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The Courage to Soar and the Confidence to Shine

A personal experience of integrating the Imago Dialogue into
working with people in business organisations

by

Anni Townend

Introduction

The purpose and passion of this paper is to share with people already working in business, and those looking to do so, some insights into working with people in organisations and how the **Imago Dialogue** approach can be used to help them work together more effectively as well as have more fun together. It is my hope that my knowledge and experience of working with people in organisations for over twenty years as a leadership consultant and coach will help people studying the Imago Facilitator Program to deepen their understanding of the possibilities and opportunities for using Imago in business.

I will be sharing some of my key thoughts about what it means to work with people in organisations and why Imago is such a brilliant fit with my own practice. It is important here to note that I was drawn to Imago because I believe in the power of dialogue to heal relationships and it is something that I have believed in for a long time, long before I ever encountered the Imago Dialogue. So when I did learn about Imago a few years ago and attended a workshop with my partner I was already thinking about how I could use the approach not only in my personal life but also in my professional life. And herein is another important part of my writing and in my work as a leadership consultant and coach that I seek to help people bring all of themselves to work, and to be conscious of who they are being and what they are doing wherever they are and whoever they are with.

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I look forward to hearing from you

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Chapter one: Safety

As I have already mentioned creating safety is key. Safety underpins all that follows. People feeling safe enough to be able to be open with each other in turn helps people to trust each other, which in turn helps everyone feel more supported and able to challenge each other. I am grateful to my colleague *Anthony Landale* for sharing with me a 'Way of group working' which I think of as a way of thinking not only about group working but also of Organisational Development. People have to feel safe enough to be able to truly engage with change. We all have much more experience of leading and managing change than I think we give ourselves credit for – not least because we are changing all the time and things around us are changing all the time. We lose sight of just how much experience we have of changing and of change and what helps us to lead and manage change. Most leaders' tasks are to lead change through people. So having an understanding of and a way of thinking about creating safety really helps.

There are a number of ways which I work with cross functional groups (groups and teams from different areas of the business) to help them think and talk about safety. Usually at the start of my working with a group or team - and especially if I know that there is a certain amount of anxiety and, or fear in the organisation (from previous context discussions with the leader and, or others in the organisation) – I ask a question related to safety to prompt this reflection that then leads to a conversation in the group or team.

My favourite questions are:

- ***What will help you to feel safe in this group and enable you to bring your best and help others to be their best?***
- ***What will help you to feel safer in this team than you already do, that would help you to bring your best and help others bring their best?***

These simple questions invite people to do a number of things, firstly to reflect on themselves but also to think about self in relation to others – so I am already here preparing the ground for future Imago Dialogue, and sowing the seed of being in relationship, the 'I – thou'.

Sometimes these questions are enough to stimulate a lively discussion – one in which I invite everyone to share in one word, and then more words what would help them to feel safe and help others. I write each person's word up on the Flip Chart (in the room) or ask them to write in the Chat Box (virtual) if a large group, and if small team then to call out (virtual). I ask ***'Tell me more...'*** sometimes I ask ***'Is there more on that...'*** Already I am using the Imago Dialogue, I **mirror** back as I write up and then invite further **enquiry**. This works well and is all part of creating the safe container. I make sure that I hear from everyone, so I notice if someone hasn't offered something. I am encouraging and inviting of more contributions, I do not rush this part as I believe this is so important and vital to all that follows. Indeed I refer to this flip chart of words frequently during the meetings and ensure that we have the list at all meetings. It can for some teams become their Team Charter, their way of working together for which they are all responsible and hold each other accountable inside and outside of meetings.

Here are some of the things that people often speak out about when asked: What helps you to feel safe and will help others to feel safe?

Openness

This is something that often goes onto the flipchart. I mirror '**Openness**' '**Can you say a bit more about that....**' And I may encourage more by offering a **sentence stem** '**And what that might look like is**'. Thus encouraging people to give more voice to what helps them to be open, and in turn will help others to be open. This of course inspires other people to think about what helps them to feel safe AND open.

Trust

This is something that usually, if not always, helps people to feel safe and builds on feeling open. Again I mirror back 'Trust' and always invite more on Trust and Trusting. I talk about how important trusting is in relationship, trusting ourselves, others and the wider world often being one of our most challenging and biggest stretches.

Positive Intent

Positive Intent or being 'non-judgemental' are things which often come up in groups and teams when they talk about what helps them feel safe. I also add that positivity and the ability to see the positive is a key leadership quality, to look for and to find the positive opens up possibilities. It helps us to be more open, more willing to listen and to hear others. I often talk about how we make assumptions about people - we make up stuff (most of which is usually not true!) and that we have a tendency to assume the negative. This opens up a discussion in which everyone is encouraged to talk and I add and mirror words. I invite people through '**Tell us more**' and '**Is there more on that would help us to understand.....**'

Curiosity

If this hasn't been offered by someone in the team or group I bring this in. I talk about research that shows the most successful CEOs have a 'passionate curiosity' for and an interest in people. Curiosity is what helps us stay open and to bring positive intent to others. Staying curious, and being curious helps with our really listening. Rather than shutting down staying open to the others, especially when their view or perspective is different from our own. Again I **mirror**, and of course I am also **validating** people's contributions and **empathising** too saying to people and '**I imagine when that happens you might have felt....**'

All the time as things go up on the Flip Chart or into Chat Box I am using the basics of the Imago Dialogue to help create the safety and to model the way of working, so when people come to not only share but also to be in dialogue with each other they are already tuned in to this way of being.

Listening

Listening always comes up as important for creating safety. Again I invite people to say more about what real listening looks and feels like. I add that I believe the quality of thinking that people enjoy is directly impacted on by the quality of listening. Real listening is directly related to great thinking, to thinking big, to thinking possibility and being open to possibility. Here I invite people to say specifically what listening really looks like – like the fact (usually) that when I am talking everyone is looking at me! And I share with them how that impacts on me, how I feel when they look at me when I am talking – I feel good. I lightly share how I would feel if they were gazing out of the window or looking away at another screen, or worse with no video camera on. And invite them to share how that might feel – and sometimes I enquire as to whether that happens at meetings – are they looking elsewhere. I encourage here that noticing is so important, noticing ourselves and others, and feedback from others.

Noticing

Key to being present which, if it has not already been listed, is noticing, noticing who we are being. I talk about the fact that I believe leadership is more about who we are being than what we are doing. I invite people to reflect on (but not to speak out) who they are being right now. To notice how they are feeling, physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. I introduce here the four energies which we explore later on if not at this meeting at future meetings.

Presence and Being Present

Presence and being Present are key. If it hasn't already been mentioned I do so. I weave this in as a key part of our being. One of our biggest stretches is often to be really present where we are. To be truly present in ourselves and for each other and what that feels like. This can often open up a discussion about the challenges, this helps people to feel safe and to understand each other better, and of course helps me to understand their context even better.

Speaking from the 'I' and addressing you as 'You'

This is something I really encourage people to do and usually people do and I validate this and encourage it and explain why this matters. It helps us be more personal, take more responsibility for what we say, and helps people to really understand us, that this is our experience and that it might

well be different from others. I do encourage people to speak directly to each other in the spirit of 'I – **thou**'; this is about directly communicating with each other - really seeing each other. From my own experience this is really important, the distinction between looking around the team and speaking to everyone about my perspective and experience and looking directly at another person who I am addressing so not referring to them by name, but actually looking at them – **soft eyes** may be appropriate here – and addressing them directly. In teams I have found this important and a great way of connecting. All too often people at meetings are used to talking about people in the third person and not really connecting. **My mission is to help people to really connect.**

Committed to each other's' success

I love this! It is so important in team working and to any group working together on a task that we are committed to each other's' success, that your success is my success and vice versa. I invite exploration on this, what does it mean and especially what does it mean when people are giving feedback to each other – and to feel the difference between when someone gives you feedback who is committed to your success and to contrast it with feedback from someone who isn't. It feels totally different.

My role as consultant and team coach

My role (at this stage especially) as the consultant and executive team coach is to bring both a sense of purpose and passion and to co-create the safety with them. To do this I bring a mix of personal stories and examples, and also professional experience and knowledge of working in organisations with teams, individuals and cross functional groups – groups made up of people from different business units and areas of the business.

