the Scientific World* (London: Institute of Physics, 2001), p. 109.

Here we just want to puncture some often-held presumptions about how the Civil War evolved and ended.

To begin with, most analyses (including, admittedly, this one so far) talk about the war being about the North and the South. After all, the most famous American line was the Mason-Dixie Line, which came to symbolise the divide (hence "Dixie", popularised through an 1859 song of that name) from which came the Northern line for the extent of slavery. However, the merchants of Maine and the slaveholders of Selma did not need the line to tell them they played by different rules. Instead, we need to take an East/West perspective. The dominating issue of the 1840s and 18502 was trans continentalism- the relentless Western conquest of the rest of the continental mainland. What the debate was about was not slaveholding in the South, but what would happen in the West, and under which rules would new States operate. Southern States in particular were aggressively seeking western expansion (and with it, the Western expansion of slavery); and this included a southern drive to see Texas incorporated as a pro-slave state. In the American mythology, plucky Americans seized Texas from the yolk of Mexican rule. In truth, Mexico had abolished slavery, and Texas's drive for independence and subsequent incorporation into the United States was not a greater step towards liberty, but the preservation of slavery. The Alamo came to symbolise the myth, in truth not everyone died in that battle – the Mexicans released the two surviving slaves.

A second error was the assumption of the inevitable decline of slavery. In this version the Confederacy was like a wounded animal, dying but extremely dangerous before death. Now whilst it is true that Northern states had grown even faster than Southern ones, the South had expanded dramatically in the years before the Civil War. The big driver of Southern expansion had been technological- the development of the cotton gin. Cotton production had increased from 156,000 bales in 1800 to more than 4,000,000 bales at the outbreak of the Civil War. The richest people – and the richest counties – in the USA were in the South. Going back to our merchant in Maine, he (and it was usually a he) mainly sold locally-made produce, to local people. Cotton (and to a lesser extent tobacco and sugar) were the first great international export crops. Rather than thinking about Southern decline and fall, immediately prior to the Civil war, think of "This vast Southern Empire".

A third error is to presume some sense of inevitability about growing northern distaste for slavery. The facts do not bear this out. In the debate about the incorporation of California, there were numerous attempts to introduce what was called the Wilmot proviso after the congressman who first introduced it. It failed

to pass because of southern opposition but some wags called it the White Man's proviso- because many supporters wanted not just to ban slavery but also ban black people (the argument being that black slaves depressed working white men's wages. One State who went down that road was Oregon. The state constitution banned slavery, but also banned any further black people moving into the State. Oregon is now regarded as one of the most liberal Sates in the USA. It may therefore surprise some people that the State did not get round to incorporating the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution (the two key Reconstruction amendments) into its state constitution until 1973 and 1959 respectively, with Oregon having rescinded ratification of the 14th Amendment in 1868, after having originally done so in 1866. Indeed, the 15th Amendment was not ratified by Tennessee until 1997.

The dramatic change prior to the war had been the sudden emergence of the Know Nothings (so called because supporters were told that the answer to the question as to whether they were members of the society was to say "I know nothing"). The Know Nothings were a strongly anti-immigrant (and anti-Catholic) party. For the previous decade there had been significant German immigration, and even more Irish immigration (following the Great Famine). There had been significant Irish emigration earlier in the century but those immigrants settled in rural areas (Andrew Jackson's family being the most prominent example). But post the famine the last thing this new generation of immigrants wanted was the unpredictability of rural life. Instead significant Irish communities were established in the big cities such as New York and Boston. The Know Nothings stoked up local resentment against immigrants but they folded almost as quickly as they were established. Much of that vote translated to the new Republican party. Interestingly we can see this therefore as a protest vote not a vote against slavery. The other consequence was to turn the Irish vote into one of the most solid Democratic Party support blocks, a phenomenon that would continue for well over a century.

Thirdly whilst our merchant in Maine was most likely involved in local trade the merchants of the big sea ports were operating on an international stage. Throughout the whole civil war New York in particular retained strong southern sympathies because of the level of international trade and finance based in the city. Indeed, there were riots in New York when the administration proposed conscription. There were strong advocates of a robust assault on slavery- but these tended to be in smaller towns in the North, particularly amongst evangelicals.

These four blocks are not independent of each other, but rather continuously affect each other. Let us just try and illustrate this. Let's start with Lincoln. We have summarised his personal development but that development was influenced by his peers (the "We"). Lincoln aimed to shape a new us. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the Gettysburg address, the first words of which are the wonderfully poetic "four score and seven years ago". (Rather than the more prosaic "87 years ago"). Gary Wills has written a brilliant book about this.[11] The "four score" reference is to the Declaration of Independence. The theme is that it is the Declaration that is the country's founding document. The implicit argument is that the Constitution is merely the technical document which codifies the original Declaration. Famously, of course, the constitution permitted slavery (though never actually used the word – the slave-owning states would never have signed up to the Constitution had slavery been banned). Lincoln's pitch – very much the prelude to the push for Emancipation – was that this was an error, so we must correct the technical document. In other words, he created the opportunity for a new "Us", in which black men now had a role to play. White and black women had to wait another sixty years for voting rights.

But "usness" also influenced Lincoln. If we were native Americans, we are not sure whether we would quite share the general enthusiasm for Lincoln, for on that issue he was much more a man of his time. Indeed, on his watch we had the largest public execution in the history of the USA with the execution of a large number of native Americans (though it is true that Lincoln did pardon a number).

Similarly, if we consider the context of the war there were some outcomes that were only possible because of the extreme circumstances. Perhaps the best illustration is the career of Ulysses S. Grant. The "S" was a pure error. He has christened Hiram Ulysses Grant (H.U.G.), and he dropped "Hiram" as soon as he could – but in enrolling in the army, the "S" was accidentally added, and he was never able to remove it – so it stuck (if only as an initial). Grant's early career in the army had some success. He was a middle-grader at West Point (his nemesis Robert E. Lee graduated second in his year). Grant was also reasonably successful in the Mexican war (even though it was a war he thought unjustified). In particular, he was a star horse rider. But after the Civil War, he had a series of unchallenging posts, and eventually quit the army before he knew he would be discharged for drunkenness. The years afterwards only demonstrated that he was unsuited to successfully pursuing a civilian career. By 1860, no one would have suggested he even would make a footnote in any history.

Yet with Lincoln's call for volunteers recruited on a state-by-state basis, Grant volunteered in Illinois. Had he tried a regular route, his chequered history in the army would have had him down as a marked man. But in a state desperate to find *anyone* who knew anything about military service, no one was doing detailed background checks. In pretty short order (if not without some twists and turns), Grant moved from being virtually redundant, to heading the Union armies in less than 30 months. But to return to the "systemic" theme...

So far, we have described this from the Union' perspective. Let us change the story, and view it from a Confederate one.

Let's begin with Jefferson Davis. Davis was no shrinking violet, but was supremely ambitious and confident in his own abilities. By 1861, Davis had fought in the Mexican war, been a Senator and been Secretary of War (and almost *de facto* President). Indeed, he had assumed that he would be asked to be the Confederate military leader. When, instead, he was appointed President. The appointment was for a fixed six-year term (with no option of a second term), so he could focus purely on establishing the new confederacy. Compared to the inexperienced Lincoln, it would be difficult for Davis to *not* feel confident about what he could achieve. As the "lost cause" myth developed after his death, Davis's standing has plummeted (certainly in comparison to Robert E. Lee's); but his death prompted one of the largest crowds, and fuelled the "lost cause" narrative. One recent study makes the salient point that there was no obvious other Confederate politician who would have made a better job of it.[12] Davis was conscientious at work; but frankly, he submerged himself in the paperwork, a technician who rarely exhibited the ability to contemplate alternative futures.

The Confederates thought they had solved the "We" challenge. Whilst Lincoln endlessly needed to focus on the political party dynamics (in 1862, the Republicans lost a swathe of seats to the Democrats), in the South people were not elected on a party ticket, so *in theory*, the Southern "We" should have seen common purpose. Quite the contrary, for as the war went on, relations between Davis and Congress deteriorated. By the end, his support base was reduced to Representatives from States where the Union was in control. With a one-term limit of office, Davis had no incentive to develop or sustain a wider presidential party. Lacking any party discipline, Representatives became heavily localist, representing their own state and district priorities rather than any strategic plan to win the war.

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[12] See James M. McPherson, *Embattled Rebel: Jefferson Davis as Commander in Chief* (London: Penguin, 2014).

As mentioned, Kantor developed his Mover/Opposer/Follower/Bystander model out of his family therapy work, though it is rooted in psychology. However, the model is equally powerful if we consider it *institutionally*. A way of summarising Kantor's approach is the title of one of his books, "Reading the room". What we are now describing is a case of Lincoln and Davis reading the situation, or reading the context. Consider, therefore, this history of the war described in that way.

Our story starts on 21st December 1860. Seven weeks after the election of Lincoln (and long before he would actually assume office the following March), the South Carolina legislature voted *nem con* to secede from the union. Often thrust into the role of the hotheads, here they were the Mover. In the following weeks, all the other states in the Deep South similarly voted to secede. (Indeed, in the "lost cause" story, how quickly you seceded became a point of honour). So South Carolina had Followers. Then we see the first major role switch, with the appointment of Davis – so he becomes the Mover. But there is little actual action because there is no effective oppose. The Buchanan presidency was approaching its end, and whilst Buchanan was opposed to the secession he was not going to try and solve the problem in his last few weeks in office. We have to await the Lincoln administration for the action to start. Meanwhile we have a significant number of bystanders-none of the Border states (the upper south) has declared one way other.

As is often the case the actual issue which prompts the action was almost accidental. Fort Sumter was a garrison of federal troops loyal to the union. Supplies were running low. The question was what would happen. After various explorations, the Union decided to advise the Confederates that they would attempt to bring further provisions to the Fort, but wold not otherwise engage unless attacked. In effect, this was a "Put up, or shut up" option, and the Fort was attacked. Put another way, the Lincoln administration was focusing not on the Mover, but the Bystanders, for they had forced the South to make the first attack.

Lincoln then called for a large recruitment of volunteers. Two things should be noted about this. Firstly, part of the motivation was not just to mobilise against the rebels. It was also a clear statement to other Northern states, that any further secession would be resisted. (California, for instance, might have considered bolting from the pack). Secondly, bystanders now had to consider their options.

Four more states went with the original seven in the Confederacy – including, importantly, Virginia, which was the most populous state in the South. The Confederate capital also moved to Richmond, so Virginia now becomes the state where much of the action in the war takes place. Four border states however stayed with the union (even if in each there were significant numbers of secession

supporters). Lincoln was desperate to keep the remaining loyal border states on side. Had they defected to the South, the balance of power would have shifted significantly, and Washington in particular would be very vulnerable to invasion – being on the Virginia border, it was never "safe". Lincoln went out of his way to state that his only aim was preservation of the Union - and that if slavery be the price of the union so be it.

For two important individuals, this also became the key decision point. Grant signed up to fight for the Union, whilst Lee rejected the offer of leading the Union forces and signed up to fight for his native state Virginia.

At this point, both sides envisioned a pretty short war (some recruits were for a 90-day stint). But fairly soon, it became clear that this was no one-sided war, and that no quick resolution was in store. With a longer war increasingly apparent, the international dimension also grew in importance. Not one single state recognised the Confederacy, but that did not mean there was not significant interest in (and even sympathy with) what was happening. Two states in particular were active bystanders, waiting to see how they might best exploit opportunities.

France had been a significant power in North America. Ejected from Quebec by the British, it then made one of the worst-judged sales in history, when Jefferson made the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. France was keen to make amends for this folly. Indeed, whilst the Civil War was going on, the French government evolved a strategy to put a puppet on the Mexican throne. France, however, recognised the importance of another key European player – and so was unlikely to intervene in the Civil War without knowing what attitude the British would take. The British had of course been ejected by the Union, in the War of Independence, and there were still many Americans alive who had fought the British in 1812. The British were also in Canada, and still had some unresolved problems with America around the boundary (although the 59th Parallel had emerged as a compromise, there were still some Americans arguing to move further north). There were, however, two other big issues. Firstly, having introduced the slave trade into America, Britain had now banned slavery and was seeking to enforce a ban on the transportation of slaves. But secondly, Britain and the South were closely entwined economically. The cotton industry in Lancashire had been the key foundation of Britain's industrial revolution and the key export location for Southern cotton – and the Anglo-Southern cotton trade remained paramount in the 1860s.

Put simply, the Confederates needed British recognition (in our language, a Follower position), whilst the Union needed Britain to remain as a neutral bystander.

There were a number of prominent British supporters of recognition (including, in a rare moment of agreement, both Disraeli and Gladstone). We can see three Southern strategies. The first plan was for the South itself to ban exports of cotton, thinking this would force Britain's hand. Unfortunately for the South, 1860 had been a bumper year for cotton, and the mills still had significant levels of reserves in 1861, so the boycott was hurting the South as much as the British. There then was also a strong diplomatic push – though the chosen diplomats had little diplomatic skills.

A "third strategy" existed, to in effect say "Join the winning side". One of the bloodiest battles of 1862 was at Antietam (or Sharpsburg in Confederate lore). Technically a score draw, it turned out to be a strategic defeat for the South. Lee admitted one of the main reasons for his engaging in the battle was the hope that a win would lead to recognition by the British (i.e. "Stop being a Bystander, and back the clear winner").

The Union equally had its challenges. It wanted to have a secure blockade of the South, stopping both Southern exports and imports of foreign goods (not least foreign ships). Britain as the dominant world sea power did not want Union dictation of sea movement, so there were remarkable diplomatic manoeuvres by the Union to try and ensure an effective boycott, whilst still keeping the British as Bystanders.

Antietam also allowed Lincoln to venture his first move against slavery. Using his executive powers, he announced freedom for all Southern slaves who volunteered to fight in the union army. This of course risked some loss of support (Followers) for Lincoln, particularly in the border states that remained loyal – but the order was carefully worded. The freedom offer only applied where the Union was effectively not in control (i.e. Confederate states). In one sense, this was merely gesture, but by the end of the war, nearly 180,000 black troops had enlisted. A significant element of the superior numbers of the Union side came from Southern slaves who had escaped to fight repression.

The next year saw increasing levels of warfare and death, but with no significant change in the dynamic. Yet one week saw the course of the war change. In short succession, the Union won victories at both Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Gettysburg was the most famous (not least for the subsequent Gettysburg address by Lincoln at the opening of the national cemetery) but Vicksburg was more important. It gave the Union effective control of the whole Mississippi river, dividing the confederacy in two. And it also brought Grant to the national stage.

It's at this stage that we see a significant change. In effect, Lincoln moved from being an Opposer to a Mover, while the South was now effectively in defence mode. At the Gettysburg address, Lincoln announces full Emancipation. This of course further risked some border state support (i.e. losing some Followers). But he had two things going for him. Firstly, the consensus was that the war was now going the North's way (so he appealed for people to "Stick with a winner"), but secondly, now that the war was specifically about slavery, this unleashed significant British support from anti-slavery supporters. Until this point Lincoln had kept to a Union pitch – thus allowing British supporters of the Confederacy to say that slavery was not the issue, it was Britain's job to defend small states against aggression. Lincoln thus swopped some greater vulnerability amongst his follower base, to increase the likelihood that Britain would stay a bystander rather than supporting the South.

Expectations that the war would soon be over turned out to be false - it would continue until 1865. The weapons then available gave defenders better odds: attacks would succeed only very slowly, and at a heavy cost in terms of lives. Grant accepted that challenge. But there was also an asymmetry in war aims. The Union had to win the war (thus force a Southern surrender). To prevail, the South had merely to not lose the war. The South therefore saw another way, to effectively "dig in", until war weariness won it for them by default. There was one imminent opportunity for that war weariness to express itself: the 1864 elections.

Slowly through early 1864, Grant made some progress but with very heavy casualties. Public discontent was evident. The Democrats chose a peace candidate McLennan, whom Lincoln had dismissed as head of the army for his dithering approach. Lincoln know he was in trouble, so he stood on a national unity ticket with a war democrat Andrew Johnson as his vice-presidential candidate. But as the summer went on few expected Lincoln to win (not least himself). Grant was acutely aware of this. He knew that only a significant victory would save Lincoln. In other words, military strategy was focused as much on securing the follower base as defeating the enemy (the opposers). But all this changed on September 2nd with the fall of Atlanta, strategically vital for the south in terms of transport and manufacture, but emotionally an even deeper wound. Lincoln won a resounding majority in the electoral college (he only got 55 per cent of the actual vote, still though a significant improvement on his 40 per cent in 1860).

Once Lincoln was re-elected, the game was up. Even if Davis did not recognise it, Confederate troops did. The end of the war came about not because of any

contrition by Confederate leaders, but because the scale of desertion was so great that Lee recognised he no longer had an army that was fit for purpose – hence the surrender at the Appotomax (coincidentally by the site of the first battle of the war). If Lee recognised he no longer had enough 'followers', Grant recognised that he needed to encourage previous 'Opposers' to now be at least 'Bystanders' if not outright 'Followers.' The terms of the surrender were therefore extremely generous.

The hoped-for goodwill did not emerge. One senior Confederate (James Longstreet, to whom we shall return), did in fact change and became a Republican, but the Confederate response that resonated was the assassination of Lincoln. John Wilkes Booth joins the ranks of Guido Fawkes and Lee Harvey Oswald in popular memory, as state assassins. Booth, like Oswald, succeeded in killing a president, but Booth's *modus operandi* was more like that of Fawkes – not a solo effort, but a coordinated attempt to remove a whole leadership cadre.

The Union now had to think of a strategy as to how it would reconnect with the South to sustain a new union. Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson was a disaster (avoiding impeachment by only one vote) but under Grant the Reconstruction policy at least had some shape. Republicans saw a way to create a new 'Followership' in the South. Two Southern states (Mississippi and South Carolina) electorally were majority black, but in most of the Deep South, even if the state was majority white, some districts were majority black. They therefore conceived a plan to develop majorities (Followers), through a mix of black votes and less illiberal whites (many of whom came from the North, and were labelled as carpetbaggers by die-hard Confederates). Indeed in 1868, Ulysses S. Grant lost only two southern states, Georgia and Louisiana. The strategy held for 8 years, but the 1876 election was muddled. In the compromise that followed, the Republicans held the presidency, but Reconstruction came to a halt. Put another way, in return for sustaining the national 'Mover' position, the Republicans defaulted over the South (they became bystanders). Meanwhile the Democrats in the South basically destroyed black rights to voting, and replaced slavery with a mix of its more modern equivalent, sharecropping and segregation. Denied voting rights in the national debate Southern black Americans were forced into the position of being bystanders, whilst in the South, white Americans became the 'Movers' and black Americans the 'Opposers.'

When we first describe the Mover/Opposer/Follower/Bystander model, people often assume that leaders must be 'Movers'. ("That's what leaders do"). We hope the American Civil War case study reveals a rather more complex analysis. Firstly, who the mover is, is not fixed. Rather, we have a much more fluid process. Secondly,

notice how the 'Follower' and 'Bystander' positions are not passive. To succeed as either 'Mover' or 'Opposer', you need to engage both 'Followers' and 'Bystanders.' Thirdly, notice how dynamic the model is. Only at the very end of the war was the next step obvious.

Southern Usness

Let's now consider how "usness" played out in the south. In particular, we want to focus on the post-Civil War manifestation – the "Lost Cause" story. What we do know is that during the Civil War, there was significant resentment against the north (against Yankees). However, it is worth noting that not every Southerner was pro-Confederacy. Although the South Carolina legislature had unanimously voted for secession, in other states there were more vigorous debates. Amongst the prominent critics was Sam Houston (the so-called "Father of Texas"). And as the war progressed, desertion became increasingly frequent. But what is startling is how the post-war story became about hegemonies.

Given the scale of casualties in the war, it was not surprising that in both the North and the South, there were calls for proper recognition. Organisations such as G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) recruited mass membership. There being many more Union troops, it is not surprising that the Northern veterans outnumbered their Southern equivalents. Memorial Day was also established (originally called Declaration Day). A key issue was whether veterans would cross the divide and meet with their previous opponents? Some did, and some did not. But the Northern veteran cause was a male cause, and in due course, the veterans died out. Memorial Day remains – but its original purpose has been lost. One of the original commemorations was organised by a group of freed slaves in Charleston, South Carolina (a city which will feature more than once in our story). By 1868, the event had become established.

Yet in the South, we see a slightly different development. It had plenty of veterans of course, but we can see two other developments. Nathan Bedford Forrest was the most effective cavalry leader in the confederacy (and perhaps in the whole war). After the war, he continued to indulge his talent for killing, by leading the Ku Klux Klan, who continued murdering and terrorising Southern blacks and any white sympathisers. The K.K.K. took a "No surrender" attitude.

In Virginia, we saw a slightly different course. Virginia had the largest population of any state in the South. It was also the state that saw so many key battles, and the state where Lee had been based with his army of Northern Virginia. Here, the

leading role was played by Confederate women. Caroline Janney tells the story brilliantly.[13] The instigators were, in the main, the wives of major slaveholders. They started organising almost immediately after the war was over. In an age in which women did not have the vote, their stance was "We women have no role in politics, so what we are doing cannot be political subversion, we are just celebrating our dead and wounded." And so we see the start of the move for flags and memorials – but also the push for a Southern story, the "Lost Cause" narrative.

