Leadership and the stings of command

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abstract

In business discourse, the leader is often portrayed as the one who changes the current order. Leaders stand above the organization, and from that elevated position they can bring about the necessary change that offers a way out of whatever crisis afflicts the business. In this paper, I consider the paradoxical fact that leaders, in our popular understanding at least, do not use orders when creating order: leadership is generally thought to exclude the coercive force that we associate with the giving of orders or commands. I explore this distinction between leading and commanding through a reading of Elias Canetti's chapter on 'The command' in his book *Crowds and power*. My overall argument is that the violence of the command (its 'sting', in Canetti's terms) can also make itself felt in seemingly benign models of leadership that challenge various forms of authoritarianism. My suggestion is therefore to put the sting back into leadership research by giving up on the idea that it is possible to conceive of leadership as operating without any coercive force.

Introduction

The notion of 'an order' as a relatively fixed system within which people and things have their place and move around in predictable ways is, of course, central to the study of organization. An organization is generally understood as an ordered entity with clear goals that forms part of the structure of society. Such an understanding of organization makes sense against the backdrop of the culturally dominant way of valuing order. Something is 'in order' when it is deemed correct or appropriate, 'out of order' when it is not. We like order

in the house, order on our desk, order in the streets, and order in our minds. People must wait in an orderly fashion, and a good citizen respects 'law and order'. It is, furthermore, a reassuring thing to be told that everything is part of one single ordered universe that is slowly being deciphered by scientists going about their research in an orderly fashion. We may lose faith in particular orders, but we maintain our general faith in order all the same – even when we, at some level, wonder if such faith rests on a reassuring fiction.

Critical scholars of organization tend to be more skeptical of the assumed goodness of order (e.g. Hassard et al., 2008). Putting people in order, especially in an organizational context, creates hierarchical relationships between individuals and groups. These might take the form of a formal hierarchy, as depicted in an organizational chart, or an informal one in which some people are deemed more valuable, or even more worthy, than others. Such hierarchies need not be problematic per se, but they are often bound up with an array of negative emotions and power struggles. On an even more fundamental level, the creation of order has also been understood as a boundary-creating activity that results in the delineation of an inside and an outside (Cooper, 1986). In relation to people, this kind of boundary activity leads to processes of inclusion and exclusion. Ordering people can quickly lead to othering, the devaluation of people by virtue of their not belonging to a particular order or their being assigned to a lower position within that order (e.g. Calás and Smircich, 1991; Stokes and Gabriel, 2010). Others have pointed out that there is nothing static about these processes of ordering: what we call 'an organization' is never merely one order; it should rather be understood as a space in which orders compete for time and space, and in which new orders are added to old ones that linger on, often diminishing in power, but slow to disappear altogether (Munro, 2001).

The outside marked off by the boundaries of order is necessarily linked with disorder. As Robert Cooper (1986) has pointed out, there is a reciprocal relation between order and disorder, between organization and disorganization. Disorders trigger calls for order, and can give rise to all kinds of 'new order'. But the mutual relation also works in the other direction. The chaos from which order is supposed to protect us is itself often produced through order: algorithm-steered voting behaviour, the favelas in Rio,

disturbed ecosystems, your autoimmune disease. On closer inspection, then, putting things in order creates all kinds of intended and unintended disorders.

In business discourse, the figures of the manager and the leader are often distinguished in their relation to the organization's order. The manager is seen as the one who has the task of protecting the current order, whereas the leader is seen as someone who changes the current order (Spoelstra, 2018). The leader, in a sense, is simultaneously inside and above the organization. Endowed with the special task of bringing about radical change, he or she is part of the organization but not constrained by it. According to the paradigm of the charismatic leader, leaders are equipped to act as change masters because of their extraordinary qualities, which may be attributed or real. The figure of the leader is, quite literally, out-standing.

