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How does Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue

inform the theory and practice of Relational Leadership?

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Supervisor: Professor Donna Ladkin

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Abstract

This thesis explores the possibility of dialogue between leader and follower in order to further develop the theory and practice of relational leadership. It draws from and contributes to Relational Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien 2006) and Buber's concept of 'I-Thou' dialogue (Buber 1958). Using first-person and co-operative inquiry methods (Reason and Bradbury 2008b) the 'space between' (Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000, Buber 1958) leader and follower is explored in order to reveal the complexities inherent within leadership relations.

Four main findings are detailed which enrich our understanding of how leadership relations operate from 'within living involvement' (Shotter 2006). Firstly, the quality of leader-follower encounter could be affected by levels of 'busyness' and the ensuing assessment and prioritising process. Secondly, the pressure to 'seem' rather than 'be' may strengthen the construction of a façade which might be dismantled, in part, through disclosure, though this may feel extremely risky given organisational 'rules'. Thirdly, mutuality between leader and follower may be crucially influenced by the way in which 'leader', 'leadership' and 'power' are constructed in the between space. Finally, ineffable dialogic moments may occur through sensing a particular quality of encounter amidst and despite the complexity of a myriad of micro-processes vying for attention in the between space.

This thesis contributes a further strand to RLT constructionist work focused on the quality of leader-follower encounter which has not been previously revealed. Leadership constructs and macro-discourses relating to power, 'busyness' and the need for 'worthwhile meetings' encourages transactional relating. Consequently, opportunities for genuinely encountering others in organisational settings are suffocated. This holds important implications for 'leaders' and 'followers' who wish to creatively address pressing organisational issues in the 21st century through dialogue. Fundamentally this thesis suggests we pause to consider the implications that the

nature of our encounters in our work-life have upon us as human beings wishing to know what it is to be fully human.

Key words: Relational leadership; dialogue; Martin Buber; first-person inquiry; co-operative inquiry.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introducing this thesis

This thesis is engaged with furthering our theoretical and practical understanding of the 'space between' leader and follower (Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000). It illuminates the constructed, complex and dynamic quality of this relational space. It shows how issues of mutuality, power, authenticity, judgement, conflict, 'busyness', insecurity and context infuse this space to such an extent that genuine openness to and meeting of 'the other' in dialogue might be regarded as a quite remarkable accomplishment.

I will propose that I have been able to generate original data which illuminates this space between leader and follower through employing an action research methodology (Heron 1996, Reason and Bradbury 2008b). This approach has been little used in the field of Relational Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien 2006, Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012) to date. Martin Buber's thinking on I-Thou dialogue (1958, 1965, 2002) has aided my interpretation of this data and in formulating the contribution I claim in relation to theorising and practicing relational leadership.

More broadly and fundamentally this thesis is a call for serious inquiry into the nature and quality of our relating within organisations. I suggest an addiction to heroic leadership constructions coupled with a frenzied pace of life can lure us into transactional encounters whereby possibilities of dialogue and creative thinking together are extinguished. More gravely, following Buber (1958), I point to how we might suffocate possibilities for encountering 'the other' and thereby lose a fundamental understanding of what it is to be truly human.

This introductory chapter firstly explores the concepts of relational leadership and dialogue explaining why they are the subject of current attention in both academic and practitioner circles. Secondly, the research question which directs this thesis is situated in relation to gaps in understanding in each of these areas. Thirdly, action research is introduced. Specifically first-person and co-operative inquiry are presented as methods which enabled effective exploration of the research question. Fourthly, the way in which this research will make a number of timely contributions both to academic research and to practitioners who wish to inquire and improve their practice is conveyed. Finally, the structure of this thesis is explained to the reader.

With these aims in mind the key concepts of interest in this thesis, namely 'relational leadership' and 'dialogue' will now be examined along with why they might be of particular interest at this moment in time.

Introducing the key concepts

The twenty-first century has ushered in remarkable technological progress which is enabling virtual, global communication and working practices. In parallel with these opportunities however we find ourselves needing to navigate the terrifying prospects of cyber terrorism, climate change, political unrest, vast economic inequities, to name but a few of our challenges. Understandably management and leadership scholars have been committed to advocating a number of ideas which might assist organisations and their leaders in navigating this uncharted territory. This paper concerns the two academic and practice fields of relational leadership and dialogue and how both might lend insight to the other in service of addressing the issues mentioned above.

Relational leadership

Academics are still no nearer reaching agreement on what *leadership* is or even who *leaders* are (see Grint 2005, Kort 2008). Nevertheless, both concepts are still promoted as critical factors in the navigation of the challenges above. "Leadership has become a panacea. People call for leadership, but what do they really mean?" asks Sinclair (2007:xiii).

Whilst the debate still continues as to what leadership is, there has been a discernible movement in the literature which has sought to distance itself from the traditional preoccupation with finding individual, positional leaders who possess remarkable heroic skills which can be analysed objectively (see for example Alvesson and Sveningsson 2012, DeRue and Ashford 2010, Meindl et al. 1985, Turnbull James and Ladkin 2008). Leadership, it is argued more recently, is surely a relational phenomenon and hence cannot possibly make sense if we simply look at the leader entity in splendid isolation. We should be at least as interested in the 'follower' (Shamir 2007 and Uhl-Bien and Pillai 2007). Taking it further still, perhaps we should be studying the nature of the relationship that forms *between* leader and follower and how leadership comes about within that encounter (e.g. Fairhurst 2009, Fletcher 2012).

Relational leadership theory (RLT) is a relatively new perspective epitomising this 'relational turn' in the leadership literature (Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012b and Uhl-Bien 2006). Uhl-Bien and Ospina in their recent important edited collection, *Advancing Relational Leadership Research* (2012), seek to articulate RLT by identifying a spectrum of thinking within what is a rather sprawling disparate mass of research which focuses on various aspects of the leader-follower relationship. On the one hand some researchers have explored the leader, the follower and the relationship as entities which operate independently, or in a measurable, causal manner, often within a hierarchical context and statically at a moment in time. On the other hand others have argued that the concepts of leader and follower are socially constructed and dynamic and the most interesting unit of analysis is in fact the 'in between' space where

leadership is constructed. The former approaches are collectively called 'entity' perspectives and the latter approaches 'constructionist'.

There has been a growing interest in the constructionist perspective in particular (Fairhurst and Grant 2010, Ladkin 2010), however with it being a relatively new area of exploration there are many gaps in theory and consequent calls for further research. There has been considerable attention directed towards what leadership constructs are formed between leader and follower and their consequences. There has also been some research into the practices that leaders would employ if they were to truly appreciate their relationality. However relatively little is understood about what happens *in between* leader and follower when leadership is constructed and how those in relation experience this meeting.

Scholars in the field have begun to explore this by suggesting that the dynamic process of leadership in between leader and follower might be considered dialogic. Ospina and Sorensen (2006) consider leadership as "relational dialogue" where "leadership emerges by way of dialogue and collaborative learning" (2006:195). Cunliffe and Eriksen appear to agree and their 2011 paper aims to conceptualise "relational leadership as an inherently moral and dialogical practice" (2011:1428). Given this centrality of dialogue, I suggest that the nature of 'relational dialogue' and 'dialogic practice' might require exploration in order to further theorise relational leadership and encourage leader sensitivity to their relationships.

Alongside this gap in our understanding of the between space and the interest in dialogue sits a further limitation of the RLT literature. Very little has been studied about the sense that those encountering one another have regarding the *quality* of their relation and how such a sense might be constructed and evolve dynamically through relation. Research regarding the quality of leadership relations has, to date, emanated from entity scholars often working with Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX), for example Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). This theory seeks to objectively 'rate' leadership relationships and identifies which variables affect quality in order to assist practicing leaders to identify and then build the required skills. I propose that the

constructionist perspective however has been surprisingly quiet on the matter of quality. I suggest that RLT has consequently failed to convey the richness of the experience of *being* in leadership relation. Focused primarily on leadership constructs, linguistic processes and practices, it has not as yet sought to inquire into how the subjective sense of quality evolves in encounter. This, I suggest, restricts our understanding of the between space and consequently the guidance that we might offer those wishing to enact leadership roles.

I wish to bring these two limitations, namely our limited conceptualisation of dialogue and our restricted view of quality, together. To date, RLT has described the leader-follower between space as 'dialogic', however I consider that this term has been understood in a restrictive way, namely 'evolving linguistic exchange' (following Bakhtin 1981 and Shotter 1993). Dialogue can be and is understood in a much broader sense than this. Certain philosophers interested in dialogue direct one to think more expansively towards the holistic encounter and direct focus onto aspects of quality referred to above, (for example Buber 1958). I suggest that an inquiry into the between space which explores its dialogic nature, *but* in a more wide-ranging manner, might serve to further conceptualise this space in RLT.

In order to explain this I introduce the field of literature relating to dialogue below.

Dialogue

Despite the use of the term 'dialogue' within the relational leadership literature it is a 'murky' and 'contested' concept, (see Deetz and Simpson 2004). Dialogue, perhaps even more so than 'leadership', means many different things to different people. To Gergen et al. it means "simply a conversation between two or more persons" (2001:681). To Tsoukas it means, rather technically, "a joint activity between at least two speech partners in which a turn taking sequence of verbal messages is exchanged between them" (2009:943). Isaacs comes at it from a different perspective describing it as "non-objectified, genuine meeting" (2001:713).

I suggest one spectrum of loose differentiation seems to be helpful in understanding this term. On the one hand some writers think of dialogue as a rational process of linguistic exchange which aids civic engagement and ethical decision making, (see for example Deetz and Simpson 2004 and Habermas 1984). On the other hand Ashman and Lawler (2008), Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000), Buber (1958) and Isaacs (1999) amongst others come from a different perspective. They point to a more expansive understanding of 'dialogue' as a quality of embodied dynamic encounter describing genuine meeting of 'the other'. They offer a 'prescriptive', as well as a 'descriptive', perspective on dialogue (Stewart & Zediker 2000). This means that as well as thinking of dialogue as a description of the way human beings inherently relate with each other, they also reserve the term dialogue for a 'special' quality of meeting one another. Dialogue in this sense should be encouraged in some circumstances, for example to improve organisational learning (Senge 2006), creativity (McNamee and Shotter 2004) and engagement (Groysberg and Slind 2012).

RLT to date has focused its attention (all be it in a very limited way) rather more on a descriptive understanding of 'dialogue'. It has focused on how leadership is constructed and what constructs are formed in a *linguistic* emergent manner when a leader engages with their 'stakeholders' (see Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011, Ospina et al. 2012). I argue in this thesis that further insights are available to RLT by examining relational leadership through a prescriptive dialogue lens. Specifically, such a lens might allow us to explore the implications that the relational quality of the between space might have on those in relation and beyond.

Of the writers who address dialogue in this prescriptive manner, as genuine encounter in the present moment, Martin Buber and specifically his study on I-Thou dialogue (1958) is surely the most renowned. He was first to popularise the term dialogue (Anderson and Cissna 2008) and his work then clearly and directly influenced other renowned dialogue writers such as Bahktin (1981), Gadamer (1989) and Freire (1990). Stewart et al. describe him as "the most widely known 20th-century philosopher of dialogue" (2004:24).

Buber suggested there are two main ways we encounter the other. 'I-It' describes how we meet another in a subject-object transactional manner. We view the other as a means to our own ends. It is a calculated meeting in that we tend to be preoccupied with our own needs or the issue at hand. 'I-Thou' meeting is genuine mutual encounter in the present where we meet the other as a unique subject with whom we nevertheless share our inherent intersubjectivity. It is not that the latter is better than the former (although Buber is often misunderstood as advocating this, see Anderson and Cissna 2012), it is simply that we are in a dynamic movement between these two extremes. The problem arises, according to Buber, because we spend most of our time meeting the other as 'It' in our increasingly transactional world and yet we only become 'I' through our meeting of 'Thou'. Buber claimed that "real living is meeting" (1958:25) and we are therefore not fully living in our I-It transactions. Buber argues we are not appreciating the deep intersubjective connection we have with each other and with the world around us; we are not enabling genuine dialogue where real voices are invited, respected and included. In turn this might mean we are not thinking and being with each other in a way that summons our full potential in relation to tackling the real issues we face in the world mentioned above (see Anderson and Cissna 2012 and Buber 1958).

Buber's interests therefore are in asserting the inherently dialogical nature of our being and in advocating passionately the necessity of re-engaging with our connectedness and intersubjectivity. In this sense he is focused on the *quality* of the between space. I propose he has a contribution to make to the relational leadership field which to date has been more occupied in focusing efforts on the linguistic construction of leadership rather than the felt sense of being within the phenomenon of leadership.

Seminal writers Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) in their *Organization Science* article use Buber's work as a foundation to advocate an increased focus on issues of relationality in organisational research and the employment of a correspondingly wider 'palette' of methodologies. Indeed the phrase 'space between' popularised

through Bradbury and Lichtenstein's work was itself borrowed from Buber. The authors state that Buber's work "points to the relational perspective that self and other are not separable but are, rather, co-evolving in ways that need to be accounted for in our organizational research" (2000:551). Yet despite this, Buber's work is surprisingly unacknowledged in both organisational and leadership studies (Slotte 2006). Despite having his work applied fruitfully to other potentially non-mutual relationships such as those between teacher and student and between therapist and client, its application to the leader-follower relationship has to date remained relatively unexplored (Ashman and Lawler 2008). This thesis is positioned to address this gap.

The research question

It is from the understanding that Buber's work might inform the leader-follower relation by further explicating 'dialogue' whilst turning attention to the quality of the space between that I present the research question guiding this thesis.

This thesis aims to offer an inquiry into I-Thou dialogue as a lens to explore relational leadership. Specifically, the research question I advance is:

"How does Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue inform the theory and practice of Relational Leadership?"

The nature and intention of this question demands a somewhat different methodology than those applied to date in the field. This will be briefly introduced next.

The research methodology and analysis

Investigation into the methodologies applied in research explicitly bringing together the concepts of leadership and dialogue leads me to observe a number of features.

Firstly, research has primarily focused on theoretical rather than empirical contributions (for example Ashman and Lawler 2008). Secondly, where empirical research is advanced, methods employed tend to examine leadership and dialogue together in hindsight (for example through interviews, Boogaard 2000), rather than in the moment (as advocated, but I suggest not undertaken, by Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011). Thirdly, 'leaders' and 'followers' are usually studied in a hierarchical relationship. It is assumed that reporting management relationships offer the opportunity to explore leadership (for example Groysberg and Slind 2012), despite the more recent espoused viewpoint that leadership is not constrained to positional authority (see Kort 2008 , Ladkin 2010 and Turnbull James and Ladkin 2008). Finally and somewhat ironically for research into relational leadership and dialogue, the researcher is often positioned as an objective observer, or certainly as separate and distinct to the research subjects (for example Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011 and Ospina and Foldy 2010).

The intention behind the research question above is to explore dialogue in the moment, following Buber's thinking, between leader and follower. This means that this research will be interested in exploring the quality of embodied encounter. It will focus on 'moments of meeting' (Buber 1958) in the between space where leadership is constructed. Therefore, in contrast to the majority of research to date in RLT, this thesis requires a methodological approach that advances precisely the opposite to that catalogued above. It seeks to generate empirical, in the moment, dynamic understandings. It will explore leadership in contexts other than the manager-subordinate relationship. It will include my own subjective involved experiences as a research subject in order to deeply inquire into moment by moment embodied experience.

In essence, this thesis wishes to address Cissna and Anderson's (2004) concern that "the challenge for dialogue scholars is to keep research into dialogue itself dialogic" (2004:203). From the outset, the aspirations of Buberian dialogue guided the way in which data was collected. Furthermore, a method was sought which met a key

objective of mine in embarking on this PhD; to improve my own practice as a facilitator and leader in organisations and to help interested others to improve their practice also.

The methodology which fits these numerous criteria well and has thus been advanced in this paper, is action research. Action research (Coghlan and Brannick 2010, Heron and Reason 2008) describes an approach or 'orientation' to research (see Ladkin 2007, Marshall 2004) which proposes "a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes" (Reason and Bradbury 2008c:4). It aims to acknowledge the intricate subjective involvement that the researcher has with the subject matter and cautions the attempt by more positivist approaches to detach the researcher and label him or her as objective. The researcher therefore uses their own experience alongside others who are interested in the research area to process through cycles of action and inquiry in order to seek positive change in an area which concerns the "flourishing of individual persons and their communities" (Reason and Bradbury 2008c:4).

This particular action research project encompasses both first-person and second-person approaches (see Heron 1996). The former requires the researcher to undertake an inquiring approach to her own life and experience. It requires an ability to critically explore personal assumptions, paradigms and the implications these hold on practice.

Second-person action research seeks to research *with* others as opposed to *about or on* others (Heron and Reason 2008). A group of researchers interested in the subject matter work together in inquiry. In co-operative inquiry (the second-person method used in this thesis) the initiating researcher is a member of this group; the group collectively and mutually determines the research structure, process and findings (Heron 1996). The operationalization of this ideal is not quite so politically neutral as this description implies as will be explained in this thesis. In the case of this research co-operative inquiry (CI) has enabled exploration of leadership in a situation where there are no overt hierarchical structures. It has provided the opportunity to study a significant parallel process, namely in the group we could talk *about* leadership and

dialogue whilst reflecting and inquiring into leadership and dialogue as it presented itself *in that moment* between us as we engaged in the process of CI.

The CI process comprised of 11 meetings, lasting approximately 2.5 hours each, held between October 2011 and March 2013. A final twelfth 'reunion' meeting was held in November 2013 to facilitate further reflections regarding our journey together. My six main co-researchers all held or have held a variety of positional leadership roles. In the group, although there were pre-existing relationships and connections with one particular organisation (discussed in chapter 3), there were no hierarchical reporting lines between us.

Data and analysis emerged from four main inter-twining strands. Firstly in the co-operative inquiry group I examined the transcripts from our meetings and used a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998) to unearth the main themes. These were then considered by members of the group and a number of external reviewers. Secondly CI members identified a number of key incidents in our meetings which offered important insights into the dynamic contextual complexity of dialogue and leadership. Thirdly we used collage as a form of presentational knowing (Heron 1996) to illuminate our insights towards the end of the co-operative inquiry process. Finally, from a first–person perspective, I kept a journal of my own reflections on leadership and dialogue, cataloguing how I made sense of my own experience and how this sense-making was influenced by my context and perspective (Marshall 2004).

I examined this data in the light of Martin Buber's work (1958, 1965, 2002). Through an iterative process akin to Gadamer's fusion of horizons (1989) I was then able to highlight how Buber's ideas could offer insight into relational leadership. Consideration of his thinking helped me to interpret the data in order to offer the findings which are summarised in the next section.

Overview of findings

This thesis concentrates on four main findings which focus on and could hold implications for the in between space of the leader-follower relationship. They are detailed in chapters 5 to 8:

1. 'Turning' towards relation and the compulsion for 'worthwhileness'

Interpretation of data highlights the 'busyness' which infused CI members' lives. We referred to being distracted by things that needed to be done and we assessed whether our meetings were 'worthwhile' to us given our alternative priorities. We identified a social discourse which lionised busyness, connecting it with being 'productive' and being a 'good' leader. I suggest these pressures might pervade leader-follower relating more generally in organisational contexts with consequences for the perceived quality of leader-follower relation.

2. 'Being' rather than 'seeming' and dropping the mask

In the CI group we noticed our temptation to spend much of our time and energy presenting a façade to each other in an attempt to be seen by others in a particular way. These façades were in part a consequence of co-created 'rules of the game'; often unexplored or unarticulated implicit cultural norms which dictated how we must behave and present ourselves. In Buber's terms we spent considerable time and effort 'seeming' to each other rather than 'being'. However 'being' appeared to require that we disclose more to others in moves which could go against the rules of the game. Such moves were experienced as extremely risky. I suggest that our inherent fragility is illuminated through the data which leads me to question the predominant image of the heroic, self-assured leader. The complexities of being an 'authentic' leader are also

examined and the ease in which genuine dialogue between leader and follower might emerge is questioned.

3. Leader-follower mutuality and the issue with 'leading dialogue'

Different constructions of leadership in the group could be seen to hold implications for what Buber referred to as mutuality. Heroic notions of leaders were apparent as were alternative views presenting leadership as a dynamic process of changing conversation. My interpretation of the data however questions the assumption that role and status inequality preclude dialogue and that power is limited to that conferred as a result of position or title. This suggests the merits of appreciating and inquiring into the multi-faceted constructions of leadership and power *inside* relation. These constructions could well have implications on leader-follower relating however they are far from predictable or generalizable. This is contrary perhaps to Ashman and Lawler's (2008) call for seemingly straightforward examples of leader-follower dialogue in order to 'prove' it is possible in this context.

4. Dialogue: the sense of relational encounter in the complexity of a moment

Moments of dialogue are presented in this thesis as subjective and extremely difficult to convey. The space between leader and follower in a single moment might be infused with numerous processes all in dynamic flow; issues of power including gender, sexuality, age, experience and titles, assumptions of role, ontological positions, distractions, intentions, understandings and misunderstandings. All these issues and many more are 'slooshing' around (to take a member's description) and taken holistically they give us a sense of the conflict and difference inherent in dialogue. Yet despite this in the CI group we were able to simply be with each other in moments of dialogue.

Overview of contribution

An important issue in the discussion of these findings is the rather one-dimensional somehow bland perspective on the leader-follower between space represented in RLT literature. This contrasts strikingly with the tumultuous, vivid and complex experience of being within a relational leadership dynamic in the CI group. Along with this lack of elaboration RLT neglects to inquire into, or articulate, the felt quality of encounter between leader and follower. The contribution of this thesis to RLT lies in illuminating this relational quality and recommending an exploration which would lead towards a theory of leader-follower encounter.

I propose that a theory of leader-follower encounter might serve to point the way to two main areas which RLT has left relatively in the shadows to date. Firstly, attention might be directed towards the implications that the quality of our leader-follower 'encounters' in organisations might have on our ability to provide creative solutions to the dramatic issues that we face as a society in the twenty-first century. In this way a theory of leader-follower encounter might invite those wishing to practice leadership to consider their assumptions regarding 'what it takes to lead'. Secondly, following Buber's work, such a theory might seek to explore the fundamental implications that the quality of our encounters might have on how we come to know what it is to be human in our organisational life with others.

These issues will be detailed in chapter 9. The next section explains how this thesis structures the lead into this contribution.

The structure of this thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2, **Literature Review**, provides a detailed examination of the extant literature in the two key fields of relational leadership and dialogue. It highlights how the research questions emerge from the gaps within these two fields.

Chapter 3, **Methodology**, action research is introduced and within that first-person and co-operative inquiry. It positions these methods in relation to my own ontological and epistemological viewpoint.

Chapter 4 introduces the process through which the **Findings** were generated. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 then detail these findings focusing on the four areas summarised above.

Chapter 9, **Discussion and Contribution**, discusses the findings and clarifies the areas where these findings contribute to both academic and practitioner audiences.

Chapter 10, **Conclusion**, provides a summary of the arguments contained within this thesis as well as a personal reflection on the importance of its contents.

The **References** and **Appendix** conclude this thesis.

The next chapter therefore introduces the key terms and context for this work in more detail with a literature review spanning the fields of leadership and dialogue.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to examine the relational leadership literature and the literature on dialogue together in order to explore how the between space of dynamic leadership relation has been conceptualised to date.

In order to do this an overview of the body of literature examining relational leadership theory will be presented positioning it within the wider leadership literature. It will be explained how, very recently in RLT, the leader-follower relation has been conceptualised as 'dialogic'. This leads on to an exploration of this term 'dialogue' through an overview of the literature. This will show how multi-faceted understanding of the term is. The concept of I-Thou dialogue identified by Martin Buber (1958) is detailed with an explanation as to why his work might be particularly well suited for responding to various calls within RLT to expand our understanding of the leader-follower dynamic. Then follows a summary of the limited occasions the two fields of dialogue and leadership and the specific areas of relational leadership and I-Thou dialogue have been brought together to date.

This examination of the existing literature and its limitations alongside specific calls voiced for further research in RLT then lead to the research question that lies at the heart of this thesis. The chapter ends anticipating a number of ways in which responding to this research question might contribute to RLT.

Relational Leadership

Overview of the leadership literature: positioning relational leadership

This section provides a brief overview of the vast leadership field illustrating how the focus of attention within it has changed over time and thereby situating relational leadership theory which this thesis focuses on. By illuminating the historical context in which this thesis has been conducted I recognise one aspect of why I may have been driven to asking the questions that I am asking at this point in time, situated at this place in history and in this place socio-culturally.

There have been many attempts to classify and summarise the leadership field (see for example Grint 2005, Jackson and Parry 2008 and Yukl 2002) all of which aim to make the immense field of leadership more manageable. They illustrate how diverse perspectives are, from theories which explore the leader's unique and special attributes, to those which argue that more emphasis should be placed on the process of leader*ship* and how individuals recognise and create leadership with those around them. Broadly speaking if one examines the field historically one can see how the emphasis from the former to the latter has evolved.

Using a classification provided by Gordon (2002), modified to include other very recent interests in the leadership field, Figure 1 illustrates the historical development of the literature from the early twentieth century when mainstream management theorists began to take a significant interest in organisational leadership.

This is a simplification of the field of course; for example, it is of note that today there are still significant numbers of trait leadership theories being posited and published (for example Judge et al. 2009 and Kant et al. 2013). Nevertheless the diagram does indicate the main time periods in which various theories have been generated and when they remained most popular.

Figure 1: Historical evolution of leadership theories

| 1920 | 1960 | 2000 |

Trait
e.g. Bowden 1927

Style
e.g. McGregor 1966

Contingency
e.g. Hersey and Blanchard 1969

New
e.g. transactional (Hollander 1979), transformational (Bass 1990), culture-based (Bryman 1996)

Non-traditional
e.g. dispersed (Gordon 2002), shared (Fletcher & Kaufer 2003), servant (Sendjaya et al. 2008), relational (Uhl-Bien 2006), spiritual (Fry 2003)

Source: based on Gordon (2002) and modified by author

Gordon (2002), writing as a supporter of dispersed leadership theories, asserts that those theories in the first four categories above and referred to as 'traditional' by him are generally founded on "concepts of differentiation (clear boundaries of identity between leaders and followers) and domination (the 'natural' superiority of the leader and the giving over of will by followers)" (2002:159). However dispersed theories, he claims, (and I have added also the recent interest in relational, shared, servant and spiritual leadership to term these theories 'non-traditional'), are generally founded upon "concepts of dedifferentiation (blurred boundaries of identity between leaders and followers) and collaboration (sharing of power between leaders and followers)" (2002:159).

However there is a further important movement which Gordon does not refer to, perhaps because it was in relative infancy when he wrote in 2002. That is the growing

interest in the *process* of leader*ship* and how leadership is constructed dynamically in *relation* rather than on the leader and follower as entities. This movement has been identified by authors such as Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011), Hosking (1988), Ladkin (2010), Uhl-Bien (2006) and Uhl-Bien and Ospina (2012) amongst others. This discernible movement in focus towards the leader-follower relational space has been termed a 'relational turn' (Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012b).

Figure 2 below summarises my understanding of five important characteristics of this movement.

Figure 2: The relational turn in the leadership literature

From leader as entity….		Towards leadership as process….
'Leadership' identified through attributes of distinct individuals	→	'Leadership' being socially constructed by those in an encounter
Leadership associated with 'headship'	→	Leadership possibilities located throughout the hierarchy
Unit of analysis is the individual leader, follower or relationship as separate 'things'	→	Unit of analysis is the process of relating and the relational space
'Self' is individuated and autonomous	→	'Self' is connected and co-constructed
Power attributed as a static possession of the individual leader	→	Power dispersed, dynamic and constructed in the relationship between leader and follower

Source: author's own with reference to Ospina and Foldy 2010, Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012b and Uhl-Bien 2006

Whilst this appreciation for the dynamic relational process between leader and follower is growing and might indeed herald a paradigm shift in the field (as argued by

Fletcher 2004, Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012b and Uhl-Bien 2006), it is recognised that the entity perspective in leadership research still predominates in both academic and practitioner publications (Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012a).

Regardless of whether or not this movement in the leadership literature represents a paradigm shift, the debate between opposing ontological and epistemological views, and its consequences, is clearly brought into focus through the on-going 'dialogue' (see Day and Drath 2012 and Ospina and Uhl-Bein 2012b) between relational leadership theorists of widely varying perspectives to whom I now turn.

Relational leadership theory

As described above, a development which has occurred primarily in the last twenty years is the growing field of relational leadership. Relational leadership could be seen to encompass a rather expansive array of claims regarding the nature of the relationship between leader and follower. Uhl-Bien fortunately however paved the way for clarification in her 2006 *Leadership Quarterly* article which outlines two main perspectives of relational leadership which reflect Figure 2 above. The first is an entity approach "that focuses on identifying attributes of individuals as they engage in interpersonal relationships" (2006:654). The second is a relational perspective "that views leadership as a process of social construction through which certain understandings of leadership come about and are given privileged ontology" (2006:654). Relational Leadership Theory (RLT) is then offered by Uhl-Bien as "an overarching framework for the study of leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination…and change…are constructed and produced" (2006:654).

In other words, according to Uhl-Bien (2006), who builds on the work of Dachler and Hosking (Dachler and Hosking 1995, Hosking 1988, 2007), the leadership literature domain can be divided into two. Firstly there are those scholars who perceive leaders as possessing certain qualities with relationship as an exchange between leader and

follower. This view focuses on the attributes of the leader, the follower and the relationship as 'things' that can be studied and to a certain extent objectified. Well known examples of this perspective are the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (for example Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995) and charismatic leadership theory (for example Shamir et al. 1993). These views regard the self as an independent entity to whom agency is ascribed with a clear separation of mind and nature (as explained by Fitzsimons 2012 and Uhl-Bien 2006). The epistemological implications of this entity perspective are profound. Methods such as those found in the natural sciences are seen as being appropriate to discover the objective reality of a leader and leadership.

This is in contrast to a more recent focus in the leadership literature, described above, on the *process* of leadership; examining how, when people are in relationship, the phenomenon of leadership is dynamically constructed and how each person in that relationship is changed as a result of that meeting. Writers such as Mead (1934) and James (1890) are seen as the forefathers of this perspective which is referred to as social constructionism (see Berger and Luckman 1966). In this view, the spotlight falls on how individuals make meaning from the interaction; how they understand leadership and how this understanding forms as a result of socio-historical factors. In this sense leadership and indeed followership are clearly phenomena of interpretation and subjective assessment, in constant flow, as opposed to labels accorded statically and permanently to individuals. The notion of self is regarded as problematic; the focus rather is on how we come to construe separation and how the concept of self derives from relational processes. Barrett et al. (1995), Bligh et al. (2007), Fairhurst and Grant (2010), Gergen and Gergen (2008), Hosking (2007, 2011) and Ladkin (2010, 2013), amongst many others, are examples of authors currently writing from this point of view.

Reiterating some of the points in Figure 2 above Uhl-Bien argues that the relational perspective (which she later termed 'constructionist' in order to provide clarity, see Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012) initiates possibilities for leaders and leadership which are fundamentally different from the previous entity view. Firstly, it "recognises leadership

wherever it occurs" (Hunt and Dodge cited in Uhl-Bien 2006:654). In other words it does not restrict leadership to those in hierarchical positions; leadership does not only happen in a manager-subordinate situation, where leadership is equated to 'headship'.

Secondly, it shifts focus onto processes rather than persons. Constructionist perspectives therefore "identify the basic unit of analysis in leadership research as relationships, not individuals" (Uhl-Bien 2006:662) and as such "processes such as dialogue and multilogue become the focus" (Uhl-Bien 2006:663). This in turn implies a focus on different methodologies in order to access such processes which will be considered further below.

Thirdly, knowledge in constructionist thinking is rather obviously viewed as socially constructed, i.e. our meaning making is influenced by our socio-historical position and the opinions, thinking and actions of those around us. Uhl-Bien (2006:655) reminds us that "meaning can never be finalized…it is always in the process of making". Those propounding a relational turn claim our predominant understanding of the term 'leader' appears to be undergoing a change in its meaning, away from 'special and superior' and towards something which allows more space for dynamic two-way influence.

Uhl-Bien and Ospina (2012) recently set out to provide more clarity to the field of RLT in their edited volume *Advancing Relational Leadership Research*. This work attempts to further explain the distinction between entity and constructionist views. For example the attempted 'dialogue' between Hosking and Shamir (Hosking et al. 2012, Hosking and Shamir 2012, Shamir 2012) highlights passionate differences in worldviews and approaches. However, the editors and many of the authors acknowledge that the distinction is often *not* perhaps quite as black and white as Uhl-Bien's 2006 article and the distinction laid out above supposes. On reading the chapters presented I perceive a movement towards a 'middle ground' in some of them. The metaphor that keeps coming to my mind is of the two main UK political parties who represent different ideological bases but on examination of policy it is sometimes difficult to draw much of a distinction between them.

