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## DEEP DEMOCRACY AND CRIME

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How does one understand the nature of this South African crime epidemic? How does one understand the forces that drive human beings to the utmost gratuitous, senseless violence that sees children raped and women shot for a cell phone? How does one find the fundamental causes behind a societal sickness that has taken hold of the body South Africa to the extent that it is the most diseased in the world today?

Many will say the cause of crime is obvious. We have structural deficiencies in the criminal justice system, we have policing capacity constraints and we don't have the deterrent of capital punishment. So the criminals can ply their trade with impunity and no fear of retribution. They do it because they can. Of course conventional wisdom must take its course. We must make more effective our efforts and resources used to capture and punish criminals. But are we addressing the real symptoms and are these the only measures that we can take? How can ordinary citizens, who are for the most part paralysed by the fear of crime, actively help and be involved? How can the same fighting spirit that helped turn South Africa from Apartheid to a true democracy be re-captured in the fight against crime? Deep Democracy may be an answer.

Deep Democracy asserts that real wisdom lies in the unconscious of a group and through a facilitated process answers can be uncovered and interventions initiated where the group can begin resolving and healing their own issues. Let us unpack what may seem a broad and far-fetched statement.

A failure of majority democracy is that it discounts the human factor. It suggests that if you are passionate about a view, but have lost the vote, you will be very adult and mature in your loss, will give up your passion and go along with the majority. Human nature has the exact opposite reaction. If people are passionate about their view and have lost the vote they will tend to initially feel hurt, rejected, disowned and disconnected from the majority. They will initially subtly sabotage the majority decision but, if unsuccessful over time, their sabotage will become more overt and could ultimately become violent. Deep democracy is a step beyond majority democracy due to this flaw of majority democracy. It recognises the human factor. It has a facilitated five step process which at the simplest level enables the decision making process in groups, ensures buy-in and lessens the likelihood of sabotage to the decision. At a more sophisticated level the

method helps resolve the deeper conflicts which have been created by past poor decision making processes where the sabotage has become clear and is preventing progress.

The Deep Democracy method is based on Arnold Mindell's process orientated psychology. It was developed and honed in South Africa by Myrna and the late Greg Lewis as part of their work helping large organizations resolve racism at the time when apartheid was being dismantled and decade's old workplace paradigms were challenged overnight. The method has spread internationally and has exposure in 15 countries including the USA, Canada, the UK, India, Israel, Ireland and Russia. It has helped, and is used daily, by people in all walks of life across the social spectrum and different situations. It is being used effectively in the boardroom and the classroom.

The method was first proven in business. Subsequent research and adaptation of the method to education was again pioneered in South Africa under the auspices of the Western Cape Education Department, specifically in Mitchell's Plain, a particularly violent and gang ridden area. In a six week period in one primary school the learners were exposed to a child being killed, a headless body being found in a nearby field, a stabbing incident between learners and violent stabbings and assaults over the weekends in their homes or neighbourhoods.

The South African project has involved the teaching of teachers of all levels from Grade R to Matric to use the method as an aid in their teaching practice. This improved the confidence of teachers to adopt a role of greater power sharing with learners. When appropriate they could suspend their traditional authoritarian approach. The consequences have been more respectful, compassionate and caring teacher learner relationships. The learners are more empowered, more involved and motivated in their own learning and take greater responsibility and accountability.

The learners have also been given a voice and a place where they can talk about their lives. The relationships between them have also improved. They listen to one another and are much slower to embarrass or criticize or undermine one another. There has been less aggression, bullying and violence in the classroom and playground and notably less need for disciplinary measures.

In one school the introduction of Deep Democracy resulted in a community outreach program, prompted by the staff, where parents and the broader community were invited to participate using the same methods as in the schools. It was this development that sparked the new and very recently launched grassroots fight against crime.

Using the trained Deep Democracy facilitators from the Education Department invitations to attend facilitated discussions on crime have gone out to people in the community, through the street committees and through the schools in the Mitchell's Plain area. The invitation is extended to all people in that smaller community and includes people involved in gangs and crime or who live on the periphery of the criminal world.