Of course, such a leader-centered idea of leadership has been criticized for putting far too much weight on the single individual (e.g. Tourish, 2013). But leadership is essentially concerned with fundamentally changing the current order in popular alternative notions of leadership as well, such as shared leadership, collective leadership, or self-leadership. The main difference is that this task becomes a task for many, or even all, organizational members (e.g. Manz and Sims, 1991; Pearce and Conger, 2002).

If we stick to the idea of the charismatic leader who hovers, in a sense, above the organization, we can ask how he (or she, although the discourse is distinctively masculine) does something fundamental to the present order. Answers to this question vary, but some of the most common in the leadership literature are that the leader acts through vision, inspiration and charisma (e.g. Bass, 1985; Nanus, 1992). But rather than focusing on these kinds of positive answers, what interests me in the present paper is an obvious answer that is almost always avoided: the leader leads by 'giving orders'. In contrast to the dominant general understanding of order as a positive structure, the verb 'to order', in the sense of 'to command', has come to be assigned an overwhelmingly negative value. Or, to be precise, it is valued positively only in relation to very specific institutional arrangements, such as those of the military (Brighenti, 2006). Paradoxically, one gets the sense that order is good, but not as a consequence of the issuing of orders.

The skepticism towards commanding is most explicitly articulated in leadership discourse. Leadership authors are usually quick to note that true leadership has nothing to do with the coercive force that we associate with 'a command', especially in the context of the military, where commands are meant to be unquestioningly obeyed (e.g. Wheatley, 1997). 'The commander' appears as the absolute other of the leader; the other who, by contrast, is needed to understand what true leadership is. For most of these leadership authors (e.g. Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Howell and Avolio, 1992), it is merely common sense that commands are to be avoided, for the simple reason that coercion is something negative. As John W. Gardner (2000: 4) rightly notes, 'in our culture, popular understanding of the leadership process distinguishes it from coercion – and places those forms involving the least coercion higher on the scale of leadership'. By means of the leading/commanding (good/bad) distinction, leading becomes a virtuous endeavor because it stands, by definition, in diametrical opposition to the coercive force of the command. But are matters really this simple?

In this paper, I explore the relation between leading and commanding by drawing on Elias Canetti's notion of the command. For Canetti, as for most contemporary leadership authors, the command is something violent that must be challenged. But unlike leadership authors, he is not optimistic about the possibility of neutralizing the harm that is done through the command: its 'sting', as he puts it, is one of the most prominent features of organizational life, and something that cannot easily be overcome through a particular form of leadership. How does he reach this conclusion, and what light does it shine on contemporary leadership discussions?

Canetti's economy of the command

While there is an abundance of writing on commanders and what is involved in giving commands, as well as a substantial literature on imperatives as linguistic acts, writings on the nature of the command itself are rather scarce. Of the few texts on this subject, one in particular stands out both for its insightful and original content and for its blunt and provocative tone: a chapter in Canetti's *Crowds and power*, first published in German in 1960, entitled simply 'The command' (Canetti, 1984). Canetti was an author of

Bulgarian descent who lived in England and Vienna for most of his life. He is known as a novelist and playwright who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1981. In organization studies, Canetti's writings are relatively unknown, although there have been a few, largely overlooked, engagements with his work (e.g. Cooper, 1990; Linstead and Chan, 1994).

In his chapter on the command, Canetti starts off with the bold assertion that the command is older than humankind, and thus older than language itself. The original form of the command, which Canetti recognizes in 'the roar of the lion', manifests in a situation in which one animal is clearly stronger than another, and in which the stronger threatens to kill the weaker. The weaker animal, in trying to escape death, responds by flight. Hence, Canetti (1984: 304) says, 'the oldest command – and it is far older than man – is a death sentence, and it compels the victim to flee'. Putting it even more bluntly, he writes 'the roar of a lion *is* a death sentence' (*ibid.*). Canetti calls this 'the flight-command' and holds that this type of command constitutes the underlying but forgotten structure of commands in general: 'Beneath *all* commands glints the harshness of the death sentence' (*ibid.*), he insists.