One of the things that I often share at this point is something about who I am when I am at my best and feel safe. And it is something that I pick up on later on in subsequent meetings or later in the same meeting.

When I am at my best, and feel safe I am Present, Open and Connected

I share these three words with people, and invite them to think about who they are at their best when they are feeling safe. Not necessarily to share with the team but to think about and reflect upon.

If it is appropriate, I sometimes talk about my not only being here to support and challenge them but also that we are very much here for each other, to look out for each other – inside of being committed to each other's' success. We are here to learn and develop and to be in the 'Learning Zone'. I sometimes draw up an inner circle which I describe as the 'Comfort Zone', then a concentric circle around this and describe this zone as the 'Learning Zone' and then the outer zone I draw is the

'Panic Zone'. I say that I am here to help people be in the learning zone, to help stretch them from their comfort into their learning zone. I am not here to have them feel panic at any time.

This simple model really helps some people, helps to reassure them and I am grateful again to my colleague *Alan Humphries* for sharing this with me. I grow the conversation here and ask people what would they do if they started to feel panic and what would they do if they noticed that someone else was beginning to panic. I ask people what this would look like, and how we can help each other to be in that learning zone. I link back to safety, and of course to taking risks knowing that we are in team of supporters – we are alongside each other.

I am encouraging people to be responsible not only for their own learning but also to be looking out for and helping each other, and that we are in it together!

Chapter Two: Introductions

If I have not already written up and asked the questions which I will use at the beginning through which people will introduce themselves to the group or team then I do so now. However usually I will write the questions for introducing ourselves on the Flip Chart if in the room, and when working virtually invite people to write the questions down themselves and invite people to think for a few minutes on their own about their responses. I let them know that we will then be coming back to them in about twenty minutes but that there is something we will be talking about as a team prior to doing this.

Being Seen, Heard and Understood

It is important to me for everyone to be seen, heard and understood. Already through the discussion on **Safety** everyone will have spoken about what matters to them in this space and this will have been written by me on the flip chart or in the Chat Box by the team

I do introductions going round the group or team, whether in the room or virtually. The first person who shares who they are in response to the questions that I have asked is very, very important to what follows. I talk here about impact, and invite everyone to be thinking about their impact, the impact that they would like to have on their colleagues in their sharing. I invite people to be aware, to be noticing who they are being – being in connection with themselves and with everyone else in their sharing.

I think carefully about the questions that I ask people to introduce themselves through, and I have some favourites! The questions do depend on what I have learnt from the leader and sometimes from listening to the sharing thus far, so I amend and or add as feels right in the moment.

My favourite questions around Who I am and Why I am here are:

- 1. *Who are you? Name and roles - think inside and outside work, think beyond job title to roles like 'peace maker' etc***
- 2. *One thing that you are proud of having accomplished and, or achieved at work***
- 3. *One thing that you are proud of having accomplished and, or achieved at home***
- 4. *Something that you are working on in your leadership that you would like the team to help you with, in particular what feedback would you like that would help you grow and develop?***

I remind everyone of what we have agreed by way of safety. As the team coach and consultant I **mirror** back after each person's response, after the '**Sender has sent**'. I explain that this is what I am going to be doing, to be mirroring, to ensure that I have heard and got what the person is saying. I invite them to send in 'short bites' so that I can mirror back. As I explain this I look around the whole team, group taking them in with my eyes all the time. I am also very conscious throughout of how I am sitting, and of my breathing. I am constantly centring myself. I am also very aware that I am modelling mirroring and that this is very important in helping the team be able to do this with each other. Depending on my own energy and the size of the group or team and when I am working

virtually I stand up for the introductions which helps me to ground and be fully present. Sometimes I invite the team to stand as well.

A key point here is size of team and, or group. With a larger group or team then it will only work to have one or two questions; with a small team or group then using all these four questions works. There really is no one size fits all and the skill I think of working in any group, team or context is flexing all the time to suit the needs of the people in the group/team whilst keeping on track!

I rarely ask more than four questions, and often think four is quite enough anyway.

Background and context to the questions that I ask

Name and roles

Sometimes I ask people to introduce themselves through their name.... this may seem at first a bit odd, but on all the occasions I have done this it has been a really wonderful way into people telling a bit of a story about who they are through their name. I am keen to encourage people to tell their stories, and I love listening to people's stories. I believe it is how we connect through our stories, and often in the telling we discover a bit more of ourselves and indeed in the listening.

I usually 'model' this by sharing that 'My name is Anni Townend, I haven't always been called Anni, but I have always been called Townend.....' depending on the size of the team/group I may say more.

Asking people to talk about their roles is something that I have grown over the recent times, since somebody in a team shared more than his work role and title, but also his other roles outside of work and then someone else shared more about roles in terms of the qualities they bring. This has been so successful that I almost always do this now – with thanks to the Director who first did this!

Pride

Why do I start by asking people what they are proud of? It's a great way in of inviting people to think about what really matters to them – usually what people are proud of is also what they care about.

Achievement and Accomplishment

Why do I distinguish between Accomplishment and Achievement? It's a question people often ask, and I talk about the difference between achieving a target, a goal that is more tangible – more out there; and that of accomplishing something which hitherto you didn't think you could do, you didn't believe you could ever do whatever it was that you are now proud of having done. In some way you might have overcome a limiting belief about yourself or about a situation; you have faced into something and done it – and are rightly proud. It can be – and I do give personal examples – something very small but that is a big step for you, like saying sorry to someone that you really didn't ever want to speak to again and have been avoiding in the workplace. And the examples do not, of course, have to be from work they can also be from home.

Working on, growing and developing in your leadership

I ask this question because I totally want to land the concept of learning, of growing and developing and that we are on a journey and part of that is being up for it, for the learning, for the coaching and that it really is a journey. And I want to let people know that it's really good to let other people know what you are working on, especially in a team so that we can help you with it. You can get feedback from us as to how you are getting on, feedback that is encouraging of you being a success in what you are working on.

Choice

I absolutely always offer the questions, and encourage people to use them as a prompt as a guide for introducing themselves to their colleagues. In doing this I am again paving the way, signposting how we are going to be working together – that we are connecting with all of ourselves and with each other. I am giving choice, and this is something that I am keen to emphasize and is key to my way of working with people. It goes along with responsibility, taking responsibility and giving choice. I like to talk with the team about choice, and encourage people to be thinking about this as part of who they are being, who they are choosing to be right now and the choices that we are making all the time – to listen, not to listen for example. To choose what we listen to!

Chapter Three: Energies

'Energy not time is our most precious resource' Tony Schwarz

'The first and foremost task of a leader is to manage her or his own energies and then help others to manage theirs' (based on quote by Peter Drucker)

'We humans are energy systems – at our core we are pulsating life energy.' (Imago)

For me managing my energy and helping others to manage theirs is fundamental to being a leader, consultant, coach and facilitator. It is key to being in relationship firstly with oneself and secondly with others. I have written about this in my book **'Assertiveness and Diversity'** published by Palgrave Macmillan. I have also learnt more about working with the energies from my reading in this area in particular Tony Schwartz and his colleagues who have written a book called **'Be Excellent at Anything'** all about working with energies, and they run 'The Energy Project'. Also in my leadership work with *Steve Radcliffe Associates* we work with the four energies, and I have through the *Hoffman Process* worked with the energies in a different but similar way.

People in organisations get that how we manage energies matters. They understand the basics of managing your energy and of how our energy impacts on others. So this is a great place to start thinking about and talking with others in a team and, or group about energy and impact, it also sits really well with how we engage others in what we are doing. I do a lot of work with leadership teams, with teams and with groups as well as individuals on energies and again it is something which lends itself to the Imago Dialogue as a way of having a reflective and exploratory conversation with others.

The Four Energies that I work with are:

Physical, Intellect, Emotional, Spirit

Physical: the energy of the body, of sensing and of doing. Physical energy is key to how we embody our leadership, how we embody ourselves. Our physical energy has an impact before we even speak. Thus noticing how we are standing and, or sitting is important self awareness and the first step in a growing awareness of how our physical energy is impacting on others, and indeed how theirs is impacting on us. Someone can walk into a room, and just the way they walk into the room and the meeting has an immediate impact – they may shine their light or cast something of a shadow – simply through how they are in their physical energy.

