Leaders Behaving Badly: using power to generate undiscussables in Action Learning sets

Introduction

Undiscussables, formally known as 'non-discussables' have been a point of discussion for over 30 years. Their widespread and far reaching effect on collective effectiveness has been well documented (Argyris 1986; Argyris 1990; Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen 2008). Chris Argyris, who first coined the term, maintained that they were in good part responsible for the 'fancy footwork' that predominates many meetings and prevents honest, robust inquiry of critical assumptions, problems and solutions.

At the same time, a growing literature identified as Critical Action Learning (CAL) identifies Action Learning (AL) sets to be far from the neutral sites of learning perhaps once considered (Vince and Martin 1993; Vince 2001; Vince 2004; Trehan 2011). In particular, the power relations at work within the set are now understood to be constantly forming and reforming, and while doing so shaping conversations, decision-making and learning within the set.

Relatively unexplored however, is the relationship between power and undiscussables. While it should be acknowledged that any one might participate in generating an undiscussable simply by withholding, how do leaders of AL sets, with the rank and privilege that comes with acknowledged positions of influence, exercise power in such a way that others might become more unwilling to disclose, and undiscussable topics or points of view are generated?

This study examines data collected over a 2-year period of facilitating various AL sets. The data consisted of contributions and actions of AL members where negative affect was also apparent. As Vince (2001) has made clear, expression of emotions (especially negative ones) present a unique window into power relations at work. They don't tell us everything, but rather tell us where to look carefully and examine. The various phrases and sentences were listed and repeatedly clustered as more data was added and literature was reviewed. Throughout the process it became clear that contributions from AL set leaders were especially predominant, which in turn inflected the literature to be more focused on issues of power, privilege and rank. It is the findings of that process that are presented. Three particular clusters of AL set leader behaviours persisted through the analysis, specifically, dismissing topics, liberal expressions of anger, and remaining remote and detached to others needs. Each one represented ways which AL set leaders may generate undiscussables, but with little awareness that they are. With this information at hand, AL sets and their leaders may be better equipped to minimize undiscussables, and their unwanted effects.

This paper continues with a description of the methodology, and then followed by a brief review of Argyris's work as foundational to understanding undiscussables. CAL is then consulted with a view to understanding the problem from those who make power relations within AL a deliberate focus. Next, key theorists, including Bourdieu,

Mindell and Lukes are then briefly reviewed as a context to presenting the data collected and its analysis.

Methodology

While this researcher has previously utilized an Action Learning Action Research (ALAR) approach to conduct social research and report on interactions between members of a particular senior executive team who became an AL set (Donovan 2011), the use of such presents rather specific challenges in the context of exploring the sensitive topic of group 'undiscussables'. If the topic does in-fact remain 'undiscussable' then the only means available for the researcher to gain insight to the avoided topics is to hear about them in one on one interviews or a sub group conversation of some kind. In that context, the researcher is unable to report those conversations, even if they give unusual insight into the 'undiscussables', since they are likely to be disclosed by participants with a request to prevent such being communicated to the remainder of the group. Therefore there does exist some challenges in utilizing Action Learning, Action Research, ALAR or ethnographic approaches to the study of 'undiscussables', if those undiscussables remain so to at least part of the group. Consequently, an alternate methodology was developed for this research, which is described below.

Data for this research was comprised of statements and actions observed in various AL sets, at the time of negative affect within the set, over a period of about 2-years. This data was collected partly because of the research of Vince, partly of Argyris and Schon, and partly my own long-term experience as an AL set facilitator. Firstly, as described above, Vince (2001; 2002) and others argued for the centrality of emotion in the study of organisational learning since individual and collective anxiety was likely to co-exist with learning. This was because where learning did occur, disruption to existing power relations were usually provoked and defensiveness or resistance tended to be triggered at such times. Consequently times of visible negative affect could be helpful in relation to understanding the exercise of power within any set. Likewise, Argyris and Schon (Argyris 1990; Argyris and Schon 1991), as described below, argued that moments of collective threat or embarrassment were especially helpful in understanding what theories-in-use were in operation in the group. Consequently, they placed considerable emphasis on such data. Likewise, my own 15 years of experience as an AR and AL set facilitator had showed that moments of strong negative feeling (and positive feeling for that matter), can be especially valuable in understanding some of the less obvious dynamics and power relations within, and outside the set.