Ensuring that all the voices are heard is an important principle of Deep Democracy. Normally in groups, strong, popular opinions dominate discussion and the voice of the minority is at best negated or at worst is threatened sufficiently to make it unsafe to have a voice. The result of the popular view not listening and the unpopular view not being heard, is not only the inevitable sabotage but the loss of the wisdom which the minority has. Not having a voice is an inherent part of the legacy of apartheid when the majority of the country was disavowed. Sadly this legacy still prevails in that many people of colour in the community still find it difficult to express their views. Again Deep Democracy applies specific techniques enabling people who struggle to voice their views to express themselves in a safe and meaningful way. These deliberately encourage the expression of what it may be unpopular to say but only to the extent that people in the group identify with this unpopular opinion.

Society's traditional response to criminals is to 'shut people up and remove them from society', not to give them a voice. Deep Democracy contention would be that without including them in some way in the discussion regarding the resolution of crime, the fundamental causes of the criminal disaffection will not be truly resolved and the isolation of the criminal will lead to more crime. The first four steps of the method facilitate the invitation and safety for all to have their say and be heard.

To go back to the statement that 'the community has the wisdom to solve its own problems' each community is unique and as a result needs to find its own solutions. As is found in individuals, a group, no matter how large, has a psyche involving conscious and unconscious parts. The group's unconscious consists of those issues which are not spoken about or given a voice. These issues could be strong emotions, technical arguments or unpopular opinions which only a few in the group are privileged to be aware of. The unconscious includes the collective unconscious; that subterranean river of life which connects us all. When an individual needs to make an important decision, the best way to help the person is to facilitate their uncovering of their own wisdom. Advice may be given but in the end the person needs to make and live with their own choice. The same is true for a group. Through Deep Democracy's facilitated process the group can uncover its own deeper understanding of the presenting issues and its own idiosyncratic solutions.

So, in a nutshell, community discussions are aimed at uncovering an understanding of crime in that community and through the facilitated discussion discover solutions previously not considered or implemented.

A process such as this is empowering on many different levels. People are involved and feel the movement from being a passive victim to being involved in actively taking some step towards the epidemic of crime in their area. The method facilitates people being heard, seen and respected. Mitchells Plain is a typical area in the new South Africa, where there is high unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse linked to criminal and gang warfare, plus a high level of HIV and AIDS. The feeling of hopelessness and depression, as was seen in the schools, will hopefully be positively alleviated through these facilitated discussions.

Through connecting and relating to one another, through finding an alternative outlet for the expression of power, through the empowerment of finding a voice, the violence between people will lessen.

One of the first meetings took place at a school which is located in one of the worst criminal, violent and gang controlled areas in Mitchell's Plain. The meeting was attended by approximately fifty people comprising learners from grade 12, their parents and friends from the community. Amongst those attending, a leader from a powerful gang was recognised as being present plus learners involved, and learners at risk of becoming involved, in drug trafficking and use.

The discussion initially revolved around the high level of crime, a sense of helplessness to fight off crime, anger at the lack of response and corruption of police and the real question of whether it's right to take the law into ones own hands and seek personal retribution. The discussion through Deep Democracy facilitation then turned and became focussed on the parents' fear for their children and their consequent tendency to limit their freedom in the hope of preventing them from falling into the ills of very prevalent gang and drug cultures. The youngsters present reacted strongly to this parental fear and attacked the lack of trust and what they saw as virtual home imprisonment at the hands of the parental role. The wisdom gained through the discussion was the need for improved communication between parents and youth enabling higher levels of trust and moral integrity by the youth, thereby lessening the possibility of their falling foul to the evils of crime in the community. The reality of violence being bred in the home whereby children are forced to listen, to follow the dictates of parents and where corporal punishment is liberally administered, tends to inadvertently teach that the way to cope with ones anger and fear is through violence. The development and promotion of healthy parent to child relationships, where the children have a voice and where discipline does not necessitate violence, could well be a necessary precondition to lessening the crime in communities.