If contemporary forms of command seem far removed from the interplay of life and death amongst animals, this is because humans have domesticated the command. Today, the command is central in all forms of human organization, including the family, businesses, and the military. During their youth, children are faced with command after command. They do not flee, Canetti holds, because of 'a kind of bribery' (*ibid.*: 307): the child, like the pet dog, follows the command because they get food in return. It is because of this process of domestication that everyday commands are normalized, and do not seem to pose a threat, let alone a threat of violence. Yet, says Canetti, these commands *are* violent in the sense that they impose a lasting harm upon the receiver of the command. He speaks in this context of two features of the command: its 'momentum' and its 'sting'. The momentum is the force of command, that which compels the recipient to act. The sting is what is left behind in the person who has obeyed the command. It will sit there, often for years, and does not change its shape ('the sting sinks deep into the person who has carried out the command and remains in him unchanged', *ibid.*: 305). It sits there until the opportunity comes to make the same command to another person, which action transfers the sting to its new recipient. The

command is therefore never lost; it goes from one person to another, with periods of inactivity when it is stored in a person in the form of a sting:

> A command is like an arrow. It is shot from the bow and hits a target. The man who gives a command takes aim before he shoots; like an arrow his command is intended for a definite person. An arrow remains sticking in the flesh of the man it hits and he has to pull it out in order to free himself of the threat it carries. When a command is passed on it is as though a man pulled out an arrow which has hit him, fitted that same arrow to his bow and shot it again. (Canetti, 1984: 308)

For Canetti, it is the military that epitomizes the economy of the command. Soldiers know nothing but commands and periods of inactivity between commands. They are trained in such a way that they wait for the next command, remaining inactive in the periods between. For the soldier, Canetti says, the command offers a release from the obligation to do nothing: 'In the vast desert of prohibitions surrounding the soldier a command comes as salvation: the stereometric figure comes to life and starts moving' (*ibid.*: 312). Yet the countless stings that the soldier collects hurt him, just as they would hurt any other person. What makes the stings more bearable is the prospect of promotion, as elevation means that soldiers can begin to release their stings by commanding others. After promotion, commanding others is itself the result of a command: the newly promoted soldier has no choice but to give commands. The soldier now finds himself in an intermediate position, in which he both receives commands but can also quickly rid himself of his stings by commanding others. Promotion is the bribe of the military organization just as food is the bribe of the domestic household.

The metaphor of the arrow may seem to suggest that, if the shooter aims well, the sting cannot be avoided. Of course, Canetti does recognize that commands can, under certain conditions, be refused or denied. But what the metaphor captures is how difficult it is to disobey commands. The command is always embedded in relations of authority and dependency, which makes refusal more than the refusal of a single commanding utterance; commands are fired from a base that is hard to move but easy to be moved by. The source of a command, Canetti writes, is something stronger than ourselves. The commands that issue forth are given by 'prospective victors', while 'we submit because we see no hope of fighting' (*ibid.*: 305).

One of the most radical features of Canetti's account of the command is his assertion that commands are 'immutable'. By insisting on their immutability, Canetti does not say that stings always affect their hosts in precisely the same way. Stings can, for instance, form alliances with other stings that are the result of the same command. The host now feels these stings *en bloc*. Stings may also grow together into a 'monster' when a person is hit by the same command from many different directions (*ibid.*: 328). Such monstrous stings, Canetti says, are too big for an individual to handle; the individual needs the support of a crowd to deal with them. Yet despite these alliances between stings, they do not diminish in power in time. They continue to exert their violence over their host until the moment comes when they can be fired to another person, either individually or as a unified collective.