This story was one about defending a way of life, and defending "States' Rights" against a bullying and aggressive Northern government. With the K.K.K., the solution was to use force to put black people back in their "proper" place. In the "Lost Cause" version, there still is a "proper" place for black people, and if only the Unionists would back off, then an older, better way of life could be restored. The "Lost Cause" myth became multi-textured:

> A second doctrine followed logically from this image of a noble South, namely, that the Cavalier South was force to take arms against money-seeking puritan invaders. The South was torn assunder precisely because of its honor & nobility.[14]

These two narratives continued to coexist, the K.K.K. being a more private version, and the "Lost Cause" a more public version. So as we get to the points that memorials replace memories, it is the Southern narrative that survives. Hence the enthusiasm to keep establishing new memorials as we enter the twentieth century. We see some slight changes in the story have developed over the years. In his lifetime, Jefferson Davis remained a key figure in the story. His death prompted a mass turnout. But failed politicians are not the heroes of poetry, unless cut down before their peak (the deaths of John and Robert F. Kennedy are cases in point), whilst the standing of Lee compared to Davis just became greater. Indeed, Gary Gallagher, in surveying recent historical fiction, notes the contrasting the rise of Lee and the fall of Grant, points out that:

> No successful novels have been built primarily around Grant. The fact that the Confederate Commander's horse has gotten almost as much attention as the general-in-chief of the United States armies in recent novels by

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[13] Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[14] Lloyd A. Hunter, 'The Immortal Confederacy: Another Look at Lost Cause Religion', in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (eds), *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

> mainline publishers delineates the chasm spearating Lee and Grant in fiction. (The notion that someone might write a novel about Cincinnati, Grant's favourite horse, is beyond imagining.)[15]

The Confederates lost the war, but won the storyline. Indeed, it could be said that the Confederacy started the storyline even before the war ended. Burns uses the phrase "confederacy of the mind" to describe the last months of the war. The explicitly pro-K.K.K. *The Birth of a Nation* was the definitive silent movie of the 1910s. It was the first move ever to be shown in the White House (for President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat who was also a Southern segregationist). But even more impact was made by *Gone With the Wind* (1939), again a pro-Southern script that became the biggest movie of its time. The "plucky Southern" narrative became so pervasive, that even Joan Baez (never one to miss a left-wing cause) could not see the irony that one of her staple songs was "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down".

The Birth of a Nation had an impact well beyond the film theatre. It was critical in a relaunch of the Ku Klux Klan (let's call them K.K.K.2). By 1920, most of the original K.K.K. (lets call them K.K.K.1) had died. K.K.K.1 still continued as a small, secretive Deep South organisation. Lynching continued from time to time. But in the North, we saw the emergence of K.K.K.2. This was more public, and its message was more about attacking Catholics and Jews. K.K.K.2 became the biggest American social movement in the first half of the twentieth century. It had a much more "respectable" veneer than its Southern K.K.K.1 sister, being more bound up with the popular fraternal brotherhoods of the time. It also had quite phenomenal political influence, with large numbers of sympathisers and members in Congress. It demonstrated that there was a significant number of Northern white men and women who felt aggrieved, and who could be motivated to engage in a very different way. The organisers were of course complete charlatans, and their very behaviour helped implode the very movement they had created.

Going back to the Kantor model, a key element of this "Lost Cause" narrative was being the "Opposer" – and so the job was to resist the arrogant Yankees. Let's consider the situation in 1927. This was the "year of the flood", with the Mississippi overflowing its banks across much of the river, causing devastating effects. This came two years after the "Scopes Monkey Trial", in which John Scopes was being

[15] Gary W. Gallagher, 'The Lost Cause and Civil War History: A Persistent Legacy', in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (eds), *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

prosecuted for teaching evolution. The devastation was so great that President Coolidge appointed Herbert Hoover to lead the relief. (Coolidge was not a man of action – when his death was reported, Dorothy Parker's famous comment was "How did they know?"). For Northern liberals, the trial followed by the flood just exemplified Southern backwardness. For white Southerners, this was yet another example of Northern arrogance. Of course, whilst white Southerners complained about Northern arrogance, they also ensured that black Southerners failed to get the support they needed. 660,000 people were displaced by the floods – of whom over 550,000 were black. But the role of black Americans was not to receive the aid, but to ensure the aid was received by Southern white Americans. 1927 saw a whole shift in the level of Black migration to the north. This is a reminder that beyond the four Kantor positions there is a fifth one: emigration north. Using Hirschman's language, thousands of black Southerners who were denied a voice chose to exit.

So far, we have looked at the challenge from the Union and Confederate perspectives. There is at least one other perspective we need to consider. The Confederacy started the war, not to defend slavery, but to extend slavery. The Union ultimately came to recognise that the war would only be won by ending slavery. In this process, black people were not passive. Frederick Douglass was a key leader who both challenged and influenced Lincoln. 180,000 black troops were a significant part of the Union army. Perhaps half a million slaves escaped, significantly weakening Southern productivity, but perhaps even more importantly, harming Southern morale. Stopping slaves from escaping became a key priority. Larger slaveholders were therefore exempted from military duty, so that they could coral their slaves. As the war progressed, this caused increased resentment about being a "rich man's war." (The Union had its equivalent – you could buy your way out of conscription if you could find someone to take your place.) But let's take up the story in the aftermath nearly a century later, with the civil rights movement.

Here we have our leader Martin Luther King. King's emergence as a leader is fascinating. It was not a planned programme. His was a brilliant example of leadership being an activity, not a rank. Instead, he emerged as the leader (or Mover) because he had attracted Followers, who enabled him to be the leader. He was in that position because others thought he would be the right person.

It's not that there was any lack of black leadership before King, from Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. DuBois. Quite the reverse, there was a clear "We", with a clear number of people articulating positions. The inter-war years saw the Haarlem Renaissance, including a large number of black educational institutions, and

vigorous debates about what strategy to adopt. George Garvey, for instance, advocated a "back to Africa" stance, through which he argued that black people could take control of their own destiny. Alongside all this there were of course black churches.

In the story of civil rights movement, a critical date was the 1st December 1955. That was the day Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white person. This event received national attention, and there followed a bus boycott. This was no simple act of stubbornness by Parks. She was a N.A.A.C.P. organiser. She was not even the original person chosen, but it was decided she had the better backstory. In other words, in making the decision to be an Opposer, the N.A.A.C.P. focused on the issue and the person most likely to engage Northerners, and to move them out of being Bystanders. Martin Luther King was famously influenced by Ghandi, in adopting a stance of passive resistance. But the reason King adopted this stance was because he believed that this was the stance most likely to force Northern liberals and Union politicians to "get off the fence." The images from *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind* helped segregationists. King was determined that the civil rights images would now help black Southerners.

On the 17th June 2015, Dylan Roof killed 9 people in the Emanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston South Carolina. It was of course just outside Charleston that the Civil War started. (Fort Sumter guarded the entry to the town.) Nine days later, on 26th June, President Obama went to the same church and spoke. It was a powerful speech. It is worth listening to the speech and not just reading it. His cadences were not in the usual Obama style. It was clearly like those of a Southern black pastor. That decision was not by accident. Southern churches had played a key part in the civil rights movement. Obama was channelling that connection. But he then broke out in song. We have heard better voices – but there are few which are more moving. Again, notice the reference: spirituals were a key part of the black resistance to slavery, including songs about setting people free. The song Obama chose was "Amazing Grace" – a spiritual, but one that had certainly made the crossover to a general audience. (A version by the Royal Scots Dragoon Band even made the British pop charts in the 1960s.) Obama was thus consciously *and* unconsciously constructing an "Us", whilst simultaneously unleashing the opportunity for an attack on the remaining use of Confederate flags and monuments. So 150 years after Gettysburg, the symbols and stories remain contested spaces. Trump of course characteristically added fuel to the fire by claiming he would remain neutral between neo-Nazis and protesters two years later.

One final element to understanding the leadership challenges of the civil war is

to consider how changes were handled. Donald Rumsfeld was George W. Bush's Secretary of Defence. The mishandling of the U.S. intervention in Iraq, particularly after the 2003 invasion, owed a great deal to his role. He became famous for a couple of phrases. The first, which came after some unanticipated developments, was that "stuff happens". A more eloquent way of making this comment was Harold Macmillan's reply when asked what worried him: "Events, dear boy, events". A strong test of leadership is how one responds to untoward events; and indeed, many leaders, from Roosevelt to Reagan, are best remembered for their responses to events which had not been foreseen when they first assumed office. Churchill's response was to "K.B.O." (Keep Buggering On), Asquith famously said "we had better wait and see", Napoleon advocated having "lucky" generals, whilst Thatcher claimed that good politicians make their own luck.

Rumsfeld's second famous utterance was about "known and unknown unknowns"; or more fully, "as we know, there known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know." This got a lot of criticism, but it was an astute and important distinction.

In closely-contested conflicts, there are usually a number of "known unknowns", which are the outcomes of battles. Good generals try to avoid fighting battles they know they will lose. Robert E. Lee was a good general. He went into the Battle of Gettysburg believing he could win. Indeed, on the first day, the battle went his way. Day two was also successful for his side. It was day three that he lost badly. So confident were the Confederacy, that some leading politicians were in the vicinity, aiming to follow up a military victory by initiating conversations with the North for an end to the war. In the "Lost Cause" myth, this "what if" moment is often blamed on the dilatory speed that General James Longstreet advanced his troops on day one (which is untrue, but a convenient piece of scapegoating, because after the war, Longstreet became a Republican and attempted to aid Reconstruction, so no-one in the South was leaping to his defence). Whereas the battle was actually lost because of the manic decision by Lee to initiate Pickett's Charge. Lee knew this himself, and offered to resign – a resignation that was not accepted. Yet this was undoubtedly one of the few major tactical mistakes that Lee made.

Our second type is "unknown unknowns". Let me give three illustrations. As part of the Mexican-American War of 1846-8, California became U.S. territory. Whilst there was a transcontinental ambition ("manifest destiny"), California was a long way from the main U.S. population. The Panama Canal had not been built yet – the

sea route from San Francisco to New York, which involved sailing around both North and South America, was longer than crossing the Pacific. California was thus a "trophy" possession rather than integral to the United States. All this changed in 1848, when gold was found. Hence came "the 1849ers". The theoretical discussions about westward drift now became very pressing. Which railway route to the west a critical issue (one through the South, or one via Chicago). These two developments really changed the temperature of the debates in the 1850s, giving each side much greater sense of urgency.

Our second example is Lincoln's assassination. Lincoln always knew there was a risk to his life. He even changed his route into Washington D.C. for his inauguration in 1861, fearing an attack. But up until then, no President had ever been assassinated. Vice-President Andrew Johnson's emergence as the new President was not in anyone's mind. Moreover, Johnson did not then have a Vice- President – a fact which probably saved him from impeachment in 1868. In the Senate, he was saved by one vote (while there was a clear majority for his removal, a successful impeachment trial needed a two-thirds majority in the Senate). In the absence of a Vice-President, Johnson would have been succeeded by the Speaker of the House, a known Republican radical. All in all, Johnson was a disaster, and his presidency took the whole momentum out of Reconstruction.

My third example illustrates the difference between Lincoln/Grant and Davis/Lee – and that is the war strategies. Davis was probably the best tactical general; he was a great technician. He managed to make the running for large parts of the war despite having less troops than his opponents. He saw off a whole series of Northern generals, and even Grant could make only slow progress against him. But Lee fought a conventional war.

Grant, on the other hand, invented a new way of fighting. He fought "total war" across a 1,000-mile front. He simultaneously squeezed Lee, whilst letting Sherman run riot further south. Learning from his own experience in the West, he told Sherman to fight "total war", and to live off what could be seized *en route*. The strategist beat the technician.

One hundred years on from the American Civil War, another enemy showed how Lee could have won. That enemy ignored conventional warfare most of the time, allowed the Americans to control the larger cities, but with significant popular support and information, they continually ambushed and surprised U.S. troops, smashing morale both amongst the troops and at home. The amount of firepower used by General Westmoreland in that war by far exceeded that available to Grant.

Had his enemy, like Lee, engaged in conventional war, that enemy would have been destroyed many times over. But the Civil War was not in Vietnam.

Here ends the attempt to use the Civil War to illustrate leadership challenges. Modern military thinking however continues to influence our thinking. The crossover phrase is VUCA: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity.

So what does this story tell us about leadership?

1. Good leadership matters. Lincoln and Grant trumped Davis and Lee, because they conceived their tasks much more strategically.
2. Individual leaders matter, but so do their top teams, and the way their teams interact. At the beginning of the war, the military leadership of the Confederacy had much greater depth and strength than the Union. But death took its toll, and demographics and ideas changed. In particular, the South had the tragedy of "Stonewall" Jackson being accidentally shot by his own side. By the end of the war, the Union had the combination of Grant, Sherman and Sheridan – an unbeatable force.
3. But if we take the longer view, and look beyond the personalities, then the framing stories (the "Usness" stories) outlived every individual. Shelby Lynne summarised the Union's victory as follows: "Before the war, we talked about 'the United States are…' After the war, we said 'the United States is…'" Similarly, the "Lost Cause" narrative has framed the national debate to this day.
4. No single-line analysis even starts to describe what happened. Instead, we need to understand how VUCA, multiple perspectives, and happenchance all interacted. **In other words, we need a systemic lens**.
5. Finally some of the great leaders did indeed have high status: Lincoln as president, for example. But some had status thrust upon them: Grant, for example. And some of the most powerful stories in this account are about people who had no formal authority role, but who massively influenced outcomes, i.e. Frederick Douglass or Rosa Parks for instance.

CHAPTER 8

1940 – Wendell and Winston

Joe Simpson

This is a story about two very different people, on opposite sides of the Atlantic, who both had their pivotal moment in history in the same year: 1940. They were Wendell Willkie and Winston Churchill. Both were important leaders for our approach. If we are to understand the turning-point of 1940, how Britain survived alone in World War II, and how America (eventually) came into the war on the Allied side, then let us look at these two figures through the domains we have been discussing.

Wendell Willkie

So far we have argued about a possible "New World Order". But to understand leadership in practice, we need to consider our four interwoven axes, "The Context", "We", "Us", "Me", and through "Time." To illustrate how some of our axes play out, let us consider the life of someone now barely remembered, but whose star shone brightly at a key point in our history. Wendell Willkie was originally from the mid-West, of German-American extraction. At the age of 40, he was Chairman of Commonwealth & Southern, one of America's largest utility companies. As a young man, he had been an active Democrat, but he fell out with Franklin D. Roosevelt

over the way he felt the Tennessee Valley Authority was impacting his company. In resolving that dispute, Wilkie won his company the equivalent in today's money of over a billion dollars. Six months after joining the Republican Party, he was running for the presidential nomination. Losing to FDR in the election of 1940, he subsequently became a *de facto* world wide Ambassador for Roosevelt (to whom he remained personally close), as well as Chairman of 20th Century Fox, and the author of a book about a possible "New World Order" that sold over a million copies.[1] Failing in his attempt to be re-nominated in the election of 1944, he died later that year, aged only 52.

The Willkie story looks like a pretty good example of the "Me" storyline. Were today's 20th Century Fox to consider a pitch for *Wendell: the Movie*, no doubt Tom Hanks would be top of the list for the lead actor. But let us consider in more detail the key reason why he should be remembered – his impact on the 1940 election. Summarising that impact this is what Walter Lippman had to say after Willkie's death:

> Second only to the Battle of Britain the sudden rise and nomination of Willkie was the decisive event, perhaps providential, which made it possible to rally the free world when it was almost conquered. Under any other leadership but his, the Republican Party would in 1940 have turned its back on Great Britain, causing all who still resisted Hitler to feel they were abandoned.[2]

Willkie was an outsider. When he first stood for the Republican nomination, he had only just joined the party. This prompted resentment from many in the Republican Party; for example, member of Indiana's Republican convention delegation, former Senator James Watson, who dryly observed, "I don't mind the church converting a whore, but I don't like her to lead the choir on the first night."[3] In his campaign, Willkie made much of his "newcomer" status – claiming that unlike the other candidates, he was standing alone, and was not beholden to any political deals (in this sense, he can be seen as very Trumpian). But of course this "heroic leader standing alone" did have key backers. Not least of these was the owner of *Time* magazine, Henry Luce (who would later be an equally important

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[1] Wendell L. Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1943).

[2] Quoted in David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Wilkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country, and Conceived a New World Order* (New York: Liveright, 2018), p. 307.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

early backer of John F. Kennedy). Luce was the most prominent, media magnate to support Willkie, but was far from being the only one. Again, like Trump, Willkie benefitted from a lot of free editorial coverage in the summer of 1940.

There were two other key players who helped Willkie's rise. How they helped starts to explain the U.S. axis. Our first story concerns Sam Pryor, a Willkie supporter who had been elected Vice-Chairman of the committee on arrangements and credentials for the 1940 convention. Frankly, it was not a particularly powerful role. At best, one could say that it gave the Willkie campaign a seat at court. But luck was on Willkie's side. The Chairman was the 70-year-old Ralph E. Williams, a supporter of Senator Robert Taft, the leading conservative candidate for the nomination. A month before the convention, Williams dropped dead from a heart attack whilst addressing the committee. So unexpectedly finding himself in the driving seat, Pryor used his new power ruthlessly. The hall contained one thousand delegates but many more visitors. Williams made sure that those visitors were not the normal "great and good" of local Republican parties, but were instead (very vocal) Willkie supporters.

If delegates felt they were surrounded by Willkie supporters inside the hall, they were deluged by telegrams from Willkie supporters outside the hall. An estimated one million telegrams arrived. Across the country, so-called local "Willkie clubs" had sprung up, some of course encouraged by the Willkie machine, but many independently (in this sense, the more recent parallel would probably be with the Obama 2008 campaign).

Now let's turn to the delegates. In those days, only a few states held primaries. As Willkie was to learn to his cost four years later, primaries could scupper a candidacy, but they were not enough to secure one. In the first half of the 20th century, presidential nominations were rarely secured on the first round (the Democrat convention of 1924 had taken 103 ballots. Certainly, Willkie knew he could not win on the first round, and his chances rested on a test of endurance and compromise.

There was a long-standing convention that candidates did not appear in the hall. With no mobile phones or computers, the key task of winning transfers in support fell to the floor managers for the candidates, who oversaw the process. Willkie's key manager was Harold Stassen. Stassen in due course became a bit of a joke as a perennial losing candidate for the Republican nomination. But in 1940 he was a rising star, as Governor of Wisconsin, and the keynote speaker for the conference. But he also became Willkie's official floor manager.

300 delegates apiece were already pledged to one candidate or other, but 700 others were still in play. Many would cast their first-round votes for "favourite son"

candidates (usually their own state's Governor or Senator) to make a demonstration of support, before shifting their support elsewhere. The job of the floor mangers was to ensure that their candidate secured enough first-round votes to be credible, while trying to hold some support back, so that on the second round they could show they were gaining momentum. Stassen managed the process perfectly. Willkie came third on the first two ballots, but his vote increased significantly on round two. By round three, he was in second place, and from round four onwards, he led. The frontrunner had been thought to be New York District Attorney Thomas Dewey. He led for the first three rounds, but with each round, his vote was reduced. (Dewey was to become a master of losing – his upset loss in the 1948 presidential election was perhaps the most famous defeat in American history.) Politicians like to talk about "momentum" as being key to political success. (Margaret Thatcher credited her unexpected rise to the Tory leadership in 1975 to momentum)[4] Willkie's campaign perfectly demonstrated the importance of momentum. However, in our language, it is a perfect illustration of "Usness", as delegates from different parts of a very diverse country seek to find a common connection.

However, the above manoeuvrings alone cannot fully account for the improbable rise of Wendell Willkie. Let us consider the wider context, of what was happening in the world. Willkie was the one *non*-isolationist Republican candidate in the field. However, in order to win, he needed to get the votes of people who had voted for isolationist candidates in earlier rounds. Moreover, none of Willkie's opponents pulled out until it was too late, as they all felt they still had a chance. ("Anything can happen in a wide open convention!" was a common cliché of the time.) Here, external events came into play. The war in Europe had not been going well for the democracies, and Germany was advancing across France at tremendous speed. Then, on the eve of the convention, France capitulated. The formal ceasefire came into force on the very eve of voting. We are in danger of straying into "What if?" territory here, but had the convention been just one week earlier, it's questionable whether Willkie would still have won. That none of his opponents did deals with one another suggests that they were all caught up in the "echo chamber" that conventions usually became; but the drama of the French defeat is likely to have influenced a critical number of delegates to realise that America could not just ignore what was happening.

[4] Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins, 1995).

I hope the above makes a good case for Willkie still to be remembered. He may not have gone down in history as a household name, but when the time came, he knew how to explore the contexts he lived and worked in. Indeed, in the last decade and a half, two books have been published making the revisionist case for his importance. One focuses on the drama of the five days in Philadelphia, whilst the other is a fuller biography.[5] But if two books in 14 years have focused on Willkie, then each year we get two books focusing just on FDR. So let us consider the parallel story to Willkie – that of FDR – in the "Me" axis.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was, to say the least, a complex character; probably best summarised as operating on the principle of "Never let the left hand know what the right hand is doing" (and vice-versa). In 1940, Roosevelt faced two difficult challenges, which anyone would have found hard to reconcile. As President, he was increasingly clear that America could not be an idle bystander as war engulfed Europe. That did not mean he was ready to go to war, but he wanted to give every practical piece of help he could to the European democracies (a policy that in due course he famously likened to lending your hose pipe to your neighbour when his house was on fire). That aspiration had both constitutional challenges (testing the limits of what was possible through a President's "Executive Orders") as well as political challenges (not least the strong isolationist tendencies found in Congress).

Partly as a result of the deteriorating European situation in 1940, Roosevelt grew increasingly convinced that he needed to stand for a third term. So on the one hand, he has a presidential focus on the situation, and on the other hand, that of a candidate. In 1940, there was not yet any constitutional bar on a president serving a third term, although it was considered a convention set by George Washington, after he had declined to serve a third term. The constitutional ban only came in force in 1951, instigated by a Republican-dominated Congress that feared another Roosevelt. FDR knew three things:

1. No-one had ever served three terms as President.
2. No-one had ever really *tried* to serve three consecutive terms as President.
3. No party had ever nominated anyone to be their candidate for a third consecutive term.