I suggest that some 'entity' writers, such as Ashkansay et al. (2012) and Treadway et al. (2012), clearly come from a post-positivist persuasion and express this through their language. For example Treadway et al. (2012) attempt to "depict the mechanisms through which communication processes operate" (2012:382) and Ashkansay et al. (2012) "consider the key affective exchanges between leaders and followers as a key determinant in shaping relational leadership outcomes" (2012:352). However, despite this causal mechanistic outlook the words 'relation', 'relational' and 'relationships' infuse their work. They show clearly that they appreciate that 'leaders' are constituted through others perceiving them as such in relation. They see leaders as sitting within a field of relationships and they firmly state that navigating these relationships is essential to the leader role.

From the other direction, constructionist writers, such as Ospina et al. (2012) and Fletcher (2012), whilst focusing more on leadership process, nevertheless seem keen to study positional leaders and help to articulate 'what leaders should do' to be more effective. Ospina et al. (2012) claim to present a framework that entails "a set of leadership drivers" and they "acknowledge that the entity perspective has informed much of [their] thinking" (2012:286). Fairhurst considers "adding the element of personal agency", more common to the entity perspective, to constructionist thinking (2012:100). She seeks to avoid "the dangers of focusing one [perspective] to the exclusion of the other" whilst realising the "advantages of holding them together" (2012:84).

Hence I suggest it is a little more difficult to discern strict chasms in ontological assumptions than perhaps the rather neat distinction between entity and constructionist research that Uhl-Bien's 2006 article implies. This move to the middle ground could be for a number of reasons. It may have been driven by greater attempts to cross boundaries and appreciate other views and work. *Advancing Relational Leadership Research* (2012) was a specific attempt to counter the "fault zone" (Ospina 2012:xvi) in leadership studies on the understanding that "multi-paradigmatic approaches" (Uhl-Bien 2012:xv) were needed to advance knowledge of relational

leadership. Such attempts may be instrumental in widening knowledge of leadership through real efforts to understand, appreciate and incorporate alternative views.

Perhaps this convergence is because some authors are trying harder to appeal to a wider audience. Entity writers may wish to acknowledge and incorporate aspects of the constructionist agenda, showing that they are appreciative of the implications of the recent relational turn. Constructionists, perhaps in an attempt to be published by journals that continue to privilege a more positivist approach, seek to emphasise how their methods conform to more traditional academic definitions of validity and offer generalised conclusions more characteristic of an entity perspective. This leads me to wonder whether the methodological approaches applied to the leadership field might be narrowed as both ends of the spectrum 'play it safe'.

The middle ground might have assumed more prominence in response to pragmatic experience. Perhaps it has become less reasonable or 'sensible' to assume positions at the far edges of the spectrum. We are cognisant of the inability of well-known leaders to navigate predictably through uncertainty and ambiguity, influencing others to behave in ways that they wish (for example Obama, Cameron and other world-leaders in relation to the Syrian conflict). Therefore claiming that such leaders are independent and possess agency which can, if it is examined in sufficient detail, mechanistically drive the environment around them simply does not stand up to our experience. Conversely, we understand that some leaders have seemed, through their own attributes in relation to others and through their own agency made a lasting impact on those around them (Mandela's legacy for example is hard to deny).

Finally, authors have emerged, such as Fitzsimons (2012) who have approached RLT from different disciplines, (in his case systems psychodynamics), which appear to engage less problematically with aspects of both entity and constructionist views. They claim to include both perspectives, for example Fitzsimons accounts for the influence of the collective on the individual and vice versa.

I am presenting this move to the middle ground as neither 'good' nor 'bad' however one implication might be that the clarity regarding ontological foundations is 'muddied'. To return to the metaphor of the UK political scene, if there were to be a danger it might be that convergence leads to a lack of choice or challenge. If knowledge is developed in part through our reactions to and comparison with difference then narrowing of the field could be problematic if taken too far. I suggest therefore that fruitful and vibrant debate is predicated on regularly noticing the balance between finding resonance and conflict between paradigms.

A distinction that has become useful to me amidst this apparent convergence is that between the primacies afforded to relations and those afforded to the individual. In relation to the subject of this thesis, one of the first questions which I hold now when reading RLT works is 'does the author believe that the between space is created 'as a result' of an individual leader and follower approaching one another, or do they rather focus on how leadership evolves only through the space between?' In essence, do the individuals presuppose the between space or vice versa?

I wish in this work to further conceptualise the leader-follower between space using Buber's work as a lens. However I am not suggesting I can do this by examining how a 'pre-existing' leader and a follower interact per se. I am not considering that I will be discovering any sort of objective reality of this between space which is the product of the characters who are meeting. I am looking rather to explore the quality of spaces where leadership is being constructed in multi-faceted ways.

Mirroring the 'muddy' middle ground described above, much as I recognise this constructionist approach which lies at the heart of my understanding of leadership, I must acknowledge that I seek practical advice which might be to some extent generalizable through my research. I recognise that I am driven by an understanding that although leader agency is very much shaped through relationality, I consider an individual wishing to take up a leader role can and often does have influence and their actions can have consequences. These are perhaps never predictable but some actions and behaviours would, I propose, be more likely to lead to certain outcomes, for

example deepening relational quality, than others. I therefore am dismissing any simplistic compartmentalisation which considers agency the domain of entity scholars and relationality the domain of constructionists. I explicitly wish to operate across both whilst recognising the paradox and tension inherent in this.

Therefore my focus to convey the complexity of the leader-follower between space, remaining open to multi-faceted perspectives on leadership, encounters pressure from another commitment to explicate the 'so what' to practicing leaders. This is the "uneasy alliance" that Fletcher speaks of and also one she attempts to navigate (2012:84).

Despite opposing views being brought together within RLT and significant advances in 'dialogue' across the entity-constructionist divide, unsurprisingly, given the relative infancy of its theoretical development, there are clear gaps in RLT which provide further opportunities for research. Out of these gaps emerges the reasoning for my research question in this thesis therefore they will be clarified in the next section in more detail. I suggest that the limitations of RLT of most relevance to this study can be examined under two categories which are deeply interdependent. Firstly there is the rather narrow range of research methods employed to date in RLT. Secondly, and as a consequence perhaps of the former, our conceptualisation of the 'between space' in relational leadership is, I would suggest, as yet limited.

Limitations of the extant literature on relational leadership

Limitations of the methods employed in RLT

Fairhurst and Antonakis (2012), two authors with very different ontological perspectives (constructionist and entity respectively), examine a section of the papers published in *Advancing Relational Leadership Research* (Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012) and engage in a correspondence regarding them. They agree on three key restrictions relating to the research approaches employed to explore relational leadership to date.

They are set out here as I suggest that they introduce important influencing factors behind the restrictive conceptualisation of the between space.

Firstly, there is a heavy reliance on the study of *individuals* to discern relational patterns. Because of this focus, the methods employed tend to be post-positivist involving mainly surveys and interviews (Fairhurst in Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012:437-8). The authors do not object to the existence of research of this kind but do object to its overwhelming *dominance.* They use LMX, perhaps the most well-known attempt at examining the leader-follower dyad, as an example; it overwhelmingly examines just one side of the 'equation' using traditional methods.

Secondly, constructionist research specifically is unlikely to be able to place more attention onto the processes of leadership wherever and between whomever it occurs if it persists in restricting itself to current research methods. For example interviewing positional leaders at specific points in time might fail to illuminate dynamic leadership process. Fairhurst observes that "if 'process' is to remain as one of the key value commitments of the relational agenda…then we must find ways of apprehending it beyond the static depictions of relational processes that most leadership scholars currently favour" (Fairhurst in Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012:436). Methods employed to examine relational leadership are therefore too limited and uncreative particularly in terms of examining the dynamic nature of relating that the constructionist perspective advocates.

Thirdly, "the researcher's bird's eye view of the world is just that – a removed view of the actors' world given to (sometimes sweeping) generalizations about a host of contingencies" (Fairhurst in Fairhurst and Antonakis, 2012:445). Fairhurst therefore advocates bringing "researchers into the interaction – treated as another 'actor' if you will – to examine how they, too make certain levels of context" (2012:445). Much deeper reflexivity of the researcher is sought and encouraged.

Although it would seem fairly clear that Fairhurst and Antonakis seek methods which can examine processes of leadership with more involvement of the researcher's

subjective experience, it is interesting to see how very differently even this seemingly clear advice might be taken. According to Antonakis, who comes from a distinctly positivist persuasion, "'relations' are endogenous variables – they depend on other factors, and it is important to model these factors completely to better understand the process model that leads to dependent outcomes" (Antonakis in Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012:441). He advances various approaches for "measuring communication" (2012:441) and offers the promise of coding human emotions which might "begin to model and quantify the unquantifiable" (2012:442). Antonakis' view is that, in order to extend our understanding of relational leadership, we should make a concerted attempt to identify even more of the variables that are at play.

In contrast, Fairhurst, (Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012), coming from a constructionist persuasion advocates that dynamic relating might be effectively examined through more interpretative methods with discourse and narrative analysis promoted. She recognises that "coding schemes are not always as sensitive as they need to be to capture more nuanced relational dynamics" (Fairhurst in Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012:437) and suggests that the challenge is for researchers to "capture naturally-occurring and dynamic open-ended data" (2012:453). This is a call I intend to address in this thesis.

Uhl-Bien in her 2006 article appears to concur with Fairhurst and perhaps goes slightly further advocating a focus on communication processes ("for example dialogue and multilogue" 2006:663) rather than individual attributes of 'leaders'. Uhl-Bien's use of the term 'dialogue' here appears to be similar to Fairhurst's use of 'discourse'; turn-taking conversation and examination of the language employed. Later in this chapter I will argue that, based on the writing of Buber (1958), the relational space can be conceptualised as more than linguistic communication; encompassing more than the rational mind. Coding alone therefore would only go so far in connecting with the complexity of the relational moment.

Following the suggestions of Fairhurst, Anotonakis and Uhl-Bien could add new perspectives to RLT however I see their proposals as remaining rather limited.

Although Fairhurst and Antonakis both warn that "analysts are likely going to have to leave their comfort zones in order to do this type of theorizing and research" (2012:453), their view of what 'out of comfort zone' might entail seems narrow. Their suggestions are perhaps projections of what risk might mean within the methodologies with which they are most comfortable. Narrative and discourse analysis can give the impression that a complex dynamic interplay can be reduced to simple factors, or 'variables'. Furthermore, whilst Fairhurst (Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012) recommends including the subjective experience of the researcher to a greater extent, she limits herself to suggesting the interviewer could become more reflexive whilst undertaking the same sorts of methods. However I wonder, and will expand on this point in the next chapter, whether the researcher needs to be kept separate at all. Methods such as action research (Coghlan and Brannick 2010, Reason and Bradbury 2008b) recognise the potential for the researcher being a full research subject.

Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) in their important article on "*Relationality in organizational research: Exploring the space between*" are more wide ranging in the options that they illuminate for researchers. They aim to provide a "'palette' of methodological choices for the researcher interested in operationalizing a relational perspective within organizational research / practice" (2000:551) adding further dimensions to those named by Fairhurst and Antonakis (2012). They advocate a framework for relational methods organised around two dimensions. The first is around "the vividness of the interactions being studied" (2000: 554), in other words whether the interactions are visible and explicit or whether they are invisible and tacit. The second is around "the locus of relationality inquiry" (2000:554), in other words whether it is 'first-person inquiry' focused on the personal researcher experience and perspective, 'second-person' focused on the interpersonal realm, or finally 'third-person' focused on wider multipersonal interactions (see also Reason and Bradbury 2008c).

In this way their framework goes further than Fairhurst and Antonakis in highlighting the sheer breadth of possibilities of further research methods in the organisational

field and in so doing, I would suggest, points to the way RLT to date has restricted itself. Of interest in this thesis, and responding to some of the points above, are novel ways of conceptualising and theorising the space between leader and follower in the moment of relation, involving myself in relation to others as co-research subjects. In this sense I might seek ways of 'travelling across' Bradbury and Lichtenstein's framework (2000), incorporating intrapersonal, interpersonal, exterior and interior views in order to build as rich a picture as possible of relational moments. I would argue that such an attempt would respond to Fairhurst and Antonakis' (2012) calls, albeit perhaps with alternative methods to the ones they specifically suggest. This is explained further in the next chapter.

To summarise, influencing the convergence to the middle ground discussed in the previous section, or perhaps as a consequence of it, constructionist researchers have been surprisingly limited in the methods employed to understanding the leader-follower relation. It should be that ontological difference becomes apparent through methodological choice, however I find constructionist scholars restricted to methods which are in many cases similar to those employed by entity scholars. A question that forms in my mind is 'how can we build our theoretical and practical understanding of the leadership process if we don't 'come at it' from different angles?' Surely there are limits to the extent to which new understanding might be formulated through persistently interviewing 'leaders' or observing them in their work. Directly addressing the research question in this thesis, I query whether interviewing those in positional leader roles, or ethnographic observation, might give me access to the quality of in between space Buber speaks of; to the embodied sense of relationality within the leadership phenomenon. New methodological approaches might serve to illuminate this particular area in RLT which seems to be largely unaccounted for at present; that is the sensed quality of encounter between leader and follower in the moment. The limited extent to which this area has been examined to date is explored next.

Limitations in conceptualising the relational space

Constructionist researchers, perhaps as a consequence of the methods employed, have focused predominantly on three specific aspects of leader-follower relation. In doing so, they appear to preclude an examination of the essence or quality of the between space of encounter which is the focus of this thesis. These three areas are summarised in Figure 3 and then discussed below in order to position this focus area.

Figure 3: The territory of relational leadership theory
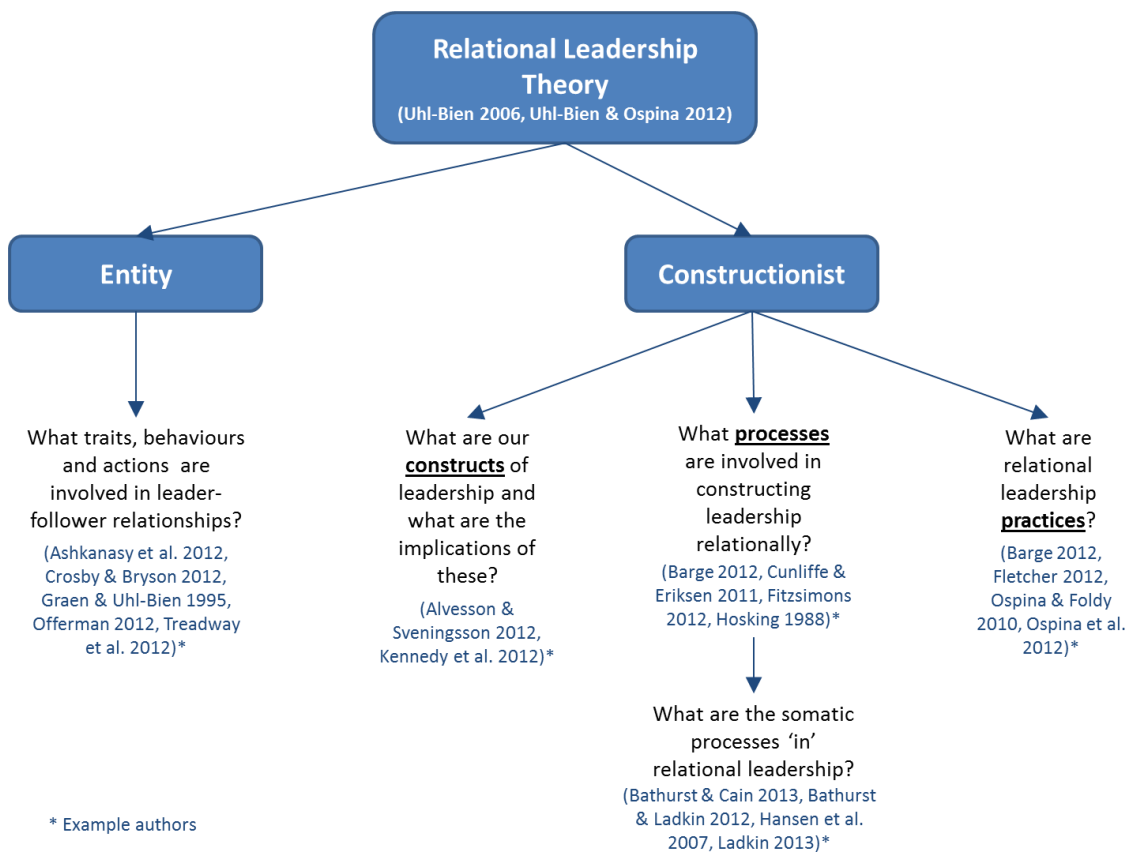
Firstly, within constructionist RLT researchers have focused on the varying *constructs* of 'leader', 'follower' and 'leadership'. They have asked 'what does leadership mean and who do we regard as leaders?' They have then debated the implications that

different constructs have on issues such as what and who is rewarded in organisations and consequently who is seen to be more or less powerful (for example, Alvesson and Sveningsson 2012 and Fairhurst 2012).

Secondly, researchers have focused on the *processes* through which such constructs are developed and enacted (for example Barge 2012 and Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011). They have asked 'how do we come to these understandings of leadership and how are they maintained or altered?' Although the predominant focus in RLT has been on linguistic processes, elsewhere a small group of authors (none of whom surprisingly are included within Uhl-Bien and Ospina's 2012 edited book) have turned their attention more towards non-linguistic processes of relating, exploring affect and embodied sense (for example Bathurst and Ladkin 2012 and Ladkin 2013).

The third area of focus that I perceive in the RLT literature is that of relational leadership *practices*. Scholars have asked 'what should leaders do if they understand their relationality?' They emphasise practices which complement an understanding of leader-follower relation as emergent and plural, for example practices dealing with unexpected problems (Bathurst and Ladkin 2012), practices which attend to the invisible, visceral sense of relation (Ladkin 2013) and improvisational practices (Kupers 2013).

These latter authors, focusing on leadership aesthetics, are in the minority; *Advancing Relational Leadership Research* (2012) gives voice rather to researchers focused on more cognitive and linguistic practices. For example Barge (2012) states his interest in "developing leadership practices that individuals may appropriate as they work within a continually evolving and changing linguistic landscape" (2012:108). Ospina et al. (2012) advocate further attention in RLT on practices with a focus on 'reframing discourse'.

RLT currently predominantly conceptualises the between space as a place where, through language interplay, leadership is constructed. Although Bathurst and Ladkin (2012) and Ladkin (2013) go further towards bringing our emotional and embodied

sense into this picture, I suggest RLT fails in bringing to life the complexities inherent in the between space. Nowhere do I find scholars asking the question '*what is it like* to be within relation where leadership is being constructed?' I see no accounts of leader and follower *experiences* in this context. The leadership space is depicted as somewhat colourless and bland, full of processes but lacking in emotional turmoil, excitement, conflict or warmth. I find no attempts to convey the "wordless depths" (Buber 2002:28) of genuine dialogue that Buber refers to or its "dynamic of an elemental togetherness" (Buber 1965:86). On the whole the between space appears as a rather unexciting, neat, processural 'place'.

In summary, I find no reference to the *quality* of the between space. It is fundamentally important here to explain what I seek to point to by the use of the term 'quality'. This is because readers might initially be surprised by this criticism particularly given the plethora of entity focused research purporting to examine exactly this term. LMX could be seen as an exercise in exploring how leadership effectiveness depends on the quality of the relationship between leader and follower (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995). More recently Ashkansay et al. (2012) seek to explicate how affective processes are key determinants of leader-follower relationship quality and Treadway et al. (2012) examine how political communication processes impact the quality of the leadership relationship. On the face of it there appears to be ample exploration of 'quality'. I propose however that quality in these projects is an extremely restricted, static concept which is regarded surprisingly unproblematically. It is assumed that 'quality' is an objective 'destination', often idealised and that describing it in terms of "mutual trust, respect and obligation" (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995:227) provides sufficient clarity to ensure 'we all are thinking of the same thing'.

If one tussles with drawing out these authors' meaning of the term one might assume they broadly refer to the individual's 'rating' of 'how good' the relationship is. The features which comprise this rating are listed (e.g. trust, integrity, authenticity), but where is the work which examines how one comes to an emerging sense of this rating? Where are the accounts which convey the dynamic sense in which parties might

construct relational quality and the differences and nuances in enacting 'quality relations'? Where are the accounts of how problematic the process through which we sense trust, integrity and authenticity can be? LMX inspired research seems to point to some relationships being 'high-quality' and others being 'low'. Graen and Uhl-Bien propose that "managerial units would contain only a few high-quality exchange relationships" (1995:227). Can relations really be categorised so neatly? Is this our experience within our dynamic relation?

Buber appears to have regarded 'quality' as a reference to the intersubjective sense of 'oneness', of the inherent shared 'being' existing across the between space. He does not however offer a 'definition' (much to the annoyance of some of his critics, see below). He appears to allow those in relation to sense their own understanding of quality. He appreciated dynamic moments of relating and the flow of I-It and I-Thou relating. Such a view is not conceptualised or examined in any way in RLT. I see no work which asks 'how do we experience our connection, our closeness in relation?' I also see no account of 'how does our sense of quality emerge through leader-follower encounter?' The reason I find these gaps so surprising is that a seminal text for research regarding relationality in organisational studies, namely Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000), which is quoted throughout many of the chapters in *Advancing Relational Leadership Research* (2012), takes Buber's term 'between space' as its foundation. The authors use Buber's work to introduce their project aimed at opening up alternative methods for examining the space between. Yet Buber's meaning of the term is lacking across every RLT article I have read to date. Not only this, he goes completely unquoted throughout Uhl-Bien and Ospina's (2012) entire book. This omission is referred to in chapter 9. Suffice to say here that it may be due to the focus of RLT work as mentioned above, but also to the poetic manner of Buber's work which may make it inaccessible to some readers.

Summarising implications for my research

To summarise this section, RLT includes a wide range of ontological and epistemological approaches exploring the leader-follower relationship. Despite the predominance of entity based research, academic work has increasingly focused on the constructionist end of the spectrum.

Existing research, which might be framed as focused on relational constructs, processes and practices, can be criticised in a number of key ways. Firstly it has focused mainly on the individual leader rather than on the dynamic leader-follower relationship. Secondly, it has limited methodologies to within traditional 'comfort zones' focusing mainly on linguistics. Thirdly, it has not accounted for, or taken advantage of, the researcher's subjectivity to a sufficient degree.

Perhaps as a result of the limited methods employed, there is really very little conceptualisation of the quality of the in between space between leader and follower beyond that advanced through LMX theory. The embodied sense of what it is to be within a dynamic and complex leadership phenomenon goes largely unappreciated whereas the more processual, linguistic and perhaps less 'colourful' description has been prioritised. Quality following Buber's concept; the sense of intersubjective 'meeting', has been overlooked.

This between space is 'slippery territory' (Ladkin 2013:323) yet Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) and Ladkin (2013) have, amongst others, called for further exploration of it. Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000), Tsoukas (2009) and Uhl-Bien (2006) call for research on *dialogue* as one process which characterises this 'in between' space. The research in this thesis will respond to these calls. However this is not as straightforward as it might seem because 'dialogue' appears to be a contested term and could imply vastly different areas of focus and consequently very different methodological approaches. Therefore it is to this body of literature that I now turn in order to position my work and make clear the choices I have made in my own research.

Dialogue

Overview of the literature on dialogue: positioning Buber's work

The array of definitions given in relation to the word 'dialogue' can be quite overwhelming. It apparently means "simply a conversation between two or more persons" (Gergen et al. 2001:681) and yet the lack of it is "not only the most acute symptom of the pathology of our time, it is also that which most urgently makes a demand of us" (Buber cited in Kramer 2003:viii). Dialogue refers to "a joint activity between at least two speech partners in which a turn taking sequence of verbal messages is exchanged between them, aiming to fulfil a collective goal" (Tsoukas 2009:943). Yet it is also seen as "the genetic material for building a culture of democracy freeing people from institutional forces that limit their personal autonomy and leading to their acquisition of a collective consciousness" (Raelin 2013:819).

Unsurprisingly then, amidst all of this, Deetz and Simpson (2004) warn that as "dialogue foregrounds specific normative hopes" (2004:141), "the coupling of high expectations with an ill-defined and murky concept increases likelihood of disappointment" (2004:152). In relation to the call from researchers in RLT mentioned in the section above and the description of relational leadership by some as 'dialogic' there would seem to be a need to make some sort of sense of the term. Expecting theorists and practitioners to understand specifically what is meant when calling the leader-follower relation 'dialogic' is far from straightforward.

To make sense of this 'murky concept', and to explicate where Buber's work (which is the main focus of my research) is positioned, it helps to firstly see the range of contexts in which dialogue is employed as this has a bearing on how dialogue is understood. Secondly, examining the historical lineage of the term illuminates some of the key elements of definitional difference that exist between authors. Taken together then one has an appreciation for the diversity of the term.

With regards to context, dialogue scholarship has been demonstrated in a vast array of fields (see Anderson et al. 2004c for a comprehensive overview). For example authors

such as Bohm (1996), Deetz and Simpson (2004), Isaacs (1999), Senge (2006) and Tsoukas (2009) write about dialogue within organisational contexts (in quite different ways). Heath (2007), Heidlebaugh (2008) and Kim and Kim (2008) examine political process and community dialogue. Rogers (1967) and Ventimiglia (2008) examine dialogue in therapeutic contexts. Many authors including McPhail (2004) and Simpson (2008) are interested in dialogue's role in race relations. Dialogue in education is examined by writers such as Morrell (2004) and its relevance to media and technology by researchers such as Pauly (2004). The 'forefathers' of dialogue theory might be regarded as originally writing within the philosophical or anthropological fields, for example Buber (1958), Gadamer (1989) and Habermas (1984).

These contexts of course overlap and there are a number of authors who write about dialogue more generally and as applicable to any interpersonal communication event in everyday life (e.g. Friedman 1983, 2002). Spanning such a vast array of contexts, it is unsurprising that 'dialogue' is used in a correspondingly broad manner.

In relation to the historical lineage of the literature on dialogue, five philosophers are "among the most frequently referenced philosophers of communication whose works foreground the term dialogue" (Stewart et al. 2004:22). They are Bakhtin (1981), Bohm (1996), Buber (1958), Freire (1990) and Gadamer (1989). Each brought a somewhat different perspective to the field but, importantly to my studies, Buber seems to have influenced most. He was the first to popularise the term dialogue specifically. Gadamer refers frequently to 'I and Thou' (although surprisingly he makes no explicit acknowledgement of Buber), whilst Bakhtin and Freire openly recognise Buber's influence on their own work. Bohm (1996), given his background in physics, drew predominantly on very different sources of inspiration such as Einstein.

Although the dialogue literature is clearly a wide field current research appears to be influenced still very significantly by these 'original' authors writing in the last century and in particular Buber whose "appropriation of [the term dialogue] has been most influential" (Stewart et al. 2004:32, see also Anderson et al. 2004a).

Perhaps surprisingly there have been very few attempts to classify some of the differences in this extensive literature on dialogue. This could well be because it is such a difficult exercise; as Anderson et al. (2004b) exclaim "we are simply not aware of tidy or definitive ways to summarise the sprawling dialogue research" (2004b:259). Having said this, there are two prominent attempts provided by Deetz and Simpson (2004) and Stewart and Zediker (2000). Their frameworks are perhaps useful in positioning Buber's work and therefore the territory of this thesis.

Deetz and Simpson (2004) categorise the literature into three areas. Firstly, the liberal humanistic 'camp' use the term 'dialogue' to convey "a normative interaction ideal founded on principles of understanding, empathy and active listening" (2004:141). Bohm (1996), Isaacs (1999) and Senge (2006) are included by the authors in this grouping. Secondly, the critical hermeneutic 'camp' "posits interaction rather than individuals as the locus of meaning…[and is interested in articulating a] rational model of civic engagement" (2004:142). Gadamer (1989) and Habermas (1984) are in this group. Finally, postmodernists emphasise "the role of indeterminancy and "otherness" in reclaiming conflicts, resisting closure, and opening new opportunities for people to be mutually involved" (2004:142). Bakhtin (1981) and Levinas (1969), according to the authors, write from this perspective.

Stewart and Zediker (2000) simplify even further dividing the dialogue literature into two areas; 'prescriptive', focused on dialogue as a particular quality of ethical relating, and 'descriptive' which sees dialogue as a pervasive, relational, meaning-making process. They cite Buber's work as an example of the former and Bakhtin's as an example of the latter.

I am not convinced however that Buber's work sits neatly in either framework. In relation to Deetz and Simpson's (2004) work, Buber might sit in both the critical hermeneutic and postmodern categories and arguably even in the liberal humanism group. In relation to the second, Stewart and Zediker (2000) clearly advise Buber's work sits in the prescriptive category within the dialogue literature. However even the

authors recognise that Buber also proposed an ontology based on the pervasiveness of dialogue where "all real living is meeting" (Buber 1958:25).

The current classifications of the dialogue literature are therefore attempting to make sense of an extremely diverse field. However the difficulty in neatly placing Buber's work, perhaps considered as the founding father of the field, within these classifications, indicates they are best used as rough orientations rather than exhaustive, exclusive categories.

Having reflected on both the academic and practitioner commentary and research on dialogue, I can identify perhaps the most important differentiator which has enormous implications on the choice of research methods adopted and is the cause of much of the confusion between scholars and practitioners alike. It is also a differentiator that both Deetz and Simpson (2004) and Stewart and Zediker (2000) recognise. This is whether dialogue is used to describe a (usually linguistically focused) process of exchange with dialogue as a noun, e.g. 'having a dialogue'. Here the use of the term is normative; dialogue is 'special'. Or whether dialogue encompasses rather an encounter with another, involving the recognition of inherent relationality between those individuals, in this case it is used as a verb or adverb, e.g. 'we encounter one another dialogically'. In other words a key differentiator is whether dialogue is 'simply' talk, or whether it goes far beyond this into our intersubjective connection and describes a particular way of being with one another. Confusion perhaps arises because some authors sit in both camps. Buber is often seen as one of them. His main project was to passionately convey our inherent relationality and the fantasy of the Cartesian split. However through his work describing I-Thou encounter, some have interpreted him to be advocating a particular quality of 'meeting' the other, hence he is often quoted in relation to a normative ideal.

Perhaps as a response to all this messiness Stewart et al. (2004) change direction and attempt to eke out any *similarities* existing across the field. One of these is 'tensionality', in other words "the tendency to understand whatever is of interest…dynamically and dialectically rather than as a static construct" (Stewart et al.

2004:23). For example Bakhtin (1981) saw language as a battle between centripetal and centrifugal forces (see Baxter 2004). Buber famously described in his work the tension between his central ideas of I-It and I-Thou (which are explained further below). In response to this and as a way perhaps of recognising the frustration of trying to force writers into particular discrete camps Figure 4 below illustrates some key *tensions* which I perceive in the dialogue literature and I position Buber's perspectives amongst them.