The world of commands appears, on this account, as a closed system, a closed economy of stings which are collected, contained and carried, then forced upon others. This economy is partly an exchange economy, at least in its domesticated forms (the 'bribery' of which Canetti speaks), but there is nothing voluntary about it: it is an economy of violence. Indeed, if there is an outside to the system, it is, for Canetti, bound up with death. Canetti notes a single exception to the rule that obedience leaves a sting in the one who obeys. This occurs when a person is commanded to kill. The executioner, says Canetti, remains free of stings because 'there is no time for a sting to form' (*ibid.*: 330). In an ordered execution, 'the account balances; the essential nature of the command coincides with the action it brings about' (*ibid.*).

The violence of the command comes from its disruption of equality; it can be seen as Canetti's version of the fall from grace. In a mythical stingless world, a world without commands, we are all equal. But our world is a world of stings, a world in which there is a dynamic play of inequality. Robert Cooper, in a little-known essay, provides an insightful summary of the logic of this world:

> Every exercise of power involves a distinction or inequality. The structure of distinction is as follows: first, an original unity is divided into two parts; second, one part takes precedence over the other. The part which precedes experiences a sense of gain; the preceded part, a sense of loss. The sting is really the outraged sense of loss of equivalence occasioned by distinction. The function of the sting is to redress the inequality and it does so by reproducing earlier situations but in *reverse*. (…) It is clear that the sting is another way of

defining the idea of freedom; one desires to be free of the commands, requests and expectations of others. However, since freedom is denied to most of us, the sting takes its place. (Cooper, 1990: 48)

Cooper's representation of Canetti in terms of the preceding and preceded recalls the distinction between leader and follower: the leader precedes, paving the way for others, while the preceded follower is led along the path laid out by the leader. If Canetti is right, following such a path is frustrating at the very least, if not downright degrading.

Taking the sting out of the command

It is not difficult to challenge Canetti's radical suggestion that the economy of stings cannot be broken. One of the least convincing parts of his account is his claim that stings do not change shape over time. Such a claim does not rhyme well with experience, which shows that grudges and feelings of revenge can both shrink and grow. Indeed, it is not clear whether stings are passed on and recycled in the way Canetti describes at all. One may also try to think of commands that do not leave any sort of sting when obeyed (e.g. 'Make yourself comfortable!', 'Love me!'). Or one might object that many people in commanding positions are so privileged that they have not experienced the violence of commands in the same way as have people in less privileged positions, thus raising the question of where their reservoir of stings comes from. Such critiques seem obvious, indeed so obvious that it is highly unlikely that Canetti had not considered them himself.

How, then, are we to make sense of Canetti's economy of the command? It seems to me that Canetti's primary interest is not in the psychology of the human individual who is stung by a command and who must subsequently cope with the sting that remains. Canetti's real concern lies on the societal level. He points towards the structural inequality in organizational life, a structure that, in his view, cannot easily be overcome. Furthermore, it is the exercise of power over others that produces (and instantiates) such structural inequality and violence; if not for the split between the preceding and the preceded that is inherent in leadership, a more humane world would be possible. But, because of the closed economy of the command, there is little hope for redemption. The violence that is embedded in any form of social

organization, and that shapes the dynamics of such organizations, seems nearly impossible to undo. This societal reading is not immune from the criticisms that can be applied to Canetti's theory at the individual level but it may help explain why he is so rigid in his presentation of the immutable nature of stings.

The historical context is not without relevance: Canetti, of Jewish descent, fled to England in 1938 after the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany. His book was written over a period of more than thirty years before its publication in German in 1960. While the book rarely mentions Hitler by name, it is clear that Canetti reflects on the question of how a leader such as Hitler could rise to power. His answer is that the potential for the rise of such a figure lies in the notion of the command. As he writes at the very end of his book:

> The system of commands is acknowledged everywhere. It is perhaps most articulate in armies, but there is scarcely any sphere of civilized life where commands do not reach and none of us they do not mark. Their threat of death is the coin of power, and here it is all too easy to add coin to coin and amass wealth. If we would master power we must face command openly and boldly, and search for means to deprive it of its sting. (Canetti, 1984: 470)

The book ends with a glimmer of hope: it is possible to at least search for a stingless form of order, even if nothing in Canetti's analysis suggests that it will easily be found.