[5] David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Wilkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country, and Conceived a New World Order* (New York: Liveright, 2018); Charles Peters, *Five Days in Philadelphia: Wendell Willkie, Franklin Roosevelt and the 1940 Convention That Saved the Western World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005).

Of course, Roosevelt knew of the nearest equivalent. His cousin Teddy Roosevelt, the then-Vice President, became President in September 1901, following the assassination of President McKinley. He was elected to his own full term in 1904, and stood down in 1909, having served nearly seven and a half years as President; but then tried to run again in 1912. Failing to secure the Republican nomination, Teddy became perhaps the most famous "third-party" candidate, coming second ahead of the incumbent President, but he still failed to win.

FDR's solution to this conundrum was to not "seek" the nomination, but to "reluctantly" accept it in some sort of coronation. That drama played out in the Chicago Stadium as the Democrats had their convention there in July 1940. A statement from FDR was read out, concluding "The President has never had, and has not today, any desire or purpose to continue in the office of President, to be a candidate for that office, or to be nominated by the convention for that office. He wishes in earnestness and sincerity to make it clear that all of the delegates in this convention are free to vote for any candidate".

Lest anyone be unclear what he meant, a voice then boomed over the microphones, chanting "We want Roosevelt! We want Roosevelt!" All pure theatre, of course, and the next day Roosevelt secured over 86% of the vote on round one.

That only solved half of his problem. There still remained the rather difficult matter of the isolationist mood which gripped much of the country. FDR had been aware of this for his entire political life, which had begun under the presidency of Woodrow Wilson (the winner of that 1912 election). Wilson only won *his* re-election in 1916 by standing on a platform of keeping America out of the First World War. After winning that election in November, he entered the war three months later. However, isolationist sentiment delivered its comeuppance to Wilson following Germany's defeat. Wilson was keen to see a "New World Order" (a recurring theme here), but his plans for American participation in the new League of Nations were scuppered by Congress, and 1920 saw a the start of a 12-year period of Republican control of the Presidency. That diminution of power for the League of Nations was, of course, eventually a key factor in assisting the onset of the next world war.

So FDR's challenge in the summer of 1940 was that whilst there was a critical position in Europe, the presidential timetable was immoveable – so the temptation to defer decisions until after November was bound to have crossed his mind. As the Democratic candidate, Roosevelt would have done everything he could to persuade his other guise that delay would not be disastrous. This is where Willkie's win

mattered. In our language, Willkie appeared in the "We" story for FDR, being the key supporter who made Roosevelt's presidential stance possible.

Even more books have been written about Churchill's role in all this. So let us put Churchill on the "Me" axis. Over the past few decades, opinion polls have consistently showed Churchill emerging top in any assessment of 20th century British political leaders. That assessment is mainly the result of his role in this key period. So let us consider developments from his perspective.

Following Neville Chamberlain's military debacle in Norway, Britain's House of Commons had the famous Norway Debate on 7-8 May 1940. In the subsequent vote, a large number of Conservative MPs either voted with the opposition or abstained (though such was the size of the Government majority, that it was still not defeated). Churchill became Prime Minister on the 10 May, the opposition having made it clear they would not enter a coalition if Chamberlain remained in post.

If May had started badly, the month kept getting worse. Germany invaded Belgium the day Churchill was appointed, and France had surrendered before the month was out. The Battle of Britain was about to begin. It was not just Britain's future that was insecure, but also British party politics. Churchill may have been made Prime Minister, but Chamberlain remained the leader of the Conservative Party, and Churchill had yet to establish his own power base within a party which had only recently tried to have him deselected. Only two years earlier, the total size of Churchill's support in Parliament was six (a larger group of Chamberlain-sceptics was clustered around Eden). So for both practical and political purposes, Churchill needed allies – an "us." In a desperate attempt to keep France on board in the war, Churchill proposed an "indissoluble union" with France, but that failed (indeed we doubt he ever seriously thought it would succeed.

America was therefore critical. Churchill invested a lot of time and effort in cultivating Roosevelt, but he knew enough about American politics to know that his efforts alone would not be sufficient. A variety of ways were explored – Mitzi Sims, the wife of the British Naval attaché in Washington was even having an affair with one of the potential Republican candidates for President, Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan. So indiscreet was the affair that one journalist wag described him as the "Senator for Mitzigan". By setting out Willkie's role in the Churchill story, we realise how he helped create an "Usness."

For our fourth perspective, let us consider how Nazi Germany looked on these events. Germany had no expectation of securing American support, but what it could achieve was neutrality, or to be more precise, sufficient neutrality for

sufficiently long. ("Sufficient neutrality" meant that Sweden, for instance, remained neutral throughout the war, which still gave a great advantage to Germany with whom it continued to trade). The Willkie story in this account became one of changing circumstances. FDR was grappling with the key decision FDR of whether he could deliver to Britain's aid 50 destroyers that had been mothballed since the end of World War I. Hitler called off the planned invasion of Britain just days after the first of those destroyers had crossed the Atlantic.

Just how difficult even *that* decision was is reflected by just how long it then took for America to actually enter the war. The 7 December 1941 is the "day that will live in infamy" (another memorable FDR phrase), but that came 18 months later. Even then, the USA did not declare war on Germany; in one of the stupidest decision of his career, Hitler declared war on the USA on 11 December 1941. In J. K. Galbraith's words:

> When Pearl Harbour happened we (Roosevelt's advisors) were desperate... we were all in agony. The mood of the American people was obvious – they were determined that the Japanese had to be punished. We could have been forced to concentrate all our efforts on the Pacific, unable from then on to give more than peripheral help to Britain. It was truly astonishing when Hitler declared war on us three days later. I cannot tell you our feelings of triumph. It was a totally irrational thing for him to do, and, I think, it saved Europe.[6]

So each of my four accounts of Willkie's role holds true. That (at least) four accounts are possible demonstrates something about complex systems. In an hierarchy, the theory is that if you are at the top, you can get the "correct" overview of all that is happening beneath you. But in a complex system, there is no such vantage point.

Before we conclude the Willkie example, there is one more dimension to come into play – that of time, and how each of the axes interact, and evolve over time. In our example, this is perhaps best demonstrated by considering Churchill. We do not think anyone could dispute that with any Prime Minister *other* than Churchill, Britain would have been likely to have at least explored some coexistence with Germany at some point in 1940. It was because of his leadership during that critical

[6] Quoted in Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with the Truth* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995), pp. 267-8.

period that the "great man" story emerged. However, even that requires attention to the other three axes – the "Us", the "We", and the "Context."

However, if the summer of 1940 was his "finest hour", few of his greatest supporters would make that case for his role as the war progressed. Ever the keen historian of interventionist generals from Marlborough to Washington, Churchill kept seeing himself in that key pivotal role he had played in 1940. The war turned on the German defeat at Stalingrad (and to a lesser extent, at El Alamein). To understand the last three years of the war, we need to understand a simple equation:

The sacrificed Russian manpower + The use of American technology = Victory

The Russian sacrifice of manpower was staggering, with nearly 10 million soldiers killed, and perhaps twice that number of civilians. A quarter of the population of what is now Belarus died in the war. That staggering sacrifice was matched by unprecedented production of arms, tanks, boats and planes in the USA. Churchill had his moment in the limelight in 1940 – but as the war wore on, he played an increasingly peripheral role. "The System" took over in importance.

Winston Churchill

Churchill is frequently cited as the personification of the heroic leader. One of the most recent (and possibly most dire) examples of that was the recent biography by Boris Johnson. To be fair to Johnson, his intention was not to write a historically accurate account, but a hagiography where he hoped that today's readers looking for an equivalent might look towards the author for the solution to our more contemporary challenges.[7] (Andrew Roberts' similarly pedestrian hagiography reads in much the same vein – increasingly, "the Churchill biography" is becoming a rite of passage for the narcissistic historian.)[8]

However, if we allow facts to come into consideration, we get a much more nuanced picture; moreover a picture in which our framework helps make more comprehensible.

Let's start our story in the mid-1930s. By this time, Churchill's career was in the doldrums. Already in his sixties, he had been an MP for most of the last 35 years. He had a succession of big jobs, including two of the four main offices of state. His

[7] Boris Johnson, *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014).
[8] Andrew Roberts, *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

track record was mixed, with his being widely blamed for the botched 1915 Dardanelles campaign he initiated as First Lord of the Admiralty, blamed for the disastrous decision to return to the gold standard when he was Chancellor of the exchequer in the 1920s, and he remained a hate figure to many working-class people for his (alleged) role with striking coal miners when he had been Home Secretary. If that was not enough, he had in his own words ratted and "re-ratted", defecting from the Conservatives to the Liberals , and then from the Liberals back to the Conservatives.

Having been out of office since 1929, and teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, Churchill spent the 1930s in his "wilderness years", and everything he did seemed to confirm the view that he should stay there. He questioned the continuation of universal suffrage, he bitterly opposed any degree of independence for India, and then in 1936 became an ardent defender of Edward VIII during the abdication crisis – another lost cause, in the public eye.

A common assessment was "Here is a man past his sell by date, who just cannot come to terms with that fact." In other words, it was not surprising he was in the wilderness. And then we come to Germany. Here again, Churchill went against the grain with some stark messages about German imperialism. If not quite a lone voice, he certainly sounded like a shrill voice, and a marginalised one to boot. Moreover, his stance regarding Germany ill-fitted with his stance regarding King Edward VIII (who showed a marked liking for Hitler). So the people who were Churchill's allies on one issue were often his bitter foes on other issues. He had no obvious constituency.[9]

In contrast we had an almost "Group think" attitude towards appeasement.[10] Of course, Stanley Baldwin then Neville Chamberlain deserve the greatest criticism, but their policies reflected a much wider public opinion consensus. One of John Maynard Keynes's great insights was his comment that every time he met someone who called himself a pragmatist, he met someone who was enthralled by some out-of-date doctrine espoused by an economist. It is therefore rather ironic to describe informed debate in the 1930s as having been captured by the arguments Keynes made in his famous populist book, *The Economic Consequences of the*

[9] For more on this, see Robert Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill, 1900-1939: A Study in Failure* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970).

[10] For the most detailed, recent study of this, see Tim Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler: Chamberlain, Churchill, and the Road to War* (London: Penguin, 2019).

Peace.[11] In that book Keynes claimed that the Versailles Treaty was too harsh on Germany, and we would come to regret it. That view dominated a lot of the early 1930s intellectual space.[12]

Given the above, it was not surprising that Churchill attracted few followers. Indeed, his criticisms seemed to be a hark back to an earlier British imperialism, that already seemed outdated in the 1920s. Even by the time of the Munich crisis of 1938, Churchill had no more than six followers in the House of Commons, and they were considered a rum bunch of political outcasts. During the Munich crisis, there was certainly more disquiet on the Conservative benches, but that disquiet did not coalesce around Churchill, but the more superficially attractive figure of Anthony Eden, who had quit as Foreign Secretary over Chamberlain's mishandling of events. Eden had what were described as "Matinee idol looks" and dandy dress, and might have seemed the obvious challenger to Chamberlain. Yet his resignation speech was a damp squib of an affair, and in subsequent months Eden demonstrated what became clear for the rest of his political career, that he simply had no gumption for the reality that politics is a contact sport.

At this point Churchill was still a marginal player, but, in Macmillan's later phrase, "Events, dear boy, events" came into play. The Munich crisis created a wedge between Chamberlain and his next Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Halifax, who started to decouple from Chamberlain's continuing appeasement policy. More importantly, Chamberlain continued to misread Hitler. The MP and diarist Henry "Chips" Channon captured this brilliantly when he wrote that Chamberlain had never met anyone like Hitler in Birmingham.[13] Hitler was equally brutal in his analysis, describing Chamberlain as a man with an umbrella.

The road to war continued down to September 1939. At this point, and only at this point once war had been declared, Chamberlain invited Churchill back into government (for a second stint at the Admiralty). It was the scale of the crisis that made Churchill's return inevitable – he was the one senior, active politician with a serious (if flawed) political role in the last war, and the one senior Conservative who had had a consistent critique of Hitler. In other words, Chamberlain needed Churchill.

[11] John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1919).
[12] Personally, we think Keynes's argument flawed – the peace terms imposed on Germany were firstly a lot lighter than those imposed on Russia by Germany in 1917; and secondly, most of the financial penalties were never collected. However, that story still captured British imagination, and it was used by Hitler to stir up German resentment.
[13] Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Chips: The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1967).

We now come to what Churchill described as the "Hinge of fate", starting with the so-called Norway debate following the military debacle (a catastrophe from which Churchill was far from immune from criticism). There was nothing inevitable about the result, but Chamberlain's appeal to his colleagues misfired (counting on his "friends" – an appeal to the "We", not the "Us"), and his critics excelled. The resulting accumulation of opprobrium from the Labour opposition and Tory backbenchers alike made Chamberlain's fate inevitable, but it certainly did not make Churchill's appointment inevitable.

How the next twenty-four hours played out has been analysed many times, with many varying conclusions. What is certain is that Churchill did not flinch from the challenge. Instead of dwelling on 10 May 1940, let us roll forward two weeks to the days following 24 May 1940. Churchill's first two weeks had not been a breeze. Starting on 10 May, the Nazis had overrun much of the Low Countries and France, the British Expeditionary Force was trapped at Dunkirk (the evacuation started on the 27 May), and the French government was on the point of capitulation. Not surprisingly, there was some private debate about war strategy, particularly in the War Cabinet. Churchill was Prime Minister of a National Government, but as noted, Chamberlain remained leader of the largest party in that government. Halifax may have lost his delusions about Hitler, but he still saw himself as a realist.

At a critical point, Churchill orchestrated one key change – he addressed the full Cabinet before the next meeting of the War Cabinet. Ordinarily, full Cabinet would be for the dissemination of strategy not the formation. While Churchill had little room for manoeuvre in the composition of the War Cabinet, he had more in the composition of the full Cabinet. There, he secured overwhelming support for his stance, pressuring the War Cabinet. To translate this into our terms, he turned a group that would normally have been "Bystanders" (awaiting the deliberations of the War Cabinet) into "Followers", who developed the momentum to carry the War Cabinet.

This – as his own phrase would have it – was Churchill's "Finest Hour" (or more accurately his finest two and a half years). Churchill had two key points on his agenda: one of them was on the domestic front, sustaining morale (creating and sustaining the "Us"). That's where we get all the famous speeches that he made then. Many Churchillian phrases have entered the lexicon, and will be repeated for many years by people not even aware of the origin. In that sense Churchill became Britain's twentieth century Shakespeare.

Churchill's second task focused on forging a new "We", in particular with the seduction of one man, FDR. Chamberlain had been pretty aloof towards Roosevelt. Though Chamberlain was not a born aristocrat, he was almost treating FDR as many British aristocrats treated the *nouveau riche* (like himself). Churchill, on the other hand, balanced a spectacularly aristocratic heritage on his fathers' side with an American ancestry on his mother's side, and felt uniquely placed to tap into that American tradition. He recognised from the very beginning that the American alliance was critical to the war. Churchill even managed to solve another problem in demonstrating his commitment to America. Following the death of the British Ambassador, the Marquess of Lothian, Churchill reshuffled Halifax into the role. Making such a high-profile appointment demonstrated the importance of the relationship, whilst simultaneously removing Halifax from the decision room (Churchill meanwhile maintained direct connection with FDR). With the illness and then death of Chamberlain in November, Churchill finally gained control of the key levers of power.

So, by that point, we can see that Churchill was at his apex, with the alignment of all our dimensions. He was in the driving seat in Britain, he had significant support in Parliament, and had built up a strong relationship with FDR (the "We" factor), British morale was holding up ("Usness" at play), and the total attention was on winning the war. This took us into the phase Churchill called "The end of the beginning" (the turning point of the victory at El Alamein).

More English-language books have been written about World War II than anything else in British history, each one trying to say something new or different. But what is noticeable is that few of them have had much of importance to say about Churchill from 1943 onwards that warrants his status as the greatest political leader. Internationally, the war played to a different tune. As noted, El Alemain and Stalingrad were the turning points, and victory was secured by the (application of) American technology and (the sacrifice of) Russian blood, while Churchillian oratory contributed little to either. Indeed, Churchill misread the change in the dynamic. Churchill remained distracted from much of the domestic agenda, so the 1942 Beveridge Report became an intellectual underpinning for the next government, and the 1944 Butler education reforms (which survived 25 years broadly unchanged) remained with Butler's name. Butler was of course an arch-Appeaser. Churchill failed to read the change of mood which led to the dramatic result of the 1945 general election. He fought two more elections, and served a

further post-war term as Prime Minister, about which there is almost total agreement that he achieved little. Friendly critics point out his health (a near-fatal heart attack, and several strokes), while, others point out that it was unclear what he was even trying to achieve by staying in office (other than blocking Anthony Eden's route to power – Churchill remained correct in his assessment of Eden's failings).

The above account is not a hagiography, but instead asks the questions *when* did Churchill really matter, *why* did he matter, *how* did he make an impact and *with whom* did he collaborate to achieve that impact? Asking those questions does not diminish his status, but instead provides the framing and context to understand why we should remember him.

CHAPTER 9

The politics of poetry - stories, symbols, tweets and Trump

Joe Simpson

Introduction

We would like to give an illustration of how our framework helps us make sense of what many feel to be problematic; namely the rise of populism, and the way in which politics seems to increasingly focus on symbols, rather than on substantive change. Our argument is twofold. Firstly, arguing for novelty is a *misreading*; but secondly, our approach is more sense-making in understanding what is happening. First, let us consider the argument. The late Mario Cuomo, the three-term Democratic Governor of New York state, famously commented that politicians campaign in poetry, but must govern in prose. We will argue here that he was only half-right. Successful politicians must avoid being tripped up by the prose – that is part of the art of administration. An extreme example of this was summed up by Roy Jenkins about President Harry S. Truman:

> If Goering, when he heard the word culture, reached for his gun, Truman, when he heard the word problem, reached for a decision. The danger was

> that he would take one before he had heard the relevant evidence; the miracle was that he made so many wise ones.[1]

But to sustain leadership, politicians need to focus on their poetry, and the symbols which animate that poetry. Rather than the traditional stop/start nature of political campaigning we now have the interweaving of campaigning and administration. In effect, we have politicians who campaign *and* govern in prose. As an illustration of this, Donald Trump (a figure to whom we shall return) filed his papers for his re-nomination campaign on the day he was inaugurated as President; and whereas Presidents traditionally wait a couple of years into their term to formally begin re-election campaign events, Trump has held campaign rallies throughout his time in office.[2]

We shall secondly argue that in the way political leadership is undertaken, we have an increasing focus on symbolism. Any historic perspective on leadership quickly reveals the critical nature of symbolism. We have only to reflect on the importance of flags or ceremonies (such as coronations and awards ceremonies) to remember that importance. As an illustration, arguably the most famous picture of World War Two was that of the raising of the American flag by four U.S. soldiers at Iwo Jima. How that picture came about is a matter of some debate, but the debate around it illustrates the argument we will make. In our post-Enlightenment world, we sometimes assume that such symbolism is more an anthropological feature, important to understand in so-called "traditional" civilisations, but less relevant to our modern world. This is simply wrong.

Against that presumption, we will use a series of specific examples to illustrate how the interplay of verse and symbol remains critical to political life today. These illustrations will also bring out a second theme; which is to expose the rather uncritical way in which leadership is now often presumed to be A Good Thing ("We need real leadership to solve this problem", etc). Any historic perspective on leadership shows it to be problematic. Leaders can create harm as well as good, and so-called "successful" leaders are often quite complex individuals.

[1] Roy Jenkins, *Truman* (London: Collins, 1986), p. 203.
[2] 'President Trump Has Already Filed for Re-Election. That's Not Normal.' *The Week*, 27 January 2017.

The aftermath of the U.S. Civil War

My first illustration returns us to the aftermath of the American Civil War. The Civil War formally ended in 1865, with the surrender of the Confederate forces to the Union (although even that surrender was in stages, as different armies surrendered at different dates). The outcome was a clear-cut victory by the Union forces of the North. Indeed, from the summer of 1863 onwards, the Confederacy had been in continual defensive mode. Gettysburg may have been the most famous battle, but Grant's victory at Vicksburg was arguably the turning point in the whole war; not least because it led to Grant's elevation to commanding the whole Union army, and a united command under him.

However, if we take the long run, we have to conclude that the South (by which we mean the *white* South) won the story. The "lost cause" myth shaped the subsequent 150 years of American politics. The myth had a mixture of elements (the fight was about sustaining a "traditional" way of life, not slavery; about States' rights against a belligerent central state; and surrender having happened not because the Confederacy was defeated, but that it was overwhelmed by the massively greater numbers of Union soldiers). All three elements are untrue – yet they remain believed by large numbers of Americans. Even Joan Baez, that paragon of left-wing causes, has "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" as a key part of her repertoire.

When we look at how that myth was developed and sustained, we see the importance of symbols and stories. Critically, in the aftermath of the war, memorials replaced myths. In the decades following the war, veterans on both sides sustained memories, but it was in the South that a major effort went into memorials. Memorial Day was established as a public holiday to remember the dead; today, few Americans in the North remember the origins of this day, yet the statues and memorials in the South continue to this day. Indeed, the first such commemoration was organised by freed black slaves in Charleston, South Carolina. (As an aside, how those memorials came about is itself important. Virginia was the most-fought battleground in the war, with Washington D.C. at its northern edge, and Richmond, the Confederate capital in the south of the state. Carole Janney's account shows the critical importance of women in the development of Southern memorials).