This energy links very much to The Imago Socialization Journey energy of 'Sensing' and 'Doing' rolled into one. It is the energy of our senses and of doing, of activity.

Some people are strong in this energy and others less so. Some of us have a strong physical presence. This is not about size although this of course has an impact. Here I am talking about Presence in terms of someone being really present in their bodies. They are often standing with both feet on the ground; or sitting with an open body posture again with both feet on the ground. There is a centeredness and openness in who they are being physically.

The physical is a great place to start because we all have bodies and tuning into, being mindful of our bodies is key. Being aware of how our bodies support us matters hugely, and looking after our physical energy is vital. Most very senior leaders have a daily physical practice that keeps them fit and on top form. And it is have daily physical practice, not necessarily exercise, which is so important to our well being. And people in organisations get this. I recently got a 'stand up desk' which I love and helps me to vary when I am working in my office my posture and energy from standing to sitting and vice versa. It encourages me to notice what I need by way of my physical energy and to change it from time to time. Indeed I tend to stand up for phone calls, and still be able to access my computer screen if we are sharing files during the call; and to sit down when I am writing like now or doing emails.

The Walk and Talk

I am a great fan of the 'walk and talk' articles and it is something which I practice regularly with my coaching clients but also when working with groups and teams in organisations. It can be a 10 minute each way walk inside or a walk in the park, or if in a country location a more extended walk. If possible this can be done side by side, otherwise it can be done with both people on the phone. The timings can work well walking in one direction one person talking and then back on the same walk only in the opposite direction. Doing this wherever I am and with whoever I am with means that people quickly appreciate the benefits of being able to go outside to 'walk and talk' and how this physical movement can impact on all of the other energies, truly lift the spirits, emotions and offers a different perspective. The movement itself facilitates a moving through and moving forwards. And of course there is always the chance to stop, stand still, to notice, to pause and to reflect.

The Imago Dialogue offers a wonderful way of **mirroring, validating and empathising** with a person helping them to explore their physical energy, and sometimes can lead to a practice that makes all the difference and impacts on the other energies. The energies are, after all , very much entwined.

Intellect: the energy of the mind, mental energy, and of thinking. This energy along with the physical are often the more highly developed of the energies in people, and in organisations. These are the energies that people have learnt to bring to work.

This energy is so important to our working together, to thinking big, to thinking differently and as I have already mentioned is greatly facilitated by listening, the quality of the listening having a direct impact on the quality of thinking. It is also I think a very useful way in to talking about positive thinking, of having a positive mindset versus a negative mindset. I often talk with teams and groups about the difference in mindset, and that herein lies choice. We really can choose with which mindset to approach a person, a situation or to frame something in. (We may not always feel that we have a choice, however being aware that we do have a choice over what and how we think about something is, and can be, very liberating).

In Imago Dialogue there is a great space for **Validating and Empathising** with how someone Thinks – through our saying to them ***'It makes sense to me that you think'*** and ***'I imagine that you might also be thinking.....'***

Emotion: the energy of the heart, of feelings. Over the past few years people in organisations are much, much more conscious of emotional energy through the great work of people like Daniel Goleman and his work on Emotional Intelligence. Our being able to express emotions in a way that is assertive and expressive and in a way that has us be heard and understood matters. Being able to express our fears, joys, love, hates and hopes emotionally has us be engaging. People feel our passion, they understand us better if they know how we feel. And it is here that connection between people happens, the heartfelt connection that we feel with another person. It is the emotional energy of another person that often has engage with them and vice versa.

In Imago Dialogue there is an important space made for emotion energy in the Dialogue not only in the Validating but in the Empathising where the person listening (**the Receiver**) validates the person talking (**the Sender**) for what they have said along the lines of *'It makes sense to me that you feel.....'* and *'I imagine that you might also be feeling*'

Spirit: the energy of our being, of our values and beliefs that are at the core of who we are. Sometimes people refer to this as their moral compass. It can be their faith which guides them in all that they do. It is what we really care about, the values that we bring and that give meaning and purpose to all that we do. And Spirit is also our beliefs about people and their development.

Imago Dialogue offers people a wonderful **mirroring** of their experience of this energy, and it is often an energy that people may not have – until now – stopped to really think about in terms of how they bring it, embody it in their leadership in who they are being. And the **validating** of them of this energy is so important, for getting to know this energy and **empathising** with them as to how they might be feeling.

In describing the above four energies and linking them to the Socialisation Journey I hope that this helps in seeing how, very simply the Imago Dialogue in its simplest and purest of forms can be used to help people explore through reflection their energies and begin to think about the impact of their energies on others.

In the next section I describe firstly how I work with the energies in a large group and use the Imago Dialogue, and secondly how I work with the energies in a small group and, or team.

The Imago Dialogue and the four energies in a large group within an organisation

I work with the energies in a number of different ways depending on the size of the group and, or team. With a very large group, say a whole department I often use this in a dialogic way as a means of people connecting with each other.

The set up for this Imago Dialogue on Managing your Energy goes something like this. I invite everyone to stand up – in the room people will already be sitting in a large circle or in semi circles around the room with no tables; virtually I invite them to stand up wherever they are.

I invite everyone if in the room to choose someone with whom to have this conversation, if working virtually then I place people in pairs in Breakout rooms. I always talk about conversation not dialogue, this is a personal preference and is of course a matter of choice for the facilitator or consultant. My role and purpose is to help people to have the conversations that matter with each other, to be in connection with each other.

Once everyone has connected with someone, and I am looking out to make sure everyone does have someone with whom they can connect I let them know that I am about to ask a question and that they will each have about 2 minutes to answer the question whilst the other person, their partner for this conversation will simply listen. So here in the large group, the departmental meeting, I am not asking people to mirror yet – I want to help people at this stage of the meeting to feel really heard through the listening, and it is only for two minutes at the most.

The following are examples of the questions that I ask related to each of the energies to prompt conversation:

- 1. How do you look after your physical energy? What gives you physical energy? What drains your physical energy? What is one thing that you could do that would help you look after your physical energy even better***
- 2. What stimulates your thinking? What helps you to bring a positive mindset? What triggers you into a negative mindset? What is something that you could do that would help you bring a positive mindset more of the time?***
- 3. What has you feel happy, sad? What brings you joy?***
- 4. What gives you meaning and purpose? What does Spirit mean to you, and for you?***

In a large group in the room I use these four questions or variations on them for people to meet people that they do not know, to introduce themselves through the energies – and to change pairs after each question. These four conversations each with someone different mean that there is an energy in the group and in the room that ebbs and flows with the conversations. For the work that I do in organisations in person in the room I only ever work in the one room, large, light and airy – and with no tables.

When we have completed the four questions then I invite everyone to sit back in the circle, look around, notice how they are feeling in all four energies and ask a few people to share with the whole group what they noticed during the four different conversations.

The Imago Dialogue and the four energies in a Leadership Team and, or small group

The four questions remain the same around the four energies. However I work differently with a team or a small group. Usually I will introduce the four energies after lunch if I am working with a team for the whole day or over a couple of days, but always on the first day as they are such an important grounding and a fundamental part of being present.

If after lunch and working in the room then with the whole team, sitting in the circle, I will ask about their energy and using a flip chart we will as a team talk about what nourishes, and what drains them, in each of the energies this often leads to the team thinking around what they could do more of to nourish their energies on a more daily basis. Usually people will talk about what helps them in the team and what as a team they could do that would help. Discussions often include and cover the physical layout of the office space, or when people are working virtually what they could do to help each other connect when on calls – cameras on!

PART TWO

Chapter Four: Context

Chapter Five: Future

Chapter Six: Values and Beliefs

Chapter Four: Context

Leadership consultants like myself are usually called upon to help people in organisations lead change as part of organisational development and business success. With this in mind it is very helpful as a leadership consultant to be aware of the 'psychological journey' which is well described in Imago. For me this forms part of the context which is my understanding of where the organisation is at and forms part of the bigger picture of where the leaders want to get to in the future. I am very much of the view that context is key!