In 1969, nine years after the first publication of *Crowds and power*, Canetti published a short book on Franz Kafka's correspondence with his fiancée Felice Bauer (Canetti, 2012). Once again, his interest here is in the workings of power and how to subvert its dangers. At the end of the book, he returns to the question of the sting of command. In particular, he expresses his admiration for Kafka's skill in playing the sting and the command out against each other. Canetti attributes this to his 'obduracy', i.e. his stubbornness or obstinate character, which enables him to create a delay between the momentum of the command and its obedience:

> It enables him not to obey commands immediately, yet to feel their sting as if he had obeyed, and then to use the sting to strengthen his resistance. Yet when he does eventually obey, the commands are no longer the same, for by then he has taken them out of their temporal context, considered them from every

angle, weakened them by reflection, and thus stripped them of their dangerous character. (Canetti, 2012: 92)

It is telling that Canetti spends more time on the question of how the sting can be taken out of the command than the question of how to escape the command altogether. The key question for Canetti is not how to dispel commands from social life but rather how we can relate to commands, and what strategies 'we', as the weaker party, may use to circumvent or diminish their force. The task is to break the 'tyranny' of the command by searching for ways of lessening its harm: 'The stings that man suffers must become burrs which can be removed with a touch' (Canetti, 1984: 333).

The stingless world of leadership

At first sight, leadership authors appear to have taken up Canetti's search for stingless order. Like Canetti, most authors writing on this topic are clearly searching for forms of social interaction that are free from the violence of commands. 'Leadership' becomes the name for these stingless forms of social interaction. There is, however, also a crucial difference between Canetti's analysis of the command and the way that leadership authors go about dealing with the problem of the command's sting: where Canetti accepts the reality of the order of command by analyzing its workings, leadership authors seek to replace the order of command by a higher order that gives the literature a pseudo-religious character (Spoelstra, 2018).

This quest for stingless leadership is sometimes explicitly framed in opposition to command. An early example of the way in which leadership has been separated from the command can be found in Ordway Tead's 1935 book, *The Art of Leadership*:

> Command is interested in getting some associated action which the commander wants to secure. It is an exercise of power *over* people. Leadership is interested in how people can be brought to work together for a common end effectively and happy. It implies … power *with* people. (Tead, 1935: 12)

For Tead, the commander subordinates people to the ends of the organization, whereas the leader 'will strive to make the welfare of the organization and of its members one and the same thing' (*ibid.*: 13). The

morality of the leader is thus in line with Kant's maxim that one should never use another person as a means to an end: '[for the leader] it is the human beings themselves who are the ends' (*ibid.*: 13). What Tead effectively argues is that true leadership, by avoiding command altogether, is devoid of the violence that comes with using people for certain ends.

This schema can be identified in many leadership texts today. Indeed, some of these texts use much the same terminology as Tead did more than 80 years ago. For instance, in a book entitled *Freedom from command and control*, we read that real leadership produces 'meaningful change that is in the interest of all parties' (Seddon, 2003: 108). Such change is quite separate from the domain of 'command and control' in that it 'is not associated with hierarchy' (*ibid.*). Similarly, in an article entitled 'Goodbye, command and control', Margaret Wheatley (1997) argues that leaders ought to stop thinking of the organization as a mechanistically functioning entity that they can control from above, moving people around as chess pieces in whatever manner they see fit. Instead, they should see leadership as a facilitating part of a self-organizing system. Once they manage to put aside the false belief that people behave instrumentally in relation to the organization ('that they are in it for the money'), they report being 'overwhelmed by the capacity, energy, creativity, commitment, and even love that they receive from the people in their organization' (Wheatley, 1997: 23). Again, leadership appears not as a function within a formal hierarchy, but rather in the form of a figure who can neutralize the destructive hold that the system of command has over people. By relieving the organization from its formal structure of command, spontaneous self-organization is allowed to take over – leading again to a situation in which, on a fundamental level, all interests align.