It was not just statues that mattered, so did stories. *The Birth of a Nation* was one of the most important films in the evolution of cinema, as the first full-fledged epic, which used revolutionary filming and editing techniques to tell its story (Woodrow Wilson described watching it as being "like writing history with lightning") – it was also a deeply racist celebration of the Ku Klux Klan; whilst *Gone with the Wind* was the most successful novel (1936) and film (1939) of the inter-war

era. Margaret Mitchell's book became a worldwide phenomenon (In Germany alone it sold 300,000 copies), whilst the box office audience for the film exceeds 200 million (leaving aside television audiences).[3] Note that neither writer-producer-director D.W. Griffith nor novelist Margaret Mitchell were politicians.

Obama's Charleston speech

The long-term effect of the "lost cause" myth is the prelude to my second example. Dylann Roof was a 21-year-old white supremacist who gained notoriety in 2015, when he murdered nine African-Americans during a prayer service at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston in 2015. Charleston was not a random choice location (Roof did not live there, but in North Carolina). Charleston is in South Carolina, the first state to declare independence in 1860 (before Lincoln had even been inaugurated). Charleston Harbour was also where Fort Sumter was situated. It was at Fort Sumter that the first shots of the Civil War were fired. Roof wanted to start a race war.

However, my second illustration concerns not that horrible day, but nine days later, when President Obama came to that church to deliver his eulogy – a speech that even by Obama's high standards, was an exemplar. We want to highlight less what he said, but how he said it. The words were indeed powerful, but the cadence slightly different to many other great Obama speeches. The setting was a Southern black church (indeed one of the oldest black churches in the country). Obama was speaking more in the idiom of a Southern black pastor, flanked by Southern black pastors. He was thus aiming to do two things, both expressing righteous anger at what had happened – but also encouraging restraint.

Obama then started singing *Amazing Grace*. The hymn was composed by John Newton in 1779, but it has become an emblematic African-American spiritual. Indeed, Aretha Franklin's *Amazing Grace* is the best-selling black spiritual album ever. Spirituals in black history always had twin meanings: they were religious songs, but they also told of a better world, where black people could be free. *Amazing Grace* is not just a black spiritual, it has become one of the most famous folk songs. Indeed, one version by the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards became one of the most unlikely pop hits in the British charts in 1972. In choosing that song, Obama was again able to use poetry and symbolism to convey two messages in parallel. In the aftermath of the shooting, it really did look for a while as if change

[3] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Macmillan, 1936).

was possible. Nikki Haley was subsequently U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., but at the time was then the Republican Governor of South Carolina. One month after the shootings, Haley signed a Bill to authorise the removal of the Confederate flag from the flagpole on the grounds of the state Capitol (note that it had been standing there for 150 years, after the end of the Civil War). For a while, even more change might have been possible – until the next President announced "equidistance" when responding to a subsequent shooting.

The nature of support for the Nazis

Our third illustration covers an even darker era: the rise of the Nazis, and how Hitler used culture and symbolism in that rise. Of course, some might ask how you can even use the word "culture" in this context. Did not Himmler famously claim that whenever he heard the word "culture", he reached for his gun? Well, actually, he did not say it. (That was a line from a play in 1930s Germany). Of course, Hitler was an utterly despicable human being who never felt more comfortable than when in the company of thugs. But, in the language of Joe Nye, he knew how to combine "hard power" with "soft power". And he is an excellent case study in the "dark side" of leadership. Hitler's rise was based on very modern campaign strategies.

In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt criss-crossed the United States by train, but Hitler's presidential campaign was fought by air. It was by plane that he arrived (almost seeming to come out of the heavens) at Nuremburg for rallies, to sets designed by Albert Speer, and filmed by Leni Riefenstahl. The Nazis had a very clear idea about culture: which was to be inter-national, not international. The first Nazi exercise of power was at a state level, and they insisted on two ministries within the Brunswick state government's coalition. One was the Ministry of the Interior, which gave them control of the police ("hard power"), and the other was that of Education and Culture – the epitome of "soft power". It was as Minister of the Interior that Dietrich Klagges granted Hitler German citizenship in 1932, by making him a 'beamter', or state employee (thus allowing him to contest the German presidential election). Hitler abandoned the Catholic faith of his upbringing, but he held to the Jesuit maxim of getting to children when they were young. When the Nazis were in power, virtually every "proper" German boy was enrolled into the Hitler Youth (excluding Jews and other "undesirables", obviously). Rituals such as the "Heil Hitler" salute – something adapted from the Italian fascists – became mandatory.

The Nazi aim was, in Richard Evans's words, "mobilisation of the soul."[4] Or as Goebbels declared, "We hope that the day will come that nobody needs to talk about National Socialism anymore, since it has become the air that we breathe!"[5]

Otto Klemperer was one of the most important contemporary diarists of Nazi Germany, and he fortunately survived (hence we can read his account).[6] In his words, we should not think of the strategy as pure propaganda, "instead Nazism permeated the flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms and sentence structures, which were imposed on them in a million repetitions and taken on board mechanistically and unconsciously". Later, he wrote that "language systems are a way of seeing but also of not seeing."[7]

Mein Kampf is a terrible, badly-written book (and fortunately, therefore, it is mainly unread, even by those who bought it) – lengthy, repetitious, plodding. But as Michael Blain observes, the book is "organised round a metaphor of a medical diagnosis and cure, the religious rite of guilt and redemption, and the drama of murder-revenge". In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote "Our programme replaces the liberal idea of the individual and the Marxist concept of humanity with the people, a people defined by its blood and rooted in its soil". Note this is a language of metaphors, not of administrative prose.

The net result of this focus has been that we have to recognise that Hitler managed to obtain a very large amount of support within Germany. The Nazis never won a majority of the vote (36.8% was their highest poll in any free election), but it is likely that in at least the run-up to the war – and probably until at least 1942 – there remained large popular support for Hitler (who always outpolled support for the Nazis in general). That support reflected the way in which Hitler's continued focus on use of symbols, ceremony, rituals and language framed public discourse. From 1942, the Nazis began relying on threat much more generally (they had always used threat against opponents), but it is also true that for the last four years of the war, Hitler retreated from public life and spent virtually his whole time either at his bunker on the eastern front, or at his retreat in the Bavarian alps. Yet despite these prolonged absences from public view (which at least in part masked

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[4] Richard J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1933* (California: Sage, 1976).

[5] Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power: How the Nazis Won Over the Hearts and Minds of a Nation* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 183.

[6] Victor Klemperer, *I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, Volume I: 1933-41* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1998); Victor Klemperer, *To the Bitter End: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, Volume II: 1942-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999); Victor Klemperer, *The Lesser Evil: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, Volume III: 1945-1959* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003).

[7] Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich* (London: Athlone Press, 2000 [first pub. 1947]), pp. 15-16.

his failing health), his public support remained strong. The truth was that although he was instinctively happiest with "hard power", he was also most skilful at "soft power".

Ireland and Northern Ireland

Our fourth illustration concerns Ireland/Northern Ireland – an issue once again very much in the news as a new generation discovers just how entrenched some positions can be. One of the major challenges is that none of the current generation of British political leaders was in power when the Belfast Agreement was reached. That agreement was concluded in 1998, after nearly a decade of negotiation. When the deal was struck, Theresa May had been an MP for less than a year (previously, she had been a Councillor in Merton). Karen Bradley, the present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was not elected an MP until 2010. In 1998, she was a 28 year old tax manager with KPMG. Bradley has even admitted in *The House* magazine that until she became Secretary of State, she had not appreciated that most people in Northern Ireland voted differently, depending on their constitutional stance.[8]

One of the keys to the Good Friday Agreement was unblocking the hard-line Unionist position (best summarised in that phrase "Ulster Says 'No'!"), by the recognition of a language few Britons have ever heard of: Ulster Scots. What that was about was enabling the idea of a distinctive Protestant culture to flourish within Ireland, recognising that culture was not purely contained within Ireland (hence Scots) but was within Ireland (hence Ulster). Of course, there is a religious divide in Northern Ireland, but that divide is reinforced by a whole series of cultural and symbolic fissures. If you travel around the country, you will notice that Protestant communities helpfully fly flags (often Union flags, but also the red hand of the Ulster flag) to help tourists distinguish Protestant from Catholic areas. Music traditions vary: "Catholic" Irish music has the fiddle at centre stage, whilst pipes and drums feature more prominently in the Protestant tradition, as does marching (there is indeed a marching season). Then we come to sport.

Again, we have two distinct sporting traditions: the whole purpose of the Gaelic Athletic Association was to develop "native" sports against "British" sports. You were not allowed to participate in GAA sports if you dabbled in "foreign sports". In one famous incident, Douglas Hyde, then President of the Irish Republic, was forced to stand down as President of the GAA, despite a life-long commitment to Irish

[8] Sebastian Whale, 'Karen Bradley interview', *The House*, 6 September 2018.

culture. The reason given was because, as President of the Republic, he attended a home game in which the Irish team played football. Croagh Park, the home of GAA, refused any use for "foreign" sports until the early 2000s.

One sport continued to cross the national divide- which was Rugby. Originally a Protestant dominated game it simply did not acknowledge the creation of two states and over time evolved as the national sport (Football remains a two-country sport).

Then we come to language. For over 150 years, there has been a sustained attempt to revive/sustain the Irish language, yet the number of active Irish speakers has long been in decline. Every few years, the Republic gets a new minister responsible for the Gaeltacht, and normally his first announcement (and normally it is a male minister) is that he is going to improve his own command of Irish. The Gaeltacht areas are all in the rural far west of Ireland, while few Gaeltacht ministers have been.

At the time of writing, there are approximately 900 days since the Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed, and there is no obvious route to a new government being formed from that Assembly in the near future. The last Irish government broke down around the heating scandal (curiously underreported in Britain, but staggering in its scale). However, the issue which more than anything else has blocked talks is language recognition. The Belfast Agreement also referenced the Irish language. Sinn Fein's demand is for that to become a more meaningful recognition; in response, the DUP argue that more people speak Polish than they do Irish.

The debate is not one which some census count will solve (were it to show, say, that the Irish language was now the second language). Both sides recognise just how symbolic the dispute is, which is why there is no "administrative" solution available.

Donald Trump

Our final example concerns Donald Trump. Type "Donald Trump" into Google and you get 740 million entries. But "add poetry", and that reduces to 16 million – and those are mainly for "poetry" that mocks Trump, or which claim to be written appallingly, in a pastiche of Trump's style. However, that is a reminder that *you* might like good poetry, but most poetry is badly written (and fortunately, it is quickly forgotten and never published). We want to argue that we need to acknowledge Trump's skill in developing a new artform in political communication.

Trump did not invent Twitter, nor was he the first politician to use Twitter. But he has used Twitter more effectively than any other politician. (One of his embattled campaign managers, Paul Manafort, expressed astonishment at how effective Trump's Twitter account was at messaging, and he even tried to copy Trump's style

by setting up a personal Twitter account – though less successfully, since he didn't seem to realise that when he "followed" a Manhattan bondage club, it was publicly visible.) Let us consider some facts. Trump has 61 million followers. That is 27 million more than he had when he was a presidential candidate. In the last year, he has acquired 11 million more followers. Now of course some of those followers track him not out of sympathy, but as an "early warning" to discover what madness might next be in store (I, for one, now follow him for that reason). However, the vast majority of those followers are Trump sympathisers/supporters. It has been estimated that 90% of his core base now gets news about Trump directly from Trump.

Furthermore, there is an "art" form to Trumps tweets. Let me highlight three features. He gives certainty: there is no equivocation in his tweets. Arbitrary use of capital letters at least once is virtually mandatory. As common as capitals are exclamation marks! Certainty and simplicity are his hallmarks. The mixture of CAPITALS and !! make his tweets visually distinctive. Thirdly, he recognises the artistic value of repetition. Think of great television performers – they all have their trademark lines ("Nice to see you, to see you…", etc). For Trump, Hillary is always "CROOKED!!!". The mainstream media only peddle "FAKE NEWS!!!".

One of the seminal books in political communication is *Don't Think of an Elephant* by George Lakoff, subtitled *Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*.[9] Lakoff was a prominent cognitive linguist, who has subsequently applied his research to politics. He argues for the importance of metaphor – and the title of this book uses a metaphor to make the point. For over 140 years the elephant, has been a symbol of the Republican Party (chosen not by them, but by a political cartoonist, who also drew the donkey as the symbol for the Democrats). Lakoff's message to the Democrats was "Don't fight on the turf the Republicans want you to fight on." Trump's solution was to never let Hillary Clinton off the hook. Virtually every day of the campaign, he put that label around her neck. Even today, nearly two years on after the election, not a week goes by without him reminding his base of the "CROOKED HILLARY!" message. As for references to "FAKE NEWS", that is almost daily. Now if you were a President who was by the mainstream media on a daily basis of lying and being associated with dodgy people (and there have been other Presidents, from Warren Harding to Richard Nixon, who have been in that position), then getting your retaliation in first might seem a clever idea. Moreover, to repeat a phrase from Otto Klemperer, "language systems are a way of seeing, but also of

[9] George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant* by George Lakoff, subtitled *Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (New York: Chelsea Green, 2004).

not seeing". What Trump has been orchestrating is *the way in which his base sees and does not see*, decides what is and is not legitimate. This explains how easily his base just shrugs their shoulders at the umpteenth allegation against him, from malfeasance to treason. That many others see it differently, far from being a problem, is a way of reinforcing his base – because he has delegitimised those critics to his base

The lessons for leadership

We hope the above examples demonstrate the contemporary relevance of poetry and symbolism in the political process. But we think there are other messages contained in these examples, of which we want to highlight the following. In so doing, the framework we have outlined helps us draw out those lessons.

Historically, much of this was *mediated* – and what mattered was control of the mediators; so issues such as press ownership were critical. But the Trump illustration is revealing. It is true that Trump's initial recognition was due to him being a significant television personality (America's Alan Sugar); but Trump has now established direct communication with his fanbase, unmediated by anyone else. His advisers thought they could control/steer/restrain him, yet he has retreated to his bedroom and outmanoeuvred them all.

Reading the liberal press, it might be difficult to see any positives in leaders such as Trump. But we need to distinguish between moral positives and leadership skills. Unless we do so you, have to argue that millions of Americans are stupid and were somehow tricked. Admittedly, Trump won under the electoral college, not the popular vote – but he still garnered 63 million votes. Similarly, to go back to our even more reviled figure, Hitler never had a legitimate majority. The hard truth is that in both cases, their electoral campaigns were skilful. Their campaigns also moved the campaigning dial. In Hitler's case, his early learning was crucial to his rise, and his failure to continue to learn and develop contributed to his defeat. For Trump, time will tell, but certainly the evidence suggests that reflection is not his strong suit, and my personal bet would be that Trump will be the master of his own downfall, rather than anyone else masterminding it.

We have seen a slightly parallel development in British politics. In the 2015 general election, what caught many analysts by surprise was the sophistication of the Conservative Party's online campaign, where the targeting of paid-for message (particularly via Facebook) was particularly effective. This was heavily supported by Conservative investment in targeted online ads: the Conservatives spent £1.1 million on Facebook advertising, compared to Labour's total spend of £100,000.

Coming into the 2017 general election campaign, there was a presumption that was still the case. In fact, the opposite was the case, and Labour heavily outspent the Conservatives in targeted online advertising, and developed far more bespoke advertising. The Conservatives did not "unlearn" (they had much of the same campaign team in place as in 2015); but Labour leapfrogged them with a much more targeted person-to-person campaign, which remained "under the radar" until the very last minute.

A consistent problem for senior leaders is hubris, a belief in their own brilliance. Yet when we examine their rise, it is never the story of one person (much though they often try to convince themselves that was the case). Instead, we need to give more attention to the "We", the key players involved. This can too easily be assumed to be the top team (and indeed, one of the key workstreams of the Leadership Centre has been "top team" work. But as the "lost cause" example shows, informal players in the cultural sphere (such as D.W. Griffith or Margaret Mitchell) can be critical in moulding political opinion. Furthermore, the dynamic between those players is critical. Another way of describing the fall of Hitler was that he increasingly operated outside the group of players who had been critical to the rise of Nazism.

Our third construct is "Usness". That Usness is a social construct, not some law of physics. We also have to address the challenge that all creations of an "Us" create a "Them", often with horrible consequences (Hitler, Germans and Jews being the most horrific examples). The evolution of the "Us" is indeed in the world of poetics and symbols, and not the world of reports. A challenge for "Us" is that symbols often have historic associations, routed in narrower definitions of "Us". So, our challenge is either to adapt older symbols, or to develop new ones. An example of the former is the determined effort to detach the flag of St George from connotations of right-wing English nationalism and racism. A challenge for the second is the failure (so far) for any of the "Remain" enthusiasts to develop any positive symbolic reference to Europe. The Remain campaign was overwhelmingly fought as "Project Fear". Since the referendum, it has failed to change gear: the basic message remains that one day you will wake up and regret the economic consequences of what you did. (In fact, the polling tells us that most pro-Brexit voters voted to leave whilst suspecting there would be economic consequences of so doing, although not expecting to be personally affected by them to any great extent). To give an American example, Trump clearly articulated the desire to "Build a wall", but the Democrats never articulated the vision of the bridge. As for Trump, he has laid not one brick of the wall, and instead proposes a new trade treaty with

Mexico. The wall was a visual and verbal metaphor for safety. (Cambridge Analytica's message testing on building a wall showed that its main appeal in focus groups had less to do with keeping out Mexican immigrants, and more to do with the appeal of physically showing that America was separate and distinct from Mexico.)

Use of poetry and symbols is not the preserve of the top "leaders". Neither D.W. Griffith nor Margaret Mitchell was a politician. The women who were key to the development of the "lost cause" myth in Virginia did not even have the vote. But political and administrative leaders can use symbols for good. We will demonstrate this with perhaps the best optimistic illustration. On the 25 June 1995, South Africa won the Rugby World Cup. The final took place at Ellis Park in Johannesburg. The game that was played, the ground it was played on, and the Springboks who played there, were all symbols of apartheid. But the most memorable scene from that day was not of a white player, but of Nelson Mandela, the new President of South Africa. He went onto the field to congratulate the players while wearing the Springbok jersey, in a gesture of reconciliation. Symbols are not merely symbolic.

"I", "We", "Us"

Our final construct is the world in which I/We/Us all play out – the environment in which all of this plays out. Let us take Trump as an example. Recognising that Trump ran a skilful campaign does not mean that he would have succeeded in *any* election. There is one version of "What ifs" that can make the election sound unique ("If only Hillary had bothered to campaign in Wisconsin"; "If only her team had been more united/ less complacent"; "If only the email scandal had not been resurrected in the last week of the campaign", etc). There is equally a version which would analyse the result by looking at longer-term trends (the relative squeeze on white middle class (in U.K. terms, skilled working class) incomes, the increasing polarisation of the U.S.A. since 2008 etc). What is clear is that any one "simple" cause-and-effect explanation does not pass muster, hence the need for more of a systems lens.

There is a second lesson – social systems do not have a life divorced from the humans who occupy them. This is not to argue that social systems dissolve into the individual constituent parts, but that social systems are social created. Their effects can long outlive those who created them. The "lost cause" myth was created within a decade of the end of the Civil War, but its impact remains more than a century after the death of all its creators. But social systems remain social creations, and increasingly, those creations are the result of poetics and symbols. Public leadership involves the creation of new stories, new verses and new symbols.

CHAPTER 10

"And it's time, gentlemen, time!"

Joe Simpson

"Time, gentlemen, time" was the song with which Liam Clancy liked to conclude his concerts. Anyone who has ever frequented a rural Irish pub in the days before the garda (the Irish police force; literally, "The Guards") started to take the drink-driving laws more seriously, will know the distinction between the *official* closing time, and the time when the landlord would actually stop serving. In the jargon of social science, the latter was a "social construction." In this chapter, we will explore time in both senses: the formal sequence of events, and the social constructions of time – namely, history and the future.

So far, we have argued that to understand leadership, we need to focus on four different spheres (Me, We, Us and the Context(s) within which all this happens). Those four spheres influence (and are influenced by) each other – that evolution takes place *over time*.

To illustrate this, let us consider two leaders, Robert Mugabe and Nelson Mandela. Their careers developed in parallel. Mugabe was born in 1924, and was an active nationalist who was jailed in 1964, and spent 10 years in prison. Released in 1974, he became Prime Minister of Zimbabwe in 1980. Mandela was born six

years earlier in 1918. He was jailed in 1964, and imprisoned for 27 years. Released in 1990, he became President of South Africa in 1994.[1]

Looking back now, you will find few who would praise the former rather than the latter. Yet if you went back fifty years, we do not think you could have predicted how differently these two individuals would have evolved, and how differently they would have impacted.

Mugabe kept a very tight sense of a collective "We" (indeed, a diminishing sense of who constituted the "We".) He never extended the sense of "Us", and utterly failed in terms of personal governance. Having real power in the changed world of an independent Zimbabwe only exacerbated those controlling tendencies. Mandela, on the other hand, dealt with a changing "We" (think of his fallout with his then-wife over their growing political differences). He also demonstrated tremendous personal governance. But we want to focus on the different way he expanded the sense of "Usness".

More than any other sport, rugby was a game strongly associated with afrikaner culture. Indeed, you could almost describe it as the embodiment of that culture. Post-apartheid, South Africa hosted the third rugby world cup. In extra time Joel Stransky scored a drop goal to beat New Zealand. However even more dramatic than that was the performance of Mandela. He not only attended the match, he wore a Springboks jersey. The photo of his handshake with the Springboks captain Francis Pinaar was the ultimate symbol of his determination to create a new South Africa, embracing black and white. In Stransky's words "The Rugby World Cup in 1995 was much more than a rugby tournament to South Africa, it was a unifying process of a new democratic nation, which was assisted by a nation rallying round a rugby team and showing support collectively. Madiba (Nelson Mandela) was the man responsible for this by wearing a Bok jersey."