Figure 4: Definitional tensions of 'dialogue'

Source: author's own with reference to Anderson et al. 2004c and Stewart et al. 2004
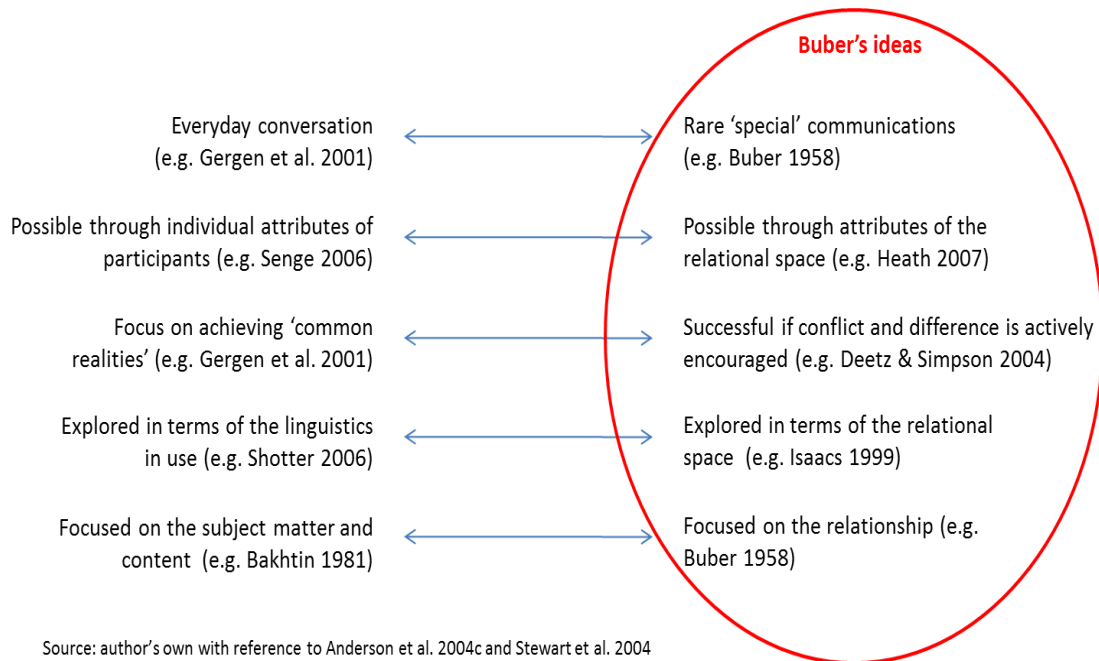
The figure above shows again how eclectic and wide the literature on dialogue is. Buber, possibly the most high profile writer on the subject (see Anderson et al. 2004c, Ashman and Lawler 2008, Stern 2009, Stewart et al. 2004), advocated intersubjectivity, relationality and a focus on the quality of the 'space between'. His work inspired Bradbury and Lichtenstein's important article (2000) which called for more extensive consideration of relationality in organisational research. Despite Buber's position in the

foundations of relationality ontology his work has not been used explicitly in RLT. Before this is examined further there is a need to account more fully his work and his specific view of dialogue.

I-Thou dialogue

Buber can be described as a philosophical anthropologist (Anderson et al. 2004c, Arnett 2004). His book *I and Thou* (1958) is his best known work. Friedman (writing in the forward of Kramer 2003:ix) claims that he "can think of no work of more lasting importance for our times". It is clear he has been extremely influential and is perhaps "the most widely known 20th-century philosopher of dialogue" (Stewart et al. 2004:24). Indeed Bakhtin went even further suggesting Buber was "the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century" (cited by Friedman 2001:25).

Buber's work is the key philosophical foundation for this thesis. His importance as a writer and theorist within the dialogue literature is clear from the assertions made by a variety of scholars above but this is only one reason for the decision to focus on his work. In addition, Buber is renowned for his insistence on focusing on the 'in between' space. Indeed, as mentioned above, Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) credit Buber with coming up with the phrase 'space between'.

Buber's particular interest area is in the nature of our relationships with others in the world around us (including inanimate objects, animals and God as well as other human beings). As referred to above this relationship can be 'I-Thou' in nature or 'I-It'. Buber says:

> "To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude.
> The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.
> The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.
> The one primary word is the combination I-Thou.

The other primary word is the combination I-It

….the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It".

One can see from these words why Buber is acclaimed for his poetic language but at the same time sometimes criticised for being vague with his concepts (see Isaacs 2001). Kramer (2003) clarifies somewhat by explaining that "rather than serving as an object of experience, 'Thou' points to the quality of genuine relationship in which partners are mutually unique and whole…this deep bonding is contained neither in one, nor the other, nor in the sum of both – but becomes really present between them" (2003:15). The critical elements to draw out here are that I-Thou relations can be identified in terms of the quality of intersubjective partnership present. In contrast, in I-It relations, the other is viewed as a separate object, perhaps as something which can be used to serve our own purposes and thus has the nature of one-sidedness. The former can be described as true meeting, whereas the latter implies mismeeting (see below for further explanation on these terms).

Fundamentally Buber argues that indeed "all real living is meeting" (1958:25), in other words we are always relating; it is the nature of being human to be in relation, and it is when one glimpses the very nature and depth of this relationality that one encounters Thou. Buber's ontology focused on knowledge forming only in *relation* to the otherness encountered in the world. Thus he offered a very different ontological perspective to that which was popular at the time that he was writing, i.e. the Cartesian view of the world which focused attention on *individuals* as the source of knowledge and meaning.

Table 1 taken from Kramer (2003:18) is helpful in summarising the two opposing orientations to relations with the world that Buber proposed:

Table 1:'I-It' and 'I-Thou' relations (Kramer 2003:18)

I-It relations	I-Thou relations
Never spoken with the Whole Being	Spoken with the Whole Being
Experiencing / Using / Knowing	Event / Happening
In Space and Time	Spaceless / Timeless
One sided: Singular	Two sided: Mutual
Controlling	Yielding
Subject – Object Duality	Interhuman Betweeness

Buber did not propose a clear framework for I-Thou dialogue; there are no 'ten steps to being in dialogue' offered. It is important to clarify and reiterate that this is not simply an annoying omission; it is a reflection of Buber's commitment to the ineffability of dialogue; to the problematic of describing the essence or quality of connection with another; and to his belief that dialogue cannot be 'willed' but emerges through 'grace'.

Having said this Buber does offer some key ideas and concepts which serve to give depth to our understanding of I-Thou relation. Firstly Buber emphasised that it is in the '*meeting*' of Thou that one is able to become 'I'. In other words, one cannot have experienced the real meaning of living, or had the opportunity to know oneself fully and engage in one's uniqueness, if one has not experienced Thou. Mismeeting occurs when one encounters the other in a subject-object as opposed to subject-subject manner.

Secondly, when one is encountering another, one may '*turn*' towards them. Kramer (2003) explains this experience as "turning toward the other with unreserved spontaneity by opening to an indwelling presence between persons....turning away from a self-reflexive monologue consumed in self-enjoyment and toward the wordless

depths of genuine I-Thou" (2003:159). One turns away therefore from preoccupation with self, whilst turning towards the other as Thou in an invitation to genuine meeting.

Thirdly, as I meets Thou the relationship is defined '*in between*' both and Buber also refers to this as the interhuman sphere which lies in a place of mutual presence and is greater than the sum of the individuals in the relationship. In the between space, self and other are reciprocal partners engaged in a "dynamic of elemental togetherness" (Kramer 2003:24).

Fourthly, Buber emphasises that one cannot '*will*' I-Thou relation due to the mutuality required. In the end whether I-Thou encounter emerges is down to '*grace*' which is the "spirit of the between that arises from, generates and supports genuine, interhuman meetings" (Kramer 2003:203).

Fifthly, when two people are '*mutual*' they are able to be inclusive and imagine the other's perspective whilst holding close their own. Buber engaged in debate with Carl Rogers the psychotherapist on whether 'purposive' relationships such as that of the therapist-client could be mutual and thereby could allow for I-Thou dialogue to emerge (see Anderson and Cissna 1997 and Cissna and Anderson 1994). This debate has interesting implications for the leader-follower relation, as will be discussed below in relation to a call by Ashman and Lawler (2008) to apply Buber's thinking on mutuality to the leadership context.

Finally, Buber did not actually mention the word 'dialogue' in *I and Thou* (despite it being such a fundamental text in the field), however in later works (Buber 2002) he identified three realms of dialogue in relation to I-It and I-Thou. Firstly, '*genuine dialogue*' when the participants meet each other as Thou; secondly, '*technical dialogue*' when there is simply a need for objective understanding between participants and; thirdly, '*monological events*' where a participant speaks "with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine[s] they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources" (Buber 2002:19). All these forms of dialogue are appropriate at times however Buber claimed that fundamentally

one is not fully human unless one experiences others, the world around them and God as Thou in genuine dialogue. Unfortunately, however, according to Buber, "the exalted melancholy of our fate [is] that every Thou in our world must become an It" (Buber 1958:31); in other words it is inevitable that I-Thou relation is fleeting.

Criticisms of Buber's work

Buber has been extremely influential in the conceptualisation of dialogue however a number of criticisms have been directed towards him. These are important to acknowledge as using his work as a framework in this thesis clearly leaves my research open to similar criticisms.

Firstly, whilst explaining his view of dialogue using the terms above, Buber's writing remains evocative and poetic. As a result of this his work might not be at all accessible to a pragmatic individual who seeks any clear 'how to' advice. Even Kramer's excellent explanation of the book is at times circuitous and unstructured in part because it follows the flow of the original *I and Thou* book. Buber's argument against this criticism was to once again explain that there are no quick steps to dialogue; I-Thou relating cannot be willed. He likened his role not to a teacher who tells others how to experience dialogue, but rather as a guide who is able to take the reader by the hand and point out of the window:

> "I have no teaching. I only point to something. I point to reality, I point to something in reality that had not or had too little been seen. I take him who listens to me by the hand and lead him to the window. I open the window and point to what is outside" (Buber, quoted by Anderson and Cissna 2012:127).

Nevertheless, perhaps one reason for the limited use of Buber's work within the leadership field is quite simply because his work might be difficult to engage with and is not immediately pragmatic. My sympathy for Buber's style of writing increased

enormously through my research as I began to truly appreciate the difficulties in conveying the experience of dialogue with clarity, a point I return to in later chapters.

A second criticism, directed at Buber by Rosenzwig (Stanford University 2007), is that he demeans the I-It relation into the position of a "cripple". Even more damningly Kaufmann complained that Buber enlisted the "oracle tones of false prophets" (see Stanford University 2007) implying that he evangelises I-Thou and falsely persuades others that there is a pinnacle of relating that one can strive towards (see also Stevenson 1963 who rejected the strict dichotomy he perceived between I-Thou and I-It). Similarly Peters argues against the "moral privilege of dialogue" (Peters quoted in Anderson and Cissna 2012:142). However as Anderson and Cissna argue, it would appear that "of prominent philosophers, Buber is among the most vulnerable to reductionist readings" (Anderson and Cissna 2012:141). I can understand how one might, on a superficial reading of Buber, feel he was advocating an attachment or grasping for I-Thou but a more in depth study of Buber's ideas indicates he is very explicit on the value of I-It alongside I-Thou. As Anderson and Cissna point out Buber "famously affirmed the value of I-It relationships in science, politics, economics and a wide variety of everyday exchanges, believing they are necessary and should be maintained" (2012:143). Heard (1995) concurs that Buber believed "both of [the I-It and I-Thou] realms are necessary to our existence as human beings" (1995:253). Given this particular criticism it is perhaps important to note that although this thesis engages with the realisation of genuine dialogue between leader and follower, I am not an idealist who wishes all encounters to be of this nature. I recognise, following Buber, the inevitability and importance of technical dialogue particularly within a pragmatic organisational setting however I join with him, later in this thesis, in suggesting that it is the overwhelming predominance of transactional meeting, sometimes to the complete absence of genuine dialogue that might be problematic.

Thirdly, following on from this last point, it could be argued that Buber is an idealist and does not spend enough time focusing on the issues which surround interhuman encounter, such as politics and power. Some argue that dialogue and power are

"inextricably interwoven" (Hammond et al. 2003:1150), however Buber makes limited direct reference to power in his work and offers no 'empirical' work as such. This can lead to a criticism that he does not adequately account for the 'reality' in which we find ourselves in relationship. I acknowledge this criticism of his work and this thesis is engaged precisely with the complexity of encounter and the turbulence of the space between those in dialogue and may therefore extend Buber's work in this area.

Finally, a very specific limitation of his work on mutuality which is of relevance to this research project is that despite Buber's relational stance, his recognition of the social construction of roles is somewhat inadequate. When he advocates the problematic nature of dialogue in purposive roles, for example, therapist and teacher, he appears to generalise what it might mean to be in these roles and offers a simplification of what those roles might mean to those engaged in relation. This is perhaps a somewhat unfair criticism given the infancy of work on social construction when he was writing his main texts but it is one I return to later in the thesis because it holds relevance to the leader-follower context. Examining the social construction of roles such as 'leader' and 'follower' in this thesis might also serve to extend some of Buber's thinking in the therapeutic and educational fields in a novel way which will be explained in chapter 9.

Despite the criticisms above, Buber continues overwhelmingly to be held in high regard and is called upon time and time again by scholars to describe most ably the essence of high quality relating in the between space. He has been enormously influential in the exploration of dialogue within the fields of education and psychotherapy and in theology with his background in Hasidism. Interestingly, as has already been mentioned, his work has been applied to leadership studies less frequently as will be explained below.

Extant literature bringing together relational leadership and I-Thou dialogue concepts

The fields of dialogue and leadership taken alone are diffuse and sizeable and have only briefly been reviewed in the previous sections. Looking at the simplified picture offered in Figure 5 below, you can see literature that connects these two broad fields and the more specific territories of I-Thou dialogue and relational leadership. I will discuss each of the overlaps mentioned in Figure 5 in the order suggested, gradually becoming more and more focused, culminating in the literature pertaining to both RLT and I-Thou dialogue.

Figure 5: Mapping the literature field
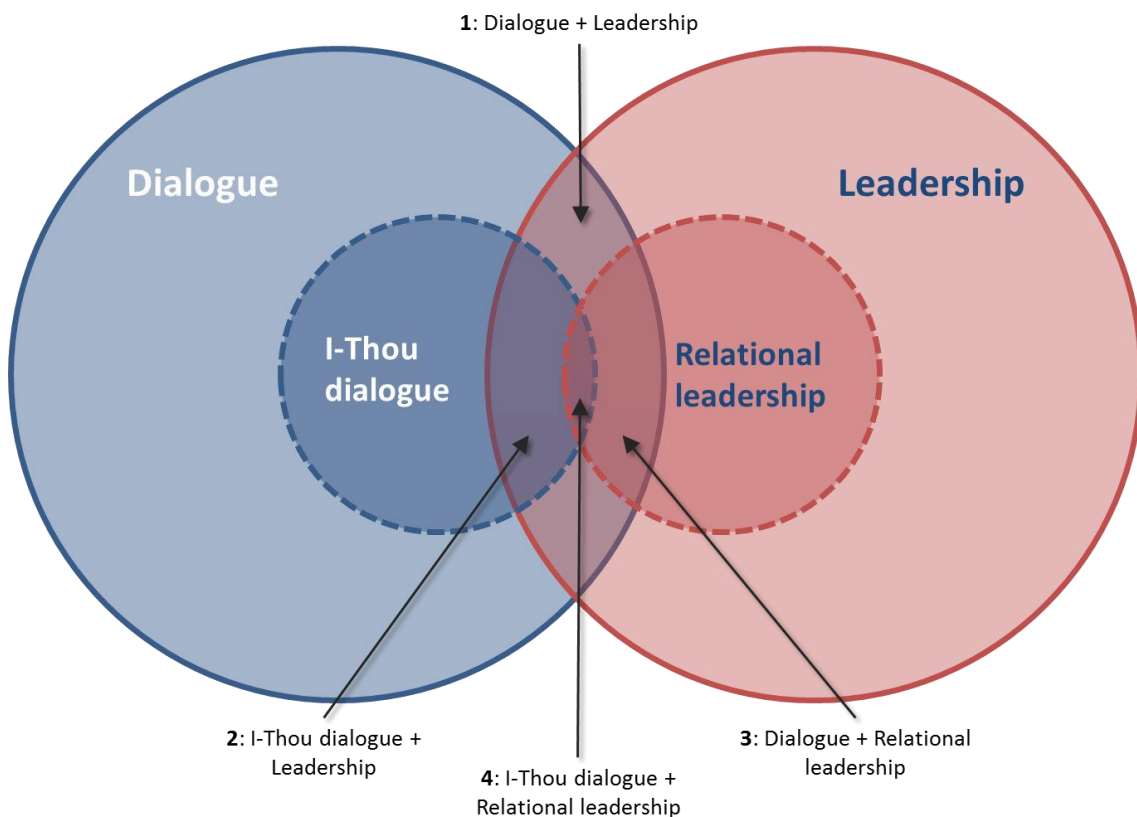
Dialogue and leadership

The general term 'dialogue' often appears alongside that of 'leader' and 'leadership' particularly in the popular press. As mentioned in the introductory chapter both terms, separately and together, are often proposed as a kind of panacea to a variety of global issues. For example a brief examination of the top news headlines as I write reveals that, in August 2013, the BBC reported that "UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on Egyptian leaders to engage in dialogue to try and resolve the ongoing turmoil in the country" (BBC 2013). It also reveals that in 2012 the UN ethics office published a 'leader's guide for 2012-2013' and in it explained that "this Leader's Guide provides you with everything you need to lead a dialogue with your staff about our responsibilities as international civil servants" (United Nations Ethics Office 2012).

It seems that increasingly 'leaders' are expected to be 'good' at dialogue and this expectation is not limited to the popular press. A growing interest in the 'leaders' dialogue skills matches the 'relational turn' in the leadership literature detailed previously in this chapter. Examples of popular management authors writing generally about both dialogue and leadership are Groysberg and Slind (2012), Isaacs (1999, 2000) and Scharmer (2000). Examples of more academically focused work in this area include Fletcher and Kaufer (2003), Hammond et al. (2003), Mazutis and Slawinski (2008) and Nielsen (1990).

In general, particularly in the popular press and management books neither 'leader' nor 'dialogue' is well defined. In most cases 'leader' is presumed to relate to positional roles and 'dialogue' means something akin to 'good at open conversation'. Isaacs, although providing an extensive look at the pragmatics of dialogue in his book (1999), provides a good example of a rather broad statement connecting the concepts; "the top leaders at Shell Oil in the United States have spent the past several years developing their capacity for dialogue. They see conversation as increasingly more critical as their leadership roles shift dramatically" (1999:22).

When both 'leader' and 'dialogue' are used in general terms, the explicit theorising of both is undermined and the practical implications which might be gleaned from theory are consequently extremely vague. I am *not* suggesting that both have to be defined very precisely, I am suggesting that the assumption that pervades some scholarly research that both terms don't need defining because there is some sort of shared understanding of them is concerning.

Looking at more specific writing in the field, some authors write about dialogue as relevant to leadership, using Buber's work explicitly as a guide. This is described next.

I-Thou dialogue and leadership

Ashman and Lawler's *Leadership* article (2008) most directly addresses how Buber's work might apply to the leader-follower context (they do not specifically refer to RLT). They pose the question "whether it is possible for [I-Thou] dialogue to occur between leader and follower" (2008:263). Given its apparent centrality to my study it is worth pausing to consider this article in more detail.

Although the majority of the paper relates to Buber's ideas and their application to leadership, this is not its stated main purpose. The authors' primary aim is rather broader; "to introduce and explain a number of important existential philosophers and concepts that we believe can contribute to a critical approach to leadership theory" (2008:253). Their emphasis is to build a claim relating to the important role the existentialist perspective can play in understanding communication. They argue that rather than communication being regarded as 'part' of leadership, leadership "might be considered as an aspect or subset of communication" (2008:253). Because their aim is therefore wider than just application of Buber's work, it is unsurprising that his concepts, although forming a significant proportion of the paper, are not explored extensively. Notwithstanding this, in their discussion they highlight a number of points of interest which relate to the work in this thesis.

Firstly, leader-follower relations are, they claim, largely based on I-It experiences rather than I-Thou encounters due to the traditional superior-inferior, active-passive assumption upon which they are based.

Secondly, the therapeutic relationship can be seen, according to them, as analogous to the leader-follower relationship. Drawing on Buber's famous discussion with the American psychotherapist Carl Rogers (Anderson and Cissna 1997) referred to above, the authors believe Buber may have thought I-Thou dialogue was impossible in the leader-follower relationship. This they claim is mainly due to the lack of mutuality and reciprocal acceptance in a relationship characterised by differing power, status and purposes and which, due to its instrumental nature, is characterised by technical dialogue.

Thirdly, they claim that the challenge to leadership researchers is "to search for incidents where such [I-Thou] acceptance is manifest and then to look for the consequences" (Ashman and Lawler 2008:264). They add enticingly "just one occurrence of the sort of leader / follower acceptance Buber describes will enlighten us as to the possibilities of genuine dialogue between leader and follower" (2008:264). This thesis responds to their call. My response will be considered later in this chapter, in chapter 7, and once again in the discussion and contribution presented in chapter 9.

A number of other peer-reviewed papers, although focused on different purposes, make fleeting mention of the implications of Buber's work on leadership. Examples include Caldwell and Dixon (2010), Fletcher and Kaufer (2003), Hammond et al. (2003), Lichtenstein et al. (2006) and Slotte (2006). It is interesting to note that all these are theoretical rather than empirical studies. It is also illuminating to note that they rely on Buber's work to make quite different claims. Lichtenstein et al. (2006) focus on Buber's ontological perspective and the implications for encouraging research in leadership towards the 'space between'. Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) emphasise the implication of Buber's thinking on organisational democracy and its implication in turn on learning. Hammond et al. (2003) connect Buber's work with being authentic as a leader. Finally, Slotte (2006) uses Buber's work to set out a methodology for dialogue interventions,

claiming that certain conditions must be present for dialogue to emerge. In these ways authors have chosen aspects of Buber's work to support their claims. Some delve more deeply into the ontological basis of Buber's thinking whereas others are satisfied in reading Buber's work at a more superficial level, focusing in on general practical features of 'good open communication'.

The six papers mentioned in this section in varying degrees use Buber's work to present a number of implications regarding the feasibility of realising I-Thou dialogue between leader and follower. These are important to frame given this thesis is engaged with this dilemma. Almost inevitably they refer to how 'leaders' can enable or get in the way of dialogue. To structure their general implications I can summarise the issues they raise into three areas. The first set of issues relates to the way we construct 'leader' and 'follower'. The second set of issues relates to aspects of the communication between leader and follower, resulting from a traditional construction of the roles (see Katz and Kahn 1966), that represent hindrances to I-Thou encounters. In contrast, the third set of ideas relates to the possibilities opened by different constructions of leadership and indicate how I-Thou might be encountered in the leader-follower relationship.

In relation to the first area, traditionally, leader and follower are seen to possess differing status and along with that power. Leadership is therefore often regarded as a synonym for positional hierarchical authority (see Ashman and Lawler 2008, Hammond et al. 2003). This in turn leads to followers, at least implicitly, being regarded as passive and needing a leader in order to motivate or empower them to do something. Caldwell and Dixon (2010) state the consequence:

> "Leaders ought to be distant and aloof from employees and avoid connecting….at the emotional level. Leaders who put employees at arms-length and who view employees as commodities, means, or as "its" still exist in many organisations today" (Caldwell and Dixon 2010:97-98).

Additionally the leader is often expected to live up to heroic expectations and any possibility of the leader exhibiting vulnerability or humility is disregarded (Ashman and Lawler 2008). Coupled with this the level of trust in business leaders by followers is relatively low (Caldwell and Dixon 2010) and given Buber wrote about the importance of authenticity this can be regarded as a challenge to leaders and followers wishing to encounter each other in dialogue.

So the stage is set for a very imbalanced relationship between leader and follower which has further significant implications for the way in which they are traditionally perceived to interact and communicate. The nature of leader-follower communication is the subject of the second set of issues. As I have explained in a previous conference paper (Reitz, 2011), communication is assumed to be essentially one-directional. Slotte (2006:797) refers to this as the 'conduit metaphor' which portrays communication as a pipeline flowing in one direction. In Buberian terms it is also characterised as primarily technical dialogue; the communication has a specific purpose to transmit information rather than any overriding purpose to build or recognise relationship. In this form of communication followers risk being commoditised or objectified and regarded as a unified homogenous group of people. Any potential that communication might have beyond these purposes is stifled. Even when 'open communication' and 'dialogue' are espoused by the leader, the reality is that the forums provided for these 'open' discussions are designed by the leader, with the leader's agenda in mind (Hammond et al. 2003). The one-sided nature of the communication is thus still present. Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) additionally warn that leaders rarely get to hear what people really think; "talking nice….[is] a mode of conversation common in organisations. No one shares with the CEO what is discussed in the hallways" (2003:36).

These authors display numerous obstacles in the leader-follower relationship as it is traditionally perceived. However they do see cause for hope in relation to developing dialogical relations within the third set of issues relating to alternative constructions of 'leadership'.

Whereas previously the traditional view of leadership left little scope for leader-follower dialogue, recent changes in theory, some of the authors argue, open up more possibilities. A relational perspective as Lichtenstein et al. (2006) in particular describe should imply an openness to Buber's thoughts which has not existed previously. Leadership can and is being reconsidered as a process by which *both* leader and follower learn, "the results of effective communication thus might not be demonstrated in, for example, improved results, but in changes for both parties" (Ashman and Lawler 2008:260). Taken even further Ashman and Lawler argue that dialogue allows the possibility that the fixed nature of roles which is implied in much of the leadership literature could be replaced with a more fluid understanding of 'leader' and 'follower'. The 'other' in terms of the follower is now being focused on increasingly with the elevated role of the leader diminishing. Other theories such as transformational leadership (Caldwell et al. 2012) which were conceptualised as relatively one-sided might, claim Ashman and Lawler, develop further to incorporate the possibility of all parties, *including the leader*, learning and transforming and thereby allow potentially more scope for a dialogic encounter. The recent burgeoning literature regarding shared and distributed leadership (Fletcher and Kaufer 2003 and Gordon 2002 respectively) and servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977 and Sendjaya et al. 2008), all shown in Figure 1 as 'non-traditional', also purport to position the leader and follower differently. Potentially they could be seen to open up the possibility of more mutual leader-follower relations and with that dialogue.

Dialogue as Buber has conceptualised it necessitates openness to change, embracing uncertainty and a consequent loosening of agendas as well as 'leader' and 'follower' roles. Recent work in complexity leadership (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007) invites this, although there might be still further to go to persuade leaders themselves; "to engage in a dialogue with no agenda can easily grow into a feeling that it is a waste of time especially if it is a conflict situation and in times of pressing problems" (Slotte 2006:799).

Before summarising this section I note that there is one doctoral thesis (Boogaard 2000) which specifically aims to identify the 'capacities' required to encourage leader-follower dialogue. This work is also the only empirical study I have found specifically looking at Buber's work and leadership generally. Through shadowing two leaders within an American organisation Boogaard identifies five capacities for 'dialogic leadership'; receptive engagement, responsive authenticity, compassionate connection, centred responsibility and respectful wholeness. By the very nature of its methodology, (interview and ethnography based in one US organisation), the study is restricted and the study is more focused on the empirical results and the method employed than it is on positioning the work within the theory on dialogue or leadership. In addition to the brief treatment of theory, Buber is only one of a number of authors studied and thus is not explored in extensive detail.

In summary, literature linking Buberian dialogue and leadership is scant and overwhelmingly conceptual rather than empirically based. Interestingly, 'leader' is often equated with headship although the implications of a more expansive, less traditional view of 'leader' and 'follower' are noted, in particular via the implications suggested in relation to changes to perceived power and status differences. This segues into the fundamental ontological repositioning apparent in the constructionist writing in relational leadership theory. Specifically, empirical examination of the implications that differing ontological views, translated into different constructions of roles, might have on the quality of encounter between leader and follower is one that this thesis will, in due course, address in depth. This appears to respond to calls within relational leadership theory which will be detailed now.

Dialogue and relational leadership

Cunliffe and Eriksen's 2011 *Human Relations* article entitled '*Relational Leadership*' is the only article specifically within relational leadership theory that mentions dialogue

in more than just a fleeting manner. Unsurprisingly it is referred to frequently in this thesis so I will review it in depth here.

The authors state their aim as extending "contemporary work on relational leadership theory by conceptualizing leadership as embedded in the everyday relationally-responsive dialogical practices of leaders" (2011:1425). They propose that their contribution is in "offering a way of conceptualising relational leadership as an inherently moral and dialogical practice" (2011:1428). They claim that relational leadership requires "relational dialogue". Their definition of dialogue here follows that of Bakhtin (1981) rather than Buber, so their interest is in "everyday interactions and conversations" (2011:1428); the to-ing and fro-ing of conversational utterances through which they argue, relational leadership is constructed.

They make a number of claims of interest to this study. Firstly, relational leadership is seen as a way of "being-in-the-world" (2011:1433). In other words the way we find ourselves situated in the world is embedded in relationships; "selves-in-relation-to-others" (2011:1433) and RLT should therefore be conceptualised by "recognising the entwined nature of our relationships with others" (2011:1434).

Secondly, relational leadership "encompasses working out, dialogically, what is meaningful with others" (2011:1433). Following Bakhtin's work (1981), they emphasise polyphony "the emerging, fluid, multi-voiced and unique nature of dialogue" (2011:1435). This leads on to a view of relational leadership as being inclusive and consistently open to working across differences in views.

Thirdly, relational leadership "means recognizing that working through differences is inherently a moral responsibility" (2011: 1433). Bringing in Ricoeur's (1992) work, Cunliffe and Eriksen argue that relationality requires intimate connection with the other and therefore "within our situated responsive interactions we need to be respectful of differences and see ourselves as answerable to others" (2011:1439).

Finally, relational leadership involves "practical wisdom" (2011:1433). In other words, relational leaders, rather than through overt references to models, frameworks or

techniques, "figure out what to do….building upon their knowing-from-within…making sense within the unique moments in which they found themselves" (2011:1441). So leadership emerges through being in relation to others and figuring out what to do through shared understandings and a process of 'feeling out' what to do by responding in the present moment.

Having made these claims they then go on to offer advice regarding what this "new way" (2011:1444) of leading might mean. Specifically they suggest that it involves:

- Creating open dialogue
- Accepting responsibility for recognising and addressing moments of difference
- Creating *scenic moments* that shape a context for working out differences and creating a path through the organizational landscape
- Understanding the importance of relational integrity
- Becoming more attuned to sensing and responding in the present moment by looking, listening and anticipating in the unfolding conversation

Cunliffe and Eriksen articulate the emergent nature of linguistic dialogue and refer to some of the 'messiness' of this process through their attempt to explore relational leadership through 'living conversations'. However, I notice that despite criticising other empirical studies for their inability to examine in-the-moment leadership, their method (ethnographic and interview based) still places the researchers separate from the event in time and in relation and still relies heavily on retrospective data from the interviews. I suggest, perhaps as a consequence of this, that they fail to really bring to life this messiness in the moment that is the central theme of their paper. In relation to the work of this thesis, the consequence of them using Bakhtin's work is clearly that they are most interested in language processes and then the practices for leaders that come out of this understanding. Because of this they make very limited reference to the more holistic experience of being-in-relation within a leadership dynamic which is more the focus area of my study.

Another reflection I have on their work is that despite attempting to show the Federal Security Directors, who were the subject of their study as 'ordinary' relational leaders rather than heroic, I found myself thinking that they were being described in a decidedly heroic manner (able to manage stakeholders, act morally, engage others etc.). Once again, it came across to me that 'leader' was being equated to a particular role in a rather idealistic manner.

Perhaps Cunliffe and Eriksen struggled with the tensions between recognising the 'messiness' and emergent nature of conversation on the one hand and the pressure to provide clarity through how-to advice on the other. Another tension might have been between depicting individuals as 'normal' on the one hand, yet describing what made them 'leaders' on the other. I am left wondering, if relational leadership is most concerned with the dynamic process of leadership, what might it be like, in a holistic sense, to be in relation within a context which is not limited to formal leadership roles? How might the *quality* of the leader-follower relation be described in all its messiness in order to suggest implications on matters such as decision making and creativity that are essential in facing the challenges of the twenty-first century?

I see Buber's work as more concerned with the holistic nature of being in relation than Bakhtin's who, as I have said, was primarily interested in linguistics. I therefore see his work as potentially being able to shed some light on the questions I raise above. Therefore I turn now to see whether Buber's work has been used in the specific field of RLT to date.

I-Thou dialogue and relational leadership

This section turns to the literature that is central to this thesis; that is literature linking relational leadership theory and I-Thou dialogue.

As referred to above, Lichtenstein et al. (2006) and Ashman and Lawler (2008) both refer to Buber and both refer in passing to the relational turn in the leadership

literature (although they do not use that term and they do not refer to RLT). To date, however, I cannot locate any academic paper or thesis which specifically aims to explore how *I-Thou* dialogue might contribute to *relational leadership theory* or vice versa.

As explained in the critique of RLT earlier in this chapter, seminal writers Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) point very explicitly to Buber's work in their article paving the way for more novel approaches to the relational space in organisational research. There is also general agreement that dialogue plays an essential element in leadership process, (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011 and Uhl-Bien 2006). Despite both these points, in the eighteen chapters of *Advancing Relational Leadership Research* (Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012) Martin Buber, widely perceived as the most important philosopher on dialogue, who founded the term 'between space', is not mentioned once.

This thesis therefore is engaged in determining what Buber's seemingly complementary work might add to conceptualising the leader-follower relational dynamic. I will outline the specific research question it will pose below.

