Psychodynamics of Leadership Exits

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Introduction

The ending of a leader's tenure stirs up complex dynamics in both leaders and followers and in their interactions. The topic of leadership exit accounts for a tiny fraction of the writings on entry and mid-tenure leadership challenges, suggesting a collective avoidance of thinking, experimenting and even writing about endings (Gilmore and Austin, 1993; Sonnenfeld, 1988; Gilmore, 2000, Schall, 1997).

Yet endings matter. When leaders leave abruptly without adequate containment or working through of relationships and learnings, the organization often loses significant knowledge and relationships that are resources for the mission. The O-rings problem with the Challenger was on the agenda of several executives of NASA who left at the same time and the issue did not get handed off to the appropriate incoming leader. (Gilmore, 1988, 11-12). We know the critical importance of network relationships with key stakeholders externally (Burt, 1992), yet often we act as if all of these relationships have been institutionalized rather than held personally by the outgoing leader and thoughtfully handed over to an incoming leader or someone on the existing staff.

The work of leadership exit does not begin only when the leader is deciding to exit. It is a stance throughout the leader's tenure in helping people to take the leader in deeply such that, without the leader's actual presence, there is a continued source of guidance. When Martin Luther King said, "I have a dream … I may not get there with you," he set forth the possibility that he may not be the one guiding the people toward this "dream" he had conceived and called others to join. At a meeting of all his former clerks, Judge Lasker, an influential federal judge, took stock of the issues he had spent his life addressing, flagged the major undone agendas and "charged them" to continue working on a set of key issues. These are important conversations too rarely held that help followers interject the leader as an ongoing source of guidance even when they are no longer present.

Issues Involved in Executive Exit

The way leaders leave an organization, even when anticipated, all too rarely is developmental for the organization or the outgoing leader. The reasons are a mix of issues in the leader and in the followers:

- Leaders avoid thinking about when the right time is for them to leave, often overstaying and making others (the board, coalitions, etc.) force the issue. This is often at considerable harm to the organization and their own legacy. Like Samson, leaders often pull down their achievements by overstaying. Ken Olsen, the brilliant founder of Digital Computing, only with partial humor, was quoted as saying "you won't be able to judge my effectiveness until five years after I have left. So I may never leave," suggesting denial both of one's ending in a role as well as of death itself. Leadership exits are inevitably suffused with associations with death. Kets de Vries (1988, p. 60) writes of CEO's facing

retirement as needing to overcome the "hidden fears that plague us all" to face stepping down. In leaving, one hopes that one will be remembered, taken-in in a valued way by those continuing (Rutan and Stone, 1992). Leaders are aware that leaving is an occasion for both their own stocktaking and others summative evaluations of their tenure.

- Conventional wisdom about "lame ducks" delays their announcing, which reduces the time for the appointing authority to think strategically about succession and for staff and key stakeholders to think and plan around the discontinuity. The term "lame duck" is derived from politics, to refer to congressmen who had been defeated in November, but until 1933 remained in office until the fourth of March. The connotations are a mix of powerlessness and irresponsibility. (Morris, W. and M, 1977, p. 335). Doug Hall notes in a thoughtful essay on his interim leadership, "all leadership is temporary, at one level" so that the "lame duck" or "interim" periods are only variations of all leadership tenures.

- Leaders over imagine that they have left a clear blueprint that others can "execute," so they do not think about the social process of working through what has been done, what needs to be done and what might need to be changed (Dixon, 2002). This may suggest fantasies of omnipotence that one is still controlling the fate of the organization after one is gone, by the strength of one's imprint. The notion of legacy, so often discussed by leaders at the end of their tenures (Austin and Gilmore, 1993, p. 50), can have connotations of resources for an unfolding future or a sense of a backward looking burden that keeps inheritors in a dependency relationship to the donor.

- Followers often react as if the choice and transition implications are completely beyond their influence and adopt a passive "wait and see" stance. This can lead to drift for the organization, just when it most needs locally distributed leadership to step up.

- Followers, even when protected by civil service, feel anxious in the face of a leader's exit, resulting in many small informal conversations that can fragment the organization into coalitions and reduce the collaborative focus on the work and goals of the agency. In a session where a leader announced his departure after 15 months, he saw the accomplishments where as his followers used the metaphor of "balls in the air" and were anxious about the inevitable new initiatives to be put in play by the successor (Austin and Gilmore, 1993, p. 51). At one level it is rational for individuals to draw energy from the collaborative change initiatives more into the ongoing operational tasks that are clearly within their role, hence less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the discontinuity in leadership. This can result in an every person for themselves as each are privately looking out for their own interests.