The above illustrates "real" time. Let us also consider the more social construction of time. Perhaps the most famous quote from William Faulkner is his line from Requiem for a Nun "the past is never dead. It is not even past".

The Cambridge historian Christopher Clark starts his book Time and Power with a wonderful phrase "As gravity bends light, so power bends time". Or, in the phrase of the system theorist Niklas Luhmann we focus on the historicities characteristic of cultures or regimes marked by "specific interpretations of what is temporally

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[1] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Little, Brown, 1994); Martin Meredith, *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

relevant". The French historian Fernand Braudel talked of short-terms disruptions (events) and longer-term continuities (epochs).

History books continue to be produced in great number. For books on recent history "new" facts can be the reason for them (say the release of state papers) but once we get beyond near contemporary history the reason for publication is not new facts but new interpretations- and in the main interpretations which have some relevance to today's challenges. As Clark points out power also comes into play, We examine the "lost cause" myth of the American south in some detail. Of course, the advocates of that myth tend to be white southerners not poor blacks.

Even what dates count is interpretation. If you consider politics in the Republic of Ireland the two main parties are Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. Since the very establishment of the state there has been essentially two dominant parties, with the dividing line being their stance in 1922 on (temporary) partition. Great grandchildren vote for one or other party because that's what their great grandparents did. Consider Northern Ireland, still (temporarily or otherwise) not part of the Republic here the dividing line reflects your view of 1916. Catholics remember the Easter Uprising. Protestants remember the staggering losses in the Somme. Now consider one simple consequence of those differing timelines. The Republican tradition still aspires to unification, but political organising of republicans has been through quite different routes north and south. The one party that now straddles the border is Sinn Fein, the party that refused to acknowledge partition.

A second , more generic historic fault line concerns a view of progress. Post the Enlightenment there has been a strong theme of progress in history, against which there has always been some kick back. Though an enlightenment idea it has been picked up by others such as social darwinists like Spencer, whilst Marxism has a dialectic version of progress. Today one of the leading advocates of this position would be the Harvard psychologist Stephen Pinker. Against him would be the philosopher John Gray. Neither Pinker nor Gray is lacking in the modesty stakes so we can let them look after themselves. Lets instead consider another progress advocate- Bismarck. "Man can neither create nor direct the stream of time. He saw himself as the boatman on the river of time (or the chessplayer).

Hugo Lerchenfeld-Kofering commented on his retirement

> "With Bismarck's departure, a lot changed...If before 19 March 1890 you set your clock to the Wilhelmsstrafse, you always new what time it was. With Bismarck's resignation, the normal time expired. There were many clocks now. They often went at different speeds, and you had to keep yours ears open in order to know how late it was."

Bismarck is more famous for his belief in the power of the state, and for him these two notions were intertwined (in a remarkable way therefore Bismarck had some similarities with Hegel who formulated both a theory of history and a theory of the state). Bismarck's framing continued beyond his retirement - you can see continuity all the way through until 1918 and the defeat of Germany. Francis Fukuyama is most famous for his use of one phrase "the end of history", a reference used to describe the end of the cold war. To be fair to Fukuyama he meant that not literally, but more in a Hegelian sense of the end of a particular history. One way of looking at the emergence of Nazism is that it exploited the ending of what had seemed a relentless rise by Germany. The Nazi thesis was about radical change. Here is Clark describing their cultural strategy "What is striking about the National Socialist museums is the sense that what had been accomplished was not merely a break with the immediate past, but the inauguration of a new kind of time". Grasping that the Nazis conceived of both a distant past (some nirvana of a German people) and some distant future (the recreation of that nirvana, but had no theory of the present explain quite why they were simultaneously ruthless but bureaucratically incompetent.

Hitler's pitch was not merely exploiting a historic faultline. It also involved rewriting history itself. The "stabbed in the back" thesis ignored what had happened throughout the war, and instead focused on rewriting the chronology of the last few weeks of the war, when he argued that a mix of leftists and Jews at home undermined an undefeated German army which was on the brink of victory.

Returning now to the "lost cause" myth, we see just how important memorials are in "creating" history. The Robert E. Lee statute in New Orleans was installed in 1884. This is how the *Daily Picayune* captured a mind-set of prevailing power: "We cannot ignore the fact that secession has been stigmatized as treason, and that the purest and bravest men in the South have been denounced as guilty of shameful crime. By every application of literature and art, we must show to all coming ages that with us, at least, there dwells no sense of guilt."

Let's roll forward to 11 May 2017 – one day short of the 152nd anniversary of the surrender of Jefferson Davis, when the Davis statute in New Orleans was pulled down. Six days later, P. G. T. Beauregard's statue came down, and then finally that of Lee. This was possible because of the actions of Mitch Landrieu, in his second term as Mayor of New Orleans. There was significant protest against this from non-recalcitrant white voters. Indeed, despite the Mayor being responsible for deciding literally billions of dollars of spending in the aftermath of the flooding after

Hurricane Catrina, he could not get one single company in the city to do any demolition work. Instead, the city had to pay well over the odds (because of the insurance and protection needs), to bring in a company from a different state to do the job.

"Time" also has a future sense – it's not just about history. Again, we have both *literal* sequences of time, and more socially-constructed time horizons. We do not have to be as sceptical as David Hume to know our limitations about knowing what will happen. A quote variously ascribed to people as different as the Danish physicist Niels Bohr and the American baseball player Yogi Berra is that "It is very hard to predict, especially the future".

It's not just that prediction is difficult. We don't all have the same time horizons, nor do we have the same outlooks. Earlier, we discussed values modes as a way of understanding people *beyond* their socio-economic classifications. Pioneers and Settlers have quite different perspectives from one another, not least about the future. Pioneers tend to be optimistic about the future, whilst Settlers tend to be more pessimistic. In the same chapter, we also discussed Grid and Group (or cultural theory) and the ideas of Mary Douglas (which in turn were an evolution of thinking by Emile Durkheim). The contrast between "hierarchies" and "enclaves" is quite startling. Hierarchies tend to conceive of the future as something that grows out of the past (so transition can be over a long timeline), whilst the more intense the enclave, the shorter their timeline.

For Douglas and her followers, no one organisational form is "correct", and the danger therefore is for one organisational form to dominate. Talking about the future, Bill Sharp likes to describe "three horizons" for "the patterning of hope". The hierarchist framing is quite managerial, the individualist framing is quite entrepreneurial, whilst the enclave framing is visionary and aspirational. Sharp does not reference Douglas, and he makes no mention of her fourth type, "isolates". Isolates are of course, at base, pragmatists. They even have their own song to summarise their position:

> Que será, será,
> Whatever will be will be,
> The future's not ours to see,
> Que será, será,
> What will be, will be.[2]

[2] Jay Livingston and Ray Evans, 'Que Sera Sera' (1956), popularised by Doris Day.

Let us consider how the future plays out in public policy. When asked what worried him the most, the late famously Harold Macmillan replied "events dear boy, events". Or to use the more inelegant phrase of Donald Rumsfeld, the then-Secretary of Defense in the USA, "Stuff happens."

Macmillan had been a pretty popular Prime Minister, easily winning the Conservatives a third term in 1959. Like most Prime Ministers, he discovered that the longer you remain in power, the unluckier you get. (And luck was the asset that Napoleon most wanted in his generals.) In fact, the two events which brought Macmillan down were not predictable. The Profumo Affair helped set the mood music of an out-of-touch leadership. In truth, Macmillan was the least likely person to tackle extra-marital affairs among Conservative politicians – his own private life was complicated, with his wife conducting a blatant decades-long affair with Tory MP Bob Boothby, until her death. The immediate cause of Macmillan's resignation was an unduly pessimistic medical assessment, misdiagnosing stomach problems as terminal cancer. Macmillan resigned in October 1963, firmly believing he was on the brink of death – and spend the next 23 years of his life bitterly regretting that decision.

The more analytical way of considering events is through the concept of the "Overton window." Joe Overton spent much of his life working in think tanks. The Overton window was his reference to the window of opportunity. What he was distinguishing was the distinction between what a politician might privately like to happen, and what was possible, what was acceptable space in a more public sense.

Above, we referred to New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu. The destruction of the confederate monuments followed such an "Overton window "opportunity. In 2015, the terrible murders in a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, produced the opposite response to that which the murderer intended – Dylan Roof hoped he might start a wave of violence by white Americans against black Americans. Instead, Dylan Roof provoked a backlash. In South Carolina, the then-Governor, a pretty seasoned Republican, Nikki Haley, removed the confederate flag from the state grounds, and shortly afterwards Landrieu was emboldened to act in New Orleans.

A Bad Time in Vietnam (and elsewhere)

To illustrate the temporal dimension in our approach, let us consider the example of the Vietnam War. It is now pretty universally seen as one of the greatest errors in the history of American foreign policy. Many of the contemporary critiques were emotionally charged, either in anger, or in attempted defence of the war. However,

50 years on, we can perhaps look more dispassionately to answer the question of why it happened. In the last year alone, we have had three robust new analyses. Max Hastings has written a classic military history.[3] More revealing is *Road to Disaster* by Brian VanDeMark. This could be summarised as American military historian meets Daniel Kahneman, drawing on all the behavioural insights which Kahneman and others have brought to light in the last thirty years.[4] Meanwhile, documentary maker Ken Burns has produced 18 hours of insight, through his densely informative Vietnam War series.[5]

Sticking with our four-dimensional model, we start with Lyndon B. Johnson. LBJ was not the only American president involved in the war. Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon and Ford all played significant roles. But Johnson has become almost defined by his involvement, due to the biggest escalations having happened during his presidency. As an individual he, was a complex character to say the least. The one thing we can say with certainty about him is that he is not in line for sainthood any time soon. Robert Caro's (still unfinished) four-volume biography is likely to be not only the definitive biography of Johnson, but perhaps the definitive example of biographical writing.[6] His four volumes run to over 3,000 pages, and have still only touched the first nine months of his presidency. If (and when) Caro finishes, we may get his definitive view of the character (though most readers of the work so far sense a growing dislike emerging). Johnson was ruthless, politically amoral, a bully with a chip on his shoulder, but also somewhat self pitying. However he also achieved a lot. An avowed New Dealer he became the supreme master of the senate. Most importantly a white southerner, quite happy to use pretty crude language, he drove through the civil rights legislation (legislation that would have almost certainly stalled had Kennedy remained alive.

Johnson's focus was never foreign policy. His achievements and interests were in domestic policy, and winning elections. As Vice President, he had been kept pretty much out of the loop on Kennedy's big foreign policy decisions. To illustrate this, let us consider Brian VanDeMark's account. His *Road to Disaster* starts with a detailed account of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and then the Cuban Missile Crisis. Johnson merits one passing, insignificant, mention in that account of those two

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[3] Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War, 1945-1975* (London: Collins, 2018).

[4] Brian VanDeMark, *Road to Disaster: A New History of America's Descent into Vietnam* (New York: Custom House, 2018).

[5] The Vietnam War (1990), dir. Ken Burns.

[6] Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, Book One: The Path to Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, Book Two: Means of Ascent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, Book Three: Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, Book Four: The Passage of Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

episodes.[7] Or take *Explaining Political Judgement* by Perri 6, 6 uses the Cuban Missile Crisis to test the Durkheim/Douglas "grid and group framework". Only two of the mentions of Johnson refer to the crisis, one of which lists him lower down on a list of less important members of ExComm (the Executive Committee of the National Security Council).[8] Or if we consult the declassified audio recordings of ExComm's meetings during the Cuban Missile Crisis, we find that Johnson was an infrequent contributor to the discussions he attended, said little of substance, and what he did say (such as advocating a pre-emptive air strike rather than a blockade) tended to be over-ruled by more dominant personalities like Robert F. Kennedy and Robert McNamara.[9] We stress Johnson's unimportance here for two reasons.

Firstly, it underlines that Johnson was not foreign affairs focused. But secondly, it draw a contrast with Kennedy, whose 1960 presidential campaign stressed foreign policy. One of the great "what ifs" is what Kennedy would have done about Vietnam had he lived. One of the most popular "conspiracy theories" about JFK was indeed that he was killed because he intended to withdraw from Vietnam. That conspiracy theory is – like most conspiracy theories – pure bunkum, but Kennedy had learned one great lesson from Bay of Pigs fiasco, that he might have applied had he lived: Reflecting on the planning of the invasion, Kennedy realised he was basically duped by his advisers. In that case, it was the CIA who confidently assured him of success, based on no evidence bar some wishful thinking. This led Kennedy to embrace a far-fetched plan that landing a handful of Cuban exiles would prompt a mass uprising, and that any American role would be plausibly deniable. All of this turned out to be wrong. From that, Kennedy learned to not presume that his military advisers were always sound, and he learned the importance of questioning their assumptions. His handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis has become one of the most examined examples of leadership. The October 1962 Kennedy was a much more rounded character than the May 1961 version – as a direct result of lessons learned from the Bay of Pigs. The tragedy for Johnson was that his learning journey started later, and it took longer.

Johnson's style was to "own" problems he wanted to solve. He would then bully, cajole, and entice support to get things done – the "Johnson Treatment" was legendary in Washington D.C. in how it could overwhelm a subject through a

[7] Brian VanDeMark, *Road to Disaster: A New History of America's Descent into Vietnam* (New York: Custom House, 2018).

[8] Perri 6, E*xplaining Political Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[9] See the transcripts contained in Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997).

combination of bribery, bullying and flattery. An avowed "fixer", Johnson had little time for niceties. His approach was literally "hands-on", using his physical presence to great effect, as he towered over legislators, arms wrapped around them, deep in negotiation. Of course, all those attributes that he had learned in thirty years as a legislator did not translate well, when dealing with people 13,000 kilometres away.

Despite his great accomplishments around civil rights, Johnson was no "bleeding heart" liberal. He had the typical attitudes of a cold warrior. He inherited the Vietnam agenda, and showed no sign of reconsidering American involvement when he became President. But when you follow his course of action, two constant issues vied for his attention with what was happening in Vietnam.

Firstly, Johnson was relentlessly focused on elections. He had lost one election in 1940, and he never intended to lose another one. How Johnson rectified that loss in winning his Senate seat in 1948 is well documented. The "discovery" of 200 "lost" votes in Alice Texas (Box 13) swung the seat. One his great phrases was learning to count was the first rule in politics. So in framing his strategy in Vietnam, Johnson endlessly focused on not being outflanked by the Republicans in domestic politics.

His second outside focus was on his "Big Society" agenda, and on making sure that was not derailed. Lots of key decisions in Vietnam were taken in secrecy, in case the full cost of the war (and the consequent inflation) might threaten congressional funding for his domestic agenda. So whereas Johnson liked to "own" an agenda, increasingly the Vietnam agenda owned Johnson. In our terminology, Johnson lacked the "personal governance" to rise to the challenge. VanDeMark gives a brilliant example of this from 1967 – about to board Air Force One, a soldier told him "Your plane is ready Mr President", and Johnson replied, "Son, they are all my planes. It is all mine. It is my war. I am the one they are fighting against, and I am going to beat the hell out of them before we are through" He then asserted, "By God, they can't do this to Lyndon Johnson!"

The tragedy for Johnson was that having made the error in the initial strategy, he kept compounding the error. Only by making the decision not to run for another term, in March 1968, was Johnson able to pull back and get some perspective. By then, he was running against the clock with time running out, and an election only months away. His credibility at home already shot by Vietnam, he added to his woes, by becoming a "lame duck", in the final months of a presidential term.

Let us consider the "We" dimension in all of this. One of the most famous books about the war was David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* (1972) – a term which was meant unflatteringly about the key advisers whose "brilliant policies

defied common sense." However, they literally were the brightest people of their generation. The people initially assembled by Kennedy, but in the main retained by Johnson, had glittering CVs: people like Robert McNamara, who had been the first non-family President of Ford Motor Company, and McGeorge Bundy, who still today remains the youngest ever Dean of Harvard University.

Contrast their education with Johnson. He was taught in a one-room schoolhouse just outside Stonewall Texas. The height of his academic career was South West Texas State College. When he signed the elementary and secondary education act in April 1965, he was accompanied by his school teacher Kate Deadrich Honey. As you can imagine, Johnson was slightly in awe of his advisers. His erstwhile mentor, House Speaker Sam Rayburn less so – he commented, "Well Lyndon, you may be right and they may be as intelligent as you say, but I'd feel a whole lot better about them if they had run for sheriff once."

According to much modern leadership theory, Johnson did everything right. He had real talent assembled around him, he more or less trusted them, and they had developed a shared vision as to what they should do. The problem was they still suffered from the development of "group think". Now let us bring the temporal dimension into play: First there was the gradual creep into further engagement. As Robert McNamara was later to lament "there is no piece of paper-no record-showing when we changed from an advisory effort to a combat role in Vietnam". The problem with this mission creep was that In Kahneman language "loss aversion" became more and more into play.

The second time point is about the time frames within which decisions are made. Thaler and Dunstein note "The picture that emerges is one of busy people trying to cope in a complex world in which they cannot afford to think deeply about every choice they have to make…Because they are busy and have limited attention, they accept questions as posed rather than trying to determine whether their answers would vary under alternative formulations".

VanDeMark quotes the comments of a junior official during the Cuban Missile Crisis: "During the Cuban missile crisis I was a member of two of the working groups under the ExComm. One was the short-range group, which toward the end of the crisis was working on invasion plans two or three days away. The other, the long- range planning group, looked two weeks ahead. I used to say, when I mentioned the name of that group, that two weeks was 'long-range' for our normal operations, not only for crises, and that wasn't a joke". VanDeMark then comments:

> Preoccupation with the problem of the moment can overtake and overshadow everything else, kicking in bounded rationality and creating pressures that inhabit thinking through the consequences of decisions and engaging in a careful exploration and thorough assessment of alternatives. This tendency to maintain operating procedures impeded...viewing each troop decision as part of a larger, failing pattern and led to an outcome that they never anticipated: the commitment of more than half a million American troops by early 1968 with no end to the war in sight.[10]

But this tripping into major military engagement had a third temporal effect. Once there were major troop commitments in Vietnam, the balance of power amongst the "We" gradually shifted. As Secretary of Defense, McNamara had vigorously asserted civilian control over the military. But with troops fighting (and dying) in large numbers, the discussion shifted to a question of how many more troops were necessary (a loaded question, to which the answer always "More!"). The military culture was strong, but in the words of Alvesson and Spicer "where there is a 'strong' culture there is also likely to be a strong tendency for people to think in homogeneous ways. Culture does the thinking for them. It can give them a sense of integration and direction, but also trap them in set ways of understanding the world."[11] Later, we will return to an even more unfortunate consequence of this shift.

As the numbers of deaths increased, so did the protests. Extending the draft also mobilised people – particularly when exemption for students stopped, and so the disproportionately middle-class students found themselves being drafted. Most of the early fighting had been done by poor and working-class soldiers. African-Americans represented 11% of the population, but 16% of draftees, and 22% of combat troops in Vietnam – while only being 2% of the officer corps. But Johnson was more worried about taking flak from the political right than the political left. Through 1968, he also faced criticism within the Democratic Party. Senator Eugene McCarthy had challenged him for the party's nomination ahead of the 1968 election. McCarthy's vote share in the New Hampshire Primary grabbed attention,

[10] Brian VanDeMark, *Road to Disaster*: *A New History of America's Descent into Vietnam* (New York: Custom House, 2018), p. 428.
[11] Mats Alvesson and André Spicer, 'A Theory of Stupidity in Organizations', *Journal of Management Studies*, 49:7 (November 2012), pp. 1194–1220.

though Johnson regarded his erstwhile senate colleague as a dilettante. A more serious challenger was Senator Robert F. Kennedy – Kennedy and Johnson loathed one another, with a years-old personal animosity. Expecting Johnson to be persuaded by Kennedy would have been like expecting Jeremy Corbyn to be persuaded by Tony Blair. This, then, formed the political backdrop vying for Johnson's attention while he tried to fight the Vietnam War.

In understanding Johnson's slow (indeed, *very* slow) understanding that things were not working in Vietnam, we should focus on McNamara. At the outset, McNamara essentially thought the war could be won by better spreadsheet analysis. Gradually, he came to realise he was wrong. McNamara eventually left office in 1968, to head up the World Bank. But his actions just before his departure remain a brilliant illustration of the "opposer" move (in Kantor terms); and in that move we saw the first signs of Johnson having started to reassess (or at least, to have started to contemplate reassessing what should happen).

Next let's consider "Us" (and "Them"), and let us set the context. With the Cold War at its height, Eisenhower had famously articulated the domino theory, which held that if one state was "knocked over" to communism, the next state would quickly follow, like a row of dominoes. American support for South Vietnam was not based on any great liking of its leading figures. American governments allowed the removal of one leader for procrastination (though Kennedy was shocked to discover that allowing a takeover in a country like South Vietnam meant tolerating assignation). Ngo Dinh Diem's successors were hardly much better. Nguyen Cao Ky told a reporter, "People ask who my heroes are. I have only one: Hitler. I admire Hitler because he pulled his country together. But the situation is so desperate now that one man would not be enough. We need four or five Hitlers in Vietnam."[12] For the Americans, their enemy's enemy was their friend- so they tolerated him, and thousands like him. South Vietnam's institutions were corrupt, including its army and government. For them, the U.S.A. was a godsend, not so much for the protection afforded, but for the amount of money coming into Vietnam. At one stage, the Americans were pouring in $750 million a week, not all of which was being spent in ways that the Americans had envisaged.[13]

[12] Edward S. Herman, *Beyond Hypocrisy: Decoding the News in an Age of Propaganda* (New York: South End Press, 1993), p. 216.
[13] For instance, Paul Theroux's novel *Saint Jack* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1973) satirises the way that part of the American military budget was spent on American-run brothels for troops serving in Vietnam.

