

Reverie & leadership

Core questions ...

- Could leaders hold an organisation & those that follow them in their 'gaze'?
- What might be the value of this capacity for 'reverie'?
- What difference might the capacity for 'reverie' make to leadership?
- 25+ years experience + key ideas



'Style' of inquiry



- A series of conjectures...
- As if you were in a gallery
- consider the ideas as if they were images (walk through or hang around)
- There are several themes in this lecture, rather than a 'logic'
- Related, but 'free standing' ideas

Little autobiography

- Based in UK: innovation & leadership interests. Facilitation.
- International work: Tunisia, Brazil, Uzbekistan, Europe
- Psychodynamic & systems
- Public and private sector
- Art, play, new theories based on practice



Key ideas

- Maternal reverie
- Therapeutic reverie
- Attunement
- Maternal preoccupation
- Corporate parenting
- Capacity
- Pleasure
- Dynamics (of the moment)
- Contextualising

Maternal reverie

- Idea from Wilfred Bion: the capacity for maternal reverie - the capacity to make sense of 'what-might-be-going-on-for-the-infant'
- 'reverie is an act of faith in unconscious process'
- Essential to 'alpha function' - developing the capacity to 'think-for-yourself' (in particular to think while 'having feelings')
- So: we are linking leadership to faith in unconscious process, and the capacity to think 'under stress'



Therapeutic reverie

- Again, Bion (& others): analyst's use of reverie is important response to patient's material
- Capacity for 'playing with the patient's images'...in order to...
- "prevent someone who knows from filling the empty space"
- So: we are linking leadership with the capacity for play, and the resistance to 'filling empty space'



Attunement

- Idea from Daniel Stern: vitality & 'affect attunement', linking it to the 'gaze' of the infant and the 'gaze' of the mother
- Sharing across modalities, in ways which 'freeze the moment', understanding the 'here-and-nowness-of-experience'
- A way of understanding life as it is lived - where the 'scale is small', living moment to moment

Attunement (2)

- So: could we think of linking leadership to the idea of 'gaze'? And think about....
- The idea that the 'scale is small', but that is where we both live and where we lead, and are led
- That attending to attunement generates a kind of 'vitality' - in relationships and in leadership



Maternal preoccupation

- Idea from Winnicott: the attention which the mother pays (or does not pay) to the infant
- Maternal 'provision' of care, of neglect, of failure...
- In some places, he speaks of how maternal 'pre-occupation' can be like an 'illness'
- So: we are thinking about the connection between 'preoccupation' and leadership



Corporate parent

- Idea from Sarah Sutton: that there is a parallel between parental function with a child and corporate leadership
- Capacity to be 'continent and cognizant' of one's own infantile feelings
- Capacity to relate to one's own particular child in their own particular context
- So: leadership can involve this 'parental function' which is different to being a father figure, or mother figure



Capacity

- Idea from Adam Phillips: implication of 'stored possibility'
- Combination of the receptive & generative...which...
- Blurs the boundary between activity and passivity
- So: we are thinking about the 'capacity' for reverie and leadership in this special sense.



Pleasure

- Idea from Paul Bloom: pleasure is linked to 'essentialism'. We cannot take pleasure in a fake.
- The pleasure of leading - and following - is linked to this essentialist quality; to believing in the leadership and their belief in you.
- And leadership is - partly - about pleasure: it can feel pleasurable to lead and to be led

Pleasure (2)

- However, much thinking about leadership stresses 'heroic', 'tragic', 'primate' qualities; 'frustration', rather than 'fulfilment'
- Idea from Ann Alvarez: symptoms often linked to anxieties about 'finding' the object, rather than losing it
- Presence: child parent relationship is achievement that is 'pleasurable in a demanding way '