- Followers often fail to think actively about their own choices around potential or actual leadership changes and instead vicariously wonder about what is next for the outgoing leader.

Furthermore, the maladaptive response of increased politics and rumor, in reply to real or imagined uncertainty about future leadership, significantly reduces the

capacity for productive work. Frequently, a particular leader over time will have "contained" various splits in the organization as members of the group have realized that their agendas are not going to be favored or that resources are going to flow to a particular mix of initiatives. When the leader announces his or her departure, this containment is relaxed and latent tensions begin manifestation. These differences can be a source of vitalization when individuals and the group can tolerate taking in the mix of feelings of loss, regret, anticipation, anxiety and hope that departures inevitably stimulate (Bridges, 1991; Storr, 1979).

However, these feelings at times are denied or projected elsewhere. In work with a revered departing leader of a major national organization, as the consultant, I was struck with the excessive preoccupation with what was next for the outgoing leader as if only she faced a new context (Gilmore and Austin, 1993, p 55). By projecting uncomfortable, but possibly exciting, feelings about the followers' own hungers for new opportunities or dissatisfactions with the current roles, the followers coped with the transition but with reduced options and less emotional aliveness.

Endings and transitions are difficult. Leaders and followers often cope in dysfunctional modes:

- *Manic Denial*—Working extra hard on specific tasks with little acknowledgement of the feelings and realities of the impending change and the rational links of tasks to goals.

- *Disengagement*—Gradually becoming preoccupied with one's own future, losing focus on the work that has to keep going. Engaging less, personally, with colleagues because he/she is unsure about his/her own future or his/her colleagues' futures. Becoming less passionate because he/she is increasingly anxious that whatever he/she does on an initiative may not matter because a new leader might not follow through on it.

- *Nostalgia*—Spending too much time on savoring successes and over valuing the past. Boym (2001, p. xiv) notes "Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals." Yet she reminds us that often this longing is for a place and time that "no longer exists or has never existed. (p. xvii) with the effect of causing the "afflicted to lose touch with the present." (p. 3) By being less reality oriented, the organizations loses touch with the traction and stimuli of real threats and opportunities in the transitional space.

The paper will work with several cases. The lead case is in a context of a political transition in which the commissioner was able to overcome his concern about being a "lame duck." He announced his resignation, and created an unusual process strategy to contain a productive set of conversations on transitions and endings with each of his major deputies and their units. One hypothesis is that the conventional wisdom about "lame ducks" that leads people to not announce their departures until it is actually happening, is a collusive defense between both leaders and followers against feeling the issues that endings stir up: envy, sadness, appreciation, anger, abandonment, etc.

A second case involves a vice president of nursing's departure in which the COO asked the nursing directors as a group to suggest how to cope with the interim structure. Given that he knew the group was split into several camps that the outgoing leader had been unable to work through, one wonders if unconsciously the COO was sowing an "apple of discord" among the current directors. However, during a consultation they were able to contain and work through many of their issues to make a good enough recommendation about an interim structure and make constructive use of the liminal space to develop their team.

A final example will look at the use of temporary absences of a leader as opportunities for learning about exits.

All of these cases occurred in the context of consultancies that are more in an organizational development frame than psychodynamic. Yet, I would like to reflect on how we could deepen the processes that surround leadership exits to make these complex moments of continuity and discontinuity more developmental for both the departing leader and those who remain with the organization.

Case 1: Commissioner Scoppetta and the Administration for Children's Services

Commissioner Scoppetta had been at the helm of a newly created agency, Administration for Children's Services (ACS) for almost five years, appointed by Mayor Giuliani after a major crisis. As the final year of the mayor's term neared, Scoppetta committed to a major strategic-planning effort to take stock of the considerable achievements and develop a plan for the next five years. He realized "he might not get there with them," and he involved critical outside stakeholders with staff at all levels within the agency whose commitment was needed to make the plans real for children, families and communities. In short, knowing all the mayor's people would be replaced, he linked insiders and outsiders that would be there beyond his term to uphold the visions and reforms to which he had committed. Scoppetta engaged ACS middle management as well as a prestigious Citizen's Advisory Board in thinking explicitly about the transition and the role they could play both collectively and as influential individuals in sustaining support during the change in administration. During much of this planning he was unsure himself whether or not he wanted to try to stay and whether to wait until the dust settled with the primaries and the election to see who the new mayor would be.