Context is everything and is made up of so many things, including the relationships between people; the level of engagement people have with the future, their experience of the current reality and much more not only internal to the organisation but also externally. Externally this very much includes the economical and socio-political environment. Indeed one way of thinking about context is all the things that make up the environment in which the organisation is now and into the future. Of course this includes an appreciation of the past by way of what has happened, whilst this forms part of the context it is not where I focus my attention in the work that I do.

Chapter Five: Future

I work primarily with leaders in organisations, sometimes with a group of leaders who form a team with a leader who is their Director. This is the person that some, but sometimes not all of the people in the team report to. They may have other teams to which they belong, and have a Director who for example if part of a Global Company may well be located in a different country, and in a different time zone. Often I am working with leaders who have 'multiple belongings'. In some ways this helps with leading for the future, because there is a real sense of the whole. Nevertheless one of the biggest challenges often experienced by leaders is the mix of leading their area of the business and leading for the whole and staying in touch with the vision of the organisation.

I do believe that leadership is a future based activity so am always looking to start in the future. I bring this future focus to all of my work so again this fits very well with the Imago Approach, but also with the work of Steve Radcliffe Associates where I am an associate and the Future-Engage-Deliver (F-E-D) approach to leadership that *Steve Radcliffe* developed.

The F-E-D approach fits extremely well with the Imago First Interview at which the Facilitator explores with the client what their desired future state is and their present/current state.

Overview of Working with individual coaching clients on their desired future

In my work as a consultant the conversation with an individual leadership coaching client is very similar to my work with a group and, or team. I ask the person what the desired **future state** looks and feels like, to visualise this – three months, six months or a year or more from now. And then to tell me more about their **current state** – I usually ask them to tell me more about why now, and what has prompted them in particular at this moment in time to seek leadership coaching.

This conversation forms a part of the first meeting, in addition at this first meeting I talk about how I work – what they can expect of me. I work with love and compassion, with the whole person so although we are in an organisational context I will be asking them to tell me about themselves, to share with me something of what has made them who they are today – starting from their childhood onwards. I sometimes talk about how organisations, teams and groups can be rather like families and that it is interesting as part of the work to look at some relationships from this perspective, to deepen their understanding of the dynamics.

In Imago reference is made to 'The Problem', this is something that I do not do. I avoid using the word 'problem' as in organisations people will seek out coaching support as part of developing their leadership with me, not necessarily because of a 'problem'. So the context is different. Sometimes people will have been referred, this happens less in my experience, and when this has happened it has been because of a perceived area of development and, or weakness. This can have been identified through an organisational 360 feedback questionnaire. People select feedback givers to give them feedback against a set of behavioural competencies and capabilities. The form is sent to them and completed online. The feedback is then collated and a report generated, the feedback is

anonymous. When used really well the feedback can help people with their Personal Development Plans (PDPs) as it gives a snapshot of where their strengths are and where there are potential areas for development and stretch. As part of the 360 the person themselves completes the form and therefore there is often an interesting conversation to be had with the person regarding their self-perception and how others perceive and experience them. Sometimes people come for coaching as a result of not getting a job, for example they may have been through an interview process and not been successful. Again they are likely to have received feedback and then been recommended to work with me.

Once I have gathered information from the person about Why Now and the desired future state I realise that I stay more with the future context whilst at the same time asking some questions about the present/current state. I am more curious about what it is that they want to be feeling, thinking and doing in the future – and that future can be the next day. Indeed I am hugely encouraging of practise, and of this starting immediately.

I also encourage people to share what they are working on with others, why this matters to them and to enlist their support – and indeed challenge.

The first meeting using an Imago Approach with an Individual coaching client in an organisation

Pre-contracting and Contracting

‘Pre-Contracting’ by email and, or phone followed by virtual or in person contracting/coaching

I think of this as ‘pre-contracting’; and do this via email and sometimes with a short phone call which forms what is often called ‘the chemistry review’. Together via email we will have agreed the date and time, and length of the first coaching conversation – I will also have sometimes suggested in the email that a person thinks about what it is they want to work on, and sometimes I may ask other questions that prompt reflection and is preparation for this first meeting.

Very often again via email and before we have met virtually or in the room we will have agreed to a number of conversations usually between 4 and 6. I will also have invoiced and been paid for either the first session and, or all four sessions. I will have had a conversation with the person about whether they are a private client, in other words paying for themselves or whether they are a corporate client in which case their organisation is paying. I operate a sliding scale, meaning the people with whom I work locally are either individuals or are from small local businesses pay less than the very large corporate clients with whom I work. I am always paid in advance of the meetings, and have a cancellation/postponement policy that means if people cancel or postpone within one week of the meeting date then there is a full charge of the fee. Obviously sometimes there are exceptional and unexpected situations when I waive this. The cancellation/postponement policy is on the invoice along with all of the other relevant information.

All of this pre-contracting is so important, it is one of the things that I learnt about in my therapy training days and has stood me in good stead over the years of practising – it helps the person get to know me, and me to know them and it means that I am already creating a safe container through bringing clarity and indeed competence.

All meeting dates and times are confirmed by me via email and meeting invites sent usually by me, sometimes by the client depending on which platform they are using.

In my work I do the whole pre-contracting and contracting before any exploration of the future, however at the end of the first meeting I do double-check with the person that they feel comfortable working with me and I too am able to confirm that I am able to work with them.

Contracting in the first meeting

The first meeting is always an opportunity for me to talk about the way in which I work, what the person can expect from me – this includes a reminder of confidentiality (and limits of by way of threat to own life, other persons, and/or threat to the company) I explain that if any of these things were to be part of the sessions I would talk with them and would with their knowledge need to talk either to their GP or the company. This reassures most people and helps them to understand just how confidential my work is with them. As ever it is about building safety, and trust and encouraging of them to be open with me – and my being open with them about how I work. Confidentiality is so important as often I am working with people in the same organisation, and often within the same team, and indeed with people who may report to same person. Over the years I have a reputation for standing for confidentiality and it is one I am proud of.

I explain how I am going to be working – listening, asking questions, reflecting back to them what I have heard, and offering sentence stems, summarising. I do realise that this is not ‘pure’ Imago, but it works in as much as it is all inside of the relationship. And I do see coaching as a relationship. I don’t usually talk about mirroring although I might if this felt appropriate; reflecting seems to be a better word in this context.

Desired Future State

This is when I ask what has prompted them to seek me out now, and also what it is that they would like in the future, what is the future that they are leading for. I use the rich mix **of mirroring, validating and empathising** which for me are the cornerstones of Imago work in organisations. I am becoming more practised at offering sentence stems and combine these with open questions to help the person explore and clarify.

Emotions

Using the Imago Dialogue approach I ask and offer sentence stems about how they will feel when the desired future is happening. Sometimes I draw on ‘Solution Focused Brief Therapy’ and as well as asking ‘*What else?*’ or ‘*Is there more?*’ I will sometimes say ‘*And if I could have it any how I would feel.....*’ In all of this I am encouraging the person to be specific, to name the feeling, and sometimes depending on how they get on to deepen the feeling here about how they will feel in the future if and when this desired future was now.

If I have not done so already with the person I will talk about the four energies, or at the very least, talk about the emotional energy and that we will be talking later on about the four energies of a leader and will pick up on this if not in this first meeting at our second meeting.

Thoughts

I also ask and pick up on here the thinking that the person will have about themselves and about others in this desired future. This taps into positive thinking, into the positive mindset that I link to the intellect energy. Again I will mention that we will look into the four energies together probably in our next meeting. For now the focus is how they will be thinking about themselves and others when the desired future is realised.

Behaviours

I ask the person what they will be doing in this **future state**; how will they be behaving. The focus here is on actions, things that other people can see and experience. This also paves the way for a further meeting when we will look at more the impact that they have on others. And again it picks up on the energy of the body, the physical energy which I will as mentioned be exploring further in a later meeting.

Summing up and re-contracting

This is the point at which I sum up what I have heard, check with the person that they do want to work with me on their desired future and how they get from where they are now to there, and that I can work with them on this and would like to.

Overview of working with Groups and Teams in Organisations on their Desired Future

The context here for me is leadership. I believe that:

1. Leadership is a future based activity;
2. Leaders are guided by the future they are leading for in all that they do;
3. Leaders who are in touch with what they truly care about, their values and beliefs, are more powerful in leading for their desired future because they really care, and they believe that what they are up to will make a difference.