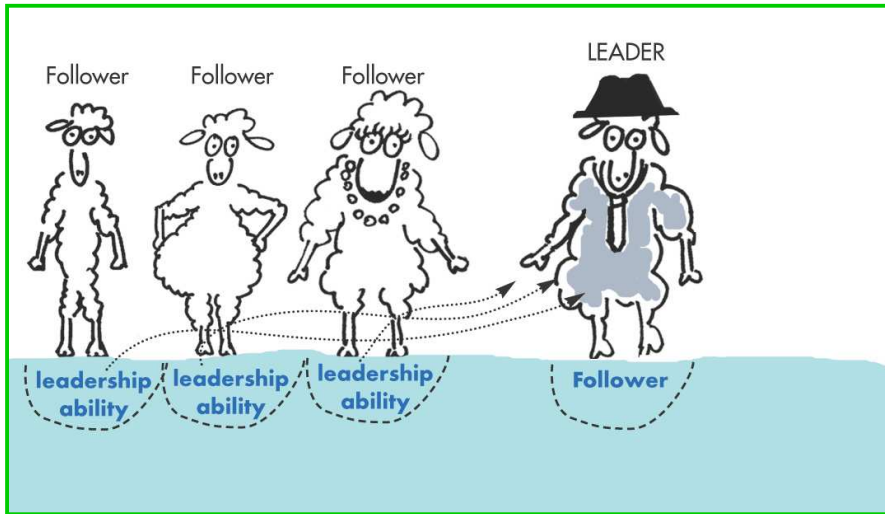
A further facilitated discussion was with youth in a special school where bullying, gang warfare, drugs and anarchy prevail. Through having, and making it safe to have the discussion, the youngsters volunteered the issue of violence, anarchy and their personal fear of the lack of safety. They felt they could no longer tolerate what was happening. Their own solution was to establish leaders of their choosing to whom they, the younger boys, would swear allegiance. They required that the leaders would be fair listening to both sides and control the level of bullying that has become impossible. As a result of the discussion leaders were selected and given an opportunity for some Deep Democracy training to assist them. During the training and given the opportunity to have an open discussion, they themselves decided to stop their turf warfare, stop their own gang behaviour, and unite in order to create discipline in the school. We were told just the next day by the school principal that there was a level of cleanliness, quietness and discipline that he had not seen in the school for quite some time.

These are however just the direct gains attached to the individual communities. There is the possibility of an even greater transformation and change attached to the resolution of conflict inside the communities. At the heart of Deep Democracy is Arnold Mindell's cutting edge 'role theory', which moves beyond systems thinking, lessening the emphasis on individuals, recognizing energy and relationship patterns, based on quantum theory in group dynamics.

Role theory postulates that the individual is a microcosm of humanity. All that humanity has so do we each as individuals have. It is like the biblical quote 'the world is in us and we are in the world'. There are however not too many of us who believe this or have even thought about it much. Most of us are unaware of this theory and tend to have a narrow and confined view relative of our potential. There are many parts of ourselves we do not recognize or do not identify with, are unaware of or downright reject at a conscious level. But these parts do not just go away. They stay in our unconscious and, as we don't own them in ourselves, we tend to project them onto others. That is we see in others, and act out on these perceptions, what we tend to not want to see in ourselves.

Take for example the person you really admire, the one you would really love to emulate, the one you want to be like. Typically what is happening as you look at that person is that you are not seeing or recognizing that part of you that is similar to the quality you are so much admiring. You have them in you as well, as you have the whole world in you! The exactness and the way they enact those qualities may not be exactly the same as yours. The shade and texture may be different but you also have the quality. An example is leadership. We all have the potential to lead whether it be leading a company or leading our children. In a work situation we tend to project our leadership qualities onto the positional leader and whilst at work give up on our leadership role. Entering home and seeing the family interacting we immediately take on the leadership role. The texture and intensity may be different but the fundamental behaviour is the same.