It was within this climate that, in coaching sessions, Scoppetta reviewed the pros and cons of his trying to stay. Scoppetta decided that it was the right time, both for him and the agency, for him to step down. One learning from this case is the power of an outside coach or consultant with whom one can test the options. The mix of personal and organizational issues are difficult to talk through with subordinates or with one's boss. By talking through the pros and cons from his own point of view and the dynamics of the political transition, he was able to realistically see the benefit of his leaving at this time on his own terms. By being clear about his intentions, he could orient people to the task of an effective

transition, and create a successful platform for a new leader to bring fresh perspectives to the future challenges.

He next faced the decision about timing. Classically, people are advised to not announce because one becomes a "lame duck." Yet in a political transition, people make their own assessments of likelihood independently of any announcement from the leader. He took the risk to make the announcement in September, to make it clear that his decision was not based upon primary results.

Just as people have observed in group dynamics, participants often actively collude to deny the ending of a conference (Rice, 1965). By letting themselves be aware of the ending, they allowed the following:

- A focus on some things that they could do in the short term—especially looking for the inner circle that would shape the leadership choices. For example, after the elections having the people best situated in the various networks brief the winners in city council, key people on the mayor's staff, etc.

- Thinking with these key people, many of whom would continue, about how they could continue the work on reform.

- The longer the time period for the transition, the more opportunity there was to introduce staff that were likely to remain across the transition to important groups (newspaper editors, community groups, judges, etc.) to give them a continued point of contact. This avoids the losses of social capital and working alliances between the particular leader and key people and groups.

The commissioner informed his top staff first, directly addressing a central issue that three of his deputies were interested in the job if he were going to step down. He stated his experience in political transitions was that it is always a mix of politics and substance that shapes the key leadership decisions. Given that context, he would not advocate any particular candidate to whomever was mayor-elect, either publicly or in private. He would be available to anyone who wanted his counsel about their own career issues—and who desired his honest feedback on the strengths and weaknesses each might bring to jobs each might seek. He hoped this team that had accomplished so much could keep the focus on the work needed between then and the end of the year—recognizing that each as an individual needed to do their own thinking as he had done.

Scoppetta's leadership during this complex transitional period involved being thoughtful about his own transition and selectively sharing some of his thoughts, feelings and learnings from this transition and others he had experienced as well as having conversations with individual managers about their situations if they seek his counsel. Rather than suppress individual rivalry or try for manic focus on collective tasks, he worked with the natural grain of deputies focusing more on their own divisions.

Out of anxiety, too many leaders do not use this as an occasion for thinking about their own future, but it is a great opportunity for each of them to reflect on where they are in their careers, their passions and their opportunities. They can then

either sign up for continued work within the organization (re-sign) or actively look to transplant themselves (resign). Many talented people surrounding a departing executive may be able to make even greater contributions to the mission of the organization. In this case, children and families from different vantage points—at the state, in other jurisdictions, in the federal government, at foundation, in the private agencies and in other related agencies.

The more Scoppetta created a climate in which people were comfortable thinking with him about their options, he continued to have influence with them rather than driving individual's career thinking underground.

Making Transitions a Theme for the Final Months of Scoppetta's Tenure

After the elections, and a new mayor was deeply involved in building up his team, Scoppetta chose to engage his top managers in addressing the transition challenges.

The families and children ACS worked with often faced poorly managed transitions and endings, especially of authority figures. Front-line staff are managing transitions all the time with clients and families, from one worker to another, from one agency to another, to a new school, etc. Having Scoppetta and his staff face the complex work of endings, saying goodbye, thinking about learnings, letting the complex mix of satisfactions, disappointments, anger and hope surface modeled what workers in family conferences often dealt with at the primary task level.

Scoppetta convened a series of meetings with each of his six key deputies to explore how in this "home stretch" they could keep up the progress, keep each other informed and prepare for the inevitable changes in the team and the team dynamics in a new administration. Thus, over a two-week period, Scoppetta scheduled six three-hour meetings at the New York Federal Reserve Bank for each deputy and 30 mangers or staff of their choice for a transition meeting. Having the meetings by division was nicely informed by the sense that people appropriately pulled more closely to the areas of the organization where their authority is most clear Individuals faced the least complexities of coordinating with others who may be their rivals in the changes at the top, as well.