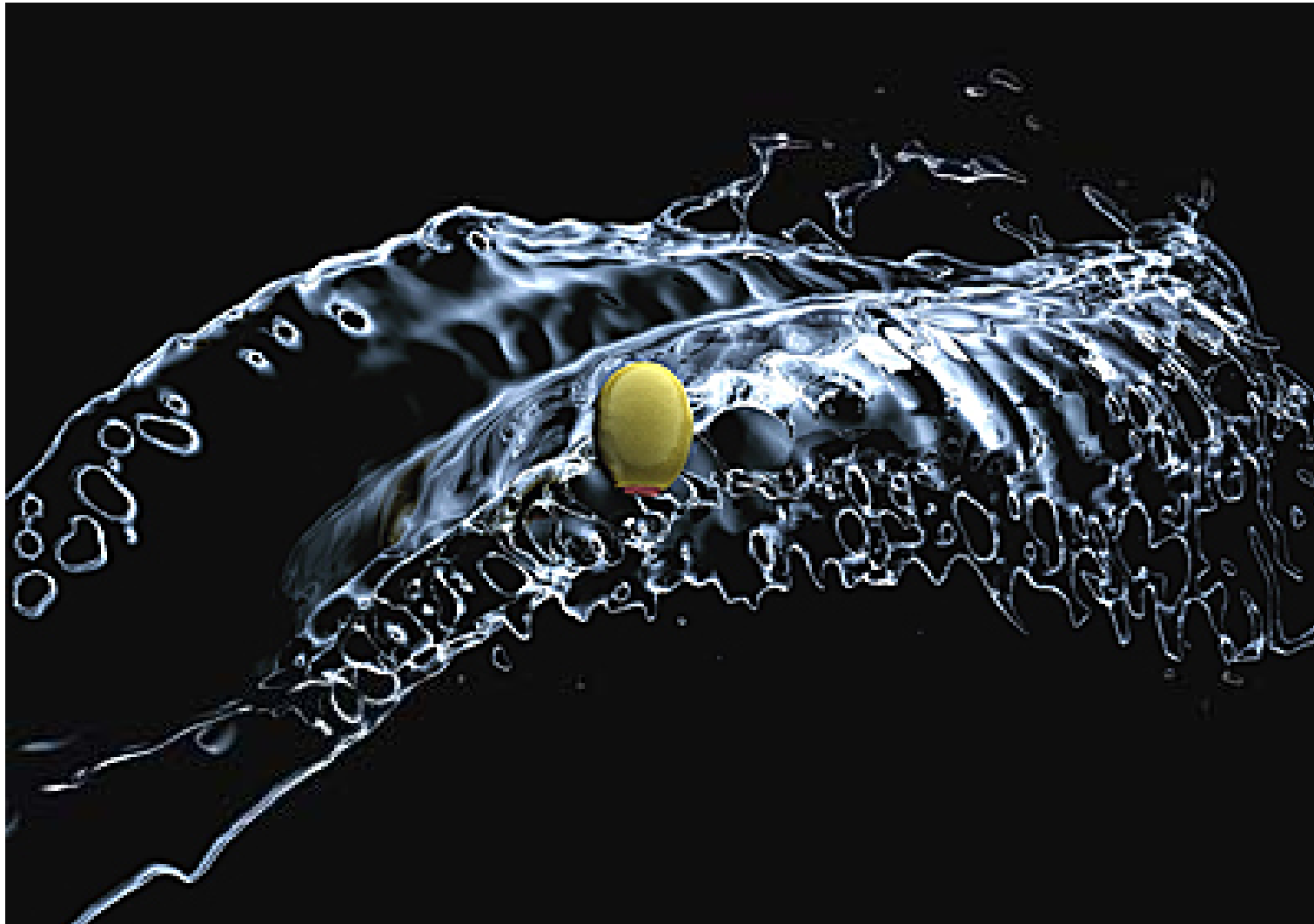


Dynamics (of the moment)

- Idea from Daniel Stern: dynamics & movement of emotions, inter-subjectively
- Subjective, psychological phenomena in response to events
- Sense of going somewhere, but more form than content - concern the 'how' of leadership, not the 'what' or the 'why'

Dynamics of the moment (2)

- Dynamic forms of vitalityconsider these words: *exploding, swelling, drawn out, forceful, cresting, rushing, relaxing, fluttering, tense, gliding, holding still, surging, bursting, disappearing, powerful, pulsing, cooling, languorous, effort full, gentle, swinging, loosely, accelerating, fading, fleeting, weakly, tentative, pushing, floating, easy, halting, tightly, bounding....*



Non verbal improvisation

- Ideas from music therapy...
- Mirroring, imitating & copying
- Matching
- Empathic improvisation
- Grounding, holding & containing
- Dialoguing - taking turns
- Accompanying



Contextualisation

- Idea from Winnicott: context & deprivation
- Events that 'merely happen' without context, lack the root that could provide continuity
- 'blinking out' in experience results from this, connecting to the idea of the unconscious being 'the place where deprivations are kept'
- So: leadership can mitigate deprivation through contextualisation. Can reverie help with this?

What I am *not* saying...but...



- Leadership is not a type of therapy, but....
- There could be a point of 'creative indifference' from which leadership takes place....which...
- Could relate - realistically
- to complexity

From experience

- Sao Paulo...mobility... future needs....
- Young people...
- Re-think life-long needs...
- Re-contextualise roles...
- Hold 'city in our 'gaze'



....and also from experience

- ‘Journey’ into work...
- Explore ‘preoccupation’...
- Help ‘see’ systems of emotion
- Tell the many stories...
- Resist simple solution



Conclusions & reflections



- I wonder what it would mean to lead from such a place?
- ... A place where reverie is valued....
- ...what might be the circumstances in which such an approach to leadership were business-critical, vital?

Thanks for listening



- Thoughts?
- Feelings?
- Decision to act?
- Some worked examples....in discussion
- Types of programme

Happy to help

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