These are two examples that explicitly place leadership in opposition to command, but one can recognize the same pattern in most leadership texts from the 1970s onwards. The influential idea of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), for instance, makes a distinction between leaders who use their formal position to get things done ('transactional leadership'), and leaders whose authority over their followers rests on their charisma, inspiration, personal consideration, and intellectual stimulation ('transformational leadership'). As is especially visible in later renditions (e.g. Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999), the idea of transformational leadership is essentially a tale

of freedom: the leader and the led no longer stand on opposite sides, each using the other as a means towards contrasting ends. Instead, the leader 'transforms' their followers into intrinsically motivated people who voluntarily identify with the goals of the organization. As a result, they don't need to be bossed around, and they do not collect any stings.

I would go so far as to say that the development of leadership studies since approximately the late 1970s can be understood as the positing of a succession of claims to have found the 'real' or 'ultimate' form of stingless leadership. Such claims often take the form of an implicit or explicit repudiation of other leadership concepts, which are held to fall short in that they have not truly managed to rid themselves of what Canetti would call their sting. For instance, the idea of transformational leadership has been criticized for over-emphasizing the role of the leader in setting the scene, and hence for not allowing employees to truly develop in line with their authentic selves (e.g. Walumbwa and Wernsing, 2013). Concepts such as authentic leadership, responsible leadership or collective leadership then claim to represent the true form of stingless leadership. This succession of theory development, with each new concept reacting to earlier ones and with the common goal of taking the sting out of organization, has led to the proliferation of a seemingly endless stream of leadership concepts, all created through a defining adjective ('transformational', 'servant', 'authentic', 'distributed', 'responsible', 'collective', etc.). The broader trend represented by these approaches is clearly the idea that leadership should and can happen without making a vertical distinction between organizational members in any fundamental sense, which is to say that they claim to dispel the distinctions that feed the economy of stings.

Putting the sting back into leadership research

Whereas Canetti analyzes the order of stings, leadership authors attempt to break free of the workings of command altogether. 'Leadership' becomes the name of the smooth order that replaces the sting-producing order of distinctions. But the underlying premise, that there is such a thing as leadership without command, and that it can be achieved in a relatively straightforward manner, is highly problematic. It is hard to see how

leadership, even in its 'post-heroic' forms, can happen without the distinction between the preceding and the preceded, or without instantiating some form of verticality. My suggestion is therefore that leadership studies has not taken Canetti's problem seriously enough, as evidenced by the endless search for the 'right' adjective to describe stingless leadership. Leadership must be thought in its dynamic relation to the stings of command, rather than as a way of overcoming stings altogether.

The unavoidability of command is even more explicit in Cooper's (1990) interpretation of Canetti. For Cooper (1990: 49), Canetti's sting points to a deep, almost ontological, structure of human motivation from which there is no escape: 'The energy of the sting derives from differentials in power so that energy and power become synonymous with and curiously close to the scientist's conception of energy or physical power as a function of mass' (Cooper, 1990: 49). On Cooper's interpretation, Canetti's sting points at a 'vital energy' in human life, that moves people forward in their attempts to 'reverse the inescapable distinctions that exist between people' (*ibid.*).