Giving the deputies the leadership in these sessions had three important dynamics:

- Each faced the task to take up leadership within their division, with the commissioner as a resource, to model their continuity across administrations.
- Each had to think about who to invite and why, a useful moment to reflect on the talent in their group, its developmental challenges, etc.
- As each crafted a design, there was a final coaching opportunity for the commissioner to reflect with them on the choices they made. There was considerable variety as some proposed designs that were more task-focused and others were more comfortable with a reflective session.

One advantage of this frame was that in advance of his actually being gone, people experienced Scoppetta standing to the side and acting as a resource, as they experienced complex feelings about the end of his term.

The meetings were framed as reflecting, learning, consolidating, and most of all feeling the mix of pride, sadness, fatigue, disappointment and anxiety that were inevitably associated with this transition. They were not instrumental; they were not about getting more work done.

Each session had a mix of the following.

1. Learning about transitions—sharing their own experience and insights and hearing some of Scoppetta's—and becoming more mindful and less on automatic pilot during this period.

2. Substantively thinking about the key shifts both for ACS as a whole—e.g., going from tight link with mayor to a more ordinary relationship, from building the plan to implementing, etc.—and for their division.

3. Thinking externally about different stakeholders, what might be going on for them and which ones might be particularly useful to keep connected to during this transition—e.g., Board of Education and courts will be much less churned up than city council and the key control agencies in the mayor's office. Also internally, lawyers could continue partnering better regardless of policy changes that might come with a new leader.

4. Allowing space for each person to imagine his or her individual futures.

5. Allowing space for them to think about the anxieties in their colleagues and subordinates who are not at this session and how to share some of their learnings with them.

What this case suggests that the fear of being a 'lame duck' is greatly exaggerated. By creating structured forums and by being transparent about his own mix of thoughts and feelings on leaving, Commissioner Scoppetta gave the agency the opportunity for thoughtful stocktaking at a time that often is overwhelmed with politics and anxiety.

Within a month of these meetings, one of the deputies was named as the new commissioner. Another deputy who had been a finalist was selected to be commissioner of another city agency. The transition faced many substantive challenges—the budget cuts, the downturn in the economy and the implementation of the plan that had been developed in the spring. Not only were the internal dynamics more productive across the transition, but also externally there were many more stakeholders who knew the parts of the plan most relevant to them and were mobilized to advocate for the continuation of those initiatives. For example, in daycare and Headstart, there had been an engaging process to develop "Counting to Ten: New Directions in Child Care and Headstart" with external advocates and stakeholders. This group began to explicitly think about the transition and how to ensure these initiatives would survive, and they had this plan integrated into the larger ACS strategic plan—"A Renewed Plan of Action for the Administration for Children's Services"—issued in July of the final year of

Scoppetta's tenure. A year later, many of these initiatives were alive and well, being carried forward by a productive working alliance of insiders and outsiders. A similar story could be told in many other areas of the agency.

We believe that the thoughtfulness of addressing the issues of transition, beginning in the final year with the planning—the conference—and ending with the explicit sessions on transition for the top 180 managers in the agency, significantly contributed to the sustainability of the hard-earned reforms. Paradoxically, by being attentive to the personal impacts of transitions, we believe that the agency was better able to live into the future challenges set forth in their plan. By taking care of themselves across a difficult transition, staff were and would continue to be able to bring more to the challenging transitions faced by the children and families they are dedicated to serving.

We now turn to the next case, which differs in that a group of nursing directors created a transitional consultancy for their group when their vice president with little warning, stepped down.

Case 2. VP of Nursing's Retirement.

An indication of growing sophistication about leadership exits and their dynamics was a request for consultation that came to CFAR when a long tenured nursing vice president announced her impending resignation. We interviewed her after beginning the work with the directors as she was taking vacation days during her final weeks. This was a more typical case in that once she had resigned, she withdrew almost immediately from being an active player in the organization. She was leaving with the hope that her departure would stimulate needed changes that she felt she no longer could be an effective advocate for. "There is limit to what is listened to" by the powers that be she told us because she believed she had been discounted.

The group of seven directors persuaded the executive VP to whom nursing reported and the COO to support a consultation to their group, initially to develop an interim leadership structure that would be effective during the many months of the national search. The group was fortunately open to reflecting beyond the issue of interim leadership to work through key dysfunctional dynamics that had grown up around the exiting leader's style.