The research question

To summarise this literature review, the recent relational turn in the leadership literature has produced an interest in exploring the in between space of leader-follower relating in order to better advise those wishing to enact effectively leadership roles. A number of academics have called for further research in this area of relationality, for example Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) who are interested in general organisational contexts and Fairhurst and Antonakis (2012) and Ladkin (2013) who examine the leadership field more specifically. Within this call, the concept of dialogue has been suggested as an area of interest by writers such as Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011), Tsoukas (2009) and Uhl-Bien (2006).

Within the dialogue field, Buber's work (1958) is particularly influential and, in contrast to some other well-regarded dialogue writers (e.g. Habermas 1984 and Bohm 1996), his work focuses specifically on the essence of the relational 'space between'. Rather than focus on simply linguistics Buber offers a more holistic view of dialogue. He emphasises intersubjective meeting and the quality of between space which has lacked conceptualisation within RLT to date.

Indeed Bradbury and Lichtenstein coined Buber's term in their important *Organization Science* article in 2000 when calling for further examination of relationality in organisational research. Despite this apparent potential for bringing a wider concept of dialogue and relational leadership together, Buber's work has been applied only sparingly to the leadership literature to date and is virtually non-existent within RLT.

For these reasons, and in response to the calls for such research, I propose the following research question for this thesis:

"How does Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue inform the theory and practice of Relational Leadership?"

Through responding to this question this thesis hopes to shed light on the 'black box' of leader-follower relating. In particular, I am hoping to convey richly the *quality* of the dynamic moment of relating; the sensed between space which affects meeting in the moment between leader and follower.

To be specific I hope to respond to the following calls:

- Ashman and Lawler's (2008) call for empirical work examining I-Thou dialogue between leader and follower
- Uhl-Bien's (2006) call for further research into the between space processes "for example dialogue and multilogue" (2006:663)
- Cunliffe and Eriksen's (2011) recognition that their "tentative conceptualisation of relational leadership…needs further development" (2011:1445)

- Ladkin's (2013) question "what does it feel to be within different leadership relations?" And "how is that experience created?" (2013:331)
- Bradbury and Lichtenstein's (2000) call for expanding research methods in order to further conceptualise the space between and the relationality inherent in organisational dynamics
- Fairhurst and Antonakis' (2012) call for more novel methods in RLT which focus less on individual 'leaders' using static, removed methods in order to further conceptualise relational leadership
- Fairhurst's (2012) suggestion that researchers should "capture naturally-occurring and dynamic open-ended data" (2012:453)
- Barge's (2012) call to explore RLT from a first-person, involved perspective to discover more of the richness and complexity of dynamic relation

Through responding to these calls this thesis aims to contribute towards a fuller conceptualisation of the quality of leader-follower between space. It is hoped that this in turn might further our understanding of what it might take to 'lead effectively' whilst navigating the fundamental issues we face this century.

In claiming to respond to the calls above I clearly signal that this research will employ different methods in order to further RLT, and I propose how in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The last chapter detailed limitations within RLT and showed the rationale for using Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue as a lens to view the leader-follower between space. From various calls within the literature it is clear that novel methods could be useful in relation to further conceptualising this aspect of RLT. This chapter formulates my response to that.

A reflection on my ontological and epistemological perspective and the key assumptions I hold in relation to research begins this chapter. Action research, the methodology that I deemed most congruent with the calls in the literature field, my ontological and epistemological views and the research question, is summarised. Then first-person inquiry and the co-operative inquiry method are examined in detail. Finally the approaches used to analyse data as well as validity criteria adhered to are described.

Methodological implications of my ontological and epistemological views

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identify the fundamental importance that one's ontological and epistemological view has upon one's research project:

> "The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions

(epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis)" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:21).

Detailing my ontological and epistemological views is fundamental to assessing and understanding the methodological choice I made and is also vital in relation to framing my contribution to theory in chapter 9. My emotional and cognitive responses to the debates in the field of study helped me to articulate these views; strong reactions *for* and *against* certain authors and their methodologies told me a lot about my own perspective.

I align more with a nominalist ontological perspective than that advocated by representationalism (see Easterby-Smith et al. 2002:33). The key differentiator between these paradigms is the degree to which there is a belief in an independent, 'true', external reality. Representationalism seeks objective truth within the social world. Nominalism proposes that the subject matter of interest should rather be the labels and names we attach to experiences and events. The emphasis in this thesis is on exploring meaning and experiences in relation to 'leadership' and 'dialogue'. There is no attempt to define who a leader 'is' in a conclusive manner and it will be suggested that there is no such thing as the 'truth' or 'fact' of dialogue which exists independently and can be measured in any way. Fundamentally this research is an interpretive activity which has been conducted with others (following Gergen & Gergen 2008).

Epistemologically, in line with Shotter (1993), an appropriate approach for inquiring into the meaning and experience of leadership and dialogue is through conversation and encounter which explore and reflect dynamically upon how people are constructing their views. Through moment by moment exploration of dynamic 'meeting' one might illuminate some aspects of the contextual leadership phenomenon. This, according to Blaikie (2007), is a social constructionist approach which claims that:

"Knowledge is neither discovered from an external reality nor produced by reason independently of such a reality. It is the outcome of people having to make sense of their encounters with the physical world and with other people" (Blaikie 2007:22).

Such sense-making is clearly sensitive to the cultural and temporal context within which it takes place. The meaning I as researcher make of the world, particularly when making sense of non-material concepts such as 'leadership' and 'dialogue', is influenced by my upbringing, the historical-social context in which I find myself; my being-in-the-world (see Gadamer 1989). I cannot help but be subjective in my interpretation of the results of my research. However what I can do is be reflexive in my approach and seek to explore and make transparent this subjectivity (as advocated by Coghlan 2008 and Marshall 2004).

Tsoukas (1994) would label my epistemological approach as contextualism in his categorisation based on Pepper's work (1942). I use Tsoukas' work at various points throughout this thesis to explain my intentions, findings and contributions so I quote him here, in relation to contextualism, in depth:

"Contextualism takes…a pattern, a gestalt, as the object of study….the multitudes of facts it seeks to register are assumed to be loosely structured, not systematically connected by virtue of a lawful relationship. There is no search for underlying structures…change and novelty are two fundamental features….Every moment is qualitatively different and should be treated as such. Every event, specified at a particular point in time, can be apprehended in terms of two additional features: quality and texture. Quality is the intuited wholeness of an event: texture is the details and relationship making up the quality…when we intuit the whole we suppress its details (i.e. its texture), and when we analyse a pattern we tend to underplay its wholeness (its quality)" (Tsoukas 1994:767).

Following Tsoukas (1994) I have been directed towards exploring the breadth of meaning, in relation to quality *and* texture, of 'leadership' and 'dialogue', reflexively with others. Rather than seeking to simplify or generalise I have been looking to illuminate complexities through exploring 'textual' processes perceived in relating as well as one's holistic sense of the encounter. This has been a difficult balance to maintain as Tsoukas alludes to when he mentions that focusing on one necessarily supresses the other. However, it has been in keeping with my attempt to navigate the boundaries between entity and constructionist work detailed in the previous chapter; my intent to convey the holistic complexity of leader-follower relating whilst nevertheless formulating some more specific practical advice.

Additionally, following Reason and Bradbury (2008c), I recognised my wish to engage actively and reflexively in research. I consider that it is through a rigorous process of asking questions, trying things out and 'reflecting-in-action' and 'on-action' (Schon 1987) that I build knowledge. Cycles of experience and reflection leading into further experience and reflection is how I come to really know in a *practical* sense (see Heron's extended epistemology 1996, explained further below). I am interested in practical knowledge and this thesis aims towards "both an action and a research outcome…unlike traditional research approaches which aim at creating knowledge only" (Coghlan and Brannick 2010:ix). The method I chose therefore had to assist both outcomes and include me as both researcher *and* subject (see Heron 1996).

In summary, congruence with my ontological and epistemological perspective demanded that my chosen methodology should:

- Enable focus on the social construction of 'leadership' and 'dialogue'
- Require me to engage with my own experiences on the subjects reflexively
- Allow me to examine both the texture *and* quality of leadership and dialogue
- Lead me to improve my action (practice) as well as add to theoretical knowledge

Methodological implications drawn from the review of literature

The literature review in the previous chapter contained some explicit suggestions for methodological approaches for future research in the relational leadership and dialogue fields. I summarise them here:

- 'Leadership' could be explored in contexts other than the manager-subordinate dyad (Kort 2008)
- Relational leadership could be explored in a manner which would access more of the non-linguistic processes in the between space in the moment (Ladkin 2013)
- Generation of more "naturally-occurring and dynamic open-ended data" (Fairhurst 2012:453) would benefit the conceptualisation of relational leadership
- Rather than conducting research externally, from outside the relation, in a detached manner, research on the issues could be conducted from the *inside* (Barge 2012, Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012)
- Methods should be congruent with the subject matter; "the challenge for dialogue scholars is to keep research into dialogue itself dialogic" (Cissna and Anderson 2004:203)

I explored the possibilities of using a variety of methods including interviews, ethnography and case studies. However the direction detailed above led me to the methodology of action research and specifically within this field to first-person (Marshall 2004) and co-operative inquiry (Heron 1996) methods. Action research is characterised by mutuality, researching *with* and alongside others, rather than *on* them, in a dialogic manner, with the aim of improving practice (Reason and Bradbury 2008b). Thus it appeared to be congruent with the implications stated above. Below a brief overview of action research and its origins is provided. Two defining features of action research relevant to this study are detailed, namely the differentiation between

first-, second- and third-person inquiry, and the extended epistemology. Then an account of co-operative inquiry is given.

Action Research

An overview

I align with the action research tradition explained by Coghlan and Brannick (2010), Heron (1996), Ladkin (2007) and Reason and Bradbury (2001, 2008b) among many others.

According to Reason and Bradbury (2008c), action research is:

> "A participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities" (Reason and Bradbury 2008c:4).

Action research elevates experience to be the cornerstone of learning. According to Bray et al. (2000) two philosophical traditions place similar emphasis on experience and can therefore be viewed as seeding some of the principles of action research, American pragmatism (and the writings of John Dewey 1910, 1929 and Lewin 1947) and phenomenology (following Husserl 1964). The latter movement, whilst not rejecting the scientific method, points to the importance of context explained by the 'life-world' concept which Heron (1996) clearly echoes in these thoughts; "the researchers can't get outside, or try to get outside, the human condition in order to study it. They can only study it through their own embodiment" (1996:21). As our own view or 'horizon' collides with the horizon of another we build new meaning through a dialectic process of question and answer and in this process assumptions are revealed

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and examined (Gadamer 1989). This is the context within which action research emerges.

Action research links with the scientific tradition in that data regarding observations and experimental action and further observation is collated in order to provide generalizable propositions. As an 'umbrella term' therefore 'action research' could include a very wide range of methods indeed (see Greenwood and Levin 1998:6-7). Reason and Bradbury (2008c) however provide some defining characteristics that assist in narrowing down the field of methods. According to these authors, action research is characterised by participation and democracy. It seeks to encourage human flourishing and might work in broad arenas including political, economic, emotional or spiritual aspects to fulfil this aim. It is concerned with practical issues, addressing important matters which people face in the every-day conduct of their lives. A primary purpose of action research is to produce knowledge in action and 'good' action research emerges over time as those involved reflect upon and improve their practice.

Following Reason and Bradbury (2008b), there are a number of practices, or methods, which tend in particular to be related to the action research tradition. These have been aptly described as a family by Reason and Bradbury (2008c) whose members "may at times ignore or wish to dominate others, yet a family which sees itself as different from other researchers" (2008c:7). They include action science (Argyris et al. 1985 and Torbert, 1981, 1987, 1991), action learning (Revans 1982), participatory action research (McTaggart, 1997) and co-operative inquiry (Heron 1996) amongst others (see Coghlan 2011). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) recognise that this plethora might "be confusing to any prospective researcher", however they also note that it "provides a wide choice for potential action researchers as to what might be appropriate for their research" (2010:x), an observation I would concur with.

Two important features of action research are the categories of first-, second- and third-person inquiry (Marshall 2004, Reason and Bradbury 2001, Reason and Torbert 2001) and the extended epistemology (Heron 1996 and Heron and Reason 2001). Due to the relevance of these to this study they will be detailed below.

First-, second- and third-person action inquiry

A way of viewing the diversity of action research methods is the distinction between first-, second- and third-person inquiry. This thesis focuses on the first and second categories of inquiry.

First-person inquiry "means that our own beliefs, values, assumptions, ways of thinking, strategies and behaviours and so on are afforded a central place of inquiry in our action research practice" (Coghlan 2008:352). It is the foundation of all action research practice as a robust ability to question one's own actions reflexively is paramount to the validity of research findings (see Marshall 2004). I have been engaging in first-person inquiry formally using my personal journal to catalogue the cycles of action and reflection since August 2011. First-person inquiry has involved holding disciplined attention (see Moustakas 1990) to the question of this thesis throughout much of my working and non-working day. Through my experiencing I conduct 'mini' action-reflection cycles, constantly questioning and recording how what I am experiencing relates to the research question. I understand therefore why action research is referred to as an 'orientation' rather than as a methodology (see Ladkin 2007, Marshall 2004, Reason and Bradbury 2008c). I see it essentially as a way of viewing life through an inquiring mind.

As well as such day to day observations and thoughts, participation in a number of events (detailed below in the section on third-person inquiry) have provided me with rich data leading to reflection and insight. Each of these events was catalogued in detail in my journal and during and after each event I sought feedback from those present and in turn reflected upon this. In gaining feedback it has been important to recognise that "how people respond might be framed by the relationship" (Marshall 2004). As a consequence I concentrated on creating an environment through which those giving me feedback can feel as comfortable as possible (for example by framing my questions openly, staying curious and other behaviours and approaches which generally promote dialogue and are explored in this thesis).

I have also reflected extensively on my reactions to the co-operative inquiry and in particular on feedback given to me through this process by the participants regarding my role as facilitator. As Holian and Coghlan (2013) explain, "typically, it is the second-person engagement that drives first-person reflexivity" (2013:402). In my analysis of the transcript data from meetings (described later in this chapter) I reflected on my own judgements, assumptions, behaviour and responses in each moment of interaction throughout the meetings. I posed myself questions to consider further and then returned to the analysis to explore and update these personal reflections a number of times. These reflections were shared with CI members who often challenged me to think differently as will be indicated particularly in chapters 5-8.

Doctoral supervisions also enabled me to inquire into my own assumptions and perspectives, particularly given the coaching style of my supervisor. I recorded many of these and reviewed them in an additional cycle of reflection, journaling my thoughts and insights. The Cranfield PhD panel review process also served to challenge my own 'story' created through my interpretation of the data. By facing those with alternative worldviews, with different life experiences, with different intentions, who possessed a certain distance that at times I found it difficult to have, my first-person process has deepened. Unsurprisingly, the journey has not been without personal conflict and frustration as well as insight and exhilaration. This is apparent in much of the data presented in this thesis.

Second-person inquiry opens the research question up for consideration with others. It addresses a researcher's "ability to inquire into and work with others on issues of mutual concern, through face-to-face dialogue, conversation and joint action" (Coghlan and Brannick 2010:6). Co-operative inquiry, my chosen method, is an example of such an inquiry in a group of collaborators who aspire to being 'equal' and it is explored in detail in this chapter.

Finally ***third-person inquiry*** "aims at creating communities of inquiry, involving people beyond the direct second-person inquiry and action" (Coghlan and Brannick 2010:6). Methods such as participatory action research (see McTaggart 1997) are examples of

third-person inquiry where the wider community is involved in the inquiry process. This category of action research has not featured so predominantly in my inquiry, however occasions where I have presented my work to others or engaged others in thinking around the issues relevant in this thesis could be viewed as representing third-person inquiry. They include:

- Designing and running sessions from 2011 to 2013 on the Ashridge MBA, the Ashridge MSc in Sustainability, the Ashridge MSc in Organisational Change and the Ashridge Centre for Action Research programme of workshops on the subject of leadership and dialogue

- Designing and facilitating three faculty development workshops at Ashridge on leadership and dialogue (September 2011, August 2012 and October 2013)

- Writing and presenting papers at conferences relating to my research (International Studying Leadership Conference 2011 and CASS 'Leading in Professional Services' Conference 2012)

Learning resulting from these occasions is reflected upon in this thesis.

The extended epistemology

Another defining characteristic which sets action research and thus co-operative inquiry apart from other methods Heron and Reason would argue is its recognition of the extended epistemology (Heron 1996, Heron and Reason 2008).

There are four kinds of knowing Heron contends (Heron 1996, Heron and Reason 2001, 2008) as represented in the pyramid in Figure 6.

Figure 6: The pyramid of fourfold knowing (Heron 1996:53)
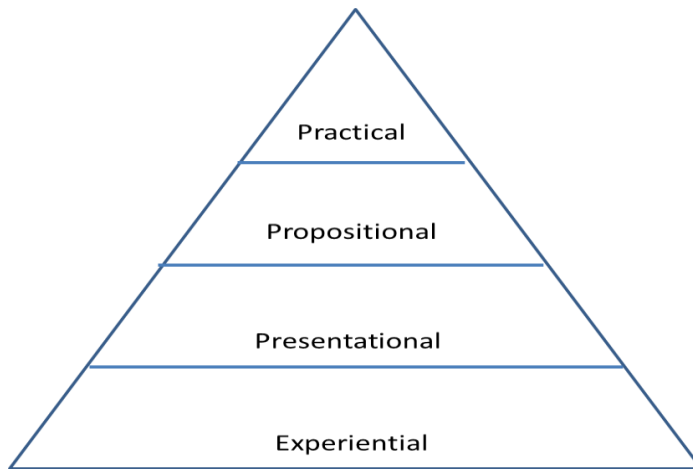
Experiential knowing occurs through perception in action, through being in direct encounter with a person, place or thing. Presentational knowing is expressed through graphic, moving, musical or other art-forms such as storytelling. Propositional knowledge occurs through statements that something is the case. Practical knowing comes through the ability to do something new; a new skill (Heron 1996).

Each level is interdependent. The foundation of experiential knowing supports presentational and in turn propositional knowing. At the top of the pyramid is practical knowing, built upon the other three and is primary. To ensure validity knowing must be based upon our experiences in the world, which we then express through stories, pictures and other presentations, which we are able to articulate through theories all of which come to fruition through our action in the world (Heron and Reason 2008).

I have found this categorisation useful in relation to my research. It has helped me to define the outcomes which I am seeking; written propositional statements in the form of a thesis which contributes to theory and practical knowing through improvement in my practice. It has helped me to make sense of the work we are doing in the inquiry group and has given me an awareness of the flow and sometimes privileged position of one way of knowing. For example I was aware that we narrowed our exploration of

presentational knowing to storytelling in the group and I wanted to help myself and the group unearth what we knew through other methods less focused on linguistics the use of propositions. It felt like we were over privileging our cognitive understanding and would benefit from engaging with more tacit knowledge through the use of drawing and pictures. We incorporated these in our 'interpretation' meeting 10 in December 2012 using collage as a method for expression. Later in this thesis I will explain why such presentational forms might be of particular relevance in conceptualising the 'space between' due to the difficulty in conveying its richness through proposition alone.

Having outlined the action research methodology and positioned first-person inquiry, I now explain the specific second-person method from within this field that I have used; co-operative inquiry.

Co-operative inquiry in theory and practice

Co-operative inquiry aspires to include others equally in the research process. It can be used for personal development, enhancement of relations or practice improvement, in addition to the solving of a specified problem. The 'level' (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010) that it examines could be the individual, the team, (where it might be used to study interactions and phenomena present between group members during their meetings), the organisation, or the interplay between all of these.

John Heron (1996) might be described as the founding father of co-operative inquiry. Peter Reason (1988, 1999, 2002) has written extensively on the method often in partnership with Heron (Heron and Reason 2008, Reason and Heron 1997). These authors will be referred to frequently below.

Heron (1996) describes co-operative inquiry as "a form of participative, person-centred inquiry which does research *with* people not *on* them or *about* them" (1996:19, original italics). He provides a list of defining features of the method (1996:19). By

being the first to 'write the book' on CI, it could be argued that he sets too rigid a view on what is right and what is wrong. Heron recognises this potential criticism rejecting any intention to restrict researcher approaches. However I have reflected upon how easy it is as a novice in co-operative inquiry to seize Heron's book and interpret it as the way 'you should do it'. I speak of this further below and particularly in chapters 6 and 9.

I now expand on five features of CI as they applied to my study, namely the action and reflection cycles in CI, the role of the researcher and subject, initiation and contracting, the specific type of CI as defined according to Heron's categorisation and issues around the 'partially insider' nature of the group.

Action and reflection cycles

Co-operative inquiry comprises four stages (Heron 1996:49) together which complete a full cycle. The first is a reflection phase where the focus for the inquiry is chosen and a plan of action and for recording experiences is agreed upon. The second is an action phase where the topic is explored through experience. The third is the full immersion phase when the researchers very openly and fully engage in experience and can build new awareness (or alternatively, according to Heron, might lose their way). Finally comes the second reflection phase where the researchers share information regarding their experiences, might modify their inquiry topic and plan the next phase. The explicitness of these cycles might vary from group to group (see 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' approaches described below).

Heron states that "subsequent stages will….involve from five to eight full cycles" (1996:50). It is not clear why he gives this figure (aside from saying that the few inquiries he is aware of tend towards this number). My co-operative inquiry group met eleven times from October 2011 to March 2013. There was a further twelfth meeting in November 2013 to reflect on our process in hindsight and discuss specifically this thesis' findings.

In relation to the action research cycles Coghlan and Brannick's metaphor of a clock is useful to represent the concurrent cycles at play (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010:10-11). In the context of the CI group spoken of in this thesis, the hour hand might represent this whole research project, beginning with the process of initiation in August 2011 and continuing up to, and after the last meeting in November 2013. The minute hand might represent each of the twelve meetings we held. The second hand might represent specific moments within each of these meetings which were reflected upon and which changed our sense of the research subject.

The role of the researcher and subject

CI groups form when one person or more initiates an invitation to research an area of common interest. CI is founded on the principle of political participation (Heron 1996), in other words the right of persons to participate in research which seeks to formulate knowledge about them. Additionally, Heron advocates that if participants are not fully involved in determining how to research the area as well as how to interpret the results then the results are "not telling us anything at all about real personhood" (1996:22). It would therefore seem to be a condition of CI that participants are willing and able to take control of the research design and process.

'Full form' CI, according to Heron, allocates very different roles from the roles prescribed in both traditional quantitative research and in traditional qualitative research. In CI subjects have full participation in decisions and the researcher has full participation in experience (see Heron 1996:23-27). Heron is passionate about how different CI is in relation to these roles of researcher and subject. However he goes on to describe 'partial' form CI where the researchers have only partial participation in experience, for example when they are external consultants brought in to facilitate the inquiry of an experience based in an organisation. Somewhat confusingly he describes this as "a restricted but valuable kind of co-operative inquiry" (1996:24). Having

written so passionately about the importance of being co-researchers and co-subjects I find this departure surprising.

What perhaps Heron does not communicate richly enough in advocating these researcher and subject roles is the 'aspirational' nature of them. It is easy to say subjects must be fully participative in decisions and experience but if the context is one in which the initiator is undertaking a PhD and the participants in CI are busy professionals then the problematic of real equality in participation is obvious (see also Coghlan and Brannick 2010, Porter 2005 and Ladkin 2007 on this subject). I have found the role expectations (see Katz and Kahn 1966) around 'facilitator' and 'group member' paradoxical and the importance of this will be explored in detail in chapter 7. For example it has been challenging trying to share facilitation and decision making in practice whilst responding to the group's clear desire for me to take the responsibility for structuring the process (see Douglas 2002 for a similar experience). Additionally, the group are most interested in practical knowing but my research is situated within the academic world where propositional knowing tends to be more valued. 'Equality' and living up to the ideals of being truly co-operative given these differences is problematic and not, in my view, explored fully enough in Heron's work.

Initiation and contracting

This section explores how the people for the co-operative inquiry group were selected and how I made certain attempts to set the tone of our being together in the first meeting. There is a limited amount written regarding the initiation of CI (see Gaya Wicks and Reason 2009, McArdle 2002 and Reason 1988, 1999 as exceptions). However this stage is important to make explicit because both these factors are of fundamental importance to what was said in the first and subsequent meetings and therefore influenced the data on which this thesis is based. In essence, therefore, it is important to illustrate some of the ways in which I have influenced the data that has been gathered.

I embarked on initiating the co-operative inquiry group in August 2011. The criteria I used for recruiting members of the group that I was explicitly aware of at the time were the following:

- 'Very' interested in researching the phenomena of leadership and dialogue. 'Very' here was my own judgement as to whether they would be interested sufficiently to stay with and commit to the process

- Appreciative of the co-operative inquiry aspirations of collective research, mutuality and authentic presence

- Fulfilling, or having recently fulfilled, leadership and followership roles in organisational settings

- Able logistically to meet face to face at Ashridge Business School in Hertfordshire with relative ease

- A mix of male and female participants and preferably ethnic backgrounds

Subsequently I have realised that I held an additional implicit, vague but important criterion. I wanted to have an overall sense that the group would be challenging, but not so challenging that it would disintegrate. Each time I spoke to a potential recruit I was asking myself 'is this person a risk taker who at the same time might have the capacity to support others?' 'Will they add positively to the diversity of the group?' These judgements were made using intuition and catalogued carefully in my personal journal to examine my assessments reflexively. For example, in relation to 'Richard' my journal excerpt reads as follows:

I also have a strange feeling about Richard – a concern which was generated from our first conversation. He was fabulously honest about why he was interested in joining (he talked of the opportunities for his own career) and I am concerned of a highjack. What will his agenda mean? What if he wants to steer the group away from inquiring into dialogue? (not sure why he would but still...) Am I actually concerned because I am slightly in awe of the purposiveness, openness and directness of his talking? Perhaps I am wondering how I will 'fare' in relation to him in the group? But what do I mean by this?? Is this unearthing an assumption that I have

that I need to be able to 'control' everyone? Co-operative inquiry is about taking the subject where the group wants to take it….

Yikes.

Clearly this is a very uncertain ambiguous process which has generated some fears in me. I want also to facilitate things well on Monday. I don't want to 'over' or 'under' facilitate. I want to 'co-operate' AND I want to meet my own needs. A difficult challenge I think.

(Excerpt from journal 25/10/11)

I show in this excerpt that in making decisions regarding recruitment I needed to navigate personal anxieties about my own abilities and about the ambiguity I perceived as inherent in the CI process.

In terms of the recruitment process, one option I considered was an open invitation sent out to the Ashridge Business School alumni network. The risks with a blanket invitation were whether I would have too many responses requiring a supplementary assessment process and whether I would end up with a 'balanced' group, particularly in relation to the challenge / support criteria.

Instead I therefore started the recruitment by approaching two people I knew reasonably well because I had worked with them as peers. I knew they were likely to be interested in the subject matter and potentially sympathetic to the co-operative inquiry aspirations and process. I thought they were likely to be reliable in terms of staying with the process and I knew they would certainly be challenging and supportive. Both had and were holding hierarchical leadership roles. I then asked those two individuals as well as my supervisor for further suggestions in a process called 'snowballing' (see Gobo 2007:419). My supervisor suggested one person who agreed to participate. That person in turn suggested two more. One of those people suggested a further person. One of my original two members suggested a final participant. That made eight people, five men and three women including myself. All were, or had been recently, in positional leadership roles in organisational contexts of one form or another.

I spoke to all individuals face to face or over the phone with the objective of building relationship, keeping things informal, clarifying the process and the general research area and 'judging' whether that person would be a suitable addition according to the criteria. Then I sent an email invitation to the first meeting, shown in the Appendix.

The first meeting was held on October 31st 2011 at Ashridge Business School. Eight people took part in this first meeting; five men, three women; five white British, one white South African, one black British, one white New Zealander. They are given pseudonyms in this thesis to protect anonymity. Seven out of eight held some connection with Ashridge; three were members of faculty (and also ran their own personal companies), two were Associates, one was undertaking their doctorate at Ashridge, one had attended Ashridge courses. These connections with Ashridge are discussed further in the section below on 'insider' issues.

Choosing Ashridge as a location was first and foremost one of logistical ease, not only for me but also for most of the other participants who were located nearby or frequently visited Ashridge anyway. It also had the advantage of plentiful meeting rooms which have a wonderful outlook onto the gardens creating a very pleasant environment. I recognise of course that having the meetings in what was, or is, a place of work for some members may have had implications; perhaps it would be more difficult to disassociate from pressing work issues. However, in discussion with the group, Ashridge was generally preferred to alternatives. For some the location had particularly positive connotations of learning and development.

I set up the room in a circle of chairs without any tables. I was aware from working on many leadership development programmes of the importance of removing physical barriers to conversation and the effect on the tone and openness that this set up can have. I was seeking to encourage intimacy and engagement as suggested as important by McArdle (2002).

My broad outline that I followed for the first meeting included a brief overview of my research, the CI process, followed by an unstructured discussion of personal interest

areas. We finished by discussing more explicitly the contracting of the group including how often we would meet, for how long, where and when. I was very much aware of the dance between my being too structured and directive or too 'hands off'; Heron speaks to this, referencing Reason's (1988) work:

> "The initiating researchers have, at this contracting stage, an important tension to manage. If they come on too emphatically about their aims and interests, they may generate dependency, resistance or alienation. If they are too vague and flexible, the forming group may flounder in confusion" (Heron 1996:39).

This tension has been apparent to me right the way through all meetings but particularly in the first meeting. I refer to it further in chapter 7 specifically. Much of the ambiguity in the inquiry process is inevitable and in fact desirable given the aspiration of inquiry conducted by equals (Bray et al. 2000). However, ridding oneself and others of the 'facilitator equals person who knows (or should know) what to do' is a challenge. In a presentation to researchers at a workshop ran by Ashridge Centre of Action Research on November 30th 2012 an image, illustrated in Figure 7, came immediately to me. It served as a metaphor for my facilitator role and is an example of presentation knowing; 'walking on a tightrope through fog'. Balancing the degree to which I intervened and 'took the lead role' whilst using a method I had never before experienced was absolutely thrilling, but stressful. I speak of this further in chapter 6.

Figure 7: Walking on a tightrope through fog: The facilitator role in CI

To my relief, all participants agreed after the first meeting to continue. I had not felt I needed to reject any of those identified through the snowballing method and no-one that I identified had turned down the invitation to be part of the CI group (however chapter 5 explores how one member chose to leave the group after meeting 4).

The meeting began the process of contracting that continued right through the entirety of the group's life. Heron talks about "the induction meeting, when people have contracted in" (1996:39). Although perhaps more explicit in the first meeting than in the others, throughout our time together we were building implicit and explicit 'rules' around how the group should operate and who was agreeing to participate, how much and in what. The first meeting was undoubtedly vital in building a foundation but I do not believe all participants at this stage can be said to have a "well informed agreement" (Heron 1996:63) as to the contract. Data indicated that we all had different interpretations of what the group was for, how it would operate and what our individual responsibilities were, despite our thorough discussions in this area. The fact that the 'real' purpose of the group was still a topic of conversation at the end of the process illustrates this.

Inquiry type

Heron in his book on co-operative inquiry lists a number of inquiry types (1996:40-49) and I examine my own CI group in the light of these differentiators below. The CI group I was part of emerged and developed through and across some of the spectrums Heron offers. This explains why I am sometimes unable to neatly put my experience into one or other of the categories Heron lists. However I find comparing our experience to Heron's categories does provide a richer description to the reader of the nature of our particular co-operative inquiry which in turn helps to put the data that emerged into context.

The CI group I was part of was **internally initiated** rather than externally. I, as initiator, was personally engaged in the subject matter of the inquiry; dialogue. In an externally

initiated group I would be only a partial co-subject as I would not be involved in the experience under focus. Following on from this point, our group could be described as **full form** rather than partial in that I, as the initiating researcher, was a co-subject as well as co-researcher with the other members of the group.

The group was generally comprised of participants with **mixed roles**, in contrast to same role (as in for example a group of doctors), reciprocal role (as in a group who work together in their 'day jobs' in equal status), or counterpartal role (as in for example doctors and patients). However, some existing or past relationships were of other role types and I refer to these further in the next section.

