The Systemic Leadership Model

I have recently concluded a longitudinal piece of organisational research, focussing on leadership and TA.

Group 1 started in February 2015 and groups 2 – 14 Started in September 2015 and finished September 2017.

136 leaders at all levels of the organisation underwent 6 days delivered in two day workshops. The company named the programme "The LEAD Programme" and the focus was on leading self, leading teams and leading performance.

Working with 15 groups of roughly 10 participants each, from across all departments and all levels gave me a unique insight into the successes, challenges, problems and processes of an organisation in the care sector. This company provides residential care for Mental Health Needs; Learning Disabilities; Dementia; Complex Behavioural Needs and employs mental health nurses, managerial staff and a range of specialist and support workers, amounting to roughly 1200 staff.

My research is entitled:

> **"Minding the gap"** - Using action research methods to discover how effective
> TA is in supporting leaders to provide a "well-led"
> environment for staff and service users

I am writing up the research currently for future publication, the focus for this article is on a model which I am developing particularly as a result of my research.

I have been teaching TA in organisations since 2003, working in the public and private sectors, with leadership teams at all levels, groups of leaders on development programmes, specialists and support staff. I am always fascinated by what goes on at the boundaries in the
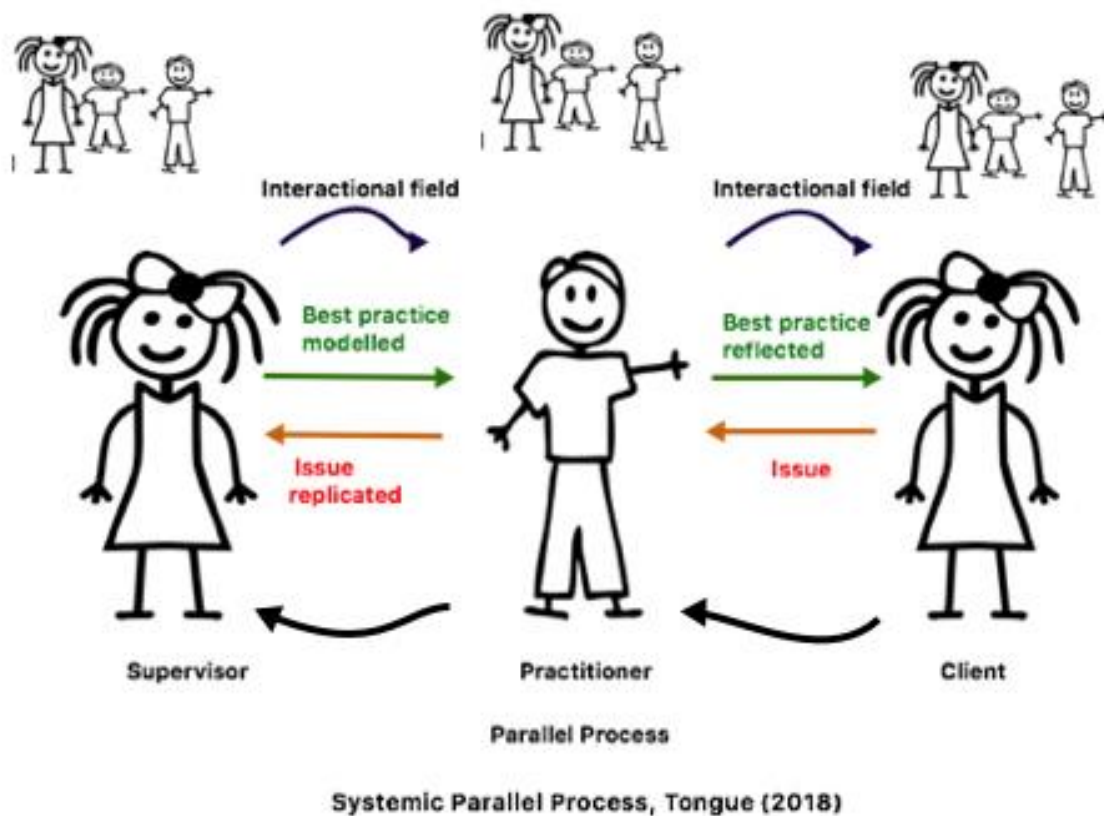
organisational system, whether that be between leadership levels and staff, or across the organisation, between teams and departments.

The Systemic Leadership Model aims to help Leaders understand the importance of clear communication from a systems point of view, and encourages personal awareness in terms of impact on others; open communication; understanding the importance of congruency and modelling effective behaviour; and the vital role leaders play in the development of others.

Clarkson (1991) wrote about parallel process in the supervision relationship and in 2011 I wrote an article entitled *Parallel Process* citing her work, where she identifies:

- What the client brings (pro-active transference)
- What the therapist brings (pro-active counter transference)
- What the therapist reacts to in the client (reactive counter transference)
- What the client reacts to as a result of what the therapist brings (client counter-transference or reactive transference)

Clarkson says that any of these may form the basis for *"facilitative or destructive psychotherapeutic outcomes"*. I believe this is also the case between levels of leaders, mapped across an organizational framework.

Systemic Parallel Process, Tongue (2018)

Rather than a pathological process as it is mostly described in Clarkson (1991), I see its potential as a developmental process, an opportunity for positive practice to be experienced within the system. Parallel process is bi-directional, working up the chain of practitioners as well as down.