The directors were clearly a group, not a team (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993), only coming together around a shared sense that nursing was devalued in this setting and needed to report in at a higher level and become more vital in the organization. Due to the low level of trust, we initially used an individual questionnaire to learn about individual points of view on the interim structure, interest in the permanent job, interest in being part of the interim and the key issues for nursing. They overwhelming saw the need for nursing to be more potent and speak with one voice, and report in at a higher level, but the first inclination was for a majority of the group to fantasize that they could somehow be a collective interim vice president. One wrote "the group would send multiple spokespeople to events to, 'keep them guessing about who is in charge, while,

having a common vision.'" (CFAR Memo, 2002). This powerfully illustrates the potential in an exit that hasn't been worked through for a group to oscillate between a fantasy of themselves as a single actor, repressing their many differences, and fragmenting into a set of individuals each seeking advantages for their own units (e.g. salary increases, working hours, etc.)

In this consultancy, the leadership role was transitionally enacted by the consultants, creating a safe enough transitional space to contain charged issues such as individual's ambitions to be considered as a candidate here or elsewhere, different ideas about both interim and permanent structure to be surfaced and worked through.

As we got into the work it was clear that the nursing group, like the rest of the organization, managed more in shifting coalitions than through the formal standing groups. People spoke about the team climate being one of gingerness, with the real issues getting taken up outside often with insiders and outsiders. The outgoing leader's style was identified "specifically intended to not allow a single leader to emerge." Nor was she regarded as potent in championing nursing's point of view on key issues and the group oscillated between classic feelings of middleness – powerless and torn in multiple directions (Oshry, 1989, Gilmore, 1997).

We used the immediate tasks of recommending an interim structure and crafting how they would participate in the search process as vehicles for building trust ("tested expectations" as defined by Aggazarian, 1998) among one another, inviting them to practice holding one another accountable via being particularly attentive to our temporary leadership and living up to the norms that we had collectively generated. The group made significant progress, giving good enough authorization to one of their members to be the interim vice president while also using their negotiations with the COO and EVP to advocate for important changes such as nursing reporting in at a higher level and becoming more effective at authorizing sub groups to work on behalf of the team.

Over the months of this consultation, significant progress has been made internally and externally. In a stocktaking retreat, participants both looked back and checked in on the distributed project leadership on a number of critical issues. By this time, I, who had been in the lead on the structuring of the interim, began to be anxious that my colleague who had taken the lead developing the team was creating such a cohesive group that the new Chief Nursing Officer, when finally appointed, would have difficulty joining and feeling potent with this group. I began to think of the new leader's dilemma about making any personnel changes. We were able to use this difference in our points of view with the group, to be realistic about the new leader as a force that would be both developmental and regressive from their point of view.

This case is unfolding, but has clearly illustrated the power of thoughtful support during transitions, creating a space, language and process for the group to live into their longer term agenda of nursing being more potent and more accountable within the larger organization. The new leader will be getting an appreciated asset

to connect with, yet with many issues appropriately still left open for this individual's stamp.

Case 3: Using Short Term Absences to Learn about Exits, Absence, and Presence

We want to touch on another mode of helping organizations become more adaptive around a leader's exit, namely the use of planned and unexpected absences of leaders as occasions for reflection by both leaders and followers. I was consulting to a top team of a medical school when the Dean had a bad accident that put him out of commission for three weeks. In working with the staff, I noted that many of his key deputies stepped up to the challenges and filled the void. One had to complete critical negotiations with a key recruit involving, salary, and space. He commented to me that he found that he had to think much more deeply about the Dean's interests because of his actual absence than when the Dean was available for frequent guidance. These moments can stimulate the imagination that Hall talks about as subordinates 'mentally role play[ing] what I would do if I were the Dean … identification and fantasy (role rehearsal) can be important sources for learning for a new role." (Hall, 1995, p. 76).

From that experience, I have been more alert to the chance to have leaders and followers work more actively with the temporary experiences of being absent for periods of a week or longer.

Before leaving for a period of time, a leader often has a heightened sense of what are the vital priorities and a stocktaking of what accomplishments are in place. One can learn from one's worries. Out of anxiety, we rarely harvest what thoughts and feelings an absence stirs up in both leader and followers or team members. Some questions that I have used with leaders preparing for a vacation include:

- What are the areas/issues/relationships that you feel are in "good enough" hands as you prepare to leave?

- What are areas/issues/relationships you are most concerned about in terms of how they will be handled in your absence? Why?

When a leader feels that the gap between his/her ability to handle issues and people and the ability of the next best person is relatively narrow, a departure occurs with some sense of security. If the gap feels large, it's time to do something about your worries. The gut can be a valuable indicator. These temporary absences are vivid reminders about the longer-term developmental challenge of leaving behind an organization that is capable of continuing effectively in the leader's absence. One might think of it as a Sisyphean index—what boulders one is rolling up the hill will not fall back just because you are away.