With these broad notions in mind, I began to pay special attention to, and list, what comments or actions were happening at times of negative affect in various AL sets with whom I worked, over about a 2year period. The sets were generally made of middle management or senior executive teams who had come together temporarily to form an AL set to address a particular organisational concern. In that context, they had a stated intention to make change for the better in their organisation, and learn from each other while doing so.

The process of analysis and theory creation was not unlike that described by grounded theorists Glaser and Strauss (1967) who report their process of theory generation in the context of data being repeatedly added and compared,

with literature seen as additional data. According to Dick (2007), references to grounded theory in the context of AR are not uncommon. He reported several AR theses he reviewed which integrated some grounded theory practices into their AR project as a means of strengthening the rigor of theory generation in their project. Dick (2002, 2007), who argued that theory generation in AR (and AL) might be strengthened by learning from grounded theorists, advocated his 'data engine' approach to theory generation as a means, among other things, of making more rigorous and explicit the theorizing inside such projects. His approach to building theory bears strong similarity to that described by Huxham (2003), and applied by Huxham and Vangen (2000) who also showed a process of continually collecting data, clustering and labeling those clusters, testing and refining the clusters, and creating a conceptual framework around the clusters in the context of additional data and literature. It was this approach that was adopted in the research presented in this paper.

As most of the comments were associated with those who were identified with AL set leadership (for instance the MD of the executive group), those contributions became of particular interest. Consequently, literature relating to power, rank and privilege, became more central, compared to more general organisational development literature. Consistent with Layder (2005), theorizing was a continuous process throughout data collection and analysis, and included the sharing of that theory with various AL sets from whom data was originally taken. Ultimately, only three categories of comments or behaviours emerged that were of sustained interest. Those three categories are described in this paper.

Chris Argyris and Undiscussables

Chris Argyris was the first to describe "non-discussables", later called undiscussables, and identified them as a substantial problem for business groups and their meetings (1986; 1990; 1993; 1995). He defined them as topics that were avoided due to an associated threat or embarrassment, and where that avoidance was in turn not discussed. Meetings that navigated around potentially threatening topics became flat, stilted, boring, and dangerously irrelevant. He described the "fancy footwork" that characterized these meetings as "anti-learning and overprotective" (Argyris 1978).
Argyris also said that groups' behaviour in navigating around contentious issues was in fact "skillful" since it is produced in milliseconds, is spontaneous, automatic and unrehearsed. For this reason, he called it "skilled incompetence" because it produces what they do not intend (mediocre managerial stewardship) and they do so repeatedly, even though no one is forcing them (1986).

As background to the above, Argyris maintained that we hold two 'programs' in our head; one contains a set of beliefs and values describing how each individual should maintain their lives and the other the actual rules they use to manage those beliefs and their actual behaviour in the world. The first is their espoused theories of action; the second is their theories-in-use.
Because the behaviours demonstrating theory-in-use are observable, Argyris was able to discover that while the behaviours varied from person to person, the actual theory-in-use did not. He called this theory Model 1. Model 1 theory-in-use instructs individuals to seek to be in unilateral control, to win, and to not upset people. It therefore informs action strategies that are primarily selling

and persuading, 'easing others in', and strategies to save their own and other's face (Argyris and Schon 1974).

The dilemma with Model 1 emerges because of its authoritarian features. For its use to be effective the recipient must become submissive, passive and dependent, which is of-course opposite to Model 1. Therefore, if Model 1 is defined as the effective theory-in-use, its implementation requires others to be ineffective by the very terms of Model 1. The intention to win, and to win over by persuasion while keeping all parties on an emotional equilibrium and looking in control, ensures issues or topics that might threaten a convincing argument, prompt upset, or embarrass, are avoided. Therefore, where Model 1 is applied, undiscussables get generated.

Argyris and Schon (1974) offered an alternative model, which he called Model 2. The governing values of this model are valid information, informed choice and responsibility to monitor how well the choice is implemented. Model 2 is characterized by less 'sell', less 'strategizing', more transparency about what one is trying to achieve in the conversation, and an open invitation to make inquiry about one's reasoning and assumptions in that conversation. In short, more vulnerability. Consequently model 2 conversations do not tend to generate undiscussables, but is must be added, Argyris found little or no evidence of Model 2 in action in the groups he studied.

It is the context of Model 2 being practiced that Argyris proposed that 'double loop learning' might then become operational. As opposed to single loop learning, where conversation is limited to solutions that immediately fix presenting problems, double loop learning invites contributors to make more transparent the associated assumptions and pre-existing beliefs that might be framing or causing the problem, or the proposed solutions.