I read a great quote a few months ago, it went something like this: *Nobody cares about what you know until they know how much you care.*

So groups, and teams especially, who are working together, who are in the words of my colleague *Steve Radcliffe* 'up to something together' need to be clear on the future that they are leading for and on what really matters to them. If a group, team ask me to work with them on helping them get clear on their 'leadership charter' or on their 'leadership manifesto' then I will be working with them on their Desired Future and on the identifying four or five things that they need to commit to work on to help them get to their desired future. This will involve not only describing, and visioning their vision – thinking big – but also talking about what their current reality is, what it's like now in their team and organisation.

There are two things which I know really matter to a Desired Future becoming real and these are a team's commitment to and sense of urgency to get to the Desired Future. Key here is of course is that it is THEIR Desired Future, that it has been co-created between them and that they are all excited by and committed to it. So that is my and their goal to get to a Desired Future that is really important and is different from where they are now. The sense of urgency, the appetite for change is vital from the team and it is likely that people will have given the Desired Future varying amounts of thought. Some people will be clear on what they would like to see different in the future and others less so. I am always keen to give space to everyone to find their way and to help each other along the way to get to a shared sense of future that is meaningful for them as a team and that they can imagine engaging others in going forward. By 'others' I mean their own teams of people but also external people/stakeholders/customers and others.

Chapter Six: Identity; Purpose and Behaviour

Leadership map/story: what you care about, what you stand for

There are three questions that underpin my work with people in organisations (and people who ever and where ever they are). The questions are:

1. *Who am I?*
2. *Why am I here?*
3. *How do I need to show up so that I am in alignment with my values and beliefs, and my purpose?*

Identity: Who am I?

For me the answer to this question is at the heart of leadership, at the heart of 'who am I being right now'? And 'Am I being the leader I aspire to be in all that I do?'

My colleague *Ian Lock* refers to the 'Who am I' as being about our values and our beliefs, it is what we stand for, what really matters to us in all that we do. Interestingly in our work with leaders we often find that many people have not spent time really getting in touch with what they care about previously and making the time to reflect on what they really care about, their values and beliefs is one of the most valuable things I think that we create space for them to do.

Values

For me my values are kindness and generosity. I look to bring these in all that I do. I want to show kindness to others, and to myself and too be generous. So when I think about leading I would like to be known as someone who is Kind and Generous – in all ways – with my time, with sharing, with offering of support. In being kind to myself those who know me well also know that I make time for myself, to refuel, to retreat and to take care of myself – and indeed 'to keep up with myself.'

Beliefs

I believe that people can change. I believe that we are born good and that stuff happens which has us shine less, lose confidence and courage and behave 'badly' in relation to others – (and ourselves); and that underpinning this is a deep felt sense of loss often mixed up with hurt which is expressed through destructive behaviours and fuelled by negative thoughts.

My belief that people can change, and that damage can be healed, is one of the things that guides me in my work and life. I am hopeful for people and know that as people we need people to help us along the way, to support us – and to challenge us if we slip and slide.

Purpose: Why am I here?

This, the second question, is all about sense of purpose linked for me to the difference I want to make through my leadership, my purpose. It is the future I am leading for, it gives meaning to all that I do. For me this is about creating organisations which enable people to safe enough to be real, to be their confident best and to make a contribution and develop their potential leading to business success. My work with people is all about helping people to be their best, to develop, and to deliver. Equally at home with my family I hope to create a family environment which is enabling and empowering of confidence and courage. I say 'create' but the reality is of course that this is a process of 'co-creation' it is not something that I can do on my own and I can only do this in relationship, in connection with others.

There is a wonderful fit here with Imago which is all about being in connection, being in relationship – I love the 'you can be right, or you can be in relationship' quote that *Sophie Slade* gave us on our training. This for me sums it up! I have said this before and will reiterate here that I believe leadership is a not only a future based activity but that it is also a totally relational based activity, leadership happens inside of relationship. Thus helping leaders to build 'bigger' relationships with each other and their people is vital to the success and the results of any organisation.

A full exploration of 'meaning and purpose' using the Imago Dialogue approach works very well here, again helping people to be really seen, heard and understood and throughout the process deepening their own understanding and appreciation of who they are and why they are here.

Behaviour: How do I need to show up so that I am in alignment with my values and beliefs, and my purpose?

Given these values and beliefs – about self and others, and purpose an important question for is '*How do I show up given these values and beliefs?*' And this is all about behaviour. How we embody our values and beliefs, and our purpose, and are congruent in our leadership. This taps into Physical Energy as well, and the way in which we express ourselves through our bodies and indeed how we use language.

The imago dialogue totally lends itself to an individual, team and, or group exploring their values, beliefs and behaviours – and the latter dialogue prepares the ground for a later conversation regarding impact intended (through behaviour) and impact felt.

Sometimes in the companies with whom I work I refer to this as the Brand. So this is Brand Me, if individual and the Team Brand if a team. Not everyone of course is comfortable with the idea of having a personal brand however in some contexts and increasingly having a brand that is congruent is very important because of the way in which use social media.

So the Imago Dialogue of **mirroring, validating and empathising** is what I use here to help people really deepen their connection with what matters to them and to be able to articulate this to others.

PART THREE

Chapter Seven: Impact

Chapter Eight: Confidence

Chapter Nine: Stages of development and stages of organisational development

Chapter Seven: Impact

We are having an impact on each other all the time, without even speaking as I enter into a room I am having an impact. This is something that as a leadership consultant is a key part of my work helping people to be seen, heard and understood – and to see, hear and understand other people and to make the connection with people through being aware of the impact that we are having on each other –and that through understand the impact of our behaviour it can help us build our relationship and enable to us to work together more successfully. A question that I encourage leaders to ask is: ***What is your experience of me?*** This question asked by the leaders helps them to understand how they experienced by people – whether they are having a positive or a negative impact, whether they are shining their light and that is being felt, or whether they are casting a shadow (possibly and usually unintentionally) and that is how they are being experienced. Either way it is essential for leaders to grow their awareness of the impact that they have on people and to be in connection with people.

I and my colleagues use a simple framework given to us by *Werner Holzmann* to help people in organisations find out more about the impact that they are having on people in the context of helping them to build bigger relationships with each other. We talk about Impact Intended and Impact Felt, and I pick up on the work the person has already done in the impact that they aspire to have, how they would like people to feel around them. Key here is emphasizing the impact felt, that this is about how people feel around us in response to our behaviour. We can have the best of intentions but still not land the way we had intended – and there is only one way of finding out – to ask people!

I describe the feedback framework and then go on to describe how we use it and how using Imago can really help people be in much greater connection with each other. It is important to note that this is something that I would not do on first meeting with a team, or suggest that a leader with her team does on first meeting – first and foremost I think the sharing of what each person cares about with the team and the difference that they want to make and related questions is the best place to start. Doing this helps build the safety, openness and trust which are prerequisites – however small they might be between some people – for sharing with each other the impact that that have on each other.