The leader can use the period of a planned absence to put people in charge of different aspects of the leader's set of responsibilities, from a single acting or interim leader, to a distributed leadership as a way of giving others temporary experiences with different portfolio's of responsibilities. This happens quite often,

but too frequently without the commitment to harvest the learnings, not only with the individual, but also in a group context to explore the ways in which the absence of the leader changed the dynamics of the team. In the literature on groups, there is rich theory of how a single absence can change the dynamics, allowing some conversations that one person's presence might have suppressed or altering dynamics among others because the accustomed role of the absent member is not enacted. (Rutan and Stone, 1993, Herbert and Trist 1953)

In a debrief with an interim leader, who stepped up from the deputy role to be commissioner, he commented that when he began his experience he wondered how he could do the job without anyone in what he felt was the vital role of deputy. He ended up realizing that for many issues having only a single person at the top was probably more effective, and when the boss returned to the top job, the interim left both from his insight about the organization and from realizing his own hunger to be the top.

On the leader's return, all can learn by inviting direct reports to notice during the absence when they most experienced anxiety in moving forward on some initiative without the leader's involvement and why. When executives are highly involved, subordinates often stop thinking imaginatively about what would the boss do. This leads to their generalized sense of a need to run things by the boss without sharpening their thinking about when the "run by" really makes a significant difference to the quality of the actions taken. This also deepens their taking in a richer image of the boss than they have when the boss is all to present and perhaps too intrusive. In once case, a major shift occurred in an organization when the consultant realizing that the president was suppressing a conversation that needed to happen within his team, invited him to leave the room with the consultant. This was a fate making intervention that began a chain of events that triggered a succession in leadership, perhaps an extreme case of the power of a short term absence to trigger changes both in the 'organization in the mind' and then the organization in reality.

Reflections on The Three Cases

Looking across these cases, we can develop some desirable characteristics of these spaces for reflection.

Turning ghosts into ancestors. (Loewald, 1960, p 29 as quoted in Epstein, 1995, pp. 200-202) Transitions and endings stir up complicated feelings in all the participants that are all too rarely given the space for reflection and making sense. Each participant would have individual issues from which each formative experiences lie beneath the organizational experiences with earlier transitions in their current shared organization as well as varied organizational experiences. Many who are being left in the current transition have been the one to leave. Yet these experiences often shape the current transition like planets hidden from view, which we can only infer from their gravitational effects on visible bodies. In Loewald's formulation, there is a potential for becoming more reality-oriented by pooling intelligence about prior experiences and by exploring what is similar or different from this current situation. In the ACS case, many people had

experienced horrific earlier transitions, house cleanings, racial tensions and careers being sidetracked. By sharing and discussing these experiences, they were able to extract lessons and see what is different about this situation to be more reality oriented as they prepared for this transition. In the nursing case, the directors were able to see the departing VP of nursing more sympathetically, release one of their members from a scapegoat role, and use their own experience of the transition in helping similar processes take place more effectively on their individual units.

Encouraging people to think about one's own future. In all three cases, the spaces that were created encouraged people to think about their own futures, not just focus on the departing leader, to use this occasion to take stock, to reconnect with earlier hungers in joining the organization and find more potent ways to realize them either in the organization or elsewhere. As noted earlier, in the organizational development tradition of these interventions, there was much greater emphasis placed on pooling experiences and thoughts rather than giving people the individual space to think through these issues. Looking back, I doubt that the Commissioner would have reached his own decision and approach without the privacy of a confidential coaching relationship. In this same case, one of the possible successors called a few days before the mayor's announcement of the new commissioner and thoughtfully reflected on both what to do if appointed and how to handle reaching out to colleagues as well as, what to do if not selected. Again, this thoughtful exploration of deeply individual issues would be much less likely to surface in a collective workshop. A climate must be created for people to own their own views. In hindsight, the sessions with ACS, with the Commissioner present, even if to the side, pulled for a too simple story of progress and celebration of his leadership. As noted above, by having him actually leave at some point during the session might have allowed a richer exploration of under explored perspectives that were contained by his leadership.