Since Argyris, others have looked at the effect of undiscussables. Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen (2000) found the 'unsaid' was responsible for unresolved tension and the persistence of unexplored business dilemmas. Runde and Flanagan (2008) proposed that the ability to discuss contentious topics was a defining competence for effective teams, and the absence of such yielded short-term frustration and long term disappointment. Donovan (2011) found the conversational strategies employed by AL sets avoiding topics resulted in important issues remaining unaddressed. Others have explored the effect of undiscussables and found similar results. (Morrison and Milliken 2000; Baker 2004; Hammond 2004; Noonan 2007; Avery and Steingard 2008; Mclain Smith 2008; Runde and Flanagan 2008). In short, many business meetings have become tedious and superficial and the presence of undiscussables is strongly indicated. Undiscussables remain a central concern as they relate to the persistent problem of frustrating and ineffective meetings, where both collective decision-making and learning is required.

CAL and the AL set

CAL, a recent manifestation of Revanesque thought, brings the above dynamics center stage in the life of an AL set. It could also be said that if there were ever a kind of meeting that might be a candidate for the generation of undiscussables, it would be that held by the AL set. The ambitious, challenging work of the AL set requires collective conversation to carefully observing existing reality and reflection

on assumptions on the context of planning. This could be confronting for some, and uncomfortable topics may loom up ahead like hazard signs on a remote highway. Not only that, if one considers the relatively recent theorizing of learning within organisations by Stacey (2003) and Clegg et al (2005), required is nuanced dialogue on sensitive issues. Interestingly, Clegg et al considers learning conversations to be in the 'tension' between chaos and predictability, where uncertainty and ambiguity reside.

A small group of important workers have created a platform upon which subsequent CAL is currently being built. They are Reynolds, (1998; 1999; 1999), Willmott (1997) Vince (2001, 2004 and 2008) and more recently Tehran (Ram and Tehran 2009, Tehran 2011). Early critical theorists in turn formed an important context for these. Fundamental to the approach advocated by CAL is the foregrounding of tacit assumptions in relation to policy and practice, and the

> "…explicit engagement with the tension, contradictions emotions and power dynamics that inevitably exist both within a group and in individual managers' lives" (Trehan 2011)

Vince (2001, 2002, 2008) has written with much effect on the challenging emotional territory traversed by many AL sets, and the usefulness of examining collective and individual emotions (especially anxiety) as means of making visible power relations. As Vince and Martin (1993) said years ago,

> "We believe that bias is always present in learning groups, that it shapes the language and the interaction used to address a work task. In addition, we believe that set/group members will bring, and act out, social power relations as an inevitable part of the group process." (p208)

Vince and Martin describe the AL set a site beset with subtle (or not so subtle) power relations that will shape and form the group's action and learning. And they are not alone in such a description. Tehran (2011), in advocating the role of facilitator in AL sets describes the context for learning by AL sets in the following way;

> "participants resist or reinforce power relations that develop from learning inaction…(and) the complex dynamics that influence collective reflection" (p168)

Cherry (2010) discussed a related problem when supporting her PhD students in Action Research projects.

> "As an academic supervisor of many action research projects over a long period of time, much of my own effort has been focused on helping action researchers to stay in the action and not to retreat to the margins where they write intense, anguished reflective pieces about their difficulties but accomplish very little" (p239)

She goes on to say of the meetings where action and learning are required;

> (they are)….concerned with challenging the mindsets of organisations and whole societies. Whatever its scale, this is not work for the faint hearted." (243)

To many AL practitioners, these observations are likely to resonate strongly. While Reg Revins (1987) may not have highlighted these subtle but decidedly practical difficulties in the life of an Action Learning set, some of us experience them with regularity.

While there has been acknowledgement of power relations at work in Action Learning sets shaping learning and action, very little research has specifically explored the subtle relationship between power and undiscussables. How do some members, especially leaders, actually precipitate in others an unwillingness to disclose? How do they conversationally, or otherwise, actually exercise power to create such an effect? The following section reviews some theorists on power, followed a consideration of data collected from various AL sets in the context of those theorists.