There were two further problems. Firstly, in showing a high level of racism, the Americans expected little more from their apparatchiks; but equally, the Americans failed to engage in any 'hearts and minds' exercises with the wider population. That wider population could see the level of corruption, and as time went, popular support for American intervention among the South Vietnamese nosedived.

Secondly, the American presumed that the North Vietnamese saw the conflict in the same "Us/Them" terms. So the military strategy of the Johnson administration was basically to keep raising the stakes until the North Vietnamese blinked. Bombing of North Vietnam was meant to destroy supply lines, and undermine their will. (Johnson resisted a full invasion of North Vietnam, not least because he feared Chinese retaliation, in an echo of the Chinese military intervention which had decisively swayed the early part of the Korean War a decade earlier.)

What the American never properly examined was what were the real, underlying motives of the North Vietnamese. Of course it was a communist regime, and of course it was being supplied by China and Russia. But any proper examination of Vietnamese history would have told a different story, that had more to it than that. Vietnam's very identity was framed in opposition to "The Outsider." Since World War II, that had meant opposition to the French, and then the Americans. But in the longer view of history, Vietnam's most consistent enemy was its northern neighbour, China. In formulating their Vietnam goals and policy, the Americans would have done well to memorise a Vietnamese proverb :"Vietnam is too close to China, too far from heaven."[14]

So bad was American intelligence on the state of North Vietnam, that the Americans thought Ho Chi Minh was the key player. In the peace talks in 1954, he had blinked, and so they thought he would do so again. In fact, by 1963 he had been effectively sidelined by the more hardline Lê Duẩn, who felt Ho had compromised too much, not only in 1954 but also back in 1946. Critically, Lê Duẩn was a southerner. For him, 'blinking' would have meant repudiating the land of his birth. We will return to this later, but let us now consider the fourth dimension we have set out – the worlds and world views within which the conflict took place.

In the 1960s, the U.S.A. was by far the world's richest economy, enjoying riches and resources unparalleled anywhere in the world. Vietnam (both North and South) was, by contrast, still essentially an agrarian economy, with most people living

[14] James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945-1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 2.

rural lives. There was little technological sophistication, and its economies were very underdeveloped.

Now let us consider the military world views. For the Americans, "Year Zero" was 1941, when the country had been forced – by an unprovoked attack – to abandon isolationism. By the 1960s, their "world view" was what they had learned from World War II, particularly what they learned from the European theatre of that war, which (unlike the bloody war of attrition in the Pacific, had resulted in a comprehensive, unambiguous victory). The "lesson" they learned from that theatre of war was that "Superior Firepower + Superior Manpower = Victory". Within three years, U.S. military manpower had grown over 10 times, to over half a million – but even more emphasis was placed on firepower. Indeed, General William Westmoreland, the US military commander in Vietnam for most of Johnson's presidency, when asked at a press conference how to fight the insurgency, replied with just one word: "Firepower." Westmoreland had served in combat command during World War II. His predecessor in Vietnam, General Haskins, had been a protégé of General George S. Patton, serving as deputy chief of staff of the US Third Army. The senior generals in Vietnam were thus all deeply steeped in the combat tactics and lessons learned in the European war. Haskins's operations officer was Lt General William DePuy. He commented: "The solution in Vietnam is more bombs, more shells, more napalm till the other side cracks and gives up."[15]

This firepower/manpower mindset so dominated their thinking that at every turn, their answer to any difficulty was "More." The logistical consumption was astronomical – more than 600,000 tons of supplies were imported every month. The ratio of support to command troops was seven-to-one. During Johnson's presidency, twice as many bombs were dropped on North Vietnam as were dropped on the Germans in World War II. (By Nixon's presidency, as many bombs would be dropped on Vietnam in a few days, as fell on Germany throughout the whole war.) In autumn 1967, McNamara, ever a numbers man, was calculating the latest ammunition request and responded, "Let's see. That would be 2,000 rounds for every enemy infiltrator. That oughta be enough." He then shuddered and wept.

The American military world view discounted the experience of the French losing their war in Vietnam, and so they viewed the French as a spent world power. They equally failed to learn from the experience of the British, and their disastrous counter-insurgency strategy in Malaysia in the 1950s. Most importantly, they

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[15] Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (New York: Penguin, 2015), p. 138.

failed to understand the North Vietnamese strategy. For the North Vietnamese, their learning had started in World War II but crystalised during the fight with the French. Put simply, it was that if your opponent has superior firepower, you shouldn't fight on his terms. Their strategy was one of seeking small victories, through guerrilla warfare, until a stalemate had been reached. They were prepared to lose ground rather than lose men. Only *then* would they go for victory. Against the French, that strategy culminated in Dien Bien Phu.

For the Americans, the strategies and tactics that had proved so successful against Nazi Germany proved utterly irrelevant in Vietnam. Nazi Germany had been a developed, urbanised industrial-military power, with fixed targets centred across its big cities. Brute force could be successfully used to destroy those targets. In Vietnam, a shifting, decentralised, agrarian enemy which disappeared into the jungle meant that "brute force" simply resulted in napalming and carpet-bombing empty hillsides, all the while U.S. forces were picked off by guerrillas, one by one.

Unlike the French, the Americans had much more resources to call upon, including much more manpower and firepower, so the 1968 equivalent of 1954 (the Tet offensive) was a psychological "win" – but it involved catastrophic loses for the Viet Cong.

Now let's see how this evolved over time. The Americans went on endless sorties, to try and "take out" the enemy, ratcheting up a seemingly impressive list of figures. In the last half of 1966 alone, Westmoreland committed 95% of his resources to "search and destroy" operations. But only 5% of the time did the forces have any reasonably accurate knowledge of enemy positions. So they did a lot of searching and a lot of destroying, but very little finding along the way.

70 tons of bombs were dropped for every square mile of South Vietnam – the equivalent of 500 pounds of explosives for every man, woman and child. The airforce eventually dropped nearly 7 million tons of bombs, three times the tonnage dropped in all theatres in the Second World War. But because the North Vietnamese/ Vietcong were not fighting by conventional rules, and because the country was so rural, the North Vietnamese calculated that only on 0.19% of the time did the Americans hit a target.

Over time, the consequences of this were considerable – but not in the way the Americans had intended. All this firepower caused other forms of destruction. It led to a massive refugee problem. By 1971, the urban population of South Vietnam had more than doubled, from 21% to 43%. The chances of a self-sustaining economy were destroyed, and instead we saw the growth of other sectors such as prostitution, as poor women fled into towns with no other livelihood available. One study

estimated "that over 500 civilians experience crop loss for every ton of rice denied the V[iet]C[ong]."[16] Defoliation eventually stripped an area the size of Massachusetts of all vegetation.

The American thus created the perfect spiral. Their use of firepower destroyed the South Vietnamese economy and killed many civilians, whilst leaving the Vietcong intact. This alienated the local population, which made it easier for the Vietcong to avoid detection and instead to plant boobytraps, which led the U.S. into greater use of firepower. A U.S. marine captured this process perfectly when he commentated, "Their homes had been wrecked, their children killed, their rice confiscated – and if they weren't pro-Vietcong before we got there, they sure as hell were by the time we left."[17]

The aftermath

The election of Richard Nixon as president in 1968 prolonged the war for a further five years, before the Americans finally began to withdraw. The capitulation of South Vietnam followed within two years. Shortly afterwards, there was the flight of the Vietnamese boat people. Here in Britain, we helped 50,000 refugees resettle. Joe had just started work after university, and his organisation was one of those funded by government to help with the resettlement. (What a contrast with our response to the present-day Syrian crisis.) What they did not focus on was who these refugees were, other than their being from Vietnam. In fact, the majority of these refugees were Hua – Vietnamese people originally of Chinese descent. In Amy Chua's phrase, the Hua were a "market- dominant minority" – the Hua controlled over 80% of Vietnamese industry.[18] This phenomenon occurred in many developing countries, where one group disproportionately dominated the market economy (for example, Indians across East Africa, particularly in Uganda before the 1970s). The reaction against them was not a purely Marxist retaliation, but had strong ethnic overtones.

As noted, Vietnamese identity was almost defined by opposition to Chinese identity. The Chinese conquered Vietnam in 111BC. Vietnam won its independence in 938AD, but relations hardly improved in the next century. Instead, there were a number of David-and-Goliath reruns (with David winning rather a lot). This enmity was postponed rather than forgotten once first the French then the Americans

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[16] Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 212.
[17] Laura Lam, *Late Blossom: Memories of Life, Loss and Love in Viet Nam* (New York: Hesperides, 2007), p. 86.
[18] Amy Chua, *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations* (London: Penguin, 2018).

arrived – but it returned once they left. Indeed, by 1979, China and Vietnam were briefly at war. By 1980, 70% of the Hoa population (which had peaked at 200,000) had fled.

The Fog of War is a brilliant documentary by Errol Morris (curiously also the author of a full-frontal assault on Thomas Kuhn of paradigm fame; the book is called *The Ashtray*, in memory of the ashtray chucked at Morris by Kuhn in the middle of an argument).[19] The documentary is essentially a 107-minute edit of 20 hours of Morris's interviews with McNamara. In it, McNamara recounts his 1995 meeting with the foreign minister of North Vietnam "Mr McNamara, you must never have read a history book. If you had you'd know we weren't pawns of the Chinese...Don't you understand that we have been fighting the Chinese for a thousand years? We were fighting for our independence. And we would fight to the last man…And no amount of bombing, no amount of US pressure would ever have stopped us."[20] When Ho Chi Minh was at the height of his powers in the fight against the French, one of his team suggested turning to China for support. Ho replied "You fools! …Don't you remember your history? The last time the Chinese came, they stayed a thousand years…I prefer to sniff French shit for five years than eat Chinese shit for the rest of my life."[21]

It wasn't just that the Americans wrongly read this "Us/Them" dynamic, such was the level of racism in senior staff, that even if they were able to comprehend this, they would fail to distinguish the Vietnamese from the Chinese.

Beyond Vietnam

One of the constraints that bore down on President Lyndon Johnson was that no American President had ever lost a war; and Johnson was determined to escape that fate as well. After the withdrawal of American troops, the U.S. Army had to work out what it meant. The lesson they decided to draw was not that they had lost, but that they should stick to what they always won, which was to fighting conventional wars.

The next big conventional war the Americans fought was the First Gulf War of 1990-1 (Operation Desert Storm). General Colin Powell was the Commander of US Army Forces Command, having earned his stripes doing two tours in Vietnam. The Gulf military campaign was a complete success. But having driven Saddam Hussein

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[19] *The Fog of War* (2003), dir. Errol Morris; Errol Morris, *The Ashtray: (Or the Man Who Denied Reality)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).
[20] *The Fog of War* (2003), dir. Errol Morris.
[21] Gary Donaldson, *America at War since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf War* (New York: Praeger, 1996), p. 112.

back within his borders, no attempt at regime change was implemented. In other words, the post-Vietnam "world view" prevailed, and American forces did not strive to do anything more than pursue a conventional campaign.

Powell was then Secretary of State for the Second Gulf War, in which he was continuously more cautious than many of his colleagues. Because that war involved invasion from the outset, "regime change" was an integral part of the project's overall goals. The military exercise ("shock and awe") was completed quickly, swiftly followed by the infamous George W. Bush aircraft carrier photoshoot in front of a banner declaring "mission accomplished."

Only afterwards did it become clear that, still within their post-Vietnam "world view", the Americans had no idea what to do next – with all the disastrous consequences that followed.

Afghanistan

A further example is Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of December 1979 came as a complete surprise – not even the most hawkish of American foreign policy analysts had predicted Afghanistan as a likely target for sudden Soviet expansionism. During the Soviet invasion, the Americans helped to finance local resistance. The Russians and their local allies controlled the towns, while the rebels stayed in the mountains and countryside. The Mujahideen were nationalists, but were almost more fundamental in their religion. They also attracted other Arab volunteers (most notoriously, Osama bin Laden). However, for the Americans the "Us/Them" divide was about Russia.

The Russians followed a long line of invaders of Afghanistan who discovered that occupying the country was not such a clever idea and withdrew. In due course, after many bloody twists and turns, the Taliban emerged in control, and gave support to Al Qaeda. After 9/11, an American invasion became inevitable, and the Americans eventually secured the cities and installed a government – and we saw a rerun of the 1980s, with rebels controlling the countryside. By this time, you would have thought that some rethinking of the military "world view" might have been forthcoming.

In fact, such a rethinking began to emerge. How this happened is well described by Fred Kaplan in *The Insurgents*.[22] Key to this rethinking was a book by a comparative outsider: John Nagl was a New Zealander and a military attaché. His book subtitled *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* is a classic. The title comes from

[22] Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Shcuster, 2012)

a line in T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* about the experience of waging war on insurgents – in his case, drawing on his experience of mobilising Arab resistance to the Ottoman Empire in World War I.[23] Nagl's book itself drew much more on British experience of counterinsurgency in Malaysia, as well as attempting to describe the Vietnamese experience differently. As the title suggests, counterinsurgency is both messy and time-consuming.

One of those who read the book was Stan McChrystal. McChrystal rose to become Commander of US and ISAF Forces in Afghanistan until extremely ill-advised comments in a *Rolling Stone* magazine interview led to his resignation. McChrystal had been a pretty tough soldier, scarcely known for softness. But through his stints in Afghanistan, he increasingly recognised the need for a different approach. His book *Team of Teams* (a play on *Team of Rivals*, the book on Obama's cabinet by Doris Kearns Goodwin) documents that approach.[24] Broadly you could describe his approach as using a systemic lens.

Back to Kaplan, he entitled his book *The Insurgents*, because that was the approach McChrystal and others had to use. The pre-existing "world view" was so pervasive that any full-scale, frontal assault would fail. Intellectually, McChrystal and colleagues applied the lessons they had learned from real insurgents, to attempt a change of the U.S. military strategy.

Now we know that this change was not totally successful. McChrystal's retirement did not help. Equally applying Nagl's second finding (that changing one's outlook takes a long time) did not fit with other expectations. But there was a further challenge. Our insurgents knew that dealing with the enemy was complex and messy (Nagl's first finding). What they came to recognise was that dealing with "friends" could be even more complex Steve Coll's book *Directorate S* deals with America's secret wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[25] Directorate S was part of the Pakistani intelligence service. For Pakistan, "Us and Them" involved much more complex relationships with radical Islam, as well as the perennial tension with India. Suffice to say Directorate S turned out to be more duplicitous than anything the Americans could frame. (Something most dramatically illustrated when U.S. forces violated Pakistani airspace to carry out the killing of Osama bin Laden, without notifying the Pakistani authorities first – something they deemed would have resulted in bin Laden being tipped off "within seconds". Even now, eight

[23] John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 2002).
[24] Stan McChrystal, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Portfolio, 2015).
[25] Steve Coll, *Directorate S.: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001-2016* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

years on and after a change in government, Pakistan's government still has yet to fully respond to questions of which parts of the Pakistani military and/or state may have known about bin Laden's whereabouts.)

Part of any different strategy for Afghanistan necessarily involved eventually establishing contact with the Taliban. In other words, recognising them as nationalists, and not just dismissing them as Islamic fundamentalists. The American challenge was that the Afghan government was of course not in favour, particularly if they were "out of the loop." Being "out of the loop" was of course a Taliban precondition. The solution to this impasse was for the Germans to convene future dialogues.

This way, the Americans could say to the Afghan government that they had not initiated contact. When the meetings eventually happened, the Taliban started with some rather ritualistic grandstanding. They denounced the Americans for being perfidious, untrustworthy people, then they turned to the German ambassador, who grew increasingly red-faced when they explained they had always found the Germans trustworthy and that he should remember that they had stuck with Hitler to the very end!

Bringing the temporal dimension into our frame creates a truly systemic way of looking at how we tackle problems. It reminds us of how poor our predictive powers are – particularly when we have a number of players with different histories, different ways of looking at "Usness", and different "world views." It is also a reminder of how we can be overconfident in our personal powers or personal leadership in such situations. Robert McNamara had demonstrated tremendous achievements in the previous roles he'd served in – during World War II, his "geek analysis" made the American bomber fleet much more efficient, and so much more destructive. That destructive power was and still is controversial, but you can trace his impact. At the Ford Motor Company, again, data helped him to make major breakthroughs in car safety. As Chairman of the World Bank, he had a long and successful career. But Vietnam scarred him. The painful lesson that he learned was that rational analysis, assuming rational behaviour from everyone, did not suffice when the key lesson you had to learn was that, "In complex situations such as wars, you don't know what you don't know."

SECTION 4

Challenges for leading systemically

CHAPTER 11

Five core leadership challenges (individual and collective)

Karen Ellis

Our take on the challenges of systemic leadership

As we said in our introduction, we at the Leadership Centre have always had a (hopefully) healthy skepticism about leadership models (ironically) and about the industry that sustains them. However, once Karen had started to discuss the meaning-making capacities with colleagues at the Leadership Centre, we began to think about the relationship between adult development and public sector 'systems leadership'. As we compared what we noticed about those people who seem to be effective 'system movers', we started to recognise the links between the later stages of these capacities, and the abilities of people that we would identify as genuinely systemic leaders. Remember our caveat at the beginning of this chapter - we're not referring here to individuals with that job title, "System Leader", which we believe is an oxymoron. *Systemic* leaders (or as we prefer here 'systemic movers') are those people need to balance the needs of their organisation/role/social group, with the needs of a larger grouping, in order to move towards a reality which fits better for everyone. This is a genuinely difficult ask.

It probably goes without saying that to lead well in a systems-setting asks us to go against almost everything that has made us successful as an organisational or community leader. We need to be able to:

- work within wildly different contexts, which require different norms of behavior
- pull together people who come from very different cultures and belief systems
- create meanings and narratives that are larger than any one organization/ social groups's purpose or objectives.

Working systemically also requires us to be genuinely creative in the way that we take things forwards — not just relying on repeating our own group's winning formula: To *give away* power, to share accountability, and to allow authority to be ceded away, you have to be a pretty mature leader if you are to tolerate, let alone enjoy, these aspects of a systemic role. And finally, a systemic leader has to shift along from simply managing their own personal resilience, to focussing on the resilience of the whole social context — while at the same time holding true to their own ethical base, *and* generating trust in others, *and* creating a balance between reliability and predictability on the one side, and adaptability and fluid movement on the other. No mean feat.

In the sections below, we outline five challenges that are handled well by our 'effective system mover' colleagues and friends at the individual level. Later in this chapter, we will think more about how these challenges can be dealt with across a more distributed and collaborative framework of leadership. While they are at the first stages of a 'work in progress', the systemic leadership challenges are articulated in a way that we hope can start to provide a useful scaffolding to help you and others consider the kinds of personal and group development that might be needed by people who want to expand their capability for systemic work. We hope that they will help facilitators, leaders and collaborative groups as they aim to build the capacities outlined above at the same time as they engage in the 'real work' of systemic change. As you read the descriptions below, you will see that they describe the practical applications of the four meaning-making capacities we outlined in Chapter 3 – each combines the capacities in different ways to create the real world outcomes we describe.

We should say here that it is unlikely that any one systemic leader or mover works well with all these challenges – this is not a comprehensive framework and delineates very high levels of skillfulness in certain areas, many of which are unusual. For any grouping of effective systemic operators, one might be a great

'meaning narrator', one a great 'innovation fosterer' etc etc. It is this reality of specialisable capabilities that makes the need for collective and collaborative leadership even more important when we are tackling complex problems in the systemic realm. Indeed, if you think of any really effective groups or teams you have operated within or alongside, you may even be able to identify the characters who showed one or two of these capabilities as part of their USP. We will go into these ideas further in our 'collective level' section further on in this Chapter.

Challenges and capabilities at the individual level

Exploring contexts

One of the key differences demonstrated by systemic leaders in comparison to conventional leaders is in how they enter a new situation – whether a new role, a newly arising issue or, indeed a new entire context. Systemic leaders have honed highly effective diagnostic skills and they have developed observation skills which are as neutral and objective as possible in a subjective world. Especially in situations where agreement is low or conflict and turbulence high, these people use their own attention to gather data of all kinds quickly and efficiently and, just as important, actively seek the 'readings' of others, especially people who are very different from them. They do not rush to judgement – 'aha, I know this, I have seen it before' but are able to suspend judgement for as long as is feasible, so that the nuances of the context can be understood as far as possible at that moment. Skills such as 'under-the-surface' questioning, assumption-mining, dilemma identification and the ability to recognise and map political, interpersonal and behavioural dynamics become important here.

When an individual works well with this challenge is attempting to lead systemically, they are not only able to suspend their own beliefs and assumptions as far as possible, but they also support and assist others to do the same. This helps everyone to create a local culture of openness and curiosity, even in the face of values and beliefs that are very different from the individual's own. 'Systemic thinking' is a natural and well-practiced skill for 'context explorers' – and creative approaches for mapping complex causes, identify and map the systems at play and create new experiments are 'in the muscle', so can be used spontaneously rather than as part of a complicated 'intervention'.

Convening conversations

The ability to set your compass and sails according to the specific context becomes even more important where agreement about 'the nature of the problem' is low – let alone agreement about the nature of the solution! So, systemic leadership demands that we create conversations where people can build a shared definition of the issues at hand before we start to build up ideas about how to address them. In situations where they are trying to diagnose complex, multi-faceted and large scale issues, systemic movers go outside their own usual positional or personal authority to convene conversations (or networks of conversations) with groups and individuals who would not normally be asked to contribute to the debate.

