BREXIT - a behavioural analysis of the UK Referendum on memberhsip the EU...

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N.B. ** The European Union was created in 1993. The European Economic Community (EEC) was created in 1957 and ratified in 1958.

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Shock. On both sides. Then the drama of the unknown. Britain voted out. On June 23rd 2016, 52% of the electorate voted to leave the European Union. 48% voted to remain. Within hours, the British Prime Minister resigned. So did the Brexit leaders. There was dismay, as the disruptors and leaders of the Out Campaign, Boris Johnson (Conservative Party) and Nigel Farage (UK Independence Party) abandoned their followers, no longer convinced it appeared, by their own campaign slogans. Adding to the instability and turbulence, the Labour Opposition party started infighting over whether their leader, Jeremy Corbyn, should go too. A disconnect between ordinary Labour party members and their professional politicians. Could this be a metaphor for a wider global picture perhaps?

One could view the consequences of the Brexit result - with its economic and emotional uncertainties - coupled with an unleashing of anti-foreigner [perceived **out-group**] aggression - as a fascinating anthropological study of primitive human/animal responses.

Let's analyse some ideas and themes, which showed themselves so viscerally, in both individual and group behaviours. I'm taking a **psychoanalytic lens**. It can be a helpful approach to use with CEOs wanting to understand the very human goings on, within their organisations. It can also help leaders devise **behavioural strategies**, to move through times of crisis and transformation. The logic of the bottom line or objective measures of success, doesn't always override the primitive component to what might be driving fears, resistance, resilience and more...

So here goes:

Shock was one of the first emotions people recall. **Loss** and **grief** was another. **Turbulence** and change, can create dogged **entrenchment**. Refusal to budge. Determination to stay in 'stuck'. Or the opposite. It can unleash **dormant desires for change** elsewhere in the System, even when seemingly unrelated at a **conscious** level. The Brexit experience seemed to create both. And not just in the UK.

The Danes and Democrats in Amercia worry that populist, isolationism might spread. **EU leaders wondered if more member countries might desert. The European Union (originally the European Economic Community), headquartered in Brussells, was **conceived** more than 50 years ago, to provide a **unifying hub**: A nuclear family which gradually expanded, offering adoption to willing states. It was meant to form a powerful trade bloc. A union designed to replace the wars of the past, with the collaboration needed for the future. Millions of people were fed up with the EU's bureaucratic mechanisms. It could be argued that the benefits of **belonging**, were poorly articulated.

Whilst the German-in-the-street swiftly acknowledged that the democratic process had spoken, EU leaders feared the upheaval of the Brexit vote, might embolden offshoot campaigns for independence from Catalan to Cornwall to Flanders in Belgium. Are the children becoming too powerful or out of control? Could a teenage rebellion kick off?

The stabilising Mother Figure - Angela Merkel - offered calm **containment** saying there's no need for nasty behaviour or for to force the UK into a hasty exit. In contrast, the furious Father Figure, Jean Claude Juncker, President of the European, told the UK to leave and leave quickly. One might view this as the **punishing parent** response. The price to pay for **rejecting the breast** - a metaphor for the bossom of Europe but also the nourishing funding it provides for projects and impoverished regional development zones. Or was Juncker displaying a different approach to **containing the chaos?** Or could this leader's reaction to rejection, be a need to reassert control and *do* the rejecting?

Almost immediately after the result of the British Referendum on Europe, a survey found that a significant percentage of British citizens who'd voted to leave the EU, felt **regret.** They'd made a mistake. They'd done it as a protest. But had not expected to win. Nor to have to follow through on radical change, as a result. Was it safe to kick against the EU, knowing it would always be there? And what happens when something you relied upon - even if you disliked it - is dismantled?

Both Remain and Leave voters experienced a physical and psychological reaction to events. Some **separation anxiety** perhaps? A fear of being **forcibly weaned,** too fast? Anxiety around leaving the EU breast in Brussells - a source of nutrition and comfort - because there might actually be less food now? Independence can be scary. The **costs of leaving** - with huge teams of lawyers who'll need years to unpack and unpick decades of EU directives - seems a far cry from the monetary savings promised by the Exit campaigners. Or is **radical surgery** - the cutting oneself out and off from Europe, an alternative route to prosperity and fulfillment as a nation?

Bowlby's **attachment theory** talks of different kinds of attachment: Secure, ambivalent and avoidant. This was in the context of a baby to its key care giver, usually the mother. How healthy are the attachment relationships connected with the EU? The EU's attachment to its member states? The member country's attachment to the EU? And the attachment various member countries feel to each other. This is bound to vary depending on history, geography and economic **dependency** or **inter-dependency**. One might equally ask about the quality of attachment workers feel to their leadership team and their organisations.

A psychoanlytic approach doesn't promise absolutely correct answers. Instead, it invites metaphor and playfulness. It hypothesises in order to help us remain open minded and to stimulate new ideas. It also asks us to examine what **conscious processes** are going on? And what **subconscious** behaviours might be evident? What might those mean? How can this thinking **enable** better understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a group? And how might that promote better decision making and healthier behaviours?

The British EU Referendum result came through during the annual global meeting of ISPSO - the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations - in Granada Spain. The 200 people there resembled a mini-United Nations. Amongst them stood the ever smiling psychoanalyst and Professor Emritus Itamar Rogovsky. Now in his 80s and a refugee from Europe, via Latin America

and now living in Israel, he comments: 'We are in this chaos. So let's ask what we can create out of this chaos, that maybe we couldn't have done, before the Brexit vote?'

Psychoanalytic themes:

- loss, grief, endings
- rejection
- attachment
- detachment - breaking attachment
- ruptured attachment
- change can unleash more change
- unstuck
- fear of the unknown
- cleaving to the familiar
- abandonment
- ripple effect
- nurturing parent
- punishing parent
- contrainment of chaos
- regret
- dependency
- dormant bias / aggression
- what *conscious* stuff is going on?
- what *subsoncious* processes might be happening?

ENDS.