Power and undiscussables; a conceptual frame

In this section, the relationship between power and undiscussables has been briefly discussed through the lens of three key theorists, Bourdieu, Mindell and Lukes. While these do not represent an entirely comprehensive analysis of the operations of organizational power, they do serve as illustrative and are supplemented by useful other theorists such as Clegg, (1989), Parsons (1967) and Foucault (1994).

Bourdieu was a renowned French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher who authored several books and vigorously engaged in academic, and later in his life, public, discourse. While Bourdieu (1987) created a considerable body of work, and most famously developed the conceptualization of the 'Habitus', the part of most interest here is the various kinds of 'capital' that he contended were utilized, or exercised as power by social agents. He specifically identified four different kinds of capital each of which can be utilized by an agent in a social setting. They are economic, cultural (primarily related to knowledge and information), social (primarily related to connections and group membership) and symbolic capital, which all the others transmute to when they are perceived as legitimate. Each of these kinds of capital brings rank and privilege to the social agents who possess them. While the first of these 'capitals' is objective, the others are subjective, and in his view at least as important in providing means of exercising social power.

In connection to the power that is exercised by those with capital, Brubaker (1985) described Bourdieu as identifying two kinds of power, one material or economic, one symbolic, with the understanding that even economic power has a crucial symbolic dimension. He describes these forms of power as interconvertable, where it is understood they may transmute into each other, or exist in the absence of the other.

Of particular importance to this review is the effectiveness of symbolic power. Brubaker (1985), in describing Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power, and how others experience it when it is exercised, says,

> "It is not perceived as power, but a source of legitimate demands on the services of others, whether material….or symbolic, such as the expression of deference; and it is precisely this perception or misrecognition that makes it effective as a form of power." (p756)

It is here that Bourdieu's theorizing (as expressed by Brubaker) may be at its most helpful in this research. When agents exercise symbolic power, many of those to whom the power is exercised may barely identify that power has been exercised at all. It is subtle. The scenarios where this kind of power is exercised are generally embedded as cultural norms. Consequently, the legitimacy of the demands of the person exercising symbolic power seems self evident, may not be tested, and indeed possibly "not perceived as power" at all. Perhaps a related proposition is that those who are exercising symbolic power may also have little or no awareness they are in-fact exercising power, primarily because of the same accepted norms and tacit assumptions about the anticipated and expected nature of their practices. These notions, and their connection to the data will be explored later.

Mindell, a psychologist and physicist, has also provided a useful and relevant contribution to the area of power. While he has published extensively for an audience of practitioners (Mindell 1992; 2000; 2002; 2010), he has not engaged in academic research and publication. There is however, in addition to a number of texts exploring further the philosophy and application of his ideas (Goodbread 1997; Diamond and Spark Jones 2004; Goodbread 2009), a growing body of research that examines Mindell's conceptualizations, especially in the area of social rank and power (Audergon 2004; Audergon and Arye 2005; Morin 2006; Collett 2007). It's also partly because of his significant presence in the life of so many practitioners around the world, that his work has been referenced here. He established the Process Work Institute in the 1991, and Institutes are now established on every continent. Every year thousands of facilitators attend workshops facilitated by a highly qualified faculty, and so far about 120 have graduated with Process Work Masters degrees of some kind.

Mindell also discussed power using the associated ideas of rank and privilege and suggested rank has certain privilege associated to it, and appropriating those privileges is an exercise of power (Mindell 1992; 1995; 2000; 2002; 2010). He described rank to be a kind of potential energy, which may or may not be used. While he categorized various kinds of rank (including psychological and spiritual), the most relevant kind to this study is what he called social rank. Mindell said that for any human group, our gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and age give us more or less social rank than others. Added to this can be the rank provided by organizational positions that are higher in the hierarchy to other positions. While a detailed comparison of Mindell and Bourdieu is beyond scope, many of terms used by Mindell, including field, rank and privilege and their associated meaning have overlap with Bourdieu.

Interestingly, Mindell, in his predictably practical approach, maintains that generally, the more rank we possess, the less aware we tend to be of the associated privilege.

Importantly, he finds this lack of awareness to be a primary cause of conflict. That is, privilege being enjoyed without understanding and acknowledgment that indeed a privilege has been accessed, tends to create angst in others. Mindell's notion of unwittingly accessing privilege provides a novel lens through which to observe groups who are attempting to discuss threatening topics. Considering how those with rank in such conversations may draw on their privilege to lesson their sense of threat, without acknowledging they are doing so, may provide a useful portal to investigate how power might be exercised in conversations. In other words, Mindell's conceptualizations may be of practical assistance in understanding how power is being exercised, and conflict created, in our everyday experience. It was this potential strength of Mindell's approach that was of particular interest in this study.