Under these conditions, effective leaders know that we need to share as many different perspectives on the situation as we can gather – especially those that contradict or are a challenge to the prevailing group-think. And they understand that when seemingly intractable or repeating problems arise, it is a sign that our assumptions and beliefs about the world (and each other) have become part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. In these circumstances, bringing together the usual suspects to have the usual conversations is worse than useless – it may even rigidify the problematic thinking.

Leaders who are effective at convening conversations learn to bring together widely distributed people in groups, bilaterals and large networks, allowing and amplifying disparate and conflicting views and facilitating conversations that otherwise would simply not occur. These 'thinking spaces' can be genuinely creative and context-changing for those who take part in the them – sometimes the issue simply dissolves in the face of greater understanding between people and groups. We sometimes find that we have actually been 'violently agreeing' in different languages or that a simple, small shift in attitude might be the 'difference that makes the difference'.

Wisdom here consists of bringing out the 'contrarians', creating space for the unpopular view and creating a wider sense of 'us' as you go. Systemic leaders will use any means at their disposal (social media, forums, tea parties and open space events) to connect people, while still finding ways of maintaining an overall sense of flow and narrative as the conversations build – not just talking for talking's sake. And action, both planned and unplanned or emergent, often spontaneously grows out of the conversations (rather than having to be 'captured' as part of an implementation plan) – people realise what needs to be done and, because they have been part of the conversation, simply get on and do it!

Narrating Meaning

Many conflicts and 'stuck conversations' in systems or communities involve circular arguments, long standing (but unvoiced) dilemmas, inadequate framing or monocultural thinking. Systemic movers get good at spotting the symptoms of unhelpful, unproductive or exclusionary 'meaning making' and at uncovering the deeper meaning issues that underlie the surface problems. Once the dilemmas and unspoken frames and assumptions are brought to the fore, systemic leaders have a variety of conversation and narrative skills which help to tease out and articulate new or contested meanings, helping others to reframe, negotiate or resolve dilemmas and conflicting points of view. They are also adept at identifying those polarities, 'underlying truths' and dilemmas which must be lived with, as opposed to resolved – the elements which are simply part of the social, commercial, political or simply human reality we operate within.

Once a new and more adequate 'meaning-making frame' has been created by these collective efforts, there is a choice point. Sometimes, systemic leaders are happy to keep and reinforce the threads of the narrative themselves, owning it as part of their personal authority – especially when they need to 'draw fire' on behalf of the rest of the collective. At other times they are delighted to let conversations develop a 'life of their own' so that the network of people involved can create and manage their own meanings. In either case, they will not tolerate meaningless verbiage or 'empty talk', preferring to use plain language, metaphors and stories where at all possible, even when conveying complex messages. Some systemic movers are particularly skillful at narrative creation and story-telling, others use different media (visual artefacts, social media, video etc) to get the core ideas across. The crucial test is whether any **new** meanings have been created in the exercise – ideally meanings which are more comprehensive, inclusive and flexible than the previous narrative.

Fostering innovation

Having mastered the skills of systemic thinking at the technical, political and structural levels, systemic movers tend to turn their attention to making the new happen – creating contexts and cultures which make innovation possible, and even easy. This is not an simple task. Organisational or social group norms and 'pre-thought thinking' often make creativity difficult, even for normally creative individuals. Experimentation – a core skill of innovation – is often discouraged by fear of failure or blame or simply by the bureaucratic 'gateway' processes designed to prevent services or institutions from significant risk. Aspects of 'design thinking'

are very helpful here, offering a framework for 'safe-to-fail' experimentation which creates a sense of appropriate control without stifling innovation.

Design thinking and 'co-production' also offer a series of large and small scale skill sets which systemic leaders appropriate as their own – sometimes commissioning ethnographic research, at other times, just going to out chat to different groupings on their own so they can better understand their worldview. Rapid prototyping and 'minimum viable product' thinking is familiar – good-enough is good enough to test and evaluate a hypothesis, welcoming failure as data becomes group habit. Rather than seeing innovation as a complex 'black box' which is only relevant to special annointees, there is an emphasis on bringing this straight-forward and easily developed understanding to as many people as possible in the system so that they can say 'we did it ourselves'.

Personal Governance

Personal governance is our term for the highly developed ability to not only stay resilient in the face of turbulence and challenge but also to constantly and consistently check in with ourselves about the ethics and principles we are managing ourselves within. Genuinely trustworthy leaders are in a constant conversation about 'who for' and 'what for' when they are considering their options and judgements. Is this prospective action genuinely in the best interest of the organisation or community and its stake-holders or does it just benefit my own special interest group?

A systemic leader is also keenly aware of the need to, in Heifetz's terms, 'manage their hungers' - noticing when more shadowy or unaware aspects of their make-up are affecting their judgement and, ideally, having ways of checking in with others who will challenge their approach when necessary. After all, we all need our blind-spots pointed out to us by people whose world view is very different from our own.[1] And they also know that, at times, their leadership will be 'on the line' in high stakes situations – preparing themselves for the possibility so that they can respond well when under fire.

The effective systemic leader pays attention both to crafting formal governance approaches which are fit for their purposes and to regular reflective questioning which guards against group-think and defensive or self-regarding conclusions. For

[1] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World – A Fieldbook for Practitioners* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009).

example, how widely can we define the value we are creating – avoiding negative impacts of our decisions as well as maximising positive ones? Or, who can we bring into guide us who would be most resistant to the decisions we are trying to take? Individual leaders who cultivate their own personal governance act as role models for well-governed groups and organisations – walking their talk makes their influence far more compelling that people who simply know the politically correct speak of their own context.

Leading systemically at the collective level

So far so good. We have now got a better understanding of how to create an effective 'We', by bringing together a diverse group of people, working with the dynamics involved and, crucially, suspending our own opinions and needs in the process, at least for as long as it takes to get the work going well! So, what can we then do together at this collective level, once we are working effectively? Well, perhaps we can even start to move the system collaboratively? Now it's worth thinking of how we might manage the five systemic leadership challenges at a collective level.

Let us imagine that you are a group of organisations from all sectors, who've come together in one place, to think through a serious local issue which affects you all. The case study we have chosen below is the somewhat charged issue of the impact of a recent influx of migrants in a small market town, which has created knock-on concerns within the NHS, about the ability within the new arrivals to access the health services they need, especially given the variety of language and cultural issues. However, you should pick your own case study, from your own work! In our case, how might this collective of organisations best negotiate the next year, in a way that maximises the opportunity of (and for) the new arrivals, and allows for integration, and any harm reduction, as quickly as possible?

Traditionally, what might happen is that a small number of "middle managers" across the organisations might come together, pooling their expertise, gathering data, and suggesting some actions that each organisation might take separately within its own accountability boundaries. Of course, this might be perfectly effective within some organisations; but this kind of approach can also lead to unintended consequences, such as increased paternalism, 'themification' of the migrant community, and potentially even increased scapegoating as the new arrivals are seen by other members of the public as disproportionately fortunate beneficiaries of the state. So, how might a small group of 'systemic movers', drawn from not only the statutory sector but from third sector groups, community leaders

and the incoming group themselves decide to lead differently for a better set of outcomes for everyone involved? Let's imagine ourselves into the heads of these system movers as they go about their work – assuming they have already built an effective 'We' using some of the ideas from Chapter 5!

Exploring contexts

Building on some of the excellent technologies of design thinking, we might first set about understanding the various contexts — not only of the organisations doing their best to help, but also the cultural context of the new arrivals, of the people who are trying to help them, and even of the people who are objecting to them being there at all. Design thinking's adaptation of ethnography has created many excellent tools for understanding other people's world views and requirements; for example, approaches developed from ethnography and story-telling. In the public services, these approaches are often dismissed as anecdotal, but the shared sense of the stories can often say more than the data will reveal, and of course there is still a place for hard data - ideally as much 'big' data as possible.

Analysing data on a granular, 'social' scale is still a developing art; and at the moment, people who have mastery of this arena are few on the ground. If you can capture them and involve them in your process, that is incredibly helpful. If not, then you need to ensure that as many voices that are affected by the complex situation are involved, preferably in a real, contactful sense of involvement rather than just by twitter and social media. Then at least you can be sure that you have a multiplicity of points of view, even if the 'hard' data is thin on the ground.

Convening conversations

Depending on the issue, we might start by convening a large-group conversation, right at the beginning; sometimes it's best just to get as many people as possible into a room, and run an effective dialogue process to allow the understanding of contexts to grow from here. However, this can be very risky: where there are issues of language differences, power differentials (and there are always power differentials), or a strong likelihood of prejudice and misunderstanding, then "large group" conversations have to be approached with caution — and a good deal of preparation. Again, design thinking approaches offer much help here. Where we might wish to start is in small group conversations, particularly with directly-affected citizens, not in "focus groups" where they have to come to you and to listen to your questions. A more naturalistic sessions, where people hang out and see how life is really lived by that group, is much more helpful.

There is another conversation that needs to start right upfront, and will probably be ongoing, and it is with the most significant power players around the situation. There is no substitute for gaining shared senior commitment and understanding. The more critical potentially high-stakes an issue is, the more vital this is. A habit in public sector organisations of delegating such conversations down, to below the level that has any authority, has caused many potentially promising initiatives to stall before they have got out of the blocks. Then the question becomes, "Who is going to convene this group?" In any given place for any specific issue, there may well be no obvious person who can be 'The Convenor', and it will often be a Chef Executive or a community leader who simply has a passion for the problem, who will bring their colleagues together, and will attempt to get the issue moving. At this point, some of the points discussed about effective group dynamics become very useful, as understanding what each person needs according to their accountabilities, as well as being as open as possible, all the while bringing to the surface openly all the conflicting viewpoints, will mean that efforts will not be stymied by organisational inertia or outright disagreement.

Once, in Mark Moore's terminology,[2] the authorising environment has at least begun to take shape, and we have gathered an understanding better of the communities we wish to work with, a programme of conversations starts to emerge. Designing and facilitating these "large group" conversations is also an often-rare skill, although many public service organisations are building this capacity, as they're recognising how effective it can be to work in these ways.

Narrating meaning

In the kind of setting that is being discussed here, meaning and innovation often move forward, hand in hand. We start to realise that there are small and large actions we can take, and experiments we can run, to improve the situation. However, for the purposes of this outline, we'll talk about 'meaning' first — as in situations where there are differing perspectives and biases at play, trying to create a shared level of meaning is the first step to getting any commitment to action, not just from the state and voluntary organisations, but also from businesses and local communities too.

At the Leadership Centre, a key guide is the social movement work originated by Marshall Ganz, and now elaborated and taken on by many others, including our

[2] Mark H. Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997).

colleague Chris Lawrence-Pietroni. Ganz has particularly contributed to thinking about the creation of *shared* meaning, particularly across diverse groups; for example, at the height of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, with tensions between black citizens and segregationists, or between labourer roots and employers, etc – Ganz brings his own 1960s experience of the Civil Rights movement to bear on this, in seeing the differing importance of shared meaning to these groups. One particularly useful technology, that we teach with on most of our programmes, is "Public Narrative", in encapsulating a meaningful, powerful, immediate narrative of *why* an action is happening, why it has to happen *now*, and what bonds the public together in a *shared* reasoning for it. It's very helpful for a group to have the opportunity to work on individual and public narratives, around the issue they're trying to address. Not only is the output created often highly creative and compelling, but the method allows many differences of view and perspective to come out into the open, in a way where people are most likely to respect and honour the differences between them.

It's worth just mentioning here the impact of media, both local and social, on emerging narratives, on places. It is no longer an option for officials or senior leaders to drive "narrative' themselves. Often, we simply need a myriad of different ways of counteracting pernicious stories, and nudging the conversation back onto more productive and constructive lines. Nevertheless, the "viral" impact of a strongly-held shared narrative (like the 'negative' narratives Joe Simpson cites, such as the Confederate South in the U.S. Civil War), from the people who are genuinely trying to resolve the issues, shouldn't be under-estimated — especially if that narrative isn't being voiced.

Fostering innovation

Interestingly, this is probably the collective challenge that needs the least description here — this would not have been the case even three years ago. The vast majority of public sector organisations (outside the NHS, at least), have at least begun to sniff around innovation-led approaches, such as design thinking, and agile innovation, if for no other reason than a desire to at least "hang on" to the coat-tails of digitalisation, as it disappears out of the door. As we said above, from a leadership perspective, system leaders need at least a passing acquaintance with the design thinking "double diamond", the value of "safe to fail" experimentation, and the concept of "letting a thousand flowers bloom".[3] Otherwise, all of the

[3] A common misquotation of Mao Tse-Tung's dictum to "Let a hundred flowers blossom"; but as ever, the point is not that it was or wasn't said, but that it's widely *believed* to have been said.

creative and imaginative people that are "pulled down" across the organisations to do innovation work will just end up voting with their feet, as traditional organisations and practices (such as programme management, resource gateways, and overwhelming governance) stifle the life out of their initiative.

As a leader, probably the most important thing to personally get your head around is the acceptance of significant levels of failure. In a private sector environment, the usual acceptable ratio of failure, is "1 success for every 5 failures." In the public sector, one single failure can be the end – not just of an initiative, but of a number of careers. Obviously, this is why the term "safe to fail" has been coined. This is not just about choosing the right scale of your experiments, but also of understanding the political "sacred cows", and unfortunately newsworthy taboos that cannot be broken at this point. The role of senior leaders in a "safe to fail" environment is to provide "air cover" for the innovators – but also to make sure that they're politically savvy enough to know *which* failures would be unacceptable. One of our partner organisations, New Urban Mechanics, based in the Mayor's office of Boston, Massachusetts, will often say that one of their key roles is to take the blame when innovation is suggested by *less* powerful employees, and when it doesn't go as well as hoped. The fact that they provided reputational "cover" for the brave individuals who come forward with ideas, has led to a rapid growth in demand for their work.

We're not going to make any attempt to teach you about innovation here – there are already plenty of resources, which are freely available under Creative Commons. But we do advise you to check the credentials and outputs of anyone advising you in this area, as there are quite a range of design and innovation experts out there, with some who are surfing on the good ideas of others.

Collaborative governance

Our last challenge was obviously couched as "personal governance", at the individual level but we are going to use the term 'collaborative' rather than 'collective' here. Please note that we do not mean in terms of formal decision-making processes, or failure regimes here. We know that leaders already know how to do those things. What we mean is genuinely open dialogue about what each player needs, what they bring to the party, the boundaries beyond which they will not go, and most importantly, the ethics they would not compromise.

Ethical issues are often particularly difficult to talk about collectively. Sometimes, we don't even know what our own ethics are, let alone any collective ethics we might wish to stand by. It often helps to get really practical in these conversations,

and to think about real things that can happen: real scenarios and real dilemmas, and thinking aloud about how to resolve them. For example, in the case we've described above, how would we handle:

- an outbreak of tuberculosis among our new immigrant population
- an obvious spike in a particular criminal activity which could be ascribed to that new population
- a gradual increase in what might be called 'soft' hate crime, i.e. insults, graffiti, shunning.

If every new party is allowed the freedom to talk through problems, it's often surprising how much common ground there is. Incoming groups usually recognise the need to "manage their own". Community groups are often more fair than some of the more vocal individuals might appear; and the statutory agencies, can be surprisingly diplomatic and understanding.

Probably the only other important element to be drawn out on collaborative governance is what we might call collective energy management or 'social resilience' in the jargon. Often these wicked issues take 2-5 years to work on and work through. it's inevitable that the leading lights at the beginning will lose steam, become exhausted, and get distracted by something that feels more pressing later on. the groups that are involved in the issue need to be mature enough to succession-plan, even if this is not in a formal sense, and the original leading lights need to be grown up enough to let go when it's clear that they no longer have the bandwidth or the personal authority to continue. These issues can be very difficult to surface in a group that has developed a sense of loyalty, particularly to founding thinkers. but they're absolutely vital to address at the beginning of the process, when the work is too late, and has begun to stagnate.

Building systemic leadership capabilities

If you agree that the five individual and collective challenges outlined above pretty much cover the specific elements of systemic, as opposed to managerial, leadership, your next question is likely to be 'So what? What can I do about this if my organisation's training and development does not take any account of these aspects?'. Well, this is something we have been working with and musing on at the Leadership Centre for the last decade or so, and we have at least the start of some suggestions.

Firstly, have a good look at the individual **capacities** that we outlined in Chapter 3. How do you and the 'systemic movers' around you show up against the

capacities described there. If you are unsure, start a conversation about each element and see what the collective view is. As you identify possible areas where some development might be needed, you can look for tools and practices which are designed to work directly on 'meaning-making' – most L&D professionals can help in these specific areas, once they know what you are looking for. If you need more resources, you can try Karen's book! Or, more seriously, come to us at the Centre where we can point you to a wide range of possible methods and techniques which can help.

Secondly, review the challenges above. Which ones feel most salient to the issue(s) you are trying to address? And then, what type of **capabilities** are going to be most useful to you? Once you have identified where you want to start, we strongly recommend that you select, in collaboration with your colleagues, a wicked issue, complex problem or opportunity for innovation that feels really salient to you. You can then use any of the technologies and models we outlined in Chapter 5 to help build a 'curriculum' for taking your 'Systemic Leadership Challenge' through a cycle of development, developing your own individual and collective capacities as you go. So, your leadership development process has the triple benefits of individual growth, collaborative expansion and solving real world problems all in one go! And, again, if we can be of any help at the Leadership Centre, get in touch. Our programmes and work in places increasingly take this form and we have wide range of top tips for getting going...

CONCLUSION

Testing our five core challenges and four domains over time

Karen Ellis and Joe Simpson

We have proposed a way to look at leadership challenges ("Me", "We", "Us", "Context" perspectives, all "Over time"), and how we might best use those challenges (our five personal and collective capabilities). So let's first consider how Abraham Lincoln performed against these key challenges. More to the point, we consider whether these five challenges are even useful in evaluating his historic performance. Whilst doing this, it is important to remember that they are not to be taken in isolation, nor is there a formal order in which these points are always to be addressed.

Narrating Meaning

While he is now remembered as "the Great Emancipator", Abraham Lincoln was never an outrider in terms of his views about slavery. Throughout his ascent to the Republican nomination, he was pretty middle-of-the-road in his views, outflanked on one side by more radical pro-emancipation opinions, and on the other by colleagues holding more conservative views. After the election of 1860, he assembled his Cabinet by balancing out the radicals, not only with more conservative

Republicans, but also by including (pro-Union) Democrats. In evaluating his tenure as President, we can see the vital role he played in developing a story which could hold the Union together. He narrated meaning.

This is perhaps best demonstrated in the Gettysburg Address – now remembered as one of the greatest speeches of all time. Nobody remembers the rambling, three-hour speech from someone else which came before it; but this short, pithy, 272-word speech from Lincoln is worth reproducing in full:

> Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.
>
> Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle field of that war. We come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who died here, that the nation might live. This we may, in all propriety do.
>
> But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have hallowed it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; while it can never forget what they did here.
>
> It is rather for us, the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us that, from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here, gave the last full measure of devotion that we here highly resolve these dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.[1]

Central to the speech is the very first line of oratory: "Four score and seven years ago." Lincoln started his framing of the future by reflecting on the past, and with his own interpretation of a pivotal moment in American history. For many

[1] Transcript of Cornell University's copy of Abraham Lincoln, 'The Gettysburg Address', *Cornell University website*, http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good_cause/transcript.htm.

Americans, the framing of the Constitution has always been a seminal moment – as pivotal in framing the start of a story, as the Bible's opening words, "In the Beginning."[2] The Constitution was deeply embedded in the main dividing issues of the day, around state versus federal control, and was a heavily contested document, frequently invoked by politicians.

But Lincoln's reference to "Four score and seven years ago" was not to the Constitution, but to an even earlier document in American history – the Declaration of Independence. A less technical document, with more lofty rhetoric, the Declaration presented a much more idealistic vision for America, offering explicit commitments to liberty. The Constitution, by contrast, arose out of complex and extended negotiations. Those negotiations effectively conceded slavery to the South, without ever mentioning the word in the final text. At the core of Lincoln's argument was the idea that if there was any doubt about the values the Constitution stood for, then Americans should refer back to an even earlier document, and that the Declaration of 1776 somehow framed the Constitution of 1788. For its time, this was a radical re-telling of the American story – but one which has been largely sustained since then.[3]

This was a pretty significant reframing, but it was one which told a story of "us" (the American people). We cannot all be storytellers as skilled as Lincoln, but Lincoln is a brilliant example of someone who invested the *time and energy* to become a great storyteller, by dint of sheer hard work. (Churchill was much the same – every last syllable of his speeches was rehearsed, even the 'improvised' asides.) Lincoln also learned to pay attention to his audiences. (His long stint as a lawyer taught him to focus on juries.)

In our terms, we can also say that Lincoln narrated meaning, to secure the widest possible sense of "us". His aim was to keep the maximum number of people inside the tent.

Exploring Contexts

Had Lincoln given something as radical as the Gettysburg address during his presidential campaign, we doubt he would have won the election. One of the more memorable lines commonly attributed to Churchill was that, "Americans can always be trusted to do the right thing, once all other possibilities have been

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[2] 'Genesis' 1:1, *The Bible*.

[3] A perceptive, full-length analysis of the Gettysburg Address can be found in Garry Willis, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

exhausted."[4] We take this to mean that as humans, we do not jump to difficult conclusions instantaneously.

