

## **Sue Congram**

### **LEADERSHIP AS AN ATTRIBUTE OF THE FIELD**

This presentation is based on PhD research at Cardiff University and will be supported by a paper. Psychological field theory as developed by Kurt Lewin (1951) will be described, and its application to leadership illustrated using case study material. Delegates will be involved in a demonstration of the inquiry method that elucidates a field perspective.

Lewin proposed a number of distinct principles that underlie psychological field theory, which now offer a basis for exploring leadership in a different and challenging way. This paper will focus on two of these principles; *the principle of organisation* and *the principle of possible relevance*, as examples of how a field theory perspective can enrich our view of leadership.

*The principle of organisation* shows how the field becomes organised around the themes that we live by, such as those found in integrity and ethics, and that awareness of this can create shifts in how the field becomes reorganised.

*The principle of possible relevance* will be used to illustrate how conventional learning in leadership has limited people's peripheral vision, and that a broader view of the field enables the imagination to consider the *possible relevance* of a wider contribution to leadership than is otherwise looked for.

The paper explains how leadership is understood as emerging from the field (is of the field) and affects the field (is in the field and not separate from it); where 'the field' is determined by the boundary of inquiry at any given time (Barber 1996). This contrasts with the normative perspective of systems theory, which Cooper (1976) describes as providing the relational structures through which the field manifests. As a way of thinking about leadership, field theory takes into account the total situation in which attitudes, emotions, deeply rooted beliefs and social phenomena influence the way that leadership is lived out.

The following questions about leadership will be raised in the presentation as a focus of inquiry from a field theory perspective:

- Is the duality of leader-follower useful or outdated?
- Are traditional mindsets of leadership maintained by deeply rooted ways of thinking, which block change?
- Where is leadership situated, in the individual, in the collective, in ideas, between people?

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Sue is a Chartered Psychologist and has been working independently in organisational learning and consultancy for over 20 years. She is researching a PhD on leadership as a property of the field at Cardiff University. Her broad and varied portfolio centres today around the praxis in leadership. She has delivered development initiatives to leaders in a wide range of commercial and public organisations. Sue teaches organisational and leadership psychology to managers and professionals in institutes in Europe. She has contributed to and published a number of management and psychology books, and recently co-editing a book on 'Education and Imagination' Routledge 2008. Sue is particularly interested in the role of imagination in leadership development and the psychology that underpins imaginative learning methods.

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