Mindell does not however, provide any further distinctions in relation to the kinds of conflict that might be triggered, or to the power that might be associated with those various kinds of conflict. In addition, the connection between the exercise of power via the use of rank, and undiscussables, is not directly explored.

Lukes, using a more sociological perspective distinguished three dimensions of power that are in turn, subtler and potentially more pervasive (Lukes 2005). One-dimensional power is limited to discrete situations where person A has power over person B, to get them to do something they don't want to do. Helpfully, Clegg (1989) clarified that overt resistance and visible conflict evidence one-dimensional power. Two dimensional power was first elaborated by Bachrach and Baratz (1962; 1970) who suggested that the hidden face of power was not about who won or lost, but about which issues and/or actors were prevented from coming to the table in the first place. In other words, a 'mobilization of bias' may be at work suppressing certain interactions. Lukes (2005, p22), quoting Bachrach and Baratz argues that: "…power may be, and often is, exercised by confining the scope of decision making to relatively "safe" issues". Therefore, two-dimensional power is not just about the challenge of one party openly attempting to dominate another, (as in one dimensional power), but it concerns *who* participates in the conversation, and *what* is discussed in that conversation. Covert conflict and the stifled resistance of a party who is struggling to be heard in the most effective forum evidence it. Lukes (2005), in offering a radicalization of two-dimensional power suggested,

> "the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place" (p27)

He therefore conceived of three-dimensional power where the powerful achieve this by influencing consciousness by the control of information, the mass media and the process of socialization. Gaventa (1980) and Clegg (1989) note that where three-dimensional power is exercised, it may be accompanied by resignation, hopelessness and acceptance. Therefore, person B may no longer resist, overtly or covertly, as in one and two dimensional power respectively, but rather appear to willingly do what A wants them to do, even though it is contrary to their objective, real interests. The conflict here is therefore latent.

In drawing distinctions in relation to types of power and associated conflict, Lukes provides an available means to connect power more directly to the phenomenon of undiscussables. For instance, it might be expected that overt conflict might be associated with less undiscussables than covert conflict, where resistance cannot be

easily voiced. Further, latent conflict may also be expected to be associated with undiscussables, but awareness of them may be minimal.

In summary, Bourdieu, through the conceptualization of subjective kinds of 'capital' showed that 'symbolic' power can be exercised by those with enough of it, and because of our socialization, we may not notice when such power has been applied. Mindell, through his more practical exploration of rank, power and privilege saw that we tend to create conflict, usually unwittingly, by the exercise of power without awareness. Lukes, in proposing his three dimensions of power showed how each resulted in a different kind of conflict. The section to follow combines these conceptualizations with the data that was collected and analyzed, and proposes how power might be exercised within AL sets to generate undiscussables.

Three ways AL set leaders may mediate power to generate undiscussables

The following section, by virtue of the clustering process applied to the data and refining of that process through the addition of further data and literature (especially that reviewed above), describes three categories of activities by AL set leaders that seem to mediate power, and ultimately the strong possibility of undiscussables.

1. Those with rank dismissing topics in a meeting.

A certain category of contribution from those who were identified as having rank in the group consisted of comments that worked to dismiss topics as no longer deserving their attention or the attention of the group. Various languaging was used to achieve this end, and some were more direct than others. Examples that constituted this category are listed below, and one or more may sound familiar to those who have experienced this kind of event;

> "Let's now take this topic off-line"
> "We have spent enough time on this topic, and therefore I would ask Bob provide us with an update/report on this next time we meet"
> "We are not getting anywhere here and need to move on..."
> "It seems like we are going around in circles, so let's progress to the next item"
> "Time is short, I suggest we have a sub-group look at this, so we can keep going"

It is proposed that the person speaking, being the manager of the management group who had temporarily become an AL set, had 'rank', or in Bourdieu's language, possessed more cultural capital within the organisation. The implication of the person with rank's dismissal is that to spend further time on the subject is wasteful or negative, and that his or her expert knowledge and experience gives them the capacity to make such a distinction, when others in the team may not. And because of this assertion, they closed down the discussion. Importantly, in many cases the person with rank doing the closing did not explain their action or reasoning, or request feedback on that reasoning. Instead, exercised power by accessing privilege associated to their rank, without acknowledgement that they had done so.