Lincoln was adept at exploring contexts; to use another popular Churchill phrase (this one that he actually said), to "K.B.O.: Keep Buggering On." Perhaps the best illustration of this is the Emancipation Proclamation. The Proclamation freed Southern slaves to join the Union army. Yet whilst Lincoln discussed this with his Cabinet in July 1862, he only made the preliminary announcement in September 1862, after the battle of Antietam. Although the Union forces lost more men, the battle was a strategic defeat for the Confederacy, and General Robert E. Lee retreated. Had the Union's General McClellan been a better military commander, it might have turned out to be a turning point in the whole Civil War. But Antietam changed the *context*, and Lincoln believed it gave him the opportunity to make the announcement. Even then, he remained cautious, being conscious of the *wider* context. So two other provisos in his speech were important: that it only affected the rebel states (it did not apply to the four "slave states" which remained on the Union side), and when it was formally introduced in January 1863, it was done by Executive Order, bypassing the need to go through Congress. In using Lincoln's war powers, this technically limited the impact (theoretically, the measure only applied until the end of the war), but in so doing, he again helped hold the wider coalition together; and once the wartime freeing of slaves was countenanced, it made it very hard for things to go back. It was also tremendously influential on future Presidents, and in framing ideas around the powers of the presidency, so that future occupants of the office who were keen to seize a reform agenda, from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan, looked to the use of Executive Orders rather than congressional legislation.[5]

The more ambitious Gettysburg Address of course followed both the Battle of Gettysburg and the more important victory at Vicksburg. Lincoln subsequently used a farming analogy to describe his approach: "A man watches his pear-tree day after day, impatient for the ripening of the fruit. Let him attempt to force the process, and he may spoil both fruit and tree. But let him patiently wait, and the ripe pear at length falls into his lap!"[6]

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[4] In fact, like most quotations commonly attributed to Churchill, there is no record of his ever having said or written it – see Richard M. Langworth, *Churchill by Himself: The Life, Times and Opinions of Winston Churchill, in His Own Words* (London: Ebury Press, 2008). But that does not invalidate the fact that he is widely believed to have said it.

[5] For more on this, see Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

[6] Charles M. Segal (ed.), *Conversations with Lincoln* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 2002), p. 309.

As one journalist observed, "He always moves in conjunction with propitious circumstances, not waiting to be dragged by the force of events or wasting strength in premature struggles with them."[7]

Convening Conversations

As mentioned, Lincoln first discussed the Proclamation with his Cabinet in July 1862, but the announcement was not made until after Antietam. In bringing the matter to Cabinet, Lincoln's intention was not to focus on *whether* he should make such an announcement, but *when*. Lincoln took advantage of the diverse voices within his Cabinet to hear a range of views, and factor in how they would respond. One key voice was William Seward, his Secretary of State (and fellow contender for the Republican nomination in 1860). Seward was a long-standing abolitionist – yet even he advised caution. Indeed, it was Seward who advised delaying the Proclamation until after a major victory in battle, lest it appear that the Union was giving "its last shriek of retreat".

And Lincoln was a good listener as well as a great speaker, seeking out the views around him. In understanding Lincoln's move to a more radical stance on abolition, one cannot underestimate the importance of Frederick Douglass, the most prominent black campaigner against slavery. Himself a former slave, he was a brilliant writer and author. His relationship with Lincoln was complicated, and he was critical of Lincoln's tardiness in adopting more radical positions. But with the perspective of time, we can see how their public conversation helped shift Lincoln's thinking. In April 1876, it was Douglass who gave the keynote speech at the unveiling of the Emancipation Memorial inside Lincoln Park in Washington.

As President, Lincoln not only listened to private conversations, but to public ones as well. He paid great attention, not just to his Cabinet, but also to Northern newspaper editorials. He was also very focused on the opinion and mood of the Union troops (whose vote would be critical to Lincoln's chances of re-election in 1864). That ability to listen gave him an acute sense of timing.

Fostering Innovation

Had the Lincoln of 1850 been able to meet the Lincoln of 1864, we think he would have been fairly surprised. Not only was the latter the leader of a completely new party (the Republicans), but he had enacted changes which it is doubtful the earlier Lincoln even believed in, let alone thought to be possible. We stress this, because

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[7] Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Leadership: Lessons from the Presidents in Turbulent Times* (New York: Viking, 2018), p. 316.

it's important to realise that *true innovation is where the innovator does not realise what is even possible*. One of the many memorable quotes attributed to Lincoln is, "I am a slow walker, but I never walk back."[8] In the context of mid-nineteenth century America, we take that remark to be one about both reassurance and change.

To give a specific example of this, like many other U.S. Presidents, Lincoln had to work out what it meant to be Commander-in-Chief. Unlike earlier Presidents, such as George Washington or Andrew Jackson, he was not already established as a great general (although he had spent three months in service in what became known as the Black Hawk War, where he ended up being elected as Captain of his troop). Yet as Commander-in-Chief, he had powers of direction. Most of the time, Lincoln remembered his lack of training, and he did not interfere excessively. Equally, however, he recognised the failings in the initial leadership of the Unionist troops. Lincoln wanted a more aggressive military leadership, even if his suggestions about how to be more aggressive were not always fully thought out. Finally, in Grant he got the military leader he needed.

This pattern can be seen in other successful war leaders, too. Much of Winston Churchill's early political career was marked by disasters and mis-steps, particularly in World War I, where his penchant for bold strategic visions, and over-ruling the advice of experienced generals, resulted in military disasters like Gallipoli. At the time, he believed that his military experience as a young Lieutenant fighting colonial wars in the 1890s gave him greater strategic insight than experienced generals. Fast-forward to World War II, and you see a very different Churchill as military leader, who had learned from his mistakes. While he could still be apt to meddle, his means of meddling had changed – he interfered less in individual, day-to-day decisions, and placed more emphasis on installing generals that he trusted (most famously, Montgomery), even though he might not always agree with their individual decisions. He queried more, and commanded less. He learned to become a better war leader.

For Lincoln, appointing Ulysses S. Grant showed his willingness to be unconventional (Grant had only re-joined the army in 1861, having previously been forced to retire to avoid drastic disciplinary consequences). Lincoln then gave Grant the space to fight a very different sort of war. If Lee was perhaps the best *tactical* commander,

[8] Like Churchill, Lincoln has had many epigrams wrongly attributed to him; but again, whether or not he said them is less important than the *belief* that he said them living on in the public consciousness.

Grant was the superior strategist, practically inventing the concept of "total war". Grant in turn gave great flexibility to his own key commanders, including William Sherman (the victor at Atlanta) and Philip Sheridan. It was Grant's conception of the interlocking battle which changed the whole dynamic of the war. The key strategic bias of the war was that the South only needed to *not* be defeated to ultimately win; whereas the North had to win to succeed. With that dynamic, the Confederacy fought a defensive/aggressive campaign. The geography of the war meant the Confederacy had shorter communication lines, enabling it to move soldiers between conflicts, and to dig in their defences. Grant recognised the interconnected nature of the war, and so he fought interconnected campaigns, decades ahead of their time. (Allied generals on the Western Front would learn how to do this the hard way by the end of World War I, after the catastrophic errors of the first half of the war.)[9] Losses were high (the technology of nineteenth century battles meant that the aggressor was always likely to sustain higher casualties) – but eventually, the tide turned.

Personal Governance

Lincoln was always ambitious. He declared his first bid for public office aged only 23. "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition, I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men"[10], he said. And for the next 28 years, his ambition remained clear for all to see, yet it translated into little in practice. It was only when he won the Republican nomination in 1860 that Lincoln really moved onto the national stage. By then, he had accumulated a lot of practice at not succeeding. Even his one electoral success, in being elected to one term in the House of Representatives, was not matched by much in actual achievements. The Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 are now remembered for their erudition, but at the time, it was Douglas who won the Senate seat. In retrospect, we can see that the extended "fallow period" in Lincoln's career was the making of Lincoln the politician, or to rephrase it, this period enabled the metamorphosis of Lincoln the *aspirant* politician, into Lincoln the great statesman. Or to quote Lord Randolph Churchill, looking back on the political career of Benjamin Disraeli, he observed that it had six distinct phases: "Failure, failure, failure, partial success, renewed failure, ultimate and complete triumph."[11]

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[9] William Philpott, *The Sacrifice on the Somme, and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009).

[10] Richard Lawrence Miller, *Lincoln and His World, Volume I: The Early Years – Birth to Illinois Legislature* (New York: Stackpole, 2006), p. 143.

[11] Lord Randolph Churchill, 'Elijah's Mantle: April 19th 1883', *Fortnightly Review*, May 1883, p. 614, quoted in Donald Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy: England, 1868-1914* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 141.

Lincoln's was not a simple "Strength from adversity" story. He suffered from deep fits of depression that were so bad that friends even feared he might kill himself. However, Lincoln started to develop a number of inner strengths. Firstly, he became a great self-teacher. He read a lot, and he also practiced a lot. His storytelling skills were not innate, but learned, particularly as he travelled as a country lawyer around the circuit. He learned through what he said in the day-time, in the courts, but also what he said at night-time, as the storyteller entertaining his colleagues travelling from one small town to the next around the circuit. Secondly, he learned patience – remember his pear analogy. Thirdly, he learned to be less self-regarding; in 1855, he had been the obvious Whig candidate for the Illinois vacancy to the Senate, but recognising the difficulties that he faced in winning, he got his fellow Whigs to transfer their votes to Lyman Trumball, who with four others had defected from the Douglas Democrats because of their dislike of the Kansas-Nebraska Act which Douglas had driven through (effectively undermining the Missouri Compromise on the extension of slavery). He therefore spent this time transforming himself into the consummate politician, commanding all the key skill sets that he would need in office.

So far we have addressed how Lincoln addressed our five core challenges. Now let us summarise how this reads across against our four domains as they play out over time.

We have already seen how the younger Lincoln was no match for the older Lincoln (and indeed how the Lincoln of 1861 was no match for the Lincoln of 1863 and 1864). But we see the contribution of Lincoln the person through how he attended to our five core challenges. We also have a vivid illustration of the difference that a President can make when we compare what Lincoln achieved, with the woeful performance of his unintended successor, Andrew Johnson. Lincoln's achievements have stood the test of time. Indeed, it is striking that in all the attempted rewriting of history that the Lost Cause myth entailed, Lincoln remained and continues to remain above it. Grant's reputation has been deliberately (and wrongly) slandered, but Lincoln remains in high regard with the public, with professional historians and with supporters of both political parties.

Equally, we know that Lincoln did not do all this alone. His "Team of Rivals" was talented. That is in marked contrast to their Confederate equivalents, who were not even famous in their own households. It is true that the Lost Cause myth has sustained the reputation of the Confederate military leaders. Lee was a brilliant tactician – but others such as Stonewall Jackson and Nathan Bedford Forrest were

not; and in Grant, Sherman and Sheridan were their match. Meanwhile, in Frederick Douglass we have a man without formal power, but who wielded tremendous influence in the development of Lincoln's thinking and actions. Moreover, once we put the time dimension into this, the difference becomes clearer. Remember that both Grant and Lee graduated the same year out of West Point. Lee graduated top of class. Lee remained the best tactician, but Grant learned to fight a different type of war, one that ultimately undermined the southern capacity to fight.

When we come to the "Us" domain, the difference is even greater. Lincoln's tremendous ability was to evolve conceptions of a greater "Us", whilst the South's failure was to engage pretty much anyone else in support. To be fair to the Confederacy's President Jefferson Davis, towards the end of the war he recognised that failure, and he proposed the most dramatic turnaround. Starting a war to sustain slavery, he proposed to offer slaves freedom in return for enlisting to fight for the Confederacy. That this never materialised was because even facing defeat, he could not persuade his colleagues that this was their last throw of the dice. Indeed, a summary of the last six months of the war could be that the Confederate leadership, far from sustaining any collective sense (a "We" characteristic), defaulted to solo decision-making, with surrenders and captures happening one by one. The Confederacy could not even organise its own surrender, never mind win the war.

When we look at the "Context" (in all the dimensions we use for that phrase), Lincoln demonstrated a mastery, both at understanding those contexts, and understanding how those contexts could evolve. Contrast this with the Confederacy, whose actions were rather like the classic bully. Used to getting its own way, in 1860 for the first time it suffered a setback. However, there was nothing that Lincoln could have done which would have led to the abolition of slavery in the likely time he would be President. All he could have hoped for was to put the brakes on the further expansion of slavery (in the hope that deprived of momentum it might internally implode). In modern jargon, Lincoln used the "Overton window" opportunities that arose, to turn the South's actions back on itself.

We see in all this both the importance of the "Time" dimension, and how unpredictable the future can be. The Lincoln of 1858 not only could not conceive of the abolition of slavery within seven years, nor would he have advocated such action (not just because he would have believed that would have been electorally disastrous). By contrast, the Southern establishment of 1858 were not conceiving of any surrender around slavery, they were contemplating its further western expansion.

Other examples: Shakespeare and other stories

Now let us widen our perspective to focus on our core argument. Put at its simplest, our thesis is an expansion of a very simple statement, namely that leadership if a (social) activity not a status. Let's unpack that simple statement. By claiming it is an activity not a status we are distinguishing doing something from being something. The leadership we are exploring is not a rank, measuring how "high" up the ladder you are, but about *doing something*.

Doing something means there is (at least one) doer. So we address the question that if you are attempting to lead, what is it about yourself that you should worry about? Lack of self-awareness is often the trigger for failure. We identify some key capabilities or challenges, that someone attempting to lead should pay attention to (the "Me" box). These capabilities or challenges are not some technical discipline (like learning a foreign language, or learning to ride a bike) but are challenges that you need to revisit when attempting different leadership challenges. Notice that we phrase them as activities, i.e. exploring, convening, narrating, fostering and staying resilient. Like any activity, you can get better at them. When we talk about "Vertical development", we are reiterating that practice makes perfect. Gary Player, the South African golfer, famously said, "The harder I practice, the luckier I get."[12] Margaret Thatcher put this another way, that "I wasn't lucky. I deserved it."[13] The converse side of this is hubris, thinking you don't need to practice any more or forgetting the luck element (with complex problems and other perspectives what the outcome might be is rarely obvious).

The second element of hubris is thinking you can achieve social change all by your own, hence our "We" box. As a shorthand, our argument here is that leadership requires listening (reading the room), and not just talking. Putting it another way, one of the attributes we describe in the "Me" box is the importance of convening conversations. The difference between conversations and lectures is that the former are two-way. Leadership is a team sport.

Our third box ("Us") reflects the fact that we are talking about a **social** activity. To repeat, on our imaginary desert island, we can think, write, garden, and try and build a boat, but we cannot "do leadership", as there is no one else on the island. If leadership necessarily involves others, then it makes sense to reflect on *who*

[12] Guy Yocom, 'Gary Player: Take it from the Man in Black: Rats Save Lives, Caning isn't All Bad, and We Make Our Own Breaks', *Golf Digest*, October 2002.
[13] Chris Moncrieff, 'Margaret Thatcher: In Her Own Words', *The Independent*, 8 April 2013.

those others are, and *what* their concerns and interests might be. We talk about "Usness" rather than "Followership", because others might be self-referencing, without any role by a "leader".

Our fourth box is about the "Worlds" (or "Contexts"), within which the leadership activity takes place. We follow Snowden's classification and, in particular, distinguish complicated from complex (though in truth, many problems are both complicated *and* complex). If a problem is complicated, then being able to break it down into separate elements can be a great advantage. That does not work if we are dealing with a complex problem. As a pretty simple rule of thumb, if you are dealing with something inanimate, then there is a chance you can disaggregate. Once you are dealing with live human beings, it becomes more complex.

Our final point is that activity takes place *over time* – there is a "Before", a "During", and an "After." When we are dealing with complexity, the idea that there are instantaneous solutions is *particularly* false. The language of "heroic leadership" entertains the idea that there can be some single moment of change, like giving the order to advance in battle, as if the battle itself were irrelevant.

We thus create our five-dimensional view of leadership activity. Those dimensions do not live in isolation, but evolve and change through time – hence we talk of *systemic leadership*.

As an illustration, let us take one of the most famous speeches in English literature – the speech Shakespeare wrote for Henry V on the morning of Agincourt. Here is part of that speech:

This day is call'd the feast of Crispian.
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say "To-morrow is Saint Crispian."
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember, with advantages,
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words—

Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembʼred.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall neʼer go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be rememberèd—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he neʼer so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursʼd they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispinʼs day.[14]

As an historical account, we can see how Shakespeare uses our five dimensions. Henry the narrator is the "Me." He cross-checks the "We" (Bedford, Exeter etc), whilst the whole narration is about mobilising the "Us" (our band of brothers). The wider context is clear, the forthcoming battle with the English heavily outnumbered, but the "innovation" of the long bow strategy delivering the victory. And there is a strong sense of history, and of the scope of time, from "this day" to "old age."

Yet here, there is a further dimension. We remember Shakespeare as perhaps our most eminent dramatist, but contemporaries would have also seen him as a Tudor propagandist. The historical plays served a purpose beyond entertainment. That role is most transparent in Shakespeare's portrayal of *Richard III* (hunchback usurper).[15] Shakespeare's general stance was one implicitly endorsing the "Divine right of kings" (and so the divine right of Tudor monarchs). So with this lens, we see Shakespeare ascribing the "Me" leadership to the monarch, the role of the major knights of the realm as the "We", and the troops as the "Us." The play was published in 1599. So the context of the publication was this was only 11 years after the Spanish Armada, and by 1599, Queen Elizabeth was 66 years old and heirless. The "message", therefore, was a sentimental one that we have had our backs to the wall before and won, and we can do so again.

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[14] William Shakespeare, *Henry V* (1599), Act IV, Scene III.
[15] In truth, Henry VII's claim to the throne was as flimsy as that of Henry V.

This message is even more obvious in the most famous adaptation of the play – the staging turned into a film starring and directed by Laurence Olivier. Churchill heard it in 1942, and encouraged the film production, which came out in 1944, against the backdrop of war in Europe.

Let us now bring focus on the fifth dimension, time. The speech starts with the historic comparison of St Crispin's Day: the feast day of the martyred twins Crispin and Crispinian. In one sense, this is an odd reference – Henry was reminding people that on that day, good people were killed. Still, he offered up some hope, that some people in the audience would not be killed (but they would be scarred for life). What he did offer was a chance to be remembered. In that sense, the speech was a forerunner of the Armistice Day refrain "We will remember them", a line from the poem *For the Fallen* by Laurence Binyon, written in September 1914 to commemorate the deaths of British Expeditionary Force members in the first battles of the War.[16]

What Shakespeare offered was not some future promise, but eternal memory. Similarly, Churchill wanted the British to remember a victory in France, with D-Day – yet only four years earlier, Britain had been forced to retreat from Dunkirk (a defeat which was somehow spun as a victory, because the British did not surrender *en masse*). What we remember, and what we forget, is often a social construction, not objective fact.

This whole agenda of history and memory has been thrust increasingly into centre stage over the last forty years. In Britain, perhaps the most significant marker of that spotlight was the publication in 1983 of *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.[17] Beyond Britain, there had already been a rich literature on the subject. Hobsbawm in particular worked within a Marxist tradition, and so conceived of tradition as having been essentially invented through the use of power. But the stories used so far show the reverse – "To the victor, the spoils; to the loser, the stories" would be nearer the truth.

Consider our examples. In the words of Caroline Janney, the outcome of the American Civil War was that "White northeners eventually capitulated to Confederate memory."[18] Hitler successfully spun the "stabbed-in-the-back myth" about the First World War and also created some mythical, Wagnerian nirvana of

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[16] Laurence Binyon, *For the Fallen* (1914).
[17] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[18] Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina, 2013), p. 267.

an earlier time of the Germanic peoples. As for the Easter Rising of 1916, it is remembered as the **Easter** rising, not the April rising. That construct was intentioned, and Padraig Pearse in particular was consumed with the notion that from "death comes life."

Put another way, a lot of conventional leadership literature calls for "Vision." At the Leadership Centre, we even call our premier leadership programme "Future Vision." But what leaders need to do is to spend at least as much time *reinterpreting the past*, or in our language, "reimagining meaning", to give people different possibilities to build on. Hence the importance of Lincoln's Gettysburg address, in how it puts the emphasis on the Declaration of Independence, to reframe the argument. A critical part of the Belfast Agreement was a recognition of Ulster Scots as a distinctive culture. Note that the language stressed both an Irish component (Ulster) and a non-Irish component (Scots). One of the challenges since the EU Referendum has been that those who negotiated the deliberate ambiguity of the Belfast Agreement are not politically active today to remind people just why such ambiguous memories (and forgettings) were important. Similarly, one of the outcomes within the Irish Republic was to lift the "collective amnesia" about Irish participation in World War I.

And there are more prosaic examples, as well. We know that most corporate mergers fail to add shareholder value. We know that is because most of the effort goes into sealing a deal, and not into addressing the clashes of culture. But we can restate this. Failure usually occurs when people have a memory of loss ("They took us over"). Sometimes, that loss can be felt on both sides of the merger ("They then become the new corporate team"). Again, notice that it's the "loser" whose memory has the staying power. Leadership is about connecting the meaning (and re-making the meaning) of the past and the future – to help us negotiate the present.

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Making Meaning Together sets out how leaders and other change agents can operate effectively in today's complex world. Building on over 70 years of accumulated international practice, and a vast body of academic and practical work on leadership, the authors propose a dynamic model for leading, going beyond "systems leadership".

Instead, they propose a more collective and systemic approach for dealing with wicked issues and making new things happen, an approach that works *with* rather than against our complex world; including, on the way, a take on the strengths and weaknesses of a conventional view of "leadership" in addressing 21st century problems.

Grounded in a combination of 'real-world' examples and theoretical models (or ideas), *Making Meaning Together* proposes a highly original framework for leaders to operate.

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ISBN 978-0-9931400-1-3 £20