

***Rethinking leadership
through the lens of
micropolitics: Three
Intersubjective Perspectives
from a Large EAP Centre***

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The Micropolitics of EAP Centres – taboos, imperatives, and politics.

'Our 'professional' literature prefers not to deal with the 'unprofessional'.' Alderson, 2009:11.

'[T]he core values of professional communities revolve around the expectation that we do not keep secrets, whether of discovery or of grounded doubt.' Shulman, 2000:50.

EAP is 'a social field like any other, with its distribution of power and its monopolies, its struggles and strategies, interests and profits' Bourdieu, 1975: 19.

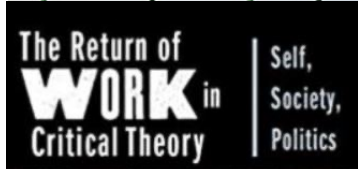
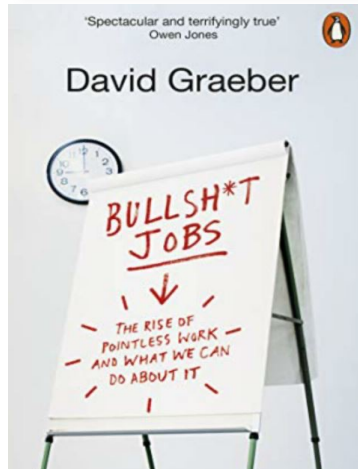
Questions

- What makes EAP Centres different?
- How can we explain the culture, identity and ethos of an EAP centre?
- Why do some EAP centres appear to flourish (despite often unfavourable structural forces) when some/many appear to struggle? Some centres seem to thrive and others don't. Some practitioners are happy others much less so.

Micropolitics of EAP Centres

- Push towards a sociological understanding of EAP (cf. Ding and Bruce, 2017; Hadley, 2015; Davis, 2019; Ding and Evans, 2022; Ding and Monbec, 2022; Bond and Bruce, 2022) and specifically a ***socio-historical analysis***.

Sociology of work - a neglected perspective



Christophe Dejours, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Emmanuel Renault, and Nicholas H. Smith

- **Work identity** largely ignored yet work **shapes us** (perhaps more than any other identity feature)
- Work requires **physical, emotional and intellectual investment** – and a great deal of hope and fear invested in work.
- **Work needs to be meaningful**
- **Agency** – technical & intellectual
- **Recognition** – peers and management.
- **Managerialism** can damage identity, investment, meaningfulness and recognition (as can peers)

Leadership Trajectory

- Variety of roles and opportunities at Leeds: formal and informal.
- Trajectory through these similar to many colleagues.
- Different demands across different layers of leadership.



Benefits and Challenges

- Egalitarian structure. Decentralisation of power. Best use of skills and talents; sharing of workload.
- Throws people together in constantly shifting dynamics. Adjusting relationships. Lack of certainty.
- Navigating the ebb and flow of perceptions about what a leader is.

Critical Incidents

- As a way of beginning to approach this
- Not the big crises, but alertness to patterns and habits that occur in passing and that can be reflected on.
- The tendency for pressure points to pull us back to familiar hierarchical structures.



Two Examples

Language

Individual
Agency

Structured conversation starters and questions

What do you feel is the most important facet of your leadership role(s) and why?

How have you had to manage changes as a leader and how have you coped with this?

Talk about what you enjoy about leadership.

Talk about the main challenges of leadership for you.

Leading often involves trying to understand, respect and manage a variety of individuals and personalities. How do you cope with this?

In what ways do you consider leadership an intellectual endeavour, as well as a practical one?

Recurrent themes and challenges: structures

- Leadership as people centred as opposed to process driven (although an understanding of structures and processes is paramount);
- references to powerful structures;
- developing shared narratives is important amongst a team;
- possibility of shifting perceptions and instigating change;
- always maintaining the 'big picture' view with integrity coming partly from a clear set of (shared?) values.

Recurrent themes and challenges: people

- a recognition of the intellectual and emotional labour involved in leadership;
- the relishing of the achievements of others/mentoring colleagues/developing people;
- leadership as people centred as opposed to process driven (although an understanding of structures and processes is paramount);
- there's always an opportunity to learn from people.

Recurrent themes and challenges: behaviour and language

- How to articulate themselves (as leaders) well/having to think extremely carefully about how to express ideas;
- Mirroring behaviours can be draining;
- Being misunderstood/misrepresented/recognising that people (themselves included) can be quick to make assumptions about others.



Interpretations

- Having a support network is key, no matter which 'layer' of leadership you're working at;
- Fallibility;
- Recognition of self and others is central;
- Some difficulties assuming the identity of 'leader' as opposed to classroom practitioner;
- Expectations and modalities of communication



Final thoughts

+ any questions?

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