I draw a four square box on the Flip Chart or invite people to draw for themselves:

1. DO GET, DO WANT	2. DON'T GET, DO WANT
3. DO GET, DON'T WANT	4. DON'T GET, DON'T WANT

And then I talk through:

Box 1. Do Get, Do Want

This is about **Affirming** something, a behaviour that a person does that has a positive impact on you, and that helps you build your relationship with that person; for example: *I do get great listening from you and this makes me feel valued and respected; it has me feel wanted and encourages me to share my point of view. This helps me to build to build my relationship with you.*

Box 2. Don't get, Do Want

This is about making a Request. It is about you sharing that there is something that the person does not bring that is having an impact on you. There is something missing that you would like from the other person that if they were to bring this to the relationship it would help you build your relationship with them. For example: *When you don't respond to my emails I feel that worried that perhaps I have offended you in some way. What I would like is just a quick response letting me know you have got the email this would have me feel reassured and help me stay in connection with you and build my relationship with you.*

Box 3. Do Get, Don't Want

This is the challenge. Here you are still inside of building the relationship, based on the rich mix of support and challenge, making the challenge – it is also still a form of request to the person. For example: *I do get from you (sometimes) that you tell me what to do and when you do this I feel patronised, and by your doing this it has me contribute less at our meetings with the team – as I feel that you will probably tell me what to do anyway. By your stopping telling me what to do will help me build my relationship with you and stay in connection with you.*

Box 4. Don't Get, Don't Want

Here is some self-disclosure. I think it's a really important 'box' as let's the other person know often what your triggers are – and I pick up on this with people in teams and groups, and individuals, later on in my work with them. An example of this self-disclosure is: *I don't get sarcasm from you, and I don't want it, and by your keeping it out of our relationship it helps me to stay in connection. When I do get sarcasm from people I feel very small and it takes me into a dark space – thank you for not bringing this to our relationship.*

This is such a great way of and for people to share about impact, about how they FEEL in response to behaviour. After you have shared in Box 1 and working with the Imago Dialogue the person listening (the Receiver) simply mirrors back, and if there is lots of time, they may go onto ask 'Did I get you' and 'Is there more'. Once the Sender has been mirrored in Box 1; then you move onto Box 2 and the same mirroring takes place, and the same again for Boxes 3 and 4. At the very end then the person receiving the feedback says a very big Thank you. Again if I am working with two people I will use more of the Imago Dialogue, and may well move into Validating as well as the Empathising. However in a team and, or group context I am less likely to do this – much depends on the size of the group.

This conversation is best done in small groups and teams, in the room or virtually in Break Out/Meeting rooms. I underline the fact that the framework is all about taking responsibility for your experience, you describe the behaviour and then share that impact that it has on you – you are offering something of yourself to the other person, so I encourage also that the listener (Receiver) remembers this, that they stay curious and really do remember that this is the other person's (Sender's) experience of them.

I emphasize the importance of **mirroring** back what the person has said during this feedback conversation and to do this every step of the way. This encourages two things, one for the feedback giver to 'send' in small amounts – giving time for the Receiver to mirror back, and also time for the note taker to jot down. Secondly it really encourages great listening, and this is something that I am always encouraging, real listening so mirroring back the key words the person has used and even when mirroring back 'the essence' of what the Sender has said using their words in the mirroring.

The feedback framework is really useful for leaders and for leaders and their teams, and gives people a shared language with which to understand the impact that they have on each other and helps them to build bigger relationships with each other. I encourage people to use the framework in an everyday way. For example to look for opportunities to appreciate people, to let them know how they are impacting on you, and for you, the leader to be consciously asking people for their experience of you.

This all goes a long way towards encouraging people to develop not only a coaching culture but also a learning environment, one in which everyone is seen to be developing themselves and has something to learn. This also lends itself to conversations about performance, and the quest to be continually improving performance and to grow a performance culture. For me the two go hand in hand, a performance culture is a coaching culture. It is one in which people are continuously learning and developing. Most people do go to work and want to do a good job, they also want to do work which is meaningful to them and to feel that their contribution matters to the overall success of the company. Valuing people for their contribution, for what they bring and the impact this has on

people is a vital part of helping people to be their best. It also helps people to feel that they belong, that they are part of something and that they are valued.

Always after a group or team have had an experience say in smaller groups I invite everyone back into the whole group or team meeting space to share any insights, and what they noticed. In particular I ask people what they noticed about being listened to and mirrored in this way, how did that feel, what was the impact on them of having what they said mirrored? I may also ask how people found using the framework, which of the 'boxes' (or **Sentence Stems**) they found more difficult, which of the feedback they found more difficult to give, and indeed to receive. If a large group who have been working in smaller groups I won't hear from everyone, but will hear from a few people – again emphasizing that we are all on this journey together and learning from each other as we go along. It also helps people to feel that this really is something that they can do every day with each other and with their people. I encourage them to find their own words for each of the four boxes, make it real for them but to basically follow the framework from 1 through to 4; and if stuck for time to focus on 1.! I really believe, as did Eric Berne (founder of Transactional Analysis) that the fastest and most effective way of changing behaviour is through positive, affirmative feedback.

Underpinning this feedback conversation is always the motive of building the relationship – and this is key, the other underpinning is that the feedback is given from a place of commitment to each other's' success. I also like, and if appropriate, reminding people 'loving eyes' – this is not always appropriate in the business context – however the sentiment is more relevant than ever when we are wearing face masks.

I also use in the impact space the very lovely clear **communication dialogue** – especially when working with two people who are seeking to build their relationship and to work together more effectively. I set up the conversation between the two people so that they both know they will get an opportunity to share their experience of each other and to make a request of each other. I describe the way in which we are going to work, and the framework that I am going to be suggesting that they use:

1. The behaviour: When 'this' happens.....
2. The impact: The impact on me is that I feel.....
3. The request: And the request that I would like to make of you is that

An alternative that I find very useful is a mix of Imago, Non-violent communication and Woman Within training that I did years ago; it goes like this:

1. The behaviour/the situation: When 'this' happen.....
2. The feeling: The impact on me is/how I feel is.....
3. The thinking: The story I make up about myself..... and the story I make about you is.....
4. The reaction (my behaviour): I react by.....
5. The request: The request that I would like to make of you is

In both of these frameworks I explain that the Sender will be mirrored, and depending again on the context, size of relationship and where I/we are at in the working together I will ask people to mirror, validate and empathise. But this will only happen after there has been some practise at the mirroring throughout and only at the end of the whole. It will also be here that I will invite the person to summarise what they heard.

One of the things that I have noticed in my work is that there is a tendency for people in organisations to send a lot of data, rather than in small digestible amounts – and this is something that I am very encouraging of (probably because I am guilty of doing this myself!).

I have mentioned that do believe that leadership happens inside of relationship and that leadership is all about being more conscious – I like very much the Imago ‘Conscious Relationship’ work in which there is no shame, blame or criticism and this fits well for me with ‘Conscious Leadership’ – of taking responsibility and of being in connection. I love the ‘you can be right or you can be in relationship’.

Chapter Eight: Confidence

When I describe what I do to people this is what I say:

I help people to be their best more of the time, and to help others to be their best. My passion is to help create organisations and communities in which everyone flourishes and is able to be who they are and indeed to be and bring more of who they are to work. Working in the business environment as I do I believe that when people are able to be their best and are helped to develop and be their best they perform better and are happier which in turn leads to greater business successes.

I have realised that at the core of being at our best is self-confidence. I was heartened to read an article by Jack and Suzy Welch entitled ***The Six Deadly Sins of Leadership*** in which they write under deadly sin number one:

‘Not giving Self-Confidence its due’: Self-confidence is the lifeblood of success. When people have it, they’re bold. They try new things, offer ideas, exude positive energy, and cooperate with their colleagues instead of surreptitiously attempting to bring them down. When they lack self-confidence, it’s just the opposite. People cower. They plod. And they spread negativity with every word and gesture.

This sums it up for me. And is the reason why I have over the past few years started most leadership team and group sessions and, or workshops and one to one leadership coaching conversations

asking the question: ***What will help you be your best today that will help others also be their best?*** Of all the notes that I take with me and encourage team and group members to take from the meeting this is the one. The things that people call out as helping them to be their best are the very things of helping people work together and are encouraging of everyone feeling confident and able to bring their best to each other. They are the very things that Lucy Kidd, my colleague and friend, have developed in '**Connected Culture Change – Creating a Culture of Care**', one in which people collaborate, in which there is inclusive dialogue and diversity of thought. The list of things is of course unique to every group and, or team or person – it is a helpful reminder of what people need to practice to keep on being their best more of the time not only at work but also of course at home. I love the quote on my dear friend Esme's noticeboard which reads: *Who you are is who you are at home!*

Quotes like this and articles like that of Jack and Suzy Welch's are really helpful to use as part of workshops, I draw on articles and quotes regularly and spontaneously. I am a reader of the Harvard Business Review and there is always at least one article in the monthly magazines which not only speak to me but which I then share with groups, teams and individuals. It also is a way of keeping in touch with a group or team through sharing articles after the workshop and encouraging them to share with each other, and with me, interesting articles and inspiring writing, Podcasts and TED Talks! TED Talks are a great discovery for people who haven't yet come across them, and for those of who have and regularly enjoy them they are an excellent source of inspiration.