The group was an **inside *and* outside group**. An inside group holds the action cycle together in the same place at the same time with each other. An outside group examines what is going on for participants in their work or personal lives and the action phase occurs outside the group between the meetings. I began the CI process believing that we might primarily be an outside group. Indeed we did pose questions at the end of each meeting, some of which were represented in a single question that we all shared, some of which were represented by an array of different, albeit connected questions. Commitment to rigorously following up these questions however differed markedly in the group. As the process progressed the focus of our inquiry became more directed to the dialogue between us in the moment in the group when we met. The level of interest in reflection on this action was significantly greater and as initiator I realised quickly that it was more likely to generate a richer picture of the dynamic between space that my research question sought. Generally therefore the action that we reflected upon was happening in our meetings and the focus shifted from being an outside to being an inside group as the co-operative inquiry evolved.

It could be described as both a **closed *and* open inquiry**. Closed in the sense that we were concerned with what was going on between us (linking in with the increasing focus on being an inside group as described above), but open in that we were also interested in, and brought in stories about, our interactions with others in the wider world.

As reflected upon in greater detail in chapter 7, the group could be described as engaging in a **Dionysian more than an Apollonian** inquiry, with Dionysian representing a more emergent and tacit approach and Apollonian representing a more rational and controlled process with sequenced steps of action and reflection. This has also been my style as facilitator; letting things emerge in the group rather than closely restricting the conversation to predetermined questions or desired outcomes. I have been tacitly aware of the balancing act Heron (1996) speaks of in the group:

> "An excess of the Apollonian tendency to make everything controlled and explicit, and the inquiry will lose depth, range and richness will overfocus and miss the point. An excess of the Dionysian propensity to allow for improvisation, creative spontaneity, synchronicity, situational responsiveness and tacit diffusion, and the inquiry will lose its focus and cease to be an inquiry" (Heron 1996:47).

I found myself wondering and worrying about whether things needed more clarity and structure or whether this would mean I would influence the conversation away from 'where it should naturally go'. I noticed I preferred leaving the group to its own process believing that it would probably get us to where we (and I) 'needed to be'. We spoke about this balancing act frequently in the group (see chapters 6 and 7) and its implications for leadership and dialogue.

Finally my CI group might be described as an **informative moving to a transformative** inquiry. Informative inquiries attempt to describe and explain a phenomenon and make propositions about it; so in our case explicitly building our understanding of dialogue. Transformative inquiries focus on building skills and transforming our practice. This was an objective which, on interpretation of the data from the reflective meetings towards the end of the process, we shared (shown particularly in chapter 5). In practice we circled between both poles, much the same as the cycling between action and reflection, to seek to describe then try out, then describe again and so on.

'Insider' issues?

Whilst the group formed was not created solely from Ashridge employees and was not formed in order to address a specific organisational concern, it is important to recognise the influence that the connection the group members had with Ashridge Business School might have had and how therefore some 'insider' issues might be relevant (Coghlan and Brannick 2010).

In the group there were three Ashridge employees; myself (part time) and two other members of the group. One of these members chose to leave the group early which will be discussed further in chapter 5. Two other members of the group were Ashridge associates, meaning that they occasionally did work at Ashridge. One member of the group was undertaking a qualification programme at Ashridge and another had been on a programme as a participant a number of years previously. The final member of the group had no links with Ashridge directly and had not visited before.

I had worked with two of the group members on a 'peer' basis before; the rest I had not met previously. However amongst the members, and as a result in part of the snowballing method, there were a variety of connections and relationships. The closest of these was a past supervisor-student relationship where the student had finished the course of study with their supervisor two years previously and had transitioned to a peer working relationship with them at the time of the CI. There was also a previous facilitator-participant relationship where one member had attended a course at Ashridge a number of years previously and had been facilitated by another member, however in this case the 'facilitator' was the member of the group who left early after meeting four.

These relationships were discussed at various points in the journey. It is critical to understand how they might have affected the 'spirit' of inquiry (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010:116). I gave much personal reflection to this and the group engaged in prolonged discussion relating to implications surrounding power dynamics, 'rules of the game' and façades in our meetings all of which are catalogued in the findings

chapters. This is hardly surprising since our research topic was dialogue and we engaged deeply in issues surrounding what might help or hinder genuine relating. Issues of my own 'role identity' are also a major aspect of this thesis and I notice in particular my 'need to be seen as a good facilitator' was in part affected by having present and potential colleagues in the CI group.

Given these sorts of relationships, the group perhaps could be described as a 'partial' insider action research group (IAR), where IAR concerns action research which "is conducted by a full member of an organisational system, rather than by one who enters the system as a researcher and remains only for the duration of the research" (Holian and Coghlan 2013:400). However due to the context of this specific CI group, some of the common issues associated with IAR that Coghlan and Brannick (2010) and Holian and Coghlan (2013) warn against were not prominent. For example gaining access and permission did not prove problematic. This is in part because I am expected, as a member of faculty, to undertake research activities as part of my role and some of these activities are anticipated to be actioned with others in the organisation. My organisation is not funding my PhD and I am on a part time contract so that my doctoral research, whilst very relevant to my work, is not done 'on Ashridge time', therefore contractual pressures relating to reporting back have been minimal. The main focus of investigation was not 'leadership and dialogue at *Ashridge'* specifically, it was dialogue and leadership within our group. We were not seeking primarily to change the system at Ashridge (although some of us were interested in the implications of our work on teaching and learning more generally at Ashridge). Primarily we were seeking to change our own practice. For these reasons I did not need to navigate some of the political sensitivities around publicly voicing criticism about the organisation typical of IAR (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010).

However, there were some considerations, typical of IAR, which can be seen to influence the work in the CI group. Certain 'preunderstanding' issues (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010) were relevant. For example, given some of the members' connection with Ashridge there were issues such as the use of organisational 'jargon' which crept

into our conversations. This was seen as significant when it gave one member of the group a sense of being 'outside' and excluded. This was perhaps exacerbated by choosing Ashridge as a location for the meetings. Those of us who work at Ashridge or know it well appeared from the transcript discussion more comfortable and at ease whereas one member, who had no prior connection with the organisation, felt distinctly 'on the periphery'. This had, according to this member, subsequent consequences on how they perceived power in the group and therefore could also be seen to have had implications, at times, on our dialogue. This was just one of a plethora of different power dynamics existing between us in the group. We attempted to deal with these issues by surfacing them and through discussion and reflection. Power dynamics and their implications are the focus of chapter 7 but are represented in every one of the findings chapters.

This section has explained the features of the co-operative inquiry detailed in this thesis in relation to the theory on the method. Now I turn to describing the process used for interpretation and analysis of data.

Interpretation and analysis

Interpretation and analysis has followed two interrelated paths in this study. Firstly, in relation to first-person data, interpretation and analysis has been captured through journaling. I kept a journal which began in September 2011 before the CI group had formed and continued up until my thesis submission. I wrote in this journal regularly and always following CI meetings and any other occasions which gave me an opportunity to reflect on leadership and dialogue. Additionally an important first-person process was undertaken alongside the analysis of the transcription data from the meetings ('column 3' of my analysis as described below). As I discuss in the section on validity below, my first-person analysis came hand in hand with and was a fundamental aspect of the analysis and interpretation of the CI data. I include

reference to it accordingly below in the sections relating to the analysis of the data derived through second-person inquiry process.

Secondly interpretation and analysis have been conducted through the co-operative inquiry process. Specifically, I have undertaken **thematic analysis** (Strauss and Corbin 1998) on the transcript data and then sought feedback and insight from the group on the outputs from this analysis. We have also paused to analyse in depth particular interactions which have taken place in the group. These interactions have been '**key incidents**' in terms of the development of our understanding of leadership and dialogue in the group. Our analysis is recorded in the transcripts of the meetings.

Additionally, we dedicated a specific meeting on December 3rd 2012 to **collaborative presentational interpretation**, using collage, in order to explore our learning relating to leadership and dialogue, the implications for organisations and our journey through co-operative inquiry.

Finally, in relation to second-person analysis, I have written **papers and presentations** for conferences and supervisory panel meetings at Cranfield which have been circulated for feedback and comment to the co-operative inquiry group.

I will explain these key interpretative processes in turn below.

Thematic analysis

The analysis of the transcribed data was informed by a grounded theory approach using emergent coding (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Broadly speaking the analysis process proceeded as follows:

1. I listened to all recordings within one week of the meeting and recorded my immediate impressions in my journal (a mixture of first-person observations and comments relating to possible conceptual themes relating to dialogue).

2. All recordings were then transcribed and put into tabular format. The first column noted the speaker, the second column verbatim transcript.

3. Alongside the transcription in the third column I then recorded my own thoughts; a fuller first-person inquiry process relating to how I felt, what sense I was making of what each person was saying, the judgements and assumptions which I observed I was making and what this told me about myself and the way I engaged in leadership and dialogue. I also made "notations...that reflect the mental dialogue occurring between data and me....asking questions, making comparisons, throwing out ideas, and brainstorming" (Corbin and Strauss 2008:169-170). In this way I was making 'inward' (what is going on in me?) and 'outward' (what is going on in the group?) inquiry notes (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010:19). The third column is an attempt to show the reader 'my workings'; how and why I came to the conclusions I did and the choices I made when interpreting the transcription.

4. When I felt this process had reached 'saturation', i.e. "when additional analysis no longer contributes to discovering anything new" (Strauss 1987 quoted by Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009:65), I turned to my fourth column where I moved to summarising, concluding, reducing and constricting. I "scrutinized the data in an attempt to understand the essence of what is expressed in the raw data" (Corbin and Strauss 2008:160). I used my "mind and intuition" (Corbin and Strauss 2008:160) to guide my identification of themes. There are various levels though in such labelling. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain, the higher level groupings can be called themes and each theme can then contain sub groups which might be called concepts. I didn't restrict what I wrote down in my fourth column; I was unconcerned about whether the label would end up being 'right' or not. Rather because I recognise that I am the only person who could or would code the data in exactly the way it has been done I wanted to keep my column four information to show any reader the range of possible labels that I considered so that they can follow my thinking and process more transparently.

5. When satisfied that I had all the possible concepts / themes I wrote them up on separate post-it notes and spent time dwelling with what I had in front of me, experimenting with which might be the overall themes and which would fit as sub-groups or concepts underneath. When I was comfortable with the overall structure I went back through the data again and put in the final theme and / or concept against the data in a fifth column. Column five then eased my navigation through the data when it came to writing up my findings

To illustrate this process a brief example of 'five column analysis' is shown below. Further examples are given at the end of chapters 5-8.

This example is taken from meeting 7. It is a seemingly mundane moment right at the beginning. I will not detail the context extensively as the excerpt is offered mainly to illustrate the analysis process. However, to set the scene somewhat, the day is beautiful and sunny and the room we have booked has an adjacent terrace with a large round wooden table with heavy wooden chairs surrounding it. Richard suggests at the beginning of the process that we sit outside. We do so, although I am immediately uncomfortable primarily because I am worried about the distractions and whether noise levels will mean that my recording will be problematic. At the same time I feel even more uncomfortable at asserting my concerns. I realise gradually through my first-person inquiry during and after the meeting that I am carrying a sense of anxiety which formed when I met the group members in the Ashridge coffee area. Two of them in particular hardly acknowledged me as they were immersed in work on their iPads. I realise also, relating to an issue taken further in chapters 6 and 7, I am struggling with the implications that power dynamics, particularly in relation to my role, have upon the CI process with its aspiration of equality.

To once again clarify; column 1 is the speaker; column 2, the transcript; column 3, my reflections mainly recorded around a week later; column 4, the initial themes and concepts I interpreted the excerpt to be illustrating; column 5, the final main theme I categorised the event as to aid my writing up.

1 Speaker	2 Transcript	3 First-person reflections and memos	4 Initial themes	5 Final themes
Megan	*...Hello. You look very far away! ((Laughs)) Would everybody like to just say how they are and where they're at and what's been going on? ((Long pause))*	I am really uncomfortable and yet I laugh like I'm making a joke! I'm in no way disclosing what is going on inside me. I am being totally inauthentic. But right now I'm more worried about disclosing my discomfort than I am about safeguarding the data through protecting the recording quality. I am conscious too that I must hold an assumption that 'environment impacts dialogue'. I feel anxious about asserting though – how will I be seen? I'm aware of my 'leader' role and don't want to use that power unnecessarily. That seems to be against CI equality. I am trying to get rid of my power in the group and think that will help equality.....And then I think 'oh for goodness sake! This is only about where we sit!!! What is my problem?!' I still feel a sense of discomfort from the iPads in the coffee lounge and I'm finding it difficult to make sense of my feelings. I'm worried – maybe about whether the guys want to be here as they are busy – will it prove worthwhile for them?	Environment Power Façade Role expectations Busyness	Power

Alongside every interaction in each CI meeting I engaged in this process of first-person reflection and thematic analysis. I notice as I return to look at the data that I can make sense of it in ever new and emerging ways. Even in one simple moment lasting about 3 seconds I realise through my reflection there were a multitude of things occurring. Rather than see this as problematic for my analysis and process ("I haven't analysed it enough and now I've noticed something else"), I see this as an inevitable aspect of emerging understanding and reflection. Towards the end of my PhD journey I understand the same original data in different ways and I will understand it in different ways again as more time elapses. In a link therefore back to my ontological and epistemological views, the five column analysis and the themes I came up with are not

offered as 'the right ones' and are not suggested to be static. They are offered as reflexively as possible so that the reader might see what led me to them and so that they might consider them and any other potential themes accordingly.

As well as attempting to make thematic analysis as transparent as possible, I also engaged others in examining the data in order to challenge and offer up alternative views which might deepen my understanding. A paper detailing my initial interpretation of the themes was distributed to my co-researchers for feedback in 2012. I also asked the group and some people outside of the CI process to study specific meeting transcripts:

- Meeting 8 transcript was read and commented upon by CI member Kate
- Meeting 11 transcript was read and commented upon by CI members Graham and Richard. It was also read and commented upon by a PhD colleague of mine
- Meeting 5, 8 and 11 transcripts were read and commented upon by two external reviewers

This inclusion of the CI group in the analytic process is clearly of fundamental importance in co-operative inquiry where the aspiration is for collaborative interpretation. All members of the group were asked whether they would read transcripts and comment on them; all professed a willingness to do so but in the end only those mentioned above contributed. This again shows that although the aspiration of CI might be mutual engagement in all aspects of the inquiry process including analysis, the different inclinations to do this will clearly have a bearing on reality.

Including a wider group of 'external' reviewers was an opportunity to gain different views on the data and perhaps guard somewhat against 'group think', i.e. the risk that in the group we might converge on certain meanings without entertaining other perspectives and challenging ourselves on them accordingly. Again, results from these reviews are mentioned where appropriate in the findings chapters.

Key incidents

During this process of thematic analysis I began, with the group, to reflect on how we could communicate more fully our experience of dialogue and leadership. Along with other members in the group I realised that in relation to my initial ambitions (and the calls from scholars) to describe more of the 'in between space', my work was lacking an essential richness. A CI member, Richard, put this concern beautifully in an email responding to a copy of my CASS 'Leading in Professional Services' paper in April 2012 which detailed some of my first thoughts on findings:

> *…All of what you are saying here makes 'sense' - it references well with expected and important ideas around this territory. But I can't help thinking there could be more to say. Does it capture (in both form and content) the ebbs and flows of our dialogue, in particular the intimacy of it? How could you break up the very coherent, formal language with some stor(ies)y of the darker, lighter, more extreme (and banal) seas we have crossed? Something about capturing the experiential quality of this…This isn't a criticism - just a yearning for something of the rich, deep, dark red reality of real contact and emotional depth that we have (I have) experienced at times, in the form (how we talk) as much as the content - like the meeting just before Christmas, when I have a recollection of real intimacy and connection that built and built….*
>
> *(Email extract, 3/4/2012)*

This reflection led me to inquire more fully into what new knowledge I was trying to convey through my 'findings'. I explain this further in the introduction to the findings in chapter 4. I realised that we needed to convey our knowledge of dialogue in relation to its *quality* as well as its *texture* (Tsoukas 1994). "Quality is the intuited wholeness of an event: texture is the details and relations making up the quality" (Tsoukas 1994:767). The thematic analysis was very useful in exploring aspects of the texture of dialogue however we needed to convey also the *quality* of our encounter; the holistic essence of our experience. As I explain to the group in meeting 6:

> *Megan: My head has been in the recordings and the transcripts and trying to do this merry dance of traditional sort of thematic analysis in the sense of these are themes that seem to come up; and then looking at that picture and thinking: that's almost comical in its inability to express the experience and convey… I mean, my whole question is around how we construct dialogue. And I look at my thematic analysis and it's really useful because it's got me right in the data. But what I likened it to is, you know, that picture of the elephant where there's*

various people touching bits of the elephant and saying, "the ear" and saying, "ooh it's a fan" or "it's a tree". It's like that. It's picked it apart so much that it's not anything like dialogue.

So, that's been very interesting. And I've been playing with thinking: how then does one convey more than in a simple thematic manner…

(Meeting 6)

I show the picture I am referring to below. Thematic analysis led me to important aspects of dialogue. It did not however convey its essence; its more holistic quality. I have discovered, and will explain in this thesis, that capturing the holistic quality of dialogue and the 'space between' is an extremely challenging task and is a likely reason why there are such limited attempts in scholarly work. This thesis makes a contribution in this area which will be referred to again in chapter 9.
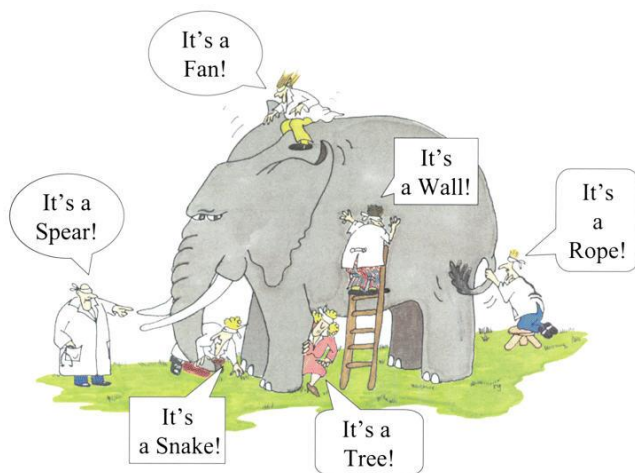
It was at this point, when I determined to try to convey the holistic quality in more depth, that I noticed how the group often sought to explore key incidents.

The group reflected that in each meeting there tended to be one or two interventions that changed the direction of conversation and that seemed to lead in some ways to a deepening of dialogue. As a matter of course the group tended to notice such 'key incidents'. We would naturally pause in session to examine these interventions. It was like placing a magnifying glass over something said by one person or an interaction between two or more members of the group and deconstructing it to examine its consequences in relation to how we were perceiving dialogue. This process of analysis conducted as a group and by me individually with the transcript has provided deep insight to the research inquiry and added, I propose, some of the 'colour', (in Richard's terms), or 'quality' (in Tsoukas' terms 1994), that I had been searching for. Barbara appears to concur referring to the 'Newton incident' detailed in chapter 8:

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> *Barbara: That incident just showed me…how important to have these times where we just kind of slow down and unpack our behaviour and then see right between us here, now, what is going on all the time in our normal situation.*
>
> *(Meeting 5)*

She points to how detailed inquiry into key moments revealed the enormous complexity of 'what is going on all the time' 'between us'.

In order to be recognised as key incidents such moments had to adhere to three criteria:

- Members of the group felt it notably changed the course or manner of further interaction.
- It was regarded by the group as a significant intervention usually because it set or challenged 'norms' of interaction and in the process highlighted important aspects of leadership and / or dialogue.
- It was focused on and deconstructed by the group in order to make sense of it.

In the process of seeking inspiration in the literature on the analysis of key incidents I drew on a number of sources. Primarily I drew on Cunliffe and Eriksen's (2011) 'rich moments' which they describe as 'words and moments that appear to carry significance' (2011:1432). These authors in turn drew me to Shotter's work on 'striking' or 'scenic moments' (2010). He describes these as occasions where something unusual surprises us and directs our attention to new possibilities that 'matter'.

Some incidents seemed to 'matter' at the time or in hindsight as we reflected upon them in later meetings. These include the '60 emails' incident in chapter 5 and 'the Newtonian incident' in chapter 8. Some events struck some of us in more depth than others and for slightly different reasons. Reflection on these events at the time and then in hindsight though was an important sense-making method in the group. Again, referring to Shotter's work (2010), reflection upon these events served as 'moments of common reference'.

I also drew on Emerson's writing (2007) in relation to key incidents in naturalistic ethnography and various definitions of 'critical incident' used in critical incident technique (for example Gundry and Rousseau 1994). Emerson (2007) explains that, in the context of naturalistic ethnography, striking moments are considered by the researcher as intuitively meaningful. Such events might not be highlighted within common methods of analysing data through induction or through grounded theory. Through examining and illustrating the key incidents I am seeking to convey in some way the richness and emotional rollercoaster ride of the co-operative inquiry process and in so doing convey the *quality* of dialogue within a leadership context. This was perhaps part of Katz's (2001) intention (referred to by Emerson (2007:430)) in his work examining 'luminous description'; data characterised as 'revealing', 'vivid', 'poignant', 'paradoxical', 'strategic', and 'situated'.

My process for identifying and analysing these incidents has been as follows. During the meetings, particularly from meeting 4 onwards (at which point I had identified the importance of these moments), I stayed alert to key incidents and on occasion asked the group to identify what these might be. When reading the transcripts I identified incidents which met the criteria above and I wrote these incidents up on post-it notes displaying them on a flip chart. I spent time absorbing the information (again 'dwelling' with it) and then wrote down next to each incident what implications it had for me about leadership and dialogue and why. I brought these insights back to the group to discuss further their relevance and what they told us about leadership and dialogue. During the final two meetings in particular, and during the additional meeting in November 2013, the group discussed in depth which incidents had been most key to them in the CI journey and why.

The best way of illustrating a key incident is to look at an example and there is one at the end of each findings chapter (chapters 5-8). Here therefore I have confined myself to an explanation of the analysis conducted.

Collaborative presentational interpretation

Aware of the extended epistemology advocated in action research approaches, the group was interested to explore different ways of expressing our presentational knowing. We tended to privilege in our meetings our propositional knowing about leadership and dialogue and any presentational knowing was explored mainly through story-telling; bringing in our experiences outside the group which bore relevance to the focus of inquiry. We wondered what we might learn if we used alternative, non-verbal methods of exploration, (see Grisoni and Page 2010 and Taylor and Ladkin 2009). This was particularly as we realised how challenging it was to describe our experiences of leadership and dialogue within the confines of language, which I speak of more particularly in chapters 8 and 9.

In December 2012 we dedicated a meeting to using collage as a way of expressing in a different way what we had learnt about dialogue during our co-operative inquiry process (see Gerstenblatt 2013). We began the meeting as usual with a check-in process (see chapter 9). It seemed important to 'warm up' and connect as a group before diving straight into the rather unusual process (an interesting implication for dialogue and co-operative inquiry generally which will be explored later in chapter 9). Then I walked the group through a representation of our journey thus far that I had created, as shown in Figure 8 below. Each meeting was shown, the date and the people present (blocked out in Figure 8 to protect confidentiality), some reminders about the subject matter covered and then the inquiry questions to which we had committed at the end.

I used this representation as I wanted to help the group to visualise and recall aspects of the journey we had been on and in the process stimulate and support them in thinking through what they might have learnt. I acknowledged in this that I was presenting my subjective view of events and had chosen certain things to highlight. We spent time discussing why I might have chosen these events and whether their importance was shared by the group. This helped to identify the key incidents referred to above.

Figure 8: The CI journey

I then laid a large number of magazines and newspapers down on the floor next to a metaplan board. We looked through these magazines and individually cut out pictures that inspired us and connected to our learning about dialogue. One person stuck one picture up on the board and the rest of us considered it and then continued our search influenced perhaps by the picture up there. In this iterative process we built a picture comprising of images which connected to each other and built on our interpretations of their meanings. We paused, reflected and spoke about the images and what they conveyed about dialogue. This collage is shown here in Figure 9.

Figure 9: The CI collage

The process proved very insightful in enabling us to access more of our 'knowing'. Examples from this collage are detailed in each of the findings chapters. The way in which they assisted us to explore more of our experiences and sometimes to approach previously 'unspeakable' issues will be illustrated.

Papers and presentations

Finally, other formal ways of interpreting, analysing and presenting data have been initiated through the academic papers I have written. Whereas the December 2012 meeting shows an example of formal *collaborative* interpretation, the writing of my PhD review papers and the thematic analysis I have undertaken on the transcripts

primarily represents my own *individual* perspective. However, in line with the co-operative inquiry approach I have circulated my perspectives to the group and facilitated feedback processes in relation to them. On occasions this process led me, often uncomfortably, to realise assumptions I had made or issues which I had ignored. An example of this might be Richard's comments above regarding the quality I had failed to convey in my writing.

The final meeting in November 2013 served as an important feedback opportunity when I presented my findings to the group. Key aspects of this feedback feature in each of the remaining chapters of this thesis. Additionally, in this meeting we agreed that this entire thesis would be made available to the CI group prior to submission to allow those members who wished to read any or all of it to do so and to comment. Four members professed an interest in reading it but did not feel they needed to do so before submission. Two members did read it and were pleased with the way they were represented and the way in which the CI journey had been portrayed.

Concluding thoughts on analysis and interpretation

In conclusion I experienced a tension in the co-operative inquiry process resulting from my specific individual needs in relation to gathering and representing data in a formal academic qualification process. Heron states that reports of CI process should be co-operatively produced. I absolutely agree however the reality is that I am undertaking a PhD which demands a certain individual rigour in analysis and presentation which the other members are not subject to. It also involves the production of a very large written thesis. As I stated earlier, other participants in the CI group were most interested in improvement in their practice and, as they all have busy lives, had a limited capacity to undertake such things as analysis of transcripts (which were each about 50 pages long).

In line with action research process I have included the group as much as they were willing in my analysis and interpretation through the methods indicated above. In

addition, I have been directed by Heron's work (1996) in relation to assuring the robustness and soundness of findings and this will be explained in the next section on validity.

Validity

Validity in action research

Despite Heron's dislike of the "epistemological and political abuse within positivism" of the term 'validity' (1996:57) he advocates its relevance to co-operative inquiry. He describes it as "well-groundedness, soundness, having an adequate warrant" (1996:57). Fundamental to achieving this appears to be thorough 'coverage' of the extended epistemology with clear procedures which prevent distortion from, for example, over privileging the initiator's concerns or failing to challenge assumptions in the group.

I have struggled at times with the concept of validity in practice in both the CI and in my first-person inquiry. It is a term which appears to mean a variety of things to different people. Whose meaning am I trying to live up to? In chapter 6 I examine the assumptions I held around the 'rules of the game' in terms of the CI process. A significant insight emerged following a reflective conversation with one CI member, Kate. I realised an internal voice accompanied me in my CI journey which frequently challenged me; "Are you doing this right?" "Shouldn't the members be more involved?" "Have you chosen the 'right' people for this group?" I defined my experience of my inquiry process to the group as 'a whole load of shoulds' and reflected with the group on where I got these 'shoulds' from and what implications they held for me and the group. My journal captures some of this process and the connection with validity:

Exhausting! The number of shoulds. And it brings me to the interesting question of what is 'right' in terms of co-operative inquiry and who decides?? This is an interesting feature of the

method in that it takes you to these sorts of questions. I doubt in many cases if one is doing the traditional survey or interviews you are so naturally led and 'forced' to consider powerful questions such as who determines what knowledge is acceptable. In this sense co-operative inquiry is quite radical.

I'm reminded of the 'tempered radical' idea here in relation to me stumbling through the method – I feel I can flex it and make it my own to a certain degree but there are boundaries somewhere – some 'shoulds' which I really must adhere to. So the system allows me to be radical with how I interpret the method and yet this must be tempered by the constraints and strong 'knowns' around what determines validity, and what is required by the academic process.

Perhaps the important question in terms of validity and robustness really is 'how has it affected practice?'

(Excerpt from journal 13/9/12)

I wonder above whose definition of validity holds sway and how much I can extend or change this. It is an important question as it examines inherent power dynamics within the academic world. My response to it was to look for the common features in the writing on validity in CI. These I refer to as the 'shoulds' which seemed to be 'obvious' both to the key scholars in the field and to myself as a practitioner, immersed in the process, answerable to a very persistent internal voice determined to 'keep me honest'. I will briefly discuss here what I felt to be the 'accepted' norms regarding validity criteria and how we responded to them in the group. Overarching this though is a recognition which mirrors the realisation in the group regarding our own 'rules of the game'. This is that such rules must be subject to critical review themselves; regarding them as simply 'right' and 'obvious' could in itself limit validity.

Five criteria, drawn predominantly from Bradbury and Reason (2001), Heron (1988, 1996) and Reason (2006) will be discussed in relation to the CI process detailed in this thesis. Their applicability to first-person inquiry is also explored at the end of this section. I recognise the brevity with which I examine what are complex issues, however I suggest that the validity of our process is illustrated best through the data presented in later chapters and the key incidents in particular. In essence this entire thesis is dedicated to aspects of validity because it has been a search for the meaning

and experience of dialogue which I see in itself as a search for genuine, open, robust meeting and learning.

Firstly, I consider the rigour of our research cycling through phases of action and reflection. Our cycling could be described as Dionysian and in my experience more rigorous *within* our meetings than *between* them. I was concerned at the beginning of the process as to how I could 'get' the members to do more disciplined action research between meetings; commitment to this differed markedly in the group. Then I realised that of considerably greater interest, given the research question guiding my study and the gaps in the literature described in the previous chapter, was how we might reflect-in-action (Schon 1987) together in the moment of our meeting. This, I suggest, we undertook with considerable commitment aided by our ability at times to risk disclosing to each other and our willingness to challenge ourselves, as illustrated in the data in subsequent chapters.

This connects with the second criterion; challenging uncritical subjectivity. This concerns questions of how we made sure we were continuously noticing and challenging our own 'story'. How did we guard against settling into a 'nice conversation about dialogue'? Chapter 8 discusses in particular how 'bumpy' the journey was and how dialogue was infused with conflict and difference. This aspect of dialogue and our appreciation of it helped to invite the 'devil's advocate' (see Heron 1988:51) into the group. Issues such as the effect of role expectations, power dynamics and 'rules of the game' were all major topics of reflection in the group. The group was essentially there to attempt to encounter each other in dialogue and therefore perhaps some of the requirements in relation to challenging uncritical subjectivity were necessarily addressed as part of this (see Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulson 2004 and Maurer and Githens 2010 on 'dialogic' action research). However I do not wish to portray a 'perfectly' critically aware group. There were *still* some 'un-mentionable' issues in the group; issues that we did not surface, or that we only lightly spoke of, including for example the effect of gender and sexuality (see the key incident in chapter 7 which offers an example).

The third criterion, connected with the previous one, was guarding against attributing my role and my needs with too great a significance in the group. To what degree did other CI members feel able to follow their own interests under the umbrella of 'leadership and dialogue'? Similarly, to what degree did power inequalities more generally influence members' abilities to involve themselves and direct the process? This theme is discussed in each of the findings chapters but particularly in chapter 7. Power was frequently reflected upon in the group and I suggest later in this thesis that it was experienced as a multi-faceted constructed and dynamic concept. My research needs clearly did influence the group and some members stated explicitly that they were there, in part, 'for me' and 'my' study. However my facilitative style I suggest meant I did not seek to control meetings or set agendas. I am not proposing this approach was entirely 'good' (some members found it frustrating at times, see chapter 7), but members appeared to agree that they felt they could effectively steer their own path. This was illustrated through the shared construction of leadership in the group as 'changing the character of the conversation' which was seen to be enacted by every member of the group. To illustrate, below is an excerpt of reflective conversation from our final meeting:

> *Kate: There were times when leadership was taken in the midst of conversation by people who stepped into a space and kind of named it and then shaped what then followed…I think there have been moments when we've all kind of been there and done that.*
>
> *Paul: I also think that you've [Megan] actually guided the process of reciprocity where we all have the opportunity like Kate just said to come in and work part of our own agenda…in terms of your role…you've allowed that and you've given the space for that…for me that really is the case for leadership; giving people their space so that they can come in and bring themselves and bring a bit of their own agendas and their own needs, and showing their own validity through that need and you've been very elegant in doing that, in allowing that action.*
>
> *Megan: What are your thoughts Tony?*
>
> *Tony: What I had was people allowing others to lead at different times.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Influence in the group appeared to be shared however chapter 7 will explore how perceptions of power differences nevertheless infused the groups' direction moment by moment and undoubtedly held implications for the data captured.