Pushing back against primitive splits. Out of anxiety, groups often split and project the enemy as outside as an easy, but defensive, way to experience cohesion in the present. In both the nursing and child welfare case, people began to talk about prior transitions and slide into an assumption that the people coming in would have to be briefed and persuaded to accept their plans, seeking them as disruptive rather than an inevitable mix of developmental and regressive forces. Participants can be encouraged to reclaim their projections of the enemy as outside, when the reality is that many of the forces of resistance are within themselves. The nursing case suggests that there can be some real progress on some of these splits, with a scapegoated member released from her role during this transition, in ways that make the group healthier to take in a new leader.

Actively exploring multiple perspectives on the transition.

Whitman (1855) in Song of Myself writes:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

The discontinuities of an executive transition is an occasion for borrowing the perspectives of the many different points of view on the transition: the leaving executive, those staying, the appointing authority, the incoming leader, customers or clients, subordinates, etc. It is particularly useful for all participants to borrow the eyes of the outgoing leader and take stock of the achievements and what is the remaining work. By thinking ahead to the arrival of a new leader, participants can be more sophisticated about how they brief the new leader. All too often, each person thinks of their part of the organization and what is absolutely critical that the new leader understand, without connecting to how overwhelming that can be to have unintegrated pitches from each of the major functions rather than seeing the context from the new leader's point of view (CFAR, 2002). This would be an example of middles integrating both in the organizational dimension that Oshry (1989) has written about as well as the time dimension noted by Gilmore (1997). As Hall (citing Vancil, 1995, p. 78) has noted "there is no truth. Every party to an executive transition has his or her own truth or perspective on what happened." Again, premature sharing might dampen the embracing of multiple truths, pulling more for a 'restorative' than a 'reflective' nostalgia, with a single plot (Boym, 2002). Hall (1995, p. 90) notes how difficult but useful it was to analyze his own experience, even as an academic with the convention of writing a journal article. He richly draws on journals from the time of his interim deanship, suggesting that journaling might be a method to create a powerful individual track.

Pooling intelligence about real challenges. In all three of these cases, the shared exploration of the real context anchors people facing uncertainty. In that any new leader needs to address these challenges, it is also useful preparation to support the new leader. In the ACS case, there were good specific conversations about specific issues such as a citywide mandated budget cut, the shift in the city's economy, interagency issues, working with the contract agencies, etc. The tone was of realistic engagement, noting the importance of their attitude toward these challenges even when the agency does not have direct control over these events. In nursing, the group was able to take in ways in which the health care delivery system was changing, with more ambulatory elements and new challenges for nursing. In the use of short-term absences, the focus is particularly on current events.

All of these protect the group from lionizing the yet to arrive new leader and overloading them with unrealistic expectations. A critical feature of ACS's success in the past five years had been the strong working alliance between Scoppetta and Mayor Giuliani. Scoppetta began most days at Gracie Mansion in a meeting of the mayor and his inner circle. When budget and personnel agencies resisted changes ACS proposed, people knew that they had some access to the mayor. People were

able to take in how specific this relationship was both to the people and the circumstances of the crisis, and free up the new leader from being resented for not having this special relationship. People were able to speak to their valuing of it and accept that it would be different.

How can the issues of executive exit can be more productively handled and worked at a deeper level? In doing so, I want to draw on work by Svetlana Boym (2001) on nostalgia. Leadership transitions are occasions in which people experience discontinuities in the narratives of their lives. As noted in the introduction, one of the defenses is nostalgia in which locates some idealized past place where one felt at home. Boym productively differentiates, however, between two types of nostalgia, one that stresses the root nostos (return home) and the other that stresses algia (longing):

Restorative nostalgia	Reflective nostalgia
Stresses the root nostos, returning home	Stresses the root algia, longing.
Suppresses "the signs of historical time—patina, ruins, cracks, imperfections." p. 45	Embraces "historical and individual time, with irrevocability of the past and human finitude. Re-flection suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis." p. 49
"National memory reduces this space of play with memorial signs to a single plot." p. 43	Sees the past as opening up potential, collective memory as a 'playground' Comes into greater awareness with distance or at moments of transition/twilight.
Involves idealization of the past and paranoia towards a scapegoated enemy who threatens that return, a "Manichean battle of good and evil" p. 43.	"Reflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play points to the future." p. 55

In Boym's framework, the challenge is to create spaces for reflective nostalgia in which people feel sufficiently protected against the manic pace that often surrounds endings to re orient themselves for the next stage of their journey. It can help if people experience themselves as re choosing to have that next stage within the organization, after thinking about options. I have been struck by the linguistic similarity of the word "resign" to the words "re-signing up," suggesting that when we really re sign up, we have had the courage to think of leaving. In such spaces there is inevitably a mix of loss and gain (Austin and Gilmore, 1993, p. 55).