In a group, team or individual setting having posed the question I use **mirroring** to mirror back each person's contribution to What will help you be your best and will help others to be their best. Given that I do this at the very beginning of the workshop and, or meeting it means that people begin to share openly through volunteering their experiences and they get seen and heard by me, and mirrored. Sometimes I check for understanding in the spirit of wanting them to be seen, heard and understood by me and the group or team. Thus there might a dialogue where I mirror and check of understanding, as well as validating and empathising – and sometimes the team, if they know each other, will do this as well for and with each other. All of this helps create a safe container, and safety is for me key and underpins all that I do and I believe underlies self-confidence. When we feel safe we are able to, as Jack and Suzy Welch, write be 'bold'. We have the courage to soar and the confidence to shine.

In some of the one to one work that I do and small group coaching work I build on 'the what will help you to be your best' by asking people to think about a recent situation at home and, or at work in which they were at their best. One that when they look back on it they are proud of and feel a sense of either accomplishment and, or achievement about. And then one in which they were at their worst, which perhaps they feel embarrassed about and at worst ashamed about. I then ask for a situation in which they would like to be at their best, but are not at the moment able to be at their best in, and invite them to explore how they could bring being at their best to that situation. So there are three parts to this Imago Dialogue and conversation:

Part one: At your best

- 1. *What was the situation, describe it briefly as others would also have seen it...***
- 2. *How did you feel in the situation?***
- 3. *What did you say to yourself?***
- 4. *What was happening around you?***

Using **mirroring, validating and empathising** I encourage the person to explore their responses so that they have a really clear understanding of the key ingredients of what they are like at their best by way of behaviour, thoughts and feelings – and impact on others.

If I am setting this up in a small coaching group where I may be the overall facilitator but not actually in the small groups I will explain the mirroring, validating and empathising to people and encourage them to listen generously – to listen for understanding – and I am clear that the purpose of the dialogue is that the individual who is exploring what they are like at their best in a situation has very, very clear picture of this by the end of the dialogue.

I then sometimes, if time, offer people an opportunity to explore what they are like when they are not at their best – when they ‘plod’ as Jack and Suzy Welch describe it – when they ‘cower’. I ask the same questions, and again encourage the mirroring, validating and empathising.

Part Two: At ‘your worst’

- 1. *What was the situation, describe it briefly as others would also have seen it.***
- 2. *How did you feel in the situation?***
- 3. *What did you say to yourself?***
- 4. *What was happening around you?***

Part Three: A situation you would like to be at your best in, that currently you are at your worst in

- 1. *What is the up and coming situation?***
- 2. *How would you feel in the situation if you were feeling at your best?***
- 3. *What could you say to yourself that would help you be at your best?***
- 4. *What will likely happen around you if you are behaving and being at your best? This is an opportunity for the person to visualise what might be happening, and as part of this I often encourage the person to visualise themselves in the situation being at their best – right down to what they are wearing, how they are standing, sitting etc..***

I am a great believer in visualisation and draw here on sports psychology and on picturing success in situations. Making links between the world of sport and the business world really helps people to get and relate to this way of working and thinking more easily. Indeed what is great is that people having made the connection with the world of sport, whether they are sporty or not, offer their own examples of sports psychology and of the use of visualisation and other strategies that help people be their confident best. Sometimes people offer strategies that they have come across via Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and I am always keen to encourage people to add whatever they have picked up along the way to use these strategies, to have them as it were in their tool kit – or as someone recently referred to it as their ‘treasure chest’.

Chapter Nine: The Development Stages and stages of organisational development

The Development stages link for me very well with Stages of Organisational development – and too with the work for Will Schutz who beautifully summed up our three basic interpersonal needs as those of:

Need for Inclusion

Need for Control

Need for Affection

I have long used this simple and powerful way of understanding our interpersonal needs through either expressed behaviour or wanted behaviour to help me think about the dynamics of groups, teams and organisations.

The first Development Stage: Attachment

Do I belong? Do I fit in?

Inclusion is very much linked to Attachment which comes from the forming of a bond of '*getting in*' with others in the group, team and organisation and indeed to the organisation. This is often done through shared experiences, literally having an experience together which might include working on something such as a project. Indeed this is one of the easier ways of forming a *bond*, and it can be much more challenging for people to form a bond if they do not have a shared task to perform together. The work I do I hope helps people to build a bond through sharing their values and beliefs, through sharing what they really care about – what matters to them and through really being seen, heard and understood by each other. I endeavour to help people to appreciate that they can through this kind of dialogue and conversation build relationships, bigger and stronger relationships that will stand them in good stead in leading for the future together.

Years ago a very popular model was used to help people think about stages of team and group development was developed by Tuckman, and in organisations, many people will have either heard of this model or be familiar with it. The stages of team development identified by Tuckman are **Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing** – later on he added a fifth stage: **Mourning**. So it can be useful to mention this as a way again of connecting with what people already know and helping them to build on their experience and expertise – to grow what they already know, to develop and think bigger is how I think of it. This first stage, in Tuckman's mode, is **Forming**, literally this is about attaching and, or detaching – how attached do I want to be or detached from others; and do I want others to attach from me, or detach from me.

In summary then this first stage of development is all about beginnings, of being as Schutz described it as 'in or out' and links with the interpersonal need for Significance. It is very much a question of belonging, do I belong here, do I fit in – and of course do I want to fit in here? Am I seen here? Will I be seen here? Is this my tribe? We often ask these questions without realising, we quickly read a room, make a judgement about whether we are going to fit in and get on or not, in an instant. Sometimes these quick first judgements are absolutely spot on, and sometimes not! Indeed often people are surprised by each other, thankfully, and discover that there is much to share with each other whereas initially they may have felt that they were completely different from everyone else and were not going to share anything with anyone. The question being asked of self is '*How much do I want to be in or out?*' And the question being asked of others (albeit silently) is '*Who is in or out around here?*'

As babies of course it is very much about our survival - we need a bond with another to survive – and so too it can be for people in organisations, it can feel like they are fighting for their survival when they do not feel a bond. A typical situation can be someone who from the interview experience feels really excited about the job that they have just landed, only to find that their experience once on board the ship as it were is a very, very different one – and they fear that they may have made a mistake and often one from which they do not feel able to rescue themselves, or be rescued from.

There is often in my experience an uncertainty about *belonging* in an organisation, whether someone has been there a while or just joined. This can be caused by the forever changing organisational structure and too the culture changes that can happen with new leadership and new changes to personnel in teams and of course that happen when companies merge and, or are acquired or acquire other companies. This rather like the 'blended family' can initially be very tricky and requires mindful leadership especially at these times. I do think of the best leaders as being leaders of change, in particular leading the direction of change and as such they need to be very aware of the challenges that people face during turbulent times even when a change may be welcomed it can still create a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity in people.

A challenge for many people is that they experience '*multiple belongings*' something that can cause quite a lot of tension for people as they feel more 'in' one team or group than another, and this can cause a conflict both internally felt and externally expressed. There is no solution to this, it is I think more of a noticing that has to be grappled with and is an increasing part of being in organisations.

Trust is the key ingredient of this stage of development be it in a group, team or organisation – and it is something that every group and or team with whom I have worked have talked about and it is something that I always take time with people to explore further. I like people to really get a handle on what it means to feel trustworthy, to feel totally trusted by others and to be trusting of others, and of course what it feels like to trust oneself. The discussion often involves talking about what it feels like not to be trusted etc and how this can undermine confidence and ultimately performance.

The second development stage: Exploration

What is possible?

In Exploration the child is literally exploring what is possible, what is allowed or not allowed – she or he is testing boundaries, discovering where she or he begins and ends – they are ‘trying out’ things, experimenting with what is possible. Ideally doing this from a safe base to which they can always return inside of themselves and in relationship with and to others.

The stage of Exploration sits most comfortably with Tuckman’s stage of **Storming**. In the storming stage of team development people are testing out just how safe it is to express differences, to disagree with others, and indeed to agree and still be part of the group and, or team. It is vital that teams and groups do move through this stage of development – that they don’t get stuck in the Forming stage of politeness and of not ‘speaking their truth’ with each other. One of my jobs as a leadership consultant is helping people to have these often more difficult conversations with each other and to explore their differences and to work with and through them.