The fourth criterion considered here relates to how we attempted to access what we knew about dialogue through the extended epistemology. Propositional knowing predominated in our talk about dialogue however this was balanced somewhat by the presentational collage meeting in December 2012. Subsequent chapters illustrate occasions where images and pictures assisted our reflection and discovery. I note how difficult it felt for me as facilitator however to bring in 'unusual' reflection methods. There was a comfort in 'talk' and suggestions of drawing and using imagery was met initially with nervousness. Members of the group connected these concerns, often built in childhood, with internal voices saying 'I can't draw', 'I don't think I will be able to do it', 'I don't understand what this might entail'.

The final criterion again, linked with the previous, is the degree to which our practice changed through the CI process. Bradbury and Reason (2001) repeatedly emphasise the importance of undertaking *significant* work as well as assessing whether the research results in sustainable change. Particularly in the closing meetings members reflect on how their practice has changed through the process and state the significance of this. Examples of this are detailed in subsequent chapters. I advocate why and how the work in this thesis contributes significant work in chapter 9.

The five criteria above apply in differing ways to my first-person inquiry. In fact it is difficult to separate neatly validity criteria applicable to CI and those applicable to first-person inquiry. The two processes intertwined and were fundamental in enabling rigour through this relation. My first-person inquiry provided challenge to the CI process, for example I reflected deeply on my own role in the group and how I experienced and constructed power. Similarly, the CI members challenged me to reflect on my own beliefs and assumptions and so deepened my first-person inquiry. Marshall prefers the term 'quality' to validity in her account of first-person inquiry (2004:308). I appreciate her understanding of first-person inquiry as an orientation or

a way of life. I notice an automatic reflection-action cycle I carry with me which has deepened through this research process. First-person inquiry I would suggest is about holding an inquiring mind and attempting to ensure that the depth of criticality of internal questioning is sufficient. However it is also about being able to offer one's own reflections up to others for challenge. Essentially therefore it is about a desire to learn and a curiosity which unsettles any comfortable attempt to be satisfied with one's own conclusions. As such the criteria above, applied to CI, are of relevance also to first-person inquiry, a point noted by Marshall (2004) when she realises that her 'list' of quality criteria mirror those of action research more generally.

In summary, I have been guided by scholars in the field of action research in assessing the validity of the CI and first-person processes. On a more ambiguous level I suggest I was guided by internal 'shoulds' that kept questioning and challenging me. These 'shoulds' emerged from the voices of experts in the field and my own intuitive knowledge of 'whether I was doing things properly'; an internal 'moral compass' that strove to produce 'good work' that I could be 'proud of'. I responded to these shoulds in an imperfect way as will be shown in subsequent data chapters, however I am satisfied that our attention to validity and rigour has indeed produced significant work.

Before presenting the data chapters, validity criteria as applicable to constructionist research also helped to formulate my 'shoulds'. These criteria therefore need to be made explicit and the next section addresses this.

Validity in constructionist research

Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012a) refer to validity and rigour issues specific to constructionist research which I have also been influenced by, given the focus of this study. In general they highlight the importance of "rigour through application of method" and "rigour of interpretation" (2012a:25) which would serve to provide a "faithful rendering of some truth from the perspective of socially situated actors" (Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012a:25, quoting Dodge et al. 2005). I take this to emphasise

the importance of aspiring to 'be true' to those in the CI group. I have sought to hold them in my mind during my process of analysis and writing and I have found myself engaged in an internal checking process where I ask myself "how would they feel if and when they read this?" and "have I represented them and the situation fairly?" I appreciate the complexity of dynamic encounter and I will never be able to convey another's 'truth' as such, however, I mean to aspire to reflexivity in the way that I depict events so that, for example, I own as far as possible my own judgements and biases which were directed towards others.

This latter point responds to Ospina and Uhl-Bien's (2012a) references to 'inside inquiry' where there is an assumption that "knowledge is validated experientially, meaning that the interpretations of the studied reality must make sense to the actors who experience it" (2012a:22). Once again, they point to a necessary to-ing and fro-ing throughout inquiry with those one is inquiring with in order to present a rich account which those party to the experience can *recognise*. I take the authors' words as pointing to the way in which those party to the CI would recognise the nature of the phenomenon and understand, be unsurprised maybe, at the account given by me.

In the final meeting members of the group had stated that they felt sure that I would represent them and the process fairly and some did not feel the need to read the final thesis with a view to 'checking' it:

> *Paul: I totally trust that you [Megan] will have done the best that's possible with the work we've done here. I've got no issues with that at all. I'm really curious what sense you've made of it in the final piece.*
>
> *Tony: I'm actually with everybody else. You'll [Megan] treat it with integrity, the conversations we've had will be represented in a way that is fair.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Two members from the group chose to read the completed thesis before submission and gave me feedback on it. Richard commented:

> *I have to say I really enjoyed it. It has a great "Megan-ness" about it - clear, thoughtful, straightforward thorough - really good to read. In terms of my own appearances in it, I feel*

Graham and I met to discuss the thesis in more depth. He was also satisfied with how he and the journey had been portrayed. He pointed out two specific places where he wished me to clarify issues in relation to his experience, both relating to feelings of inclusion / exclusion. Each of these issues has been clarified accordingly.

From the feedback I have received I believe therefore that members have appreciated the manner in which they have been represented and how I have represented the CI process. With regards to Ospina and Uhl-Bien's (2012a) criterion mentioned above I propose that this thesis offers valid research.

The issues accorded to validity in constructionist research appear to echo those advocated in CI. By aspiring to dialogue in the CI group we necessarily thoroughly inquired into and indeed enacted some of the advice Heron (1996) and Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012a) give.

Concluding reflections on first-person and co-operative inquiry

A request from Ashridge Centre for Action Research to present to some novice researchers my experiences of co-operative inquiry in 2012 led me to be specific about my experience of CI. Seven points which are of particular importance are explained below and reiterated later in this thesis.

First; I have found Heron's work to be insightful and organised. I have enjoyed the 'neatness' of being able to categorise my own work in relation to his various definitions. However I find, having done this exercise, in sympathy with Porter (2005), that I have in no way conveyed the living process of CI and I think that is what I miss in his writing; the felt experience of being in a group and the felt experience of trying to convene and facilitate one. This insight provides a fascinating parallel with my

attempts at describing the essence of dialogue and leadership in the between space and the challenges between describing quality and texture as explained earlier in this paper. I hope, therefore, that my thesis serves also to provide some insight to the felt experience, the *quality*, of CI as well as leadership and dialogue.

Second; as explained above, my lived experience of facilitating a co-operative inquiry as a novice is essentially one of encountering a 'lot of shoulds'. I explain this to the group in session 8 as follows:

> *Megan: I just realised that my whole research is one pile of 'shoulds' going on. "I shouldn't be doing it this way", "I should be doing it that way". "I should have done that, but I haven't", and "I should now do this". And honestly, everything is a 'should' and it's an incredible amount of pressure…. just lots of 'shoulds', all the time. It was a real revelation, actually, that there's quite that many 'shoulds'. So yes, that's it, that co-operative inquiry has been redefined by me as just a load of 'shoulds'!*
>
> *(Meeting 8)*

I have tried to navigate my way through others' opinions on co-operative inquiry but it is challenging for anyone to describe the complexities of the method in practice. The fact that I have been nervously asking 'am I doing this *properly*?' 'Is this *really* co-operative inquiry?' has impacted on my role in the group and my wariness has affected others and the dialogue we have and have not had. Absolutely paramount has been our ability in the group to surface the implications of my role and my ability to stay open to challenge in what I do and how I conduct myself.

Third; the 'co' in co-operative inquiry is an aspiration. In any group being truly 'equal' in terms of power and status is a fantasy (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010 and Ladkin 2007). We always retain an awareness of roles (see Katz and Kahn 1966), an awareness of different purposes, and an often unstated perspective on the value of the interventions of others in the group. We are never equal; power is never constructed in the same way and we all have different perspectives on mutuality at different times. However the *aspiration* of equality is a useful one and it is a useful benchmark for the group to review itself on. Heron, even though strongly advocating equality, does acknowledge this saying:

"It is a mistake to suppose that there can be a simple parity of influence and to try to achieve it….What undoubtedly can be achieved as the inquiry proceeds is a sufficient degree of non-dependent collaborative reflection and management, for the research to be genuinely *with* people and not about them or on them" (Heron 1996:65).

In relation to his words, I propose that we have been conducting research with each other and not on, or about, one another.

Fourth; my role and style as facilitator was fundamental. At the start of the process, in part in response to the 'shoulds' and the aspiration of equality in CI, I did not want to be too directive. I felt if I were to be then the likelihood of the participants feeling a sense of co-ownership would diminish. I also felt that too much directedness would stifle conversations and might mean that participants did not share their own thinking. Paradoxically in many ways however I chose to become more directive, or certainly assertive, through the CI journey. From the group's feedback I realised that they needed more structure from me in order to feel comfortable to contribute fully, particularly at the beginning. To be co-operative I actively needed to use my facilitator role rather than try to get rid of it (see Douglas 2002 and Ladkin 2007 who report on this balancing act). I gave up trying so hard to push the role onto others. As Torbert suggests (1999), disempowering myself as facilitator might have sent confusing messages to other CI members; 'I want you to influence this process, but I will try to negate my own influence'. So whereas in the first three meetings I was extremely tentative about posing a question or specifically asking the group to agree a question for consideration between meetings, in the subsequent meetings I became more assertive which, it seemed, was appreciated. This assertiveness was matched by others in the group and so I did not feel I was taking over. An important inquiry for me was to explore when 'facilitator' became 'leader' and when 'leader' was constructed to mean that I held more decision-making power or would have the 'last word'. In *every single meeting* the construction of my role as facilitator and the effect it had on dialogue in the group was discussed. This openness I saw as fundamentally important to the

aspiration of equality in the group. Chapter 7 goes into this area in detail and the implications for the in between space.

Fifth; in relation to my facilitator role it became clear after the first few meetings that my actions were particularly important in setting the tone for the group and if I was genuinely open others might follow. I actively paid even more attention to my actions as a result. Chapter 6 in particular looks at this role modelling in the facilitator role.

Sixth; after the first two or three meetings, I realised the importance of *who* is in the room to the data collected. This may sound an obvious statement but as my understanding of the individuals grew I became aware of the influence they had on the direction of conversation and therefore the data gained through this method. It served to reiterate to me that co-operative inquiry is such a contextual method; if others were to take the same sort of questions into their own co-operative inquiry they may end up with quite different findings. For example, one member of our group is trained in psychotherapy and has a clear interest in the area; my sense was that that person tended to lead the conversation into 'deeper' emotional territory as a result; another was a CEO in a large organisation and I felt he brought a very practical business perspective to the proceedings.

Finally in some ways co-operative inquiry sits uneasily in the doctoral research world, (see Coghlan 2007). The accepted norms of academic research generally state that work is individually undertaken in written form and its validity and worth can be objectively assessed externally. Yet CI is undertaken with others and outcomes other than those documented in written form might be privileged. The inquiry group plays a significant role in assessing its own rigour and validity processes (see Heron 1996).

Although the stark contrast between the method and academic 'norms' has perhaps narrowed since Heron wrote his 1996 book (see Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000 and Coghlan 2011), I have felt the paradox between my chosen method and the requirements of the academic process throughout. What co-operative inquiry exposes well are the challenges that it *and* other, perhaps more accepted methodologies, face

in relation particularly to the researcher role. I will explore these issues further in the following findings chapters.

CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCING THE FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapters 5 to 8 detail the findings from the co-operative inquiry and first-person inquiry processes that respond to the research question of this thesis:

"How does Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue inform the theory and practice of Relational Leadership?"

I will illustrate four main findings. Before I do this however I need to fill in a gap for the reader which is how I got from the analysis laid out in the last chapter (which involved thematic analysis, examination of key incidents, collaborative analysis exploring presentational knowing and responses from others to my papers and presentations) to the four main areas I focus on in this thesis.

My aim is to 'show my workings' to the reader so that they can determine how and why I chose these four areas and understand that, again, the process of determining findings was not as 'neat' and linear as it might initially appear. These four areas informed each other in a multifaceted iterative process.

Below, firstly, I will detail the themes I arrived at through thematic analysis. Secondly, I will explain how the collaborative analysis then influenced my focus. Thirdly, I will show how the key incidents supported and challenged the analysis. Fourthly, I will explain the influence that first-person inquiry had on the findings. Finally I will describe the 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1989) between the themes and Buber's concepts.

Thematic analysis

The previous chapter described the process I undertook to analyse the themes in the transcripts. Through undertaking this process for all twelve transcripts I arrived at seven overarching theme titles in 'column 5' and they are shown in Figure 10 below. Underneath each title I list the more detailed concepts which make up the overall theme and in bold, I show the concepts which featured most frequently.

Figure 10: Outcome of the thematic analysis

Rules of the game
The 'shoulds'
Risk taking
Organisational / team
culture

Presence
Busyness
Worthwhileness
Listening, curiosity /
    suspension
Environment
Challenge of virtual working
Intent
Endings

Facade
Disclosure
Confidence

Method
Reflections on CI
Facilitator role
Co-researchers

Themes

Definition of dialogue
Simplicity and complexity
Difficulty in conveying
Connection
Quality
Sensed

Power
Power over / with
*Negative and positive
    connotations of power*
Positional
Gender
Age
Sexuality
Physicality
Educational background

Judgements & Assumptions
Role expectations
Labelling others
Self judgement
Starting anew

Briefly:

- **'Façade'** refers to how we wish to be seen by others and our attempts to change our behaviour in order to match this desired image. For example the

desire and attempts to be seen as clever, attempts to be seen as a 'good' facilitator". It also refers to the role that disclosure plays in breaching the façade.

- **'Rules of the game'** refers to the pressure on individuals to act in certain ways in certain contexts; the 'shoulds' they find themselves responding to, e.g. "we *should* be talking about other things" or "he *shouldn't* talk so much" or "I *should* work to an agenda". It also refers to the risk perceived in acting in opposition to these 'shoulds'.

- **'Presence'** refers to our ability to focus in the present moment and the things that distract us from that or help us towards that, e.g. we often find ourselves hurrying from somewhere and on our way to somewhere else which can impact on how we focus right now. Our busyness means we tend to evaluate our interactions according to whether we perceive them as 'worthwhile' of our time and energy.

- **'Judgements and assumptions'** refers to the way we label others, often connected with the formal roles people play e.g. "CEO", "facilitator", "PhD student" and the way in which this affects how we think about them.

- **'Power'** refers to the different sources of power we experience (in particular positional power), whether we think of power as positive or negative, how we attempt to use our power or hide it and the dynamic, socially constructed nature of power.

- **'Definition of dialogue'** refers to the complexity, and yet simplicity, of the dialogic moment and any explicit attempts at defining dialogue.

- **'Method'** refers to any reflections on the process of co-operative inquiry, the tension around facilitating a group and being a *co*-researcher and how we made the method our own.

Although this list and Figure 10 above show the themes as standing alone, they were in fact intricately interwoven and interconnected. Figure 11 below attempts to show this 'messiness' and blurring of boundaries:
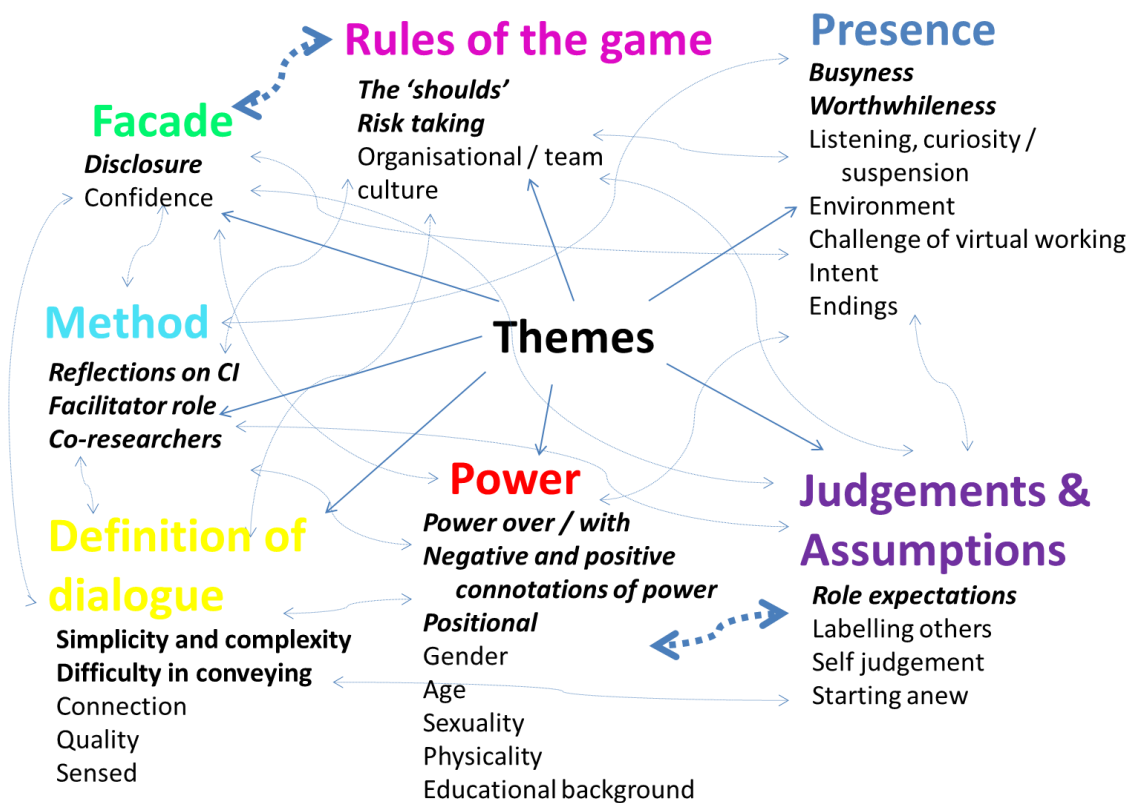
In particular I interpreted two pairs of themes to be especially interconnected. 'Power' issues frequently related to the judgements and assumptions we made about each other, in particular the roles that we played such as 'facilitator' or 'CEO'. The 'façade' we tried to convey often had a lot to do with the perceived 'rules of the game' in a certain context. These pairs were therefore combined.

The theme of 'method' connected to all other themes in a symbiotic relationship. For example, our understanding of power in dialogue held implications for the CI method and facilitation; how I felt I needed to be seen as a facilitator or leader in the CI group held implications for 'leaders' wishing to invite dialogue. For these reasons I determined to reference these implications explicitly within each theme.

In this way I ended up with four main focus areas as illustrated below in Figure 12 and as represented in the four chapters following this one.

Figure 12: Merging themes

1 Presence

2 Facade   +   Rules of the game

Method

3 Power   +   Judgements & Assumptions

4 Definition of dialogue

The influence of collaborative analysis

The findings reflect my own analysis and framing more than any other, however through a collaborative process I have sought to check their robustness and validity through as much involvement of the CI group members as they were willing to have. In addition, as explained in the previous chapter, other 'external' individuals served to improve the robustness of the findings by casting fresh eyes over the data and coming

up with their own viewpoints. I will reference these inputs in the chapters that follow. There are a few points I would highlight here.

Firstly, CI group members were instrumental in identifying that I was focusing on the texture but not the quality of dialogue (Tsoukas 1994) and were thus the main driving force behind the identification of key incidents, detailed further below.

Secondly, CI group members were vital in enabling my first-person inquiry through their extensive feedback to me on how they perceived me as a facilitator and person. This put emphasis on aspects of power, judgements and façade specifically.

Thirdly, external reviewers backed up my focus on the themes above but added some other interesting points. However through my first-person research I noticed the difficulty I had in recognising the input which either did not confirm my view, or more frequently, just added other complimentary but different perspectives. Once I had developed the four themes I became attached to them and wanted to read other's comments in light of them. Similar to the way in which we have a first impression of someone and then look for data to back up that opinion, I found myself leaning towards doing the same with these inputs. This was one area where the first-person research therefore was especially helpful and led me to revisit the input from others on many occasions to ensure I had fairly reflected it and taken it into account in my work.

Identifying key incidents

As explained in the previous chapter, I and the group felt that the thematic analysis uncovered some interesting data but somehow something was missing. We had described perhaps some of the texture of our time together but the quality proved elusive, (Tsoukas 1994).

In response to this, we turned our attention to moments in our meetings which seemed particularly important and influential in our dialogue to see whether they might shed some light on the quality we were trying to convey.

I have focused in this thesis on those key incidents that I and others felt were important in elaborating the themes above as well as illustrating the complexity and dynamic nature of how the themes above weave together in a moment. These specific key incidents were also discussed at the additional meeting we held in November 2013. I wanted at this meeting to validate the degree to which the incidents I picked up on from the transcripts and my memory resonated with others.

Each of the findings chapters detail a key incident in depth and are there to convey aspects of the theme but also importantly to convey the richness of our encounter and how the theme does not stand alone but is in dynamic connection with many other issues experienced in the moment.

The influence of first-person inquiry

It is impossible to clinically separate out how my own assumptions and bias affected the thematic analysis and the identification of the key incidents described above. Undoubtedly they affected how I read and heard the comments given to me by external reviewers and those from the CI group. They influenced strongly then the fusion of horizons which I explain in the final section.

I liken these assumptions and biases to wearing a pair of glasses through which I see

the data. Robust first-person inquiry has enabled me to notice that I *am* wearing a pair of glasses and has allowed me insight in to how those glasses affect my vision. I can never take them off though as such. The glasses represent my 'being-in-the-world' and the way I dwell within it (Heidegger 1971) and therefore

any attempt at a kind of objective exhaustive understanding of my influence here is futile.

Aspects of my first-person research and its findings are detailed in each chapter that follows. First-person research proved especially influential in identifying my ontological and epistemological views and how they colour this whole project: the way I framed the issue, the way in which I leant towards certain extant literature, the way I chose my method and then the way in which I sought to operationalize it. I have referred to this influence in the previous chapter on methodology. Worth reiterating is that I understand concepts such as leadership and dialogue are socially constructed therefore I have never looked to 'find' a common static understanding of either term in my research, rather I have looked for difference and change in people's understandings and how these are affected by context.

Excerpts of my journal and my 'third column' will be shown in the following chapters to emphasise how first-person inquiry informed my findings.

A 'fusion of horizons'

The understanding that I represent in the next four chapters was formed through the fusion of horizons from two main areas; my data on the one hand, and Buber's concepts and writing on the other. Through interplay between these I framed the themes alongside particular concepts of Buber's. So I understood the data through my understanding of Buber's work, then I understood Buber's work through an understanding of my data, and so on iteratively. In a sense a hermeneutic dialogue between Buber and I ensued; a questioning and response between Buber and I (see Gadamer 1989, Scott-Villiers 2009). Buber invites individuals to read *I and Thou* in a manner which echoes aspects of Gadamer's fusion of horizons. This mirrors how I engaged with his work. Kramer summarises it thus:

"Through faithful openness and by returning again to the text with new questions, the reader is able to grow through ever-new dialogues with the unique person's words, thoughts and feelings addressing him or her. Through this lens a dialogic reader discovers and responds to links between personal life [and I would add here, the CI data] and textual insights….a fruitful reciprocity exists between *I and Thou*, Martin Buber, and the reader, with understanding located in their interplay. By entering into dialogue with *I and Thou*, as with each *Thou*, the reader's own voice becomes articulated more clearly" (Kramer 2003:9).

I propose that Buber's work serves as a lens to relational leadership by enabling us to articulate the in between space more clearly and I will illustrate this in the following chapters.

Chapter 5 focuses on the theme of presence, in particular 'busyness' and 'worthwhileness'. Chapter 6 focuses on the themes of façade and 'rules of the game'. Chapter 7 concentrates on the themes of power and judgements. Finally chapter 8 explicitly examines our understanding of dialogue in the group.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENCE: 'Turning' towards relation and the compulsion for 'worthwhileness'

Introduction

> *Tony: I think when I've tried to initiate dialogue ...I get a sense, certainly from my management team, of impatience, they want to be out there fixing rather than sitting, and I'm trying to get people to understand the value [of dialogue].*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

Tony's reflection aptly mirrors my sense, at times, of inviting the CI group members into dialogue; the sense of time pressure; the sense I had that they felt they needed to be doing something 'useful' and the desire to somehow 'make' the time worthwhile for them.

These issues will be discussed in this chapter. They link to the first theme identified in the previous chapter, that of presence. I concentrate on an aspect of presence which drew my attention because it was mentioned in every meeting and by every CI member on numerous occasions; that is how 'busyness' led members to assess the use of their time, including whether they should come to meetings. Transcript data suggest that this assessment process may have distracted members away from being present in the group which in turn held implications for dialogue. Through first-person data the sense of responsibility, stress and distraction I felt as facilitator or 'leader' in this context will be explained and the effect that had on my relation with others.

Buber's concept of 'turning' is considered in order to illuminate aspects of these issues. Processes related to busyness and assessment of 'worthwhileness' are not currently considered by RLT and I suggest that they could hold important implications for the quality of leader-follower encounter.

The tyranny of 'busyness'

In check-ins at the beginning of our meetings, one descriptor which CI members used frequently to describe how they were was 'busy'. Organisational and personal pressures proved consistently distracting for most of them. Stuart comments:

> *Stuart: I find myself distracted by what I've got to do next…..I should draw a circle of my attention; I'm aware that at the edge of the circle there's something chomping, over there, saying "next, next"…… I suspect it's a leadership challenge for lots of people….the ability to be really present. Because I find myself today, as I found myself last time…..on my way to somewhere else…..how can you be really present here between 10 and 12, and do really good work here and then go somewhere else? Or are you always partly here, partly there?*
> *(Meeting 4)*

He highlights a 'leadership challenge' which is to be present in the moment despite knowing that one will need to imminently change focus and attention on to something else. He speaks of how this distracts him. He implies presence is required to 'do good work' although he does not allude to what he means by this. His comments, if shared, would indicate an issue which could infuse leader-follower encounter and thus hold significant implications on that relation which is not accounted for currently in RLT.

Graham would appear to think the issue Stuart speaks of *is* shared; he feels 'busyness' has reached 'mad' proportions:

> *Graham: I'm really struck by how mad everyone's lives are when they're in full time employment ….suddenly you stand aside and look at it and think "this is crazy; everyone's just so busy".*
> *(Meeting 5)*

Tony gives an example of how he felt the pressure of work was encroaching on his personal life:

> *Tony: …the iPad kind of beeped, and I reacted and the wife said "oh Pavlov's dog's back" ((laughter)). I was like "it's not like that!"*
>
> *(Meeting 7)*

His comment is humorous but Tony alludes to an automatic perceived necessity to prioritise and react to work commitments; a feeling that one is always 'on call' and answerable to business needs.

Richard appears to think such pressures are 'unsustainable'. He reflects on a *McKinsey Quarterly* report (Barton et al. 2012) on leadership in the twenty-first century which interviewed a number of eminent CEOs and which he had just read:

> *Richard: There was a line there which so appalled me … Basically their life is so fast moving …. now you get off the plane and you go straight to the meeting and in the limo you've got a telephone call from someone, you don't have time for a shower – this is their life. [One CEO] was saying, "I don't read novels anymore because I can never have enough time; so I read poetry now". ((Laughter)) And I thought: that is just not the answer! There's something appalling in the idea that …my experience does not allow me to hold together a train of thought [needed for] a novel. It's not doable, is it? It's just not doable. It's just not sustainable!*
>
> *(Meeting 6)*

I remember the passion with which Richard spoke these comments. He seemed 'appalled' at the inference this CEO was making that one could substitute novels for poetry to 'save time' and that leadership distractions meant this sort of sacrifice was necessary.

I interpret the data as indicating that organisational life is experienced as overwhelmingly busy. Furthermore CI members noted that organisational discourse lionised such busyness. Here, Graham describes this using his own experience and Richard links to him, reflecting on an experience he had recently at a meeting:

> *Graham: For quite a long time after I wasn't working full time I had to kind of apologise for not being busy because that's the kind of norm. If you're not really, really busy….if you've actually*

got time to reply to an email perhaps something is wrong with you so you have to kind of put it off for a few days so they don't think you're strange….

Richard: You reminded me….there was a guy who said in the meeting something to the effect of "well of course I want to be involved, but yes of course I'm busy, because you've got to be busy; if you're not busy you can't be any good".

(Meeting 5)

Similarly Kate and Paul reflect:

Paul: Most of my clients, when I'm asking how they are; "oh I'm terribly busy"…

Kate: It's the dominant way of talking.

(Meeting 11)

These CI members suggest a discourse around busyness and a 'need to be seen as busy' (the 'need to be seen' in a certain way is considered further in the next chapter). I suggest that these numerous comments point to the likelihood that 'leaders' might frequently experience a sense of time pressure, they might be busy but also might feel the need to appear busy. I question whether these two issues reinforce one another; as discourse links busyness with 'being good', leaders are encouraged to be busy. As others see 'leaders' being busy they connect leadership with requiring 'busyness'. An important question to consider is what are the implications of such busyness on leader-follower relating?

The following section discusses how busyness might lead to a process of assessing our activities and the worthwhileness of our 'meetings' with others. The suggestion is that this then could affect the quality of our leader-follower encounters in the moment.

A constant search for 'worthwhileness'

Busyness appeared to lead to an *assessment* in relation to how the CI members were using their time. Kate refers to this:

> *Kate: ….We have kind of come back and that hasn't always been easy, because we've carved out this space and you go, "right I've carved it out it had better be good" …it's hard to be here; I need it to kind of deliver for me.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

She intimates her other priorities by her use of the words 'carving out this space' and that she has been considering whether the meetings have 'delivered' for her. A similar assessment process is illustrated by Paul and Tony's comments:

> *Paul: When I sat here, I had a feeling of, "I wonder if I should have really been [at work], or maybe there are other places that are more important to be [than here]".*
>
> *(Meeting 1)*

> *Tony: I'm really, really conscious of just how many times I had this thing of "do I need to be here or do I need to be at the office? Do I need to be at some appointment between?" I'm dashing off trying to juggle things around that I thought were important.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

Paul, Tony and Kate were asking themselves 'what is important?' They are unclear in these excerpts what *was* 'important'. What would 'being worthwhile' look like? I can reach no simple single answer to these questions through my analysis of the transcripts. I suggest that this is because there were no shared, objective criteria. However, what the transcripts do indicate is that group members cited different reasons for joining the CI group and that they held consequently different hopes and expectations for it. Whilst all professed an interest in learning more about dialogue there were additional motives. For example, Tony felt 'relationships' were important in his role as CEO and wished to find out how dialogue might help him 'to structure his thoughts' around 'getting people to think differently' in his organisation. Richard specifically wanted to build his connections with Ashridge and saw the group as one way to gain a greater understanding of the organisation. Paul was strongly motivated by 'helping me get my PhD'. It would perhaps be reasonable to assume that 'worthwhile' might link to some extent to whether personal objectives were being met.

However transcript data indicate that it might not be this straightforward and 'worthwhileness' might be a rather complex term for three reasons. Firstly, intentions and needs did not remain the same; they changed as we progressed as Paul explains:

> *Paul: [My needs] have gone from 'learning' to 'being' ….it's become a space where I can 'be' … I'm not that bothered about the 'doing'….. But that was not my initial agenda.*
>
> *Megan: So your sense of worthwhileness has changed? Is that what you think?*
>
> *Paul: Exactly.*
>
> *Megan: …Has moved? "I need to see a learning outcome from this" more towards "it's worthwhile because it's a space where I can be".*
>
> *Paul: That's how I walked into this this afternoon.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Paul began the process wanting to feel he was 'learning' (again another very nebulous phrase), but towards the end of our meetings he said he stopped coming in with an outcome in mind; he found it worthwhile because he had the space in the meetings to simply 'be' (by which he seems to mean being present to what emerges, as discussed below).

Secondly, I see Graham as adding a further nuance to this exploration of 'worthwhileness' through indicating the importance of contextual needs. In meeting 3 we had been discussing how powerful our experience of meeting 2 had been. Graham, who had not been present at that meeting stated:

> *Graham: I'm not sure I feel that relaxed at the moment. I feel like I'm waiting for something to happen. There's a thought going through my mind at the moment actually. It's only just come into my head in this form; is this meeting going to live up to the billing of the last one?*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

I interpret Graham as suggesting, at that moment, the meeting might be worthwhile if 'it lived up to the billing of the last one'. I see this as a specific contextual assessment criterion applied at a certain point in time. Graham and I discussed this comment just before I submitted this thesis and he explained he had been predominantly concerned

with feeling included in the experience of the previous meeting rather than specifically wondering whether this one would be worthwhile. I had however interpreted him at the time as suggesting one way he might 'rate' the meeting. This then had consequences for me as I felt responsible for ensuring that somehow the meeting 'would live up to the last one' (I explain this further in the next section).