In Cooper's characterization of Canetti, power is not merely a dangerous force. More than Canetti, Cooper emphasizes the creative energy that stems from the inequalities between people. For him, it is significant that Kafka writes his greatest story, *The trial*, as an attempt to reverse his stings. The sting, as violent as it can be, is not merely a negative drive in Cooper; it is part of the human condition. It seems to me that Canetti is not willing to go that far: power never achieves the status of an ontology of social life in his work; his project remains bound to the question of how humans can relate to power in order to subvert or neutralize it, hence his fascination with Kafka's astonishing capacity to 'withdraw from power in whatever form it may appear' (Canetti, 2012: 87). But Cooper's analysis does remind us how powerful commands are in society, and that, even in Canetti, they are a part of social life that cannot be overturned by a higher order.

I end this paper by raising three points (each deserving of a much richer analysis than is possible here) which, together, suggest that we should allow the sting back into leadership research.

1) Some forms of leadership that present themselves as stingless are merely ways of hiding commands by employing different linguistic expressions. This is something of which Canetti was very much aware. The command is not limited to its most explicit linguistic form – the imperative utterances that directly communicate a desired action together with the threat that failure to comply will result in some form of punishment (e.g. 'Put the report on my desk by 6pm!'). The truth is that people who have great power over other people rarely need to resort to explicit commands. Instead, 'gentler' uses of the imperative, such as placing requests or suggesting directions, can be as forceful as direct commands if uttered by an authority figure. For instance, when a charismatic leader 'requests' a course of action, their followers may very well receive the request as a direct command, gentle as it may sound. What is more, and this is partly Canetti's point, such a request can leave a sting in the employee that is as hurtful as the explicit command. Indeed, a command in the form of a request is typically more difficult to flee from (when one wishes to do so).

2) Hierarchy cannot be wished away. As long as organizations are built upon the employee contract that assigns functions to organizational members, hierarchy is an enduring part of organizational life. If leadership authors suggest that informal leadership can override position-based command and control, what they effectively suggest is that the formal organization ought to be enriched with a leadership layer. How thick this layer is, and to what extent such a layer accomplishes anything more than a rhetorical hiding of stings, is a matter for empirical investigation. Even in alternative and more horizontal forms of organizing, forms of hierarchy inevitably appear (Western, 2014). Such forms of hierarchy may be more mutable than is typically the case for formal hierarchies, but they are there nonetheless. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of a complex system of relationships without any form of hierarchy. This, of course, does not mean that one can do no more than simply accept hierarchical relations as they stand. But what it does mean is that one needs to

engage with the workings of power rather than seeking to overrule power from above.

3) Stingless leadership is not necessarily benign. Even when transformational leaders, for example, do not leave stings in their 'transformed' followers, they can still create a toxic, cult-like, environment that can lead to all kinds of misery (Tourish, 2013). This takes us back to one of the points with which we started, namely that putting things in order can create all kinds of disorder. This is evidently true for leadership as well: when a charismatic leader, for example, succeeds in building a charismatic community consisting of dedicated followers, there will, by necessity, also be an outside of that community where one can, more often than not, also find the excluded. Canetti's sting, one might say, can also be felt by those employees who lament the fact that they do not receive any commands in the first place (for instance, because of their exclusion from the charismatic community). On a grander scale, we are reminded of the fact that the greatest harm is usually done to people who are too far away from the orders of organizations to be of direct interest to them. If we allow ourselves to stretch Cannetti's notion of the sting a little, we might say that the most hurtful stings are collected outside of any given order. The arrow reaches further than its target. Indeed, it can reach so far that the shooter has no cognizance of the victim, and the victim no cognizance of the shooter. The economy of stings remains, but without proper addressees.

While not always convincing on its own terms, Canetti's wild and provocative analysis of commands reminds us that commands have been undeservedly left behind in studies of organization, and in leadership studies in particular. In addressing organizational commands today, we do not need to accept the full scheme of Canetti's economy of stings. We do not need to accept their immutability, their indifference to time, their relationship with death, or their intrinsic violence. The analysis of command itself is and ought to be mutable if it is to fit our own times. The challenge today is a different one than that which Canetti faced. Commands in organizational life tend to be much more hidden, and the discourse of leadership itself is complicit in their hiding.

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