The stage of Exploration also sits I think somewhere between the need for Inclusion and Control as described by Schutz and the the interpersonal need for Control – which Schutz linked with Competence. Control is a vital interpersonal need for us all, to be seen , heard and understood for our experience and expertise; and for some people more than others to express this through making decisions and through having influence over people and in decision making. This stage is greatly helped by people staying curious in each other, indeed one of the top success criteria of the very best of CEOs is a ‘passionate curiosity’ – in people and in what makes them think and feel as they do. Given this then it behoves leaders and their teams, and groups to be curious in each other, to not only see and hear each other but also to seek to understand each other as well.

As part of the work that I do with leaders helping them to develop a language of leadership with which they can have leadership conversations is a key to their success. The language of leadership gives people a way of exploring more about themselves and each other, it facilitates curiosity and makes it okay to have ‘big’ conversations that are about sharing more rather than less, that are more generous and spacious of each other and thus more allowing of creativity and of co-creativity.

The third development stage: Identity

Who am I? Who are we?

Tuckman identified the third stage of team and group development as **Norming**. The team and, or group having successfully worked through their differences in the Storming stage, and importantly knowing that they can express their differences and not fall apart establish some norms/some ways of working which help them perform better together. In my work as I have already described I move quickly into what help us work together effectively by asking the question: What will help you be

your best and help others be their best?’ Thus asking people to think about what helps them work effectively with others in their experience (so also drawing on their Competence and acknowledging this).

This stage follows on very much from that of Exploration and at the heart of leadership development, and it is about awareness – self-awareness and awareness of others. It is about being a conscious leader, aware of one self and the impact we have on each other, and others on us including the environment in which we live and work – and of course our impact on the environment in which we live and work. Much of the work I do with leaders and with teams and groups in organisations is about developing greater self-awareness through conversations, through the giving and receiving of feedback around impact in order that people can really be aware of themselves in relationship with and to others. This fits wonderfully well with Sophie Slade’s ‘You can be right or you can be in relationship’. And is for me what the work is all about – about being in relationship to ourselves, and to each other – and for this reason I think this stage sits with Schutz’s interpersonal need for Affection. As part of this managing our boundaries is vital, knowing where we begin and end, and having a sense of our ‘I’ in relation to ‘You’ and then to who ‘we’ are – our connectedness to ourselves and to each other.

In working with leaders I think of the Identity stage as fitting perfectly with the question: ‘Who am I?’ and fast followed by the ‘Why I am here?’ – linked to Competence the next development stage. With leaders I sometimes refer to this as ‘Brand Me’ which is all about Identity and with teams the two questions can help the team explore their identity: *Who are we and what is our purpose as a team?* Inside of this conversation is the question about boundaries and getting clear on these, and again the questions from what I have referred to earlier as the Leadership Map lend themselves to further exploration as part of Identity – in particular ‘What is the impact we want to have on others? And what is the reputation we want to create? (This is the question about legacy/ or what they want to be famous for as a team) and therefore given their responses to these questions: How do they need to show up as a team (behave with each other and others).

The fourth development stage: Competence

What am I here to do? What is the difference I want to make? What is my, our purpose?

This fourth stage sits alongside Tuckman’s stage of **Performing**. This is when a group and team are ‘up to something together’ delivering results with and through others. Reference is often made here to being a ‘high performing team’; one in which the relationships are strong between people leading ultimately to better results for the team and the organisation. The team or group understand each other and their role, they are able to answer the question/s: *‘What is our role as a team, and what would not be happening if we didn’t exist as a team?’* They know what it is that they together are here to make happen – the difference that they want to make through their leadership.

I think that it is important to add in here Confidence in self and others as part of the Competence stage. This is all about trusting ourselves, having trust in who we are, in others and the wider world as well. It is about feeling that we 'have a place at the table' and that we have a 'voice'. There is with this stage a faith in our own abilities and our own qualities, a knowing who we are at our best in touch with our values and beliefs and behaving in line with these.

Interestingly Schutz did describe the second interpersonal need for Control as being about Competence. For Schutz it is about power, control and influence and the extent to which we want to be in power and have power over the direction of things and the extent to which we prefer to be given direction by others.

Schutz described the third interpersonal need as being about **Affection – about being 'close or far'** and of Acceptance; and I think it is about self-acceptance as well as acceptance (crucially) of others – of the good things about me and others - and the not so good stuff – so it follows on from self-awareness. With this awareness we are more connected to ourselves, love ourselves for who we are, and are more able to connect with others readily and easily, and to enjoy close and intimate relationships with a few people with whom 'any conversation' is possible. Affection seems to me sit somewhere between the development stages of Identity and Competence, the linking being Confidence – the real connection with self, self belief, self acceptance and self compassion.

I would not want to end this chapter without referencing Tuckman's fifth stage of group and team development, that of **Mourning**. During all the years of working with people in organisations I have always been fascinated in 'endings'. In particular in how organisations deal with 'endings'. 'Endings' are happening all of the time in organisations just as all other areas of our lives – in things coming to an end and our moving on, but also in the end of life. For people in organisations they are often dealing with change in the form of reorganisations, restructuring meaning that for some their role may no longer exist and they are offered another role in the organisation or as happens they are offered redundancy. For many people who may have devoted much of their working lives to one company within which they may have had a variety of roles to find that their job no longer exists is very, very hard. Their survival is truly threatened.

All of this is very much part of the context in which I as a leadership consultant am working. There will be those employees who, as a result of a restructuring, are delighted with their new role and who at the same time struggle with seeing their colleagues, sometimes friends, having lost their jobs. They sometimes talk about 'survivor's guilt' and find it difficult to really express their delight and joy at their new job when others are experiencing such very different emotions and are clearly distressed. In my role as a leadership consultant helping people 'hold their losses' is one of my jobs, and helping leaders live with getting 'comfortable with being uncomfortable' is a part of what I help people do – dealing with loss as well as with gain is one of the many leadership dilemmas that leaders grapple with.

In summary the development stages and stages of team and group development linked to interpersonal needs

Stage of development	Tuckman stages of group development	Schutz interpersonal need	Questions being asked of self	Question being asked of others
Attachment 'getting in'	Forming	Inclusion (significance) In or Out	How safe is it for me to be in? Do I fit in? Do I belong? How significant am I?	Who is in here? Who belongs here? Who are the significant others?
Exploration 'trying out'	Storming	Control (competence) Top or Bottom	How much power and influence do I want to express towards others? How much of this do I want from others? How much control and influence do I have?	Who is top around here? Who is bottom around here? Who are the main 'rattler and shakers'?
Identity 'trying on'	Norming	Control and Affection (competence and self-acceptance)	Who am I? What really matters to me? What do I stand for? What do I really, really care about? (Values and beliefs)	What do they really care about? What matters to them? Do they share similar values and beliefs to me?
Competence 'getting on'	Performing	Control and Affection (competence and self and Other acceptance)	Why am I here? Where can I make an even bigger difference given my values and beliefs? What is our (higher) purpose?	What can we do even more of together, through trusting each other? We know that we can make a bigger difference, what is it?
"Detachment " 'getting out' (or being got out in organisations)	Mourning (endings)	Exclusion (Echoes of Inclusion here – of significance/insignificance)	What's going to happen next? Where do I belong? What am I going to do? Who am I?	Who can be trusted? <i>Am going to give this more thought AT</i>

Sophie Slade and I have had a conversation about the development stages and in revisiting them I think that there is some movement betwixt and between the stages. It is helpful to have the development stages in mind at the same time as to appreciate that they are not rigid; there is a fluidity and movement between the stages when applying them to organisational development – and it is something I hope to spend more time thinking about and talking about with Imago colleagues.

Conclusion

I wrote this paper as part of my project and offer it to the Imago community as a way of integrating the wonderful Imago Dialogue into our working with organisations. I offer it as a snapshot of the way in which I work with leaders, teams and groups of leaders in organisations and the way in which I integrate Imago Dialogue into my work. My hope is that this will help those interested in applying Imago Relationship Theory in the work place, in communities, in organisations to see how this can be done and to develop their own ways of integrating Imago in Organisations.

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