Thirdly, Kate indicates that assessing worthwhileness was not necessarily a quick process; it took time for her to 'test':

> *Kate: I have thought about the self-indulgence piece: it's 'can I really justify setting aside this time?' And I've, well, I've come to the conclusion that it's very productive.*
>
> *(Meeting 8)*

Kate is not specific as to what 'productive' meant to her although when she spoke the group were discussing the benefits of having a 'space' in which dialogue might occur and where there might be space to slow down and reflect and build relation with each other. She hints that it would be 'bad' to come if she judged the meetings to be unproductive; that would be 'self-indulgent'. She points though to worthwhileness being a concept that she has considered over time and one that she has 'come to conclusions about'. She implies that it is not a simple case of judging 'are my needs being satisfied now, yes or no?'

In summary, I suggest these comments point to busy people who undertake an internal assessment process in order to determine whether the interaction they are engaged in is worthwhile. I also suggest the criteria associated with this process were individually constructed, multi-faceted and dynamic.

Given the research question posed in this thesis, it is necessary to consider the implications of this on leader-follower relation. This is the subject of the next section.

'Busyness' and 'worthwhileness' in leader-follower relation

Thus far it might be reasonable to suggest that the leader-follower relation could be infused by desires on both sides for 'meetings' to be 'worthwhile' and that this might prove to be distracting, taking those in relation away from being present. This in turn might affect the quality of relation sensed by those meeting.

In addition to these general suggestions, because my role of facilitator was frequently likened by the CI members to a positional leadership role (this will be explored more in chapter 6), it could thus offer a perspective on the traditional context of leader-follower relating where 'leader' is the 'boss'. For example:

> *Paul: You're the boss ((looking to Megan))…*
>
> *Richard: …You [Megan] are in the hierarchical position in my view*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

An incident leading up to our final 'reunion' meeting is useful in exploring the implications of busyness and worthwhileness in this context. A few hours before the meeting Tony emailed me with the following question:

> *Hiya Megan*
> *Can I confirm (finally) that we're meeting today at 1.00pm? I'm down in [region x] and before I embark on a 200 mile round trip, I thought I'd just check one last time……*
>
> *(Excerpt from email 6/11/13)*

At the meeting we reflected on this:

> *Megan: …Frequently we reflected…'should I really come to the meeting?' And that probably came up in your minds with this meeting; should I go to the meeting or should I do something else? Is this worthwhile? And how do I rate this in comparison to what I should be doing over here?*
>
> *Tony: ((Shaking his head)) that email went through my mind…I said to myself, "why did I have to refer to a 200 mile round trip to come here? Why did I have to do that? What made me include that?"*

> *Megan: Yes … that's the phrase that I picked up on most from that email was '200 mile round trip'. And what went through my mind was… "Oh God I've got to somehow make this worthwhile for others, because I'm the facilitator and I'm kind of the leader, or at least I've been referred to as that, so how do I make sure that everybody finds this worthwhile?" So it links massively into role expectations…*
>
> *Richard: But it's so important ….because of the amount of pressure that facilitators, teachers, whatever, put on themselves to deliver stuff; that actually gets in the way of dialogue.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Tony was implicitly conveying to me, as 'leader', that he was making a significant effort to be at the meeting. He doesn't specify what 'made' him mention the 200 mile trip, although prior discussions had been related to the need to convey to others the value of one's time so that it is not 'wasted'. My reaction as 'leader' in this case is what I wish to focus on. On reading the email I had absolutely understood the inference Tony was making and my reaction was to physically feel a sense of stress and responsibility. As I state in the transcript above I felt it was my responsibility to ensure Tony felt the meeting was worthwhile. This state of stress translated into a distraction for me; both a physical feeling of stress which was distracting but also a burgeoning internal dialogue that unhelpfully reared in conversation asking such things as "are you making this worthwhile?" "What is Tony thinking?" "Oh no, what if he thinks he's wasted his time?!"

The brief five column analysis below indicates how even in a fleeting moment in the first meeting this complex dynamic played out. As explained previously, column 1 states the speaker, column 2 what they said and column 3 my first-person reflections. Column 4 lists the initial themes I felt were illustrated in the excerpt and column 5 details the final theme I decided to categorise the data into.

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Tony	*For me, I'm hoping to learn something; I'm hoping to be able take*	I'm feeling pressure here in my body. 'I must make sure he learns something'. Taking	Role expectations – facilitator	Presence

something away that I can work with, either within myself or within my organisation. I don't know what it could be, maybe one little thing, right at the end of this process, or it might be something someone says in the next five minutes. I've got no idea.	responsibility for others is making it difficult for me to be present, relaxed. What if he doesn't think this first meeting is worthwhile?? He might leave! I need him! Gosh that makes me sound so selfish and transactional! How does this relate to 'leaders' who are reliant on their team's performance to meet their own and their business' objectives?	Worthwhile-ness Presence Power over Façade - seeming	

In a circular dynamic, Tony appears to be concerned that his needs are going to be met which instigates concern in me that my needs in relation to 'getting good data for my PhD' wouldn't be met! Given the constructed, multi-faceted, dynamic nature of the personal assessment criteria mentioned above, holding an imperative to facilitate in a way so that those present (including myself) 'rated' the sessions had to be fraught with difficulty. It would be difficult enough trying to understand what members' expectations were at that moment, let alone being able to see whether I could 'do' anything that would ensure those needs were all met. This logical, cognitive reflection and understanding however does not help me in the moment in my relating with Tony. I am clearly distracted by my emotional response and not present to him.

A further effect that noticing Tony's busyness and his need for the meetings to be worthwhile has on me, as shown in the third column above, is that I question his commitment. This is also what occurred with Stuart in meeting 4. Stuart by this stage had mentioned a number of times how busy he was and how he was 'dashing off' at the end of the meeting. He had also questioned what 'the work was that we are doing here' and Richard had voiced that he felt 'wary' towards Stuart although found it difficult to articulate why. I reflect back to Stuart:

Megan: ((To Stuart)) I think what I notice is…. you are a busy guy, and you do zoom around quite a lot and in my head is a little bit of 'hmmm' ((Megan frowns as if worried and unsure))…. and when you said "what's the work here?", I had that just a little bit of a kind of anxiety,

again. Which is like "oh gosh, okay, will he find it worthwhile?" …So I think it's… it's in relation to the voicing of the – "I've got to be somewhere in a little while"….I can understand the wariness [referred to earlier by Richard]….I feel a little bit wary as well…

Stuart: Wary of?

Megan: Wary of - actually possibly something around commitment…whether you want to be here. And I think that started at the first meeting, because you were in a particular place in the first meeting, and I wasn't sure at all that you'd come to any of the others. And so I think - that's still present for me.….

<div align="right">

(Meeting 4)

</div>

The dynamic here is similar to that with Tony; I notice Stuart' busyness, it leads me to anxiously wonder whether he will get what he wants from the meeting, and because I am not clear that he is 'pleased' with his attendance at the meetings I doubt his commitment. I imagine that he will leave. I become wary of him, tentative in my interactions and distracted by anxiety; the quality of our relating from my experience diminishes.

This excerpt also illustrates how history informs the present moment and anticipations of the future. I carried with me memories of what I perceived to be his low energy at the first meeting and I was 'wary'. I was seeing him in meeting 4 through this lens and I was anticipating that he might leave in the future. I was able to carry therefore many concerns, about the past, the present and the future in my mind in a moment, all of which, I propose had an impact on my presence with him and the nature of our encounter.

Indeed after this meeting my concerns were realised and Stuart withdrew from the CI group. In an email to me and the group he explained:

…..My fantasy is that I am a bit of an obstacle to the group doing still better and deeper work since I am conscious that I am unprepared to fully step into it. I have so little bandwidth right now for joining and participating in another group, even though the learning could indeed be valuable in many ways. I find myself coming to the group mainly as it is "your" [Megan's] group and wanting to be there to support you. This isn't enough basis for me to be fully present and genuine in collaborative inquiry in this group……

<div align="right">

(Excerpt from email 3/5/2013)

</div>

The complexity of the processes I refer to in this chapter is evident in Stuart's words. A cacophony of issues relating to busyness, personal needs and assessments of it being 'worthwhile' are indicated. Stuart implies that being there for me is not enough; I suppose by this he means it would need to meet *his* needs more clearly in order for him to be 'present'.

Dwelling with these excerpts leads me to notice just how vaguely constructed some of the key terms are in our conversations. The words 'worthwhile', 'deliver', 'commitment', 'productive', 'important' are all used in the excerpts so far in this chapter and my experience is that when they were used they went often unexplained and unquestioned. It is now, when I reflect upon them, that I realise the multitude of meanings that these terms might convey and how we may have assumed what others meant when using them in the group.

This complexity perhaps fed into my experience of powerlessness as facilitator. I realised I didn't know how to 'make' the meetings worthwhile for others. Even if I had known more about how individuals were constructing terms such as 'worthwhile' I sensed the great limits to my agency in being able to accommodate everyone's different expectations. This leads me to consider questions about the level of agency and control sometimes ascribed to 'leaders'. For example, if a team of individuals have differing needs and expectations, how is the team 'leader' to navigate these? What happens for the 'leader' and the 'followers' if they recognise this lack of ability to determine a particular outcome? Does this lack of control go against the more popular heroic expectations which tend to be ascribed onto 'leaders' (which are discussed in chapter 7)?

Given the research question in this thesis I turn to Buber's work to examine whether he might offer a lens through which to examine the data, which could in turn offer a contribution to RLT. Certainly RLT has not to date considered the impact of busyness or the assessment process on leader-follower relations. I consider therefore Buber's work and likely implications below.

'Turning' to the other in dialogue; a 'luxury'?

Buber speaks explicitly of the increasing busyness that we identified in the group. In *Between Man and Man* (2002) Buber forcefully advocates that busyness and objectification does not mean that one cannot 'turn' to the other in dialogue or that dialogue should be regarded as an unrealistic ideal:

> "The notion of modern man that this turning to the other is sentimental and does not correspond to the compression of life today is a grotesque error, just as his affirmation that turning to the other is impractical in the bustle of this life today is only the masked confession of his weakness of initiative when confronted with the state of the time" (Buber 2002:26).

His words lead me to appreciate that the 'busyness' of corporate life is not simply a recent phenomenon. One perhaps might not therefore dismiss Buber as an idealist from the last century who knew nothing of the pressures of leaders in this century. The excuse of busyness to Buber is just that; an excuse. It serves as encouragement to inquire more deeply; how might one meet others in dialogue despite and with 'busyness'?

Buber states that "the basic movement of the life of dialogue is turning towards the other... you direct your attention to him" (Buber 2002:25). The opposite of turning towards Thou is what Buber calls 'reflexion' (Buber 2002:26) by which he means 'bending back on oneself' (Kramer, 2003:158); one is self-absorbed, distracted by "self-reflexive monologue", (Kramer 2003:159). There are two movements in turning, "one a turn from solitude, and another, a turn toward the unique presence of the other" (Buber 1965:85-86). The data in this chapter I suggest illustrate in particular the problems encountered in the first movement; the distracting 'self-reflexive monologue' members engaged in as they considered their busyness and assessed the various priorities they had. It also indicates the fretful monologue I engaged in when perceiving the members' concerns. Our focus appears to be on ourselves and our needs and as such we are, according to Buber, unlikely to 'meet', we are more likely to

engage in transactional or technical dialogue. This leads on to the question 'so what'?
Does it matter if we do not engage in genuine dialogue?

Buber is unwavering in his insistence that dialogue should not be considered a distant
ideal in organisational contexts:

> "Is the leader of a gigantic technical undertaking to 'practice the responsibility
> of dialogue'?…And I…reply…you put before me the man taken up with duty and
> business. Yes, precisely him I mean, him in the factory, in the shop, in the
> office, in the mine, on the tractor, at the printing-press: man…Dialogue is not
> an affair of spiritual luxury" (Buber 2002: 40-41).

I am led to wonder whether Kate's term 'self-indulgent' links with Buber's term
'spiritual luxury'. The group members infer that dialogue is essentially important (and
indeed are all present because they are interested in the subject), however Buber's
words lead me to consider whether there is a fundamental, deep assumption that
dialogue, given our busyness, is a 'luxury'. It is an assumption I react against when I
consider how my 'busyness' has impacted my relations with new faculty members at
Ashridge:

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*Megan: I keep on thinking of these new faculty members….literally all they've seen of me is me
sprinting past and going "How's it going? Are you settling in? Great!" ((laughter)) and running
past them…..*

Paul: You have two children don't forget

*Megan: I know….and Chief Executives of big organisations have a ton of things to do….so
there's always a reason why not [to turn to others], but to me the challenge is how despite
that, how with that? Because otherwise you go through life and you've retired and then you go
"right, I can do dialogue now because I'm not working"…*

(Meeting 3)

What I mean by the words above is that dialogue isn't and shouldn't be a luxury that
one engages in once one 'has time'. But perhaps this goes against the macro-discourse
on the busyness mentioned above. As Richard considers:

> *Richard: The step I'm looking for I suppose, is when we can, as a chief executive, or as any human being, start saying "I need to go for a walk, not because it's part of a leadership programme, but because I need to go for a walk right now".*
>
> *(Meeting 6)*

He considers it difficult for CEOs to say that they need space to think. I interpret Richard's words as indicating that CEOs are expected to be busy and obviously 'at work' and that it is simply not acceptable to go against the norms and 'go for a walk', or I would add here 'take time to enter into dialogue'. Such acts would be seen perhaps as a luxury rather than 'productive'.

Furthermore Richard questions how macro-structures might also inhibit dialogue:

> *Richard: Dialogue might be possible, but all the cards are dealt in such a way to make that really hard because of….the everyday pace of what you are doing – there's so much stacked against the possibility of really connecting with this other person that the fact that you might reach a level of dialogue is really exceptional…..what is dialogue when people are locked into political and economic systems which work against it?*
>
> *(Meeting 7)*

He brings out here a concern for macro-*structures*; economic and political systems which seem to be, if not irreconcilable, certainly problematic to dialogue. This reminds me of Habermas' concern at the way the 'lifeworld' was being suppressed by such systems (1984). Indeed Habermas explained that as the lifeworld was supressed the method of keeping the system in check was also supressed. Translated to the issue here, the question arises; if we are too busy to engage in dialogue, how will we be able to reflect on and question our busyness? This will be returned to in chapter 9.

This debate also reminds me of Kegan and Lahey's work on competing commitments (2001). We can passionately advocate our commitment to dialogue all we like, but if we hold an unarticulated commitment to being 'productive' which requires us to 'be busy' which is then translated into economic and political structures which appear to be irreconcilable with dialogue then we find ourselves at an 'equilibrium'. In relation to RLT, perhaps 'busyness' is another macro-discourse (along with for example gender and power discourses, see Fairhurst 2012) which should be accounted for. However, *is*

dialogue difficult to further whilst our macro-discourse is around busyness? *Are* they irreconcilable? Can we not be busy *and* encounter others dialogically?

This leads me back to the CI and first-person data. Some of the comments above and in later chapters allude to CI members thinking we had had moments of dialogue in the group despite our busyness. In analysing how this might have been the case I can identify three specific practices or orientations which were mentioned in the transcripts and which I suggest might have helped in 'turning' to the other. 'Stilling the mind', 'creating spaces for dialogue' and 'intention to turn towards the other' perhaps indicate that 'being CEO' and 'encountering others in dialogue' are not necessarily incompatible.

Stilling the mind

The data above allude to the internal dialogue, the 'self-reflexive monologue' that distracted group members away from being present with one another. In response, it was suggested that an important aspect of dialogue had to be the intention and ability to still one's mind, despite pressures of busyness. Kate refers to this:

> *Kate: I guess for me there's something about how I show up in a space, and I'm thinking now… of quality. And I think something about me being in something where I feel as if I'm really there and …my head isn't chaffing away with stuff that I'm not putting out….*
>
> *(Meeting 8)*

Kate links dialogue with 'quality' and quality with presence. I interpret her words as implying relation is of greater *quality* from her perspective if one 'shows up' and is present, without the distractions of internal dialogue. This could be seen to concur with Buber's concept of turning. He states "if you look at someone and address him you turn to him, of course with the body, but also in the requisite measure with the soul, in that you direct your attention to him" (Buber 2002:25).

A number of the group suggested that the CI meetings had helped them to recognise the 'value' of quietening their minds. Here is an example from Paul:

> *Paul: I've never had a meeting lasting longer than an hour, because I can't, it's just too bloody boring and people don't get to the point…..and what I've learnt through here is if I do what you [Tony] have suggested, 'being the quiet mind', and not allow the race in my head to overtake me, I actually get a lot of value, and perhaps even give a bit of value. So I've learnt over the year that we've been together to calm myself and really open myself up for dialogue, and that's the single biggest thing for me that's happened.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

Linking back to the terminology above, Paul seems to suggest that by stilling his mind his meetings might be more *worthwhile*, more valuable, to him. He seems to also to intimate that stilling his mind and being present means he gives more 'value' to others (again his definition of value is unarticulated). Similarly Graham mentions:

> *Graham: So when you go into organisations, and something I've been thinking about a lot recently, is seeing if I can just slow down. It doesn't necessarily mean to slow the machine down; it just means learn how to slow down because that's part of what we have to do.*
>
> *(Meeting 11)*

Graham intimates that one needs to slow down but this doesn't mean 'slowing the machine down'; in the context of Graham's wider comments in this meeting, I read this to mean that slowing down the pace of one's mind and actions in order to meet others in dialogue might not lead to lower 'productivity'.

Perhaps Paul and Graham's comments would counter the conundrum above around competing commitments and the assumption that dialogue is incompatible with 'getting things done'. However one does need to 'trust' that taking time might lead to more 'value':

> *Richard: If you take time, if you trust the fact that we can come into this room, and although your head might be full of other stuff you have to do, if you spend a bit of time just chilling and waiting and just calming and stilling yourself, then stuff will emerge.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

The confidence required for such trust, in the face of the macro-discourses and structures mentioned above, might be a challenge. This is explored below in the context of 'creating spaces' for dialogue.

Creating the space for dialogue

The transcript data appear to suggest a further practice which might encourage

Create your own space

Create your own adventure

dialogic encounter is creating 'spaces for dialogue' in organisational settings. This picture, chosen in the collage session in meeting 10, illustrates this.

In the meeting the picture was only briefly mentioned with Richard referring to the need to "create the conditions" for dialogue but not alluding to specific suggestions on how this might be done. I see the desire for 'space' as responding to the comments above on restrictive 'system' and 'structures'. Specifically, group members referred to the structured nature of typical organisational meetings:

> *Tony: I'm guessing our meetings [in my organisation] are no different to many others, they're so choreographed. That's what gets in the way [of dialogue] I would suggest.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

This excerpt introduces a broader discussion we had in the group around the balance of structure and ambiguity in our meetings, in meetings in organisations generally and the effect of this on dialogue. One of my external reviewers picked up this issue:

> *I was struck by people reflecting on the role 'not having an agenda' played – is it possible, if you are a leader in an organization, to create dialogic spaces when you DO have an agenda? What would that look like?*
>
> *(Reviewer 1, 18.4.2013)*

Indeed 'not having an agenda' possibly featured so strongly because it is so antithetical to organisational life which CI members found tended to function around agendas and tightly defined meeting spaces. I responded to the reviewer's question in meeting 11. In contrast to previous meetings I introduced an agenda at the beginning, set out on a flip chart. I was curious as to the effect this was having:

> *Megan: …What I've noticed, doing the sort of flipchart thing…I felt more sort of separated.*
>
> *Richard: I was a bit dismayed in a way! ((laughs)) I mean you have the need, which is to converge, and that may not be our need in the group at the moment, so there's a tension…So I kind of want to wrestle it [the agenda] away from you for a bit longer! ((laughs))…*
>
> *Graham: …It feels a bit like I'm back in more a conventional environment of flipcharts and instructions and the person who 'owns' the session, which I found quite tiring actually…*
>
> *(Meeting 11)*

My desire and preoccupation for specific outcomes in the final meeting led me to attempt to structure it more which was met with 'dismay' and a sense of 'tiredness' by some. However, in an example of the complexity of the situation this was not a universal response as Paul explains:

> *Paul: I quite like the structure, ((bells chiming))…because…I think many endings appear extremely chaotic and difficult to make sense of in the moment, and I tend to avoid endings…So I've found the structure quite comforting…*
>
> *(Meeting 11)*

Looking back to my reviewer's comments, for Paul, the structure seemed to invite him more to dialogue because of contextual factors. Again there appears to be no simple answer; I do not suggest 'having an agenda' is 'bad' and dialogue is only possible through unstructured meeting. The CI members' responses lead me to see the tensions inherent in a leader navigating such structures; some will feel more comfortable with less structure, some will prefer more and these attitudes are dynamic, changing according to context.

What the CI members did seem to emphasise once again however is the risk that may be felt in going against organisational norms which demand agendas and clear

adherence to structure. Paul gives a good example of this, reflecting back on a recent experience he had:

> *Paul: …[At a recent client meeting] I…walked into a room and… they just wanted to get cracking with the agenda. And I just stopped the whole proceedings and I said, "no, we need to get to know each other; I want to know who you are". The boss didn't even know that one of his direct reports had any kids, and we started talking about his kids, and I could see this "you've got kids??" and they'd worked together for four years! And it changed everything, the way they were working, the way we could work together, and it was simply just sitting there checking in, and initially from me taking the time because everybody thought that was crazy. So that is something that I haven't done before that came up as a result of this piece of work, I was just able to regulate my own emotions and my anxieties, thinking, 'oh shit, is this going to turn into total rubbish?' the sort of fantasies you have… And the unstructuredness of the previous meetings has helped me to be able to do that…*
>
> *(Meeting 11)*

This excerpt indicates the role that his experience in the CI group has had in building his confidence to be able to experiment with being more unstructured in other contexts. In his example he feels this 'changed everything' in terms of the quality of their work. But he emphasises how ingrained the adherence to structure was and that doing anything different was perceived as 'crazy'. He also alludes to needing to 'regulate his own emotions' and again a concern with whether the meeting might turn into 'total rubbish'. This issue was picked up by a second external reviewer:

> *[I notice] the cultural challenges of working without an outcome in mind… Dwelling in the face of the fear of pointlessness….the tyranny of busyness.*
>
> *(Reviewer 2, 13.4.2013)*

This reviewer's comments returns to the overall theme in this chapter of presence alluded to by his word 'dwelling' and the effects of 'the tyranny of busyness' and the 'fear of pointlessness'.

The comments so far have focused more towards the first aspect of Buber's concept of turning; that of turning away from self-reflexive monologue. References relating to the second movement of turning; turning towards the other are now examined.

Intention to turn towards the other

There are fewer comments within the transcripts alluding to the second of Buber's movements; that of turning towards the other. Because of the lack of explicit data it is only possible to speculate as to the reason for this. From my first-person analysis I suggest that the sheer noisiness of internal self-monologue means it is more prominent. In addition, the process of turning towards the other is perhaps less easy to articulate.

However, Richard does allude to it in the following comment in meeting 3:

> *Richard: It strikes me that there's actually a very simple very powerful kind of thing that I'm learning here again, which is if I want to really have dialogue with you I've got to find ways of practicing de-objectifying you; stopping seeing you as an object in my world, rather than really seeing each of you.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

I interpret Richard as emphasising a point similar to Buber's in that he suggests entering into genuine relation means ceasing to focus on the other as an object and rather choosing to see the unique presence of the other. This point is echoed again in meeting 10 in the collage work. The following picture was chosen:

It was chosen to represent the need in dialogue to see people as human beings more than numbers in an organisation. Rather than seeing colleagues as 'means to an end' in

I-It relating, one needs to see them as Thou; as individuals who are unique but nevertheless share the same humanity. Kate refers to this in meeting 1:

> *Kate: It's my own desire to have that place in which we might practice treating each other as human beings. Because I don't think we do that very often – it's a big 'we' – I don't think I do that very often. I do do it. But here and now, some people, some places. I suppose for me this will be incredibly valuable if I experience that, and notice my own coming in and out of that.*
>
> *(Meeting 1)*

Kate reiterates the desire to treat each other 'as human beings' and intimates that this is not something 'we do very often' in organisations. She says she does 'do it' but only fleetingly, 'some people, some places'. She seems to convey a real desire to experience more connection with others.

How is this done? Richard suggests the following:

> *Richard:…There are things I can do that help me to do that. There are practices that I know if I can pay a bit of attention to them can help. So at one level it's not rocket science, is it? You've just got to really listen, I've got to really cut down some of the voices in my own head, I've got to let go of some of that sense of striving…pretty straightforward things really aren't they?*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

Again he links back to the importance of stilling the mind. This represents the importance and the interdependence of the first movement in undertaking the second movement of Buber's turning. He also links back to letting go of some of 'that sense of striving' which I understand to be a reference to the discourse on 'productivity' and busyness referred to earlier in this chapter. Although he claims 'it's not rocket science' and it's 'pretty straightforward' other data presented in this chapter would indicate it might actually be surprisingly challenging in practice.

This section shows how the issues developed in this chapter; busyness, worthwhileness, stilling the mind and creating spaces for dialogue are infused and directed by macro-structures and discourses relating to such nebulous terms as 'productive', 'important' and 'value'. The key incident below also shows this cacophony of issues. I propose that the incident shows the 'texture' of the specific issues and the 'quality' of how they emerge together in the moment between us in the

group. I suggest that the incident illustrates how the issues in this chapter link with those developed in the other findings chapters. The reader might also, through seeing a more extended interaction in the group, comprehend the nature and depth (and sometimes fragility) of our 'meeting' each other. In this way perhaps the reader might obtain an insight into the quality of our encounter.

The '60 emails' key incident

The data above examine a range of issues related to the turning process Buber describes focused on the implications of busyness and worthwhileness. A number of connected issues have been mentioned which form the bases of subsequent chapters such as the need to maintain a façade and role expectations. The '60 emails' incident occurred in the first meeting. Looking at all twelve meeting transcripts it was one of the most frequently referred to interactions in the group.

Before I detail the transcript I invite you to picture the scene. It is the first time we have come together; we are sat in a circle and have begun to talk about what brought us to be part of the group. We are 'feeling each other out', no doubt forming assumptions about the others in the group and what we think this experience might be like. So aspects of all of the themes, and more, are happening in the moment; yearning to assess and predict what the others might be like in the group, presenting a 'good' façade to others, worrying about whether we have made the right decision to be part of this group, thinking about what else we have on our to do lists, trying to figure out how we should behave with each other and what is or is not acceptable. The word 'perilous', used by Buber (1958: 103) to describe the path of relation towards Thou in comparison to the path of 'It' relating, in many ways sums up how I viewed the situation at this point. This is because of just how ambiguous the situation felt; I had no idea what would happen in the meeting or whether we would even get to subsequent meetings. I desperately wanted it 'to work'.

My five column analysis of this incident is shown below:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Tony	*One of the questions I am asking is "How much of me does this group need to be here, to ensure my contribution to the group is worthwhile?" …Because I have to say, from my point of view, I'm still not quite sure what my contribution to the group, or this process could be, and what will make me feel as if it was a worthwhile investment of myself and my time. I'm guessing I've probably had about 60 e-mails in the time that I've sat here, should I be doing that?*	Even though Tony puts his comment really quite gently as soon as he starts talking about "is this worthwhile" I feel a knot of anxiety and responsibility. A feeling of '*I must make this work*'. This is taking me away from being present; I'm preoccupied. 'How am I going to prove to Tony it will be worthwhile?' is going through my head. Will his doubts affect the others? Will it lead them to question their own involvement? I feel so dependent on those in the room at this point; they feel very powerful in relation to me.	Method - Contracting Busyness – worthwhile-ness Role expectations – facilitator Disclosure Power over	Presence

Tony's question regarding whether he should be at the meeting given he guesses 'he has probably had 60 emails in that time' instigates the fretful internal dialogue I detailed earlier in this chapter. I notice I want to 'prove' it is worthwhile to Tony yet I don't know how to. I feel dependent which in turn makes me feel powerless in comparison to the others. I am immersed in my own research needs and my own preoccupations around wanting the meeting to 'work'. Interestingly I do not consider disclosing this though. Perhaps I feel it would be too risky and would not conform to how I see one needs to behave, particularly with 'new' people. A few minutes later an interaction between Tony and Richard went as follows:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Richard	*May I take issue with you*	Richard taking a risk.	Risk taking	Façade

	[Tony], in the spirit of this process?	Giving feedback. I feel a spike of excitement when he poses the question – I feel he is going to be challenging. I'm hoping he will say what I have been too anxious to voice.	Disclosure	
Tony	*Yeah, yeah*			
Richard	*When you talked about your 60 e-mails, part of me had quite an angry reaction. And the angry reaction was about me proving this was worthwhile to you, as in worth your time to stay here, as against those 60 e-mails. For me there was something that resonated about leaders needing to feel it was worthwhile to be in something, in order to find what was worthwhile to them. Leaders as in people in a position of authority, who I meet a lot of, I suppose coming from my own experience, people whose first question is, "How do I know it's been worthwhile, how do I know this is a good use of my time?", and that pushed me away from you. That might be my projection onto you. That might not be fair on you, that might not be what you meant by it.*	Richard put this very well. Tentatively but clearly and firmly. I had my heart in my mouth – how would Tony react?

What if he got angry and walked out? I don't want to lose him already!!! I realise I avoided saying anything to him because I felt I needed him in the group – this is objectification – I need him to fulfil my own needs so open dialogue suffers. Here this means I am not talking straight through fear of the consequences.

But Richard voiced exactly what I was also thinking. | Disclosure

Busyness

Worthwhile-ness. | Presence |
| Tony | *It wasn't at all.* | Was it not? Perhaps | Façade | Façade |

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		Tony, however unconsciously, was illustrating to the group he was important / needed back at his workplace?		
Richard	*I kind of wanted to name it.*	Whereas I was too nervous to – I was worried about the consequences – 'losing' people or being seen as a 'bad' facilitator	Disclosure Façade	Façade
Tony	*Yeah, and pleased that you've done that because it kind of elevated the conversation, I think for me it was about me, and my time, my contribution to the group. I'm sitting here, with a group of people I don't know, what can I bring to this group?...It was very much about where I am, as opposed to where anyone else is.*	Phew. Really important that Tony responded so positively. In his response and the way he said it (thoughtfully, calmly rather than defensively) he is showing some vulnerability around what he can contribute and that makes what he said previously more understandable. He recognises how this disclosure and feedback 'elevated the conversation'. So this sort of open conversation seems to be important in contracting and enabling dialogue.	Façade Disclosure Method Rules of the game Presence – worthwhile-ness	Presence

In these excerpts Tony has clearly articulated the pressure he feels with allocating time to the group given his work commitments. His concern to understand whether it is likely to be worthwhile could potentially be affecting his ability to turn in dialogue, through internal monologue hinted at when he explains 'it was very much where I am'. What is clearer is that his initial words effected emotional reactions in at least two

members of the group; Richard (anger) and me (anxiety). We 'pushed' ourselves away from Tony indicating perhaps an example of 'mismeeting' or I-It relating. Richard's disclosure that he had 'an angry reaction' brought the issue out for discussion and seems to have 'elevated' the conversation.