According to Bourdieu's theory, these leaders were exercising symbolic power afforded them by virtue of their hierarchical status, to unilaterally close down conversation. In most cases, no objection was raised, which was entirely consistent with Bourdieu's description of the use of symbolic power. That is, it may achieve its aim partly because it is often not noticed or recognized, at least in the first place, and consequently not challenged.

Mindell however, suggested that exercising power without acknowledgement (or awareness) is likely to create angst or conflict in others. Therefore, even if compliance is achieved as Bourdieu observed, covert conflict may ultimately eventuate.

In connection to Lukes' conceptualizations, it is proposed that when the person with rank (or more cultural capital) dismissed the topic, they were exercising one or two-dimensional power, depending on the response of the team. On the few occasions where team members openly objected, active resistance was visible and one-dimensional power was exercised. Undiscussables were minimized. When those in the meeting did not raise their concerns (on the occasions when they might have had them), they were then unable to be heard in that forum in relation to the topic being dismissed, or their feelings about the topic being dismissed. Conflict became covert, two-dimensional power was exercised and undiscussables likely generated.

The above reasoning is graphically shown in figure 1. Beginning at the top, the person with more rank or cultural capital exercised power in relation to person B who had less rank, without acknowledging they were doing so. The kind of conflict that occurred in response provided an indication in relation to which dimension of power had been exercised, as per the previous discussion. Likewise, the implications of each kind of power in relation to undiscussables are also shown.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

2. **Liberal expressions of anger by those with rank**.

The second cluster of contributions by AL set leaders to be discussed relates to liberal expressions of anger. Below are listed examples taken from the cluster. The tonality, which cannot easily be conveyed in these short sentences, was critical in the delivery, and central to the experience of others in the AL set. The tonality was usually conveying one or, or a combination of; aggression, impatience, irritation or exasperation.

> "Why can't you just get this right?"
> "How long does it take to get an accurate answer around here?"
> "Now I'm mad, and things will change around here…. watch."
> "What? The report has not been finished yet?"
> "What would you say is the main reason for this failure?"
> "They can't do this, they're imbeciles"

The response of the remaining AL set to these comments by the leader was usually an awkward pause or silence. It is proposed that when those with more cultural capital, or more rank as Mindell might express it, openly and liberally expressed anger in the AL set meeting as shown above, it constituted an appropriation of privilege, and an exercise of symbolic power (also shown in figure 1). As a point of

explanation, they were appropriating the privilege of not needing to exercise self-discipline in relation to their expression of anger and frustration. The remainder of the team was likely to be aware that they didn't enjoy they same privilege of being able to freely express their anger toward the person with rank, and even possibly with each other. In some cases, to do so may have ultimately threatened their employment. Further, in most instances the leader did not acknowledge that he or she was drawing on their social 'capital' or rank to do so. As Brubaker also explained of Bourdieu's symbolic power, our social conditioning is such that we barely know when that power has been applied. Somehow, in the case of this exercise of power, it was collectively understood that the boss had the right to lose their temper, a right the rest of the set didn't possess.

Where, on the rare occasion the team raised their concerns with the person with rank about his or her outburst of anger, Lukes' one-dimensional power has been exercised and overt resistance was evidenced. It is argued here that undiscussables were minimized in that case. The more common response of an awkward silence would seem to have evidenced a possible discomfort that remained underground, and in that case second-dimension power had been exercised. A bypassing of topics, at least on the topic of the leader's outburst, or perhaps from any topic that might prompt further outburst was likely. In short, the team may actively withhold in relation to some important concerns, and undiscussables created.

As Clegg (1989) confirmed, this expression of power is difficult to perceive when compared to one-dimensional power, since the usual behavioural signs of meeting conflict are not easily visible. Interestingly, the person with rank, or leader, although generating undiscussables through their unacknowledged exercise of power, in turn may not raise the issue that those in the meeting seemed uncomfortable, or withholding. To do so would blow the whistle on their original exercise of power.

3. Those with rank remaining remote and detached.

The third cluster (also shown in Figure 1) of comments made or associated with negative affect to emerge from the process of analysis that was a point of direct discussion for some AL sets. Here, they spoke about a group or individual who were outside the AL set, but whose influence was being felt inside the set. In this case one or more members of the set felt they required certain resources that a powerful group or individual outside the set controlled, but the resources were not forthcoming. At the same time, set members felt the powerful individuals outside the set were indifferent and dismissive of the set's need. Examples of the statements made by AL set members are listed below. Accompanying these statements were usually tones of frustration or resignation. Below is sample of the cluster.