Given the increased velocity of changes in leaders, organizations are at risk of keeping relationships with new leaders superficial as a defense against the anticipation of future abandonment. M. C. Bateson (Bateson, 1989) wrote

poignantly about her own experience of frequent transitions and the criticality of her belief in her capacity to mourn. If she did not have that confidence, she never would arrive and form deep connections in each new setting. Being connected to the losses enables one to hold onto valued parts of the departing leader that form resources for each individual in facing the future without them. A powerful example of this process in an extreme situation is reported in a case of resilience post 9/11 when only one of three founder's survived and faced rebuilding the firm. The surviving partner, Dunne, had been the tough, hard driving member of the trio, in contrast to his partners who were experienced as relationship oriented and gentle. The day after the unspeakable disaster, he addressed the surviving members of the organization, "From now on I've got to be Herman and I've got to be Chris." He was able to take on new traits. (Freeman, Hirschhorn, and Maltz, 2003 p. 26.)

These spaces are complicated and filled with ambivalent feelings. Mixed with a sense of loss of a leader, there are often feelings of envy of the leaving leader, of their ability to escape the continued challenges that are left for those remaining in the organization. This is often linked with vicarious interest in what the leader is going to do next, perhaps even hopes that the leader will call them to the new settings when he or she arrives, thereby confirming their favorite status or indispensability to the leader.

Leavings stir up associations to other important losses in people's lives. In both the nursing case and in the children's services case, these are organizations that experience considerable issues of loss and death in the core work. In neither of these cases, were these explored thoughtfully. Herbert and Tirst (1953) in a study group have a powerful case study of a situation in which an educator's paper on truancy is delivered by someone else as the author is absent. They explore the links between the there and then topic and the here and now dynamics of the group. With hindsight, being more mindful of the primary task connections to issues of loss and discontinuity could make such sessions much more powerful.

The linking of the here and now dynamics to the there and then discussions could be more powerful. We had one experience in working with a much-loved COO of a hospital who was leaving. The team had a powerful final half-day retreat to work the issues of this transition and its implications. By design, at the break, the COO left so that the group would have time together without his presence. It was almost intolerable, with one member talking about her wish to go out and bring the leader back. They had reflected on his power that they had valued, but realized that when they came into the space of his meeting, they often relaxed as if the meeting was a haven from all the battles they felt on the point in their work outside the group. They saw the need for them to take up some of his aggression to keep their group vital.

From the leader's point of view on their exit, there is often a mixture of regret and pride and anxiety about the sustainability of one's achievements. How quickly will it be undone, how quickly will I be forgotten? Just as in successful termination from therapy groups, as Rutan and Stone (1993) suggest "The goal is not perfection but the capacity to recognize, accept, understand, and forgive one's

weaknesses and vulnerabilities and to own and recognize one's strengths" (p. 251).

In creating an in-between space for reflection, for protection from the manic pace that endings often use to ward off being mindful, the feel should be of lightness as Calvino has described it. "Lightness does not mean being detached from reality but cleansing it from its gravity, looking at it obliquely but necessarily less profoundly" (Boym, p. 255). This recalls Mary Catherine Bateson's image of having the courage to unpack upon arrival because one has the confidence of one's capacity for mourning. Baggage is heavy; luggage contains resources for the next stage of the journey.

Winnecott (1958) writes about the importance of the individual developing the "capacity to be alone" which he relates in a Kleinian framework to "the existence of a good object in the psychic reality of the individual … good internal relationships are well enough set up and defended for the individual … to feel confident about the present and the future" (p. 32). This evolves paradoxically when one has the experience of being alone in the present of an other (the mother) who forgoes making demands or interfering with the infant's ability to "flounder, to be in a state in which there is no orientation." Obviously, the dynamic between a leader and a follower is far less intense than the mother-child dynamic that Winnecott is writing about, but it does suggest the developmental potential of leaders creating transitional or play spaces in which the leader's exit is available for reflection. The use of brief absences as learning opportunities assists people's reverie on how they might cope with a longer separation. Earlier we have explored the organizational development strategy of creating a space and place for followers to recover, share, and reflect on their experiences with earlier transitions and bring them to bear on the realities of the present situation. With the addition of processes that enable more individual work (journaling, coaching, silence), well-designed leadership exits might be able to assist the working through of the losses from the past and be playful enough to enrich the resilience of the group to take in a new leader productively.

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