A client takes their issue or challenge to a practitioner (Therapist, Counsellor or Coach). The same issue is replicated between the Practitioner and the Supervisor. The Supervisor avoids getting stuck in the parallel process, and models a more effective approach to the Practitioner and the Practitioner does the same at their next encounter with the Client. The Client lives and works within a system (family, friendship network, workplace). So of course, do the Practitioner and Supervisor. Unconsiously, changes are made, invitations given out and received and many more than one individual at each level makes changes, responds differently, behaves differently. Fascinating! A powerful positive process ripples through the systems. This could of course could go the other way if the Supervisor gets caught in the parallel process!

We can map this work on to leadership frameworks within organisational systems. Leaders can be taught to understand the bi-directional nature of parallel process – that if they are aware of the impact they have on others, if they understand the messages they give unconsciously as well as consciously and "clean up their language", then they realise their leadership power in a positive way by modelling the behaviour they want to see in their direct reports. Obviously concepts like Life Positions, Ego States, TA Proper, Games, Strokes etc all serve to help the leader gain personal insight, and give them opportunities to change how

Complicated Organisational Structure
(described, but not diagrammed by Berne)

Directors

Senior Leaders

Leaders

Team Leaders

Team members

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they communicate with their staff. Their positive modelling of effective behaviours is then replicated throughout the leadership levels.

Berne described the "Complicated Organisational Structure" in his 1963 book, "*Structures and Dynamics of Organisations and Groups*". He did not diagram it, but below is a version to help us look at hierarchy from a parallel process point of view:

Depicted here on this model is a straightforward structure of six departments and four layers of leadership – many organisations are much more complicated than this in their structure. However, even with this straightforward structure the complexity can be seen – boundaries between membership of the group and non-members, boundaries between levels of leadership and boundaries between departments. How these boundaries are managed, how people communicate at each point is crucial because systems thinking tells us that the vibrations of the quality of that communication will be felt throughout the system. In other words, how senior leaders behave, how they get results through their teams will be observed (consciously and unconsciously) and replicated throughout the system.

Seen as a "slice" and viewed from a different angle, we can clearly depict the interactional fields between levels of leadership.

At each pink arrow is the interactional field between leader and follower. Best practice filters down through an organisation and so starting at the top, the relationship between directors and next level down needs to be one where Integrating Adult (Tudor 2003) processes are applied, strokes given and received, Working Styles allowed and Accounting through clear contracting in place.   The value and importance of regular one to ones to enable feedback and information to flow cannot be over-emphasised. Back down through the hierarchy is the avoidance of negative parallel processes and the positive role-modelling of effective leadership. When this is not happening, the effects will be felt throughout the system.
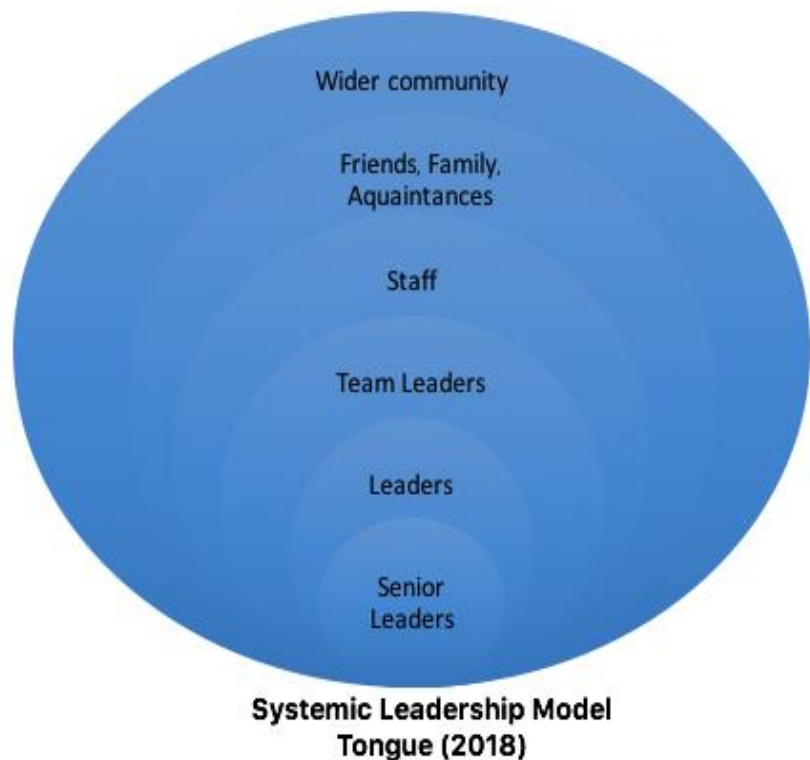
Quentin Holdeman wrote about the "Symbiotic Chain" (1989) – a parallel process involving symbiosis from Parent to Child from one layer of management to another throughout an organisation. Paying attention to the communication style at each level, with each individual

in relationship with team members is crucial to an open flow of information, allowing for problem solving, creativity and personal and professional development.

Kreyenberg (2005) says "the dynamics of processes are often more important than structures". She gives the example of a river – in order to understand a river, it is necessary to analyse not just the water, ground, sand and stones, but also its energy – how it flows. How the energy flows through the leadership layers is information for the Transactional Analyst – what gets stroked?; what permissions are given?; what leadership style is transmitted?

If we change the Systemic Parallel Process diagram above to show positive leadership parallel process, we can see clearly how leaders hold the keys to the success of the organisation. How they behave, the relationships they build, how they encourage positive morale, giving recognition, providing direction and structure has the potential of rippling down through the organisation, and out into the wider community.

Systemic Leadership Model
Tongue (2018)

Those of us who work as TA Practitioners in the organisational field especially, understanding organisational dynamics as well as individual psychological processes - we are part of this positive process and wherever we apply our interventions, at whatever level of the hierarchy –the impact we have can be far reaching.

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