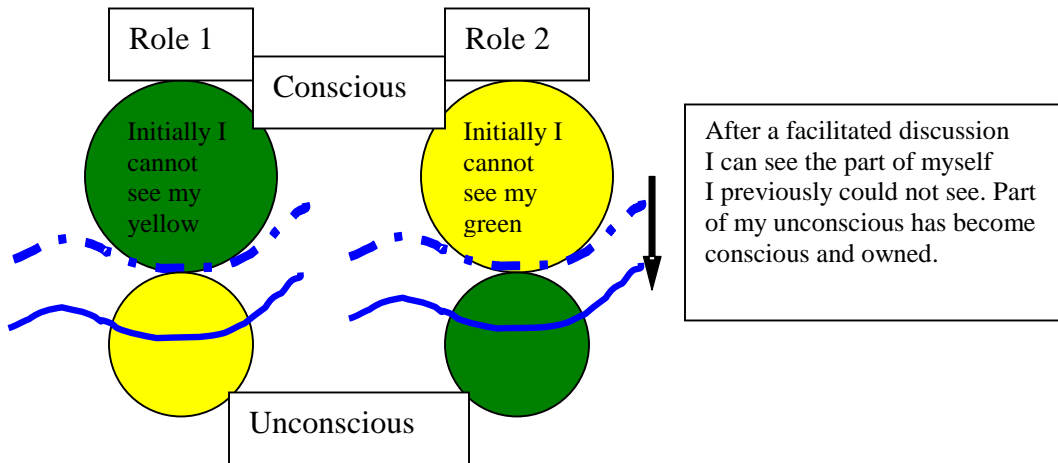
Through projecting the feelings of leadership and behaviour onto others we make the person bigger than what they really are. For example in relation to leadership they now own their own leadership abilities plus the extra energy which you have projected onto them, to act in their leadership capacity. This is when they feel more powerful as leaders than they may in reality be.



Although it may be hard to recognise, the same is true with those behaviours and emotions in society which we describe as criminal. We tend to not recognise these within ourselves, as we are frightened, ashamed, guilty, uncomfortable or disturbed by them. Most of us, for example, will not identify with a killer and would clearly and consciously state that we would never kill. However we tend to not recognise the killer in us when we kill a whole lot of ants or flies. Or we don't recognize that we can kill when we are asked to kill in defence of our country or take up arms in defence of our families. As humans we kill and love. These qualities are part of life whether we like them or not. They are part of humanity and therefore they are part of each of us. Crime exists and therefore we all have the ability to commit a crime, whether it is speeding on the highway, trying to pay less tax or committing a burglary, we have the ability within us. By not owning our criminal part the criminal elements are projected onto others and, for them, they then act out far more than they may have otherwise.

The level of crime and the intensity of the violence could be the criminal's acting out of the projected rage, anger and hurt of many others and not only his own anger and rage. These strong emotions may not only be present feelings but may well be linked to the unspoken and unresolved pain, rage, guilt and shame from our apartheid past.

Through Deep Democracy facilitated discussions these energies will be allowed to shift and people will be encouraged not only to talk about their feelings, but they will be encouraged to own their own rage, anger and pain thereby potentially freeing the criminal from acting out of a greater energetic rage and need for power or to be heard. This fluidity of energy should in and of itself lessen the violence.



It is hoped that as a result of this experiment more communities will be come involved and each will find their own solutions plus some key learning may be gained for the broader group.

An argument against this process would be that it is impossible to involve all the communities in South Africa and therefore resolution will not take place. However, as described in the 'Tipping point', when one is working with energetic fields one can affect the whole through having a direct effect on 10% of the population. This means that by working intensely with 10% of the Mitchell's Plain community we could hopefully affect crime in the whole area. Maybe the effect won't be total healing but whatever can assist to reduce the crime in this area and turn the tide of continuously escalating crime has got to be welcomed.