> "They said they would get back to us about our budget request, but not a word. The silence is deafening"
> "It was confusing. They asked for our proposal but gave so little time for discussion, and almost no feedback"
> "The delays in Head Office returning our emails are huge. We will ground to a halt if we don't hear soon. The whole things seems of no consequence to them"
> "I explained the obstacles to completing on time, but we've had no response for weeks"

While we can't be sure about the intentions of those the set were speaking about, what did emerge is that when those in the set concluded that those with rank or capital outside the set, on whom the set were relying on for something, were experienced as remote, detached or somehow dismissive to the needs of the set, negative affect emerged. It is proposed that those with rank, apart from the possibility of exercising economic power to obstruct resources, were also experienced as exercising the symbolic power of removing themselves from the frustrations of the set. Their privileged position enabled them to do so, and they were doing this without any apparent acknowledgement they were drawing on their elevated rank to achieve it. If Mindell was right, it is the accessing of this privilege without awareness or acknowledgement that was a major point of upset for the set.

Interestingly, Bourdieu in his own research into the French bourgeois who possessed significant privilege through their economic, cultural and social capital echoed this third cluster. He described them as "distant, detached or (with) a casual disposition towards the world or other people", as described by Brubaker (1985).

In terms of applying Lukes model to this cluster, it is the response of the set that will determine which dimension of power was being exercised, and the ultimate impact on the generation of undiscussables. Where the set openly raised their concerns with the powerful about their remoteness and lack of involvement, one-dimensional power had been exercised and undiscussable minimized. Where the team did not do so, but rather spoke only to each other about their frustration, covert conflict was generated, two-dimensional power had been exercised and undiscussables generated. In that case at least one undiscussable topic between the set and the powerful was the set's experience of feeling dismissed.

There does exist a third possibility, and one, which I would contend, is not uncommon. Here, the set might become accustomed, even socialized to expect those with power to remain remote and unresponsive to their needs, and may be entirely resigned to this scenario. In such a scenario, conflict will remain latent, and according to Luke's conceptions, three-dimensional power has been exercised. An undiscussable topic for the set that relates to the behaviour of those with rank outside it might exist, but the set may be unaware of it. These are the features that characterize the use of three-dimensional power.

Figure 1 serves as a graphic summary of the previous discussion where the relationship between power and undiscussables is shown, with the exercise of two and three-dimensional power creating them. In the bottom part of the diagram, it is suggested that continued use of one-dimensional power may ultimately become two-dimensional, where resistance becomes covert and undiscussables prevalent. Likewise, continued exercise of two-dimensional power may ultimately transform into three-dimensional power, where resignation, acceptance and latent conflict are present. In this case, undiscussables may be prevalent but elusive.

Conclusions

It is now understood that the work of planning and learning for which AL sets are charged is centrally located in contested territory, where uncertainty is present and anxiety is provoked. Consequently, the work of leading AL sets is not for the faint hearted. The growing area of research called CAL has made the power relations of AL sets of central concern, and underlined the requirement of AL sets to

authentically include issues of politics and power connected to the changes they are striving to achieve. In the spirit of CAL, this research focuses on those within AL sets who possess cultural capital, or rank, and three ways they may be tempted to draw on their rank to subtly control conversation to somehow lessen their discomfort or prevent an approaching vulnerability. At the same time, AL set members have become so socialized to the demands of their leaders, they may barely know power has been applied and fail to challenge the legitimacy of the demands. This pattern leads ultimately to the generation of undiscussables within sets, and their far reaching unwanted consequences.

The title of this paper, Leaders Behaving Badly is intentionally provocative. While the study intends to show how leaders, when they forget their rank, can become agents of discord, it also could be argued that the AL set member, whose forgetting lulls then into unquestioning deference, then covert frustration, unwittingly supports this unwanted dynamic. The responsibility of AL leaders is to consider how they may be accessing their privilege to protect their vulnerability. At the same time AL set members also have a critical role in disrupting this unwanted dynamic by staying alert to their frustrations and finding more ways to respectfully voice them. If both parties practice bringing their awareness to this situation, especially by listening carefully to their subtle feelings of discomfort, a new dynamic where undiscussables are minimized may more easily emerge.

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