This interaction had much wider effects however than simply a momentary 'elevated' conversation between Richard and Tony as the following excerpt, taken from later on in meeting 1, alludes to:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Barbara	*There's a level of trust … which actually I felt when Richard said something to you [Tony] and the way you responded, I was quite impressed, you just went "well that elevates the conversation". So you've demonstrated earlier that you were the kind of guy that responds to challenge. ((laughter))…I was really impressed…trust has to be a pretty core value to the whole thing. And no one's done a runner this afternoon, 'sorry but I've got to look at my emails'. ((over-talking))*	Shows how Barbara made meaning of that exchange – she found it important. There is something here about Tony having said he responds to challenge and he then demonstrated that he really meant it – not just espoused theory but theory in use. This is illustrating and building the norms of the group. This tells me and the group that 'it might be ok to challenge, we can handle it'. I feel some relief: no one has done a runner!!	Contracting Rules of the game Worthwhile-ness	Presence
Tony	*I checked…I had 9!*	Brilliant humility and humour from Tony. Really releases my retained anxiety from the incident.	Disclosure Worthwhile-ness	Presence

| Barbara | *What? Oh what a reject! ((laughter))* | The humour relieves some of the tension. I certainly find myself laughing wholeheartedly. | Worthwhile-ness

Disclosure | Presence |
| Tony | *I'm disappointed actually! ((over-talking and laughter))* | Again I'm really warming to Tony – he is now taking the mickey out of himself. It shows a willingness to risk dropping the façade. | Worthwhile-ness

Façade | Presence |

The interaction was important in building what I refer to as the rules of the game (see chapter 6). It made it 'ok' for us to challenge each other and Tony in his response perhaps made us (certainly me) less anxious at such a prospect. It perhaps therefore set the ground-rules very early on in our time together. I agreed with Barbara that this challenge has not led to anyone 'doing a runner' and I began to feel tentatively more relaxed, more able to focus outside of my own internal monologue. Tony alluded to the consequence this incident had on dialogue in meeting 3:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Tony	*We [looks at Richard] had an exchange in that first meeting which elevated dialogue for me immediately, and took it out of the place of safety in terms of we didn't know each other ...You didn't know how I would react, although intuitively you might have done, I don't know…I think in dialogue that can happen; a new reality could be established just through an exchange. I remember leaving last time and thinking to me that was really quite powerful, that was really quite powerful*	Connection of risk bringing about change. Bringing about a new reality through dialogue. But this requires challenging the rules of the game. The rules 'said' in a first meeting you must be polite, you can't say things like that. But Richard challenged it.	Reflection on key incident Worthwhil-eness Rules of the game - risk Dialogue	Rules of the game

	at the time, and I wasn't offended, but for me it changed things.	This clearly made a real impression on Tony, as it did on me.		

This key incident was mentioned in nearly every subsequent meeting. As well as highlighting that 'busyness' and 'worthwhileness' might lead to an array of different responses in those voicing it and those hearing it, it also leads me to consider how self-monologue and unwillingness to risk might get in the way of the open and genuine meeting and encounter Buber was referring to. Richard appears to take the risk that Buber emphasises is required to turn wholeheartedly to another, a risk which is examined more in the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter has explored an issue which featured in every CI meeting; busyness. Deeper exploration of the transcript data and first-person reflection illuminated a process of assessment of worthwhileness, driven by competing priorities, that was frequently occurring in the meetings. Following Buber's work especially his concept of 'turning', I have proposed that this could influence the leader-follower relation in two key ways. Firstly through encouraging a more transactional encounter where those present are concerned with meeting their own needs rather than turning to the other and secondly by distracting those in relation through extensive self-monologue. Both these issues could limit the capacity for 'meeting' and therefore are areas that I suggest should be examined in more depth in relation to RLT.

This chapter has also highlighted how complex the criteria are in this assessment process. Words which are frequently used in conversations such as 'important', 'worthwhile' and 'valuable' are subjective, dynamic and multi-faceted. Those in leader-follower relations may feel a pressure, as well as to meet their own needs, to attempt to define, understand and meet needs of others. Given the complex nature of such needs that attempt would be fraught with difficulty. How could a 'leader' navigate

their way through this territory? How might the role expectations of a 'leader' impact on this navigation? I wonder whether the 'heroic' discourse surrounding leadership might hold implications for this navigation and vice versa.

I propose that an assumption running through some of the excerpts has been that dialogue and busyness (or worthwhileness) are not compatible. Dialogue was frequently associated in the CI group with 'slowing down'; the antithesis apparently to the busyness of everyday life. The members of the CI group identified economic and political structures as well as prevalent discourse which appear to work in favour of busyness and against the 'slowing down' described as part of dialogue. Such discourse and structures seem to encourage transactional encounter rather than genuine dialogue.

However the transcript data point to an understanding in the group that dialogue could lead to giving and receiving more 'value' and does not have to mean 'slowing down the machine'. Practices such as stilling the mind and creating spaces for dialogue may be necessary in order to invite dialogic encounters. These practices might need courage to employ given they often seem to go against organisational norms. This leads me to wonder how such courage is enacted and who by. Is it more 'scary' to go against norms as a seemingly powerful hierarchical leader or does one's position and the expectations which come with it actually stifle one's courage to be counter-cultural? These questions will be considered in subsequent chapters.

To date RLT has not accounted for the process of assessment, the construction of 'worthwhileness' and the macro-discourse and structures lionising 'busyness'. Furthermore, the impact that they might have on the quality of encounter perceived by leader and follower is not as yet theorised. Given it featured so heavily in our group I suggest this might be an area of importance worthy of future research. This is examined further in chapter 9.

The next chapter will explore another two themes, connected with that of turning; 'façade' and 'rules of the game'. Aspects that have been mentioned in this chapter

relating to these subjects and the risks involved in being 'authentic' will be discussed and expanded upon in depth.

CHAPTER 6: RULES OF THE GAME AND FAÇADE: 'Being' rather than 'seeming' and dropping the mask

Introduction

This chapter examines a pair of themes; rules of the game and façade. Just as the process of assessing worthwhileness mentioned in the last chapter led to distracting, noisy internal monologue, so did frequent self-management of how we presented ourselves in the group as Kate intimates:

> *Kate: I'm noticing myself making choices the whole time about …what to say, what it's ok to say, what it is helpful to say, what feels inappropriately selfish to say or what serves us in the group and I'm kind of noticing all of these great waves of stuff going through me and imagining that they're all going through all of you as well.*
>
> *(Meeting 5)*

I see Kate as highlighting the complexity of the between space as she conjures up an image of each of us busily engaged in attempting to 'read' the group and sensing moment by moment how to respond to our perceptions in the 'right' way.

This chapter focuses on three connected issues which Kate introduces; firstly how our perception of the 'rules of the game' dictated how we should behave with each other in the CI group; secondly how this and our own personal insecurities led us to present a façade to each other; and thirdly how risky it felt to drop the façade, to go against the 'rules' and face the prospect of non-acceptance. Buber's concepts of 'being' and 'seeming' provide an insight to the data and lead me to suggest implications for RLT.

How we think we *should* be; creating the rules of the game

The CI group provided a rich opportunity to discover some of the unspoken and often unquestioned assumptions that were formed as we navigated through the unknown territory of how we ought to behave and be with one another. In meeting 8 these were discussed in depth and later in this chapter I will explain more about what led up to this. In analysing transcripts of the previous meetings I had come up with the term 'the rules of the game' or the 'shoulds' to describe these assumptions and these phrases became common parlance in the group.

In meeting 8 Kate referred to one rule she perceived that we should have 'quality conversations' in our meetings; that they should be more 'edgy' than 'normal' organisational contexts allowed conversations to be. Graham responded that he had occasionally felt 'punished' in the group for transgressing a rule and refers to a key incident which is detailed at the end of chapter 8 called "the Newton incident".

The excerpt below shows some of the ensuing discussion, starting with Graham reflecting his concern around how his previous comment on punishment might have been received by others. It illustrates the prevalence of rules and the constant (even if often unconscious) navigation of them:

Graham:..Since I say ['punished'], I think that wasn't really a very nice thing to say, maybe I shouldn't ... ((laughter))

Kate: So is there another rule that says you must only say nice things?

Richard: Well-articulated! You could probably get away with saying something nasty, but as long as you say it very cleverly! ((referring to another previously stated rule of 'needing to be seen as clever'))

Paul: …So the rule is we need quality conversations [in this group]…We create our rules…If we just go back to two things that have just occurred in the last few minutes; you [Kate] said you wanted something slightly more edgy, and then you [Graham] responded with what could be construed as oppressive. So okay, now we're all going to be nice to each other; let's not be too edgy, because it might be oppressive; here's a rule! For me, my internalised [voice says] 'don't push too hard, because it might hurt people's feelings, it might be construed oppressive'…I'm

just sort of bringing out one rule that's just present for me now. The other rule was we need to be careful that this doesn't turn into a rubbish conversation. So what is a rubbish conversation? I'm starting to [remind myself] about everything I know about dialogical principles! ((laughs))...This is the thing: the rule comes through the conversation, from whatever I pick up, and because I want to be nice and sensitive...I can now just pick up the rules and I'll just live with them and be even more inauthentic ((laughs))...it's my response to what's in the room.

Kate: It's a co-creation thing, isn't it? I wonder what other rules we've created for ourselves? So we have a 'don't be too self-indulgent' and ...

Richard: Useful.

Kate: ... Be useful. And don't be oppressive. And be authentic. And have good quality conversation! ((laughs))

<div align="right">

(Meeting 8)

</div>

Graham highlights the qualification process which guides him in his contribution; the internal monologue focused on asking 'was that the 'right' thing to do or say?' Paul also emphasises this when he refers explicitly to his 'internalised voice' which is giving him directions on his moment by moment actions. These questions and directions appear to be compared to an implicit understanding of what the 'shoulds' or the 'rules' are in the group. Graham alludes to a rule he perceives about 'being nice' and so he is qualifying his behaviour in order to adhere to this rule. Paul refers to a rule he has interpreted from Kate's previous comment; 'we mustn't have rubbish conversation' and he is attempting to direct his behaviour along 'dialogic principles' as a result.

Paul and Kate also articulate their understanding as to how these rules emerge and are 'co-created' through conversation and through our own sense-making process. We listen to what others say or do, judge their meaning and develop implicit rules for ourselves to guide our future interactions. Furthermore these complex assumptions and rules often go unchallenged. When, as a group, we became aware of this cacophony of 'shoulds', which were undoubtedly impossible to satisfy, we found the situation humorous. I suggest we were recognising how utterly complex, contextual and problematic 'being' rather than 'seeming' was in practice.

As facilitator and implied 'leader' in the group I found myself trying hard to sense what the desirable rules were and role model some of the behaviours mentioned above; facilitating 'proper' conversations, trying to be seen as authentic (rather ironically) and leading others to the realisation of 'usefulness'. I was led by the desire described in the previous chapter to 'make' the meetings worthwhile for others and this is evident again in the key incident detailed at the end of this chapter.

Implied in the analysis above is that those in relation, for example leader and follower, might construct rules which influence how they then behave with one another. As such, this process is likely to be an important consideration in examining how leadership is constructed in the between space. It is important to note however that these rules were not simply regarded as problematic and getting in the way of dialogue as Richard reflects:

> *Richard:…Do the rules get in the way of, or help dialogue? How do they have an impact on dialogue? Because they may not always be a bad thing, it may be quite useful sometimes, maybe in moderation! ((laughs))….I think that rule [about not being too intellectual] does have some utility for me…helps me police myself…so it could be oppressive but it's also a bit helpful, so the quality of the dialogue's helped a bit for me, by the fact that we don't go 'off on one'.*
> *(Meeting 8)*

So this is not a simple case of rules being 'bad' for dialogue. The situation is much more complex and contextual than that; some rules, such as Richard's example of 'don't be too intellectual' may have served in our group to improve our encounters by orientating us towards the other, so 'we don't go off on one' as Richard puts it.

Although there was agreement on a number of existing 'shoulds' in the group each of us paid attention to some more than others. We each appear to have regarded some rules with more importance than others depending upon our own value systems and personal anxieties. Above Richard shows he was particularly conscious of the 'don't be too intellectual' rule and in fact he mentions it on a number of occasions in other meetings. In contrast, I was less preoccupied with this but my internal attention was more targeted towards being a 'good' facilitator and attempting to negotiate the nebulous rule of 'these meetings must be worthwhile'.

The group felt that these rules had consequences on the possibilities of dialogue but these consequences, partly because of the dynamic constructed nature of the rules, were impossible to pin down. Paul does allude though to one consequence, 'inauthenticity', with facades being erected to serve as a navigation device across the 'waves', as Kate put it, of shoulds. I turn to explore this point further now.

The façade we wear

As I have begun to introduce through the data shown above, rules of the game led us in the group to try to mould our behaviour in certain ways. Buber's concept of 'being' and 'seeming' may be a useful lens to interpret the data both in relation to the reasons for this process and its potential consequences. According to Freidman:

> "The essential problematic of the sphere of the between, writes Buber, is the duality of being and seeming. The man dominated by being gives himself to the other spontaneously without thinking about the image of himself awakened in the beholder. The 'seeming man', in contrast, is primarily concerned with what the other thinks of him, and produces a look calculated to make himself appear 'spontaneous', 'sincere', or whatever he thinks will win the other's approval" (Friedman in the introduction to Buber 1965:27).

When I read Friedman's words and Buber's comments on being and seeming they come across as quite damning regarding the 'calculating' nature in which we make ourselves appear a certain way. Friedman remarks that a 'being' person would be spontaneous, however Kate remarks in our final meeting:

> *Kate: I don't think I have at many points felt spontaneous, unguarded…I can remember times where I sort of thought, 'I'll say this, no I won't say it'.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

I interpret such data however as emphasising less the sort of purposeful individual manipulation of circumstances and more the processes whereby we affect and are

affected by the group interactions moment by moment. Rather than presenting the group members as specifically 'calculating' I suggest the data illustrate more of the personal anxieties as well as positive intentions that drive, often unconsciously and automatically, such façade building. It shows also the inevitability of engaging with how we perceive others to be perceiving us in the moment. This is discussed again in chapter 9.

These points can be shown through the data which identified how and why we attempted to 'seem' to each other. For example, Paul brings the question of seeming into the CI group in meeting 3. He mentions a recurring subject for the group, the need to be seen as clever, (which Richard acknowledges but then counters in the example above with his need 'not to be *too* clever'):

> *Paul: To what extent do we work very hard at projecting some desirable persona into a group? Then as we have better and better dialogue in the group and the trust is established, the importance of projecting such a persona decreases….at the last meeting I thought we were all trying to be really clever, so why is that? You're all reasonably well educated people, why did we have to say, why did we have a conversation to show how clever we are? ((laughingly))…Maybe it's partly a strive for acceptance, so we all want to be accepted in the group….I also want to make a contribution to your [Megan's] research, so I think that's pretty hot, I'd better be clever and make a contribution to a PhD.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

A façade of cleverness is erected by Paul in order to gain *acceptance* (confirmation in Buber's terms) and in order to meet certain rules, one of which is 'in order to make a contribution to a PhD I need to be clever'. This leads me to consider the possible existence of assumptions between leader and follower such as 'I need to seem confident in order to get promoted', or 'I need to seem like I know where we are going in order to be leader' for example. These role-related assumptions and their implications are discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

On the same subject Paul mentions this need to be clever in Meeting 4, again suggesting this particular façade might be dropping as we built trust in the group:

> *Paul: I have a recollection of our first meeting; I had a sense that we were banding about in fact quite a bit of highfalutin language…I had a clear sense that we were all trying to impress each other….and then I started to relax, we got to know each other…there was no need to do that anymore, because we just got in touch with each other's humanity, rather than trying to think how clever am I?...that's all gone basically…*
>
> *Richard: I think it's still around a bit. Just a little bit…I've known that for myself. As you were talking I was reflecting – there is an agenda for me here…[I need] to position myself in a certain way.*
>
> *Paul: Well I think that's ok. We're always positioning.*
>
> <div align="right">(Meeting 4)</div>

Paul's words 'we're always positioning' I interpret as fundamental to the possibilities of I-Thou dialogue that Buber advocates. They raise the question of how and whether one can truly 'be' with another without *any* apparent seeming, even when there is a high perceived level of trust. This is an important finding in the data and the implications that it has for the plethora of leadership literature which directs one rather simplistically to 'be authentic' will be examined in chapter 9 further.

One incident interpreted as depicting façade rather well came to be parodied as the "22 Danish pastries" incident (more accurately it would have been the "21 Danish leaders" incident). This occurred in meeting 4 and I detail it below as an example of rules leading to façade building:

> *Stuart: ...I got up at 3.30 .I have 21 Danish [Executive] directors arriving at 12 noon…*
>
> *Kate: …I'm just thinking about the kind of discourse that's here in this room, that's about words like 'busy', 'leaders', 'numbers', '22'; there's 22 coming, not like a group or one. Would it be different if it was one, and they were coming from Scunthorpe, not Denmark? So there's something about all of that. What does that mean? The power in that kind of discourse. "150 from ...", where would it be really sexy to come from?*
>
> *Stuart: San Francisco….Google…*
>
> *Kate: And it's all here, slooshing around in the space here. Which is very interesting.*
>
> *Paul: How come we do that? People ask me, what do you do, and I say "I work with 30 top leaders from all over the world". Not just leaders from Hemel Hempstead! ((laughter))*

> *Kate: "All over the world".*
>
> *Paul: "All over the world". So there is a piece of how we establish ourselves in any kind of conversation; a power base…*
>
> <div align="right">*(Meeting 4)*</div>

At the end of this meeting this conversation was referred back to humorously by Stuart:

> *Stuart: I must go and meet a numberless gaggle of local itinerant visitors ((laughter))*
>
> *Kate: Some people from somewhere or other…((laughter))*
>
> <div align="right">*(Meeting 4)*</div>

This excerpt links back to issues developed in the previous chapter around macro-discourses which, through celebrating certain things, lead us to position ourselves in relation to others accordingly. The last chapter discussed the 'busyness' discourse. Here members of the group are highlighting the use of other terms which are favourable in certain contexts such as 'leaders' and 'numbers'. Such terms appear to be common parlance for positioning oneself favourably in the eyes of another; examples of 'seeming' according to Buber. Façade building appears to be 'slooshing about' in the space between us in the group. Power appears to be relevant; discourse is employed in an attempt to 'establish' a 'power base' although the excerpt above does not detail why this is happening.

The excerpt does however indicate to me how the word 'leader' is used to signify importance and superiority. Calling oneself a 'leader' or saying that one works with 'leaders' is perceived to convey importance and power. It leads me to suggest that the way in which 'leader' is constructed will be fundamental in theorising the leader-follower space. This will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

This theme of façade, the way seeming is so prevalent in organisations and the manner in which it gets in the way of dialogue featured strongly in the collage session in meeting 10. There were more pictures relating to this theme than any other. The

<div align="center">159</div>

following pictures are examples which illustrate how the group visually depicted their understanding of the concept.

The first picture of the Beckhams was chosen by a member of the group (possibly Tony although this was not recorded in the transcription) to illustrate an iconic couple who, according to members of the group, focus on how they 'seem' to others and are defined by the image and façade they work hard to project to the outside world. Tony explains:

> *Tony: There's a question still in my mind about dialogue, about style and substance and the Beckhams are the archetypal style over substance.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

Tony suggests that dialogue is implicated by style and substance. I interpreted him as questioning whether dialogue would be possible when style (seeming) was prioritised over substance (being).

Although not explicitly discussed in the meeting this second picture, again chosen by an unidentifiable member of the group, asks 'does your smile match your image?' I interpret it as reflecting the focus the group had on authenticity and façade, or in Buber's words, 'being' and 'seeming'.
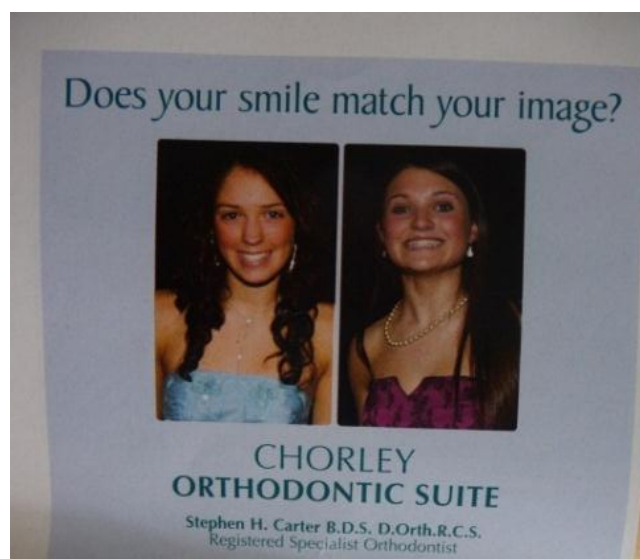
The third and fourth pictures are both images which I had offered to portray the pressure felt by the group members and perhaps more generally by people in organisations who feel the need to maintain a façade. I explain why I had chosen first the picture of the man positioned on the rings and secondly the picture of the man with a snake:
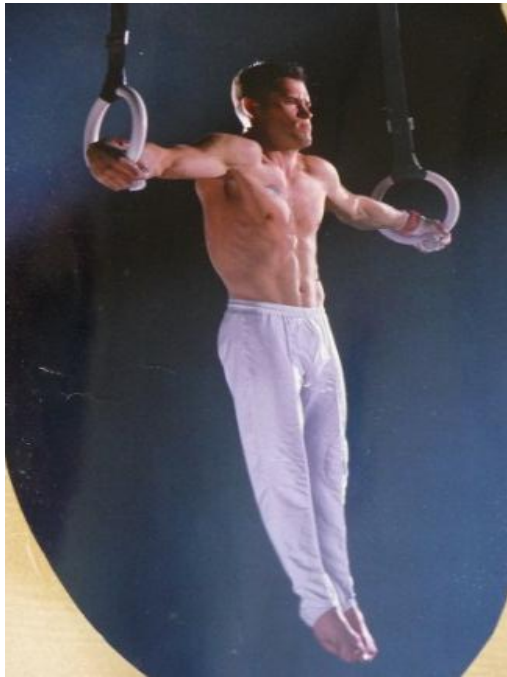
> *Megan: That one [the gymnast] I chose because it just struck me as kind of the position that so many people seem to hold in organisations, like 'I must be strong, I must…' and it just feels very uncomfortable way to be for a long period of time…[and this one with the snake]…it was a picture of someone being really guarded, to me, so presenting an image, and there's the snake; there's a kind of protection.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

I allude here to the pressure and stress which might build if one felt the need to conform to rules which required an effort to 'seem'. However, there were also pictures chosen by group members which presented the possibility of seeing beyond the façade such as this one below of a party with the words 'catch a glimpse':

This picture suggests that there may be occasions when one could 'let the guard down' where perhaps one did not feel the need to be so protected. These pictures lead me to wonder what exactly we are protecting ourselves against with our façades. Why do we need a 'guard' in the first place?

Buber's alludes passionately to our felt need for protection. He states:

> "Each of us is encased in an armour…living means being addressed, we would need only to present ourselves and to perceive. But the risk is too dangerous for us, the soundless thunderings seem to threaten us with annihilation, and from generation to generation we perfect the defence apparatus…each of us is encased in an armour which we soon, out of familiarity, no longer notice" (Buber 2002: 12).

Buber suggests we might take off the 'armour' warning us however that doing so might 'threaten us with annihilation' (Buber 2002: 12). The rules of the game and the consequent façade we adopt, according to Buber, result from deep seated concerns about being accepted by others. As Friedman explains:

> "The origin of the tendency toward seeming is found in the human need for confirmation. It is no easy thing to be confirmed by the other in one's being; therefore one looks to appearance for aid. To give in to this tendency is our real cowardice to withstand it our real courage" (Friedman 2005:140).

It would appear therefore that we might adhere to 'rules' and that we might construct a façade in an attempt to assure confirmation from others. Profound courage and risk

taking might be involved in 'presenting ourselves'. This leads me back to the CI data to explore how this risk and the reasons behind protection might have appeared in the group.

Dialogue as risk; the courage to disclose and what to do when you 'mess up'

The courage required to withstand the flight to façade and to risk the threat of being adversely judged by others indicated by Buber and Freidman's words above was illustrated in my interpretation of the transcripts of the CI group.

Firstly, Kate illustrates how maintaining the façade might indeed seem easier than the alternative option of disclosure:

> *Kate: Since I've been back at work, I've been in several meetings where I've been stunned by the rubbish quality of conversation that's happened in the meeting. And I've become preoccupied….what's my part here, what am I doing?...Why is there a great absence of serious encounters with each other? Am I prepared to step into some space? And I mostly decide I am not! ((laughs)) Which of course tells me everything about what everybody else is doing.*
> *(Meeting 8)*

Kate reflects that she is not 'prepared to step into some space' which I interpret as indicating that it might be difficult to go against the rules of the game and 'present herself' as Buber would phrase it. Kate would prefer to play it safe perhaps and maintain the façade as others are. This seems to become a self-fulfilling process; others aren't prepared to step in so we aren't and we aren't prepared to step in so they aren't. A rule is co-created that suggests 'you don't step into the 'space'' and consequently you don't do what is required to have 'serious encounters with each other'.

Although the subject of disclosure and façade came up in every meeting in some form, as mentioned above, it was in meeting 8 that we explored our need as human beings to be accepted and confirmed by others. We identified the real fear experienced in the

choice to risk disclosing more of ourselves to others. The conversation was initiated by my first-person inquiry which had allowed me to realise how much I was influenced and felt pressured by self-imposed 'rules of the game'. I came into meeting 8 feeling exhausted; I had a lot of teaching work on, I was about to go away for a few days and had just said goodbye to my children and I was a little stuck in terms of the direction of my research. It was a revelation when I realised that in all these categories; teaching, parenting, research and more I had an inner monologue that was frequently critiquing the way I was being and behaving. When I became mindful of this voice and began to tune into it I was harangued by comments such as "you should be spending more time with the children", "you should be facilitating better than this", "you should be practicing what you preach more; you should be role modelling a dialogic orientation", "you shouldn't be doing co-operative inquiry like this" and so on. Hand in hand with these condemnations lay a need to be seen by others in a certain way; the need to be seen as 'a good facilitator', 'a good mother' and 'a good student'; unwillingness to risk 'presenting' myself in any other way.

Although this inner voice was not always critical and was not always focused on me and my own experience and needs I found that it did lurk in the background frequently. I found it had an effect on my ability to be present with others and was certainly affecting my stress levels. It also had interesting implications for the rest of the group. Below I account how this topic arose and developed in detail. It begins with Richard talking about a workshop he had been to. He had heard my check-in, clearly thought there was more to what was going on for me than I had disclosed and came back to challenge me on how I *really* was:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Richard	*…when the facilitator started to name their difficulties and challenges that really opened up the space, the community*	I was thinking that I *did* do this quite a lot; name my own challenges and be honest about my difficulties. Although in my check-in, looking back, I sounded	Role – facilitator Disclosure	Façade

	space in the group… So there's something around that, and I don't think it has to come from the facilitator, but I think the lead came from people starting to name some of the elephants in the room, some of the deeper, crunchy, I don't know how to …! ((laughs))	so superficial. But I didn't think I should take up too much time….perhaps also I felt a facilitator should appear strong? Perhaps I wanted to be seen as 'in control'? I am still governed by a horror that others might think I'm 'rubbish' at what I do! And yet I don't see myself as lacking in confidence particularly…. I wonder how much of 'naming elephants' is cultural. In Hamburg with Company X I talked to the CEO about the British culture and he was quite damning about how we avoided direct conversation…	Rules of the game	
Megan	*Yeah, I'll respond to that….I'm still holding a kind of anxiety and confusion around the next steps of this [research]. I just realised that my whole research is one pile of 'shoulds' going on. "I shouldn't be doing it this way", "I should be doing it that way". "I should have done that, but I haven't, and I should now do this". And honestly, everything is a 'should' and it's an incredible amount of pressure. So, now I'm confused about the 'shoulds' that come next, because I should know what to do! ((laughs))…*	I take a deep breath and decide to voice what's going on for me. Introducing the idea of 'shoulds' here ended up being really important as it became a subject throughout the meeting and beyond. I speak here about the shoulds related to CI but there are shoulds in other areas as well – perhaps the more sensitive ones are related to family and how I am as a mum. I can feel though tension dissipating as soon as I open up about this (although I still have a "you shouldn't take up too much time talking about yourself; you might be seen as selfish" voice going on!)	Rules of the game Façade Disclosure CI method	Rules of the game

Paul	*Lots of shoulds*			Rules of the game
Megan	*Yeah, just lots of shoulds, all the time. It was a real revelation, actually, that there's quite that many shoulds. So yes, co-operative inquiry has been redefined by me as just a load of shoulds!.... And in terms of how am I, I shouldn't say this because I always do, and I sound like a broken record: I'm knackered, I'm exhausted, and quite close to tears. ((tearful)) I've been too busy for about the last two months and it's got to a stage where I need to slow things down. So I really am quite exhausted.... It's when things are back-to-back, and there's no morning free anywhere to sort of ground. So yeah, I'm really conscious of it.*	I can't believe how close to tears I was. It really showed me how finely balanced everything is for me – how I am just holding things together. Also made me realise how I am balancing shoulds in so many areas and how this takes me away from connecting with others in some ways (although sharing my real feelings here has certainly bought me closer to others). This links with busyness – I just don't think it is sustainable to live at this pace! It is also deeply ironic (but predictable) that I am therefore doing a PhD which relates to mindfulness and dialogue…	Judgement Busyness Disclosure Façade Rules of the game	Rules of the game
Richard	*…So, I'm really grateful for you saying what's really going on for you and that helps me a lot. And I'm wondering what shoulds I'm carrying, and I'm wondering if there's a should that we're carrying as a group, or a number of them, about*	I really, really appreciate Richard's contribution here and more generally in the group. He is excellent at naming things and gently processing stuff and taking risks himself. There's a moment after I shared how I felt where I suppose I waited to see if the others	Risk Disclosure Rules of the game CI method – facilitator	Rules of the game

			role	
	how we need to be or whether we're doing this right. That comes into our space now, between…	confirm me or judge me – it's a scary moment. I teeter on the edge of feeling stupid, holding my breath in the hope that someone says something to relieve me. I feel such relief at Richard's response		
Paul	*And I agree with that…… thank you for sharing that. That's good.*	Disclosure has really helped us come together. It has helped me certainly – I feel relieved and more present because I feel confirmed in what I've said.	Risk Disclosure Rules of the game CI method – facilitator role	Rules of the game

This excerpt can be seen to show how Buber's key thoughts around the riskiness of 'being' play themselves out in an actual encounter between people. In it the underlying felt need to conform to assumed rules is evidenced through my first-person reflection at the start; my concern to not take up too much time; a rule I perceive that says 'facilitators should be strong'. It is also evidenced by the sheer number of 'shoulds' I refer to both to the group and in my first-person reflections.

My check-in originally had hidden my emotional state behind a façade of 'control' (although Richard in his intervention appears to have seen through this façade to some extent). My perceptions of rules has led me unconsciously to 'play the game', to seem rather than to be. I don't feel I am being inauthentic in a manipulative, calculating way as perhaps is intimated by some of Buber's comments and the literature on authentic and inauthentic leadership (for example Avolio and Gardner 2005 and Goffee and Jones 2005). Rather I am protecting myself and I also believe in some ways that I am being of more use to others by maintaining the façade (for example, by being in control, because facilitators 'should' be in control in order to be 'good').

Richard invited me to disclose more, to dissolve the façade. Of interest to the leader-follower relation is that he appears to suggest that although 'it doesn't have to be the facilitator', I, in the facilitator role could valuably 'open up the space', a suggestion referred to again in chapter 9.

I note in my first-person reflections that I 'took a deep breath' and I remember the courage it took me to speak. I was concerned about adhering to another 'load of shoulds' that emerged, (I shouldn't take up too much time talking about myself). More fundamentally I think I knew that disclosing meant taking the risk that I would 'say something stupid' or that I would 'get emotional' and I would feel that others would judge me poorly. In Buber's words, they wouldn't confirm me. Indeed at the end of my disclosure I 'teetered on the edge' waiting to see if I would be confirmed by others. The relief when I feel I am is apparent. My disclosure also appears to have had an impact on the group. This was noted by an external reviewer as important:

> *What was striking was the time it takes for people to show-up, to begin to share their private thoughts and how once someone has disclosed something personal and gritty it frees-up others.*
>
> *(Reviewer 2, 13.4.2013)*

Perhaps once I had 'disclosed something personal and gritty' it allowed such risk taking to be 'part of the rules' which in turn leads others to feel some sense of 'relief'; to be 'freed-up'. Perhaps such moments of disclosure inched us more toward 'being' than 'seeming'. In this case it does lead us into a frank conversation around the 'shoulds' we have individually and in the group. Because I felt that in that conversation we were being more open and honest I felt we came closer in dialogue.

The external reviewers all highlighted their impressions of risk as an important aspect of dialogue, for example:

> *Dialogue is stressful and scary…For dialogue to occur people need to be committed to it as it's effortful, risky (as you offer something up)…*
>
> *(Reviewer 3, 15.5.2013)*

Buber has this to say on the issue of risk taking:

"One can struggle to come to oneself – that is, to come to confidence in being. One struggles, now more successfully, now less, but never in vain, even when one thinks he is defeated. One must at times pay dearly for life lived from the being; but it is never too dear" (Buber 1965:78).

This led me to consider what we feel and do if we are 'less successful' in front of others; whether we retreat swiftly into furious façade building to protect ourselves in a pretence of perfection or whether we have the courage to face others as ourselves in acceptance that we might have done something 'wrong'.

Presented here are some first-person inquiry reflections offered to the group in meeting 2 that had emerged following a workshop I had been invited to. The workshop topic was dialogue and at one point became highly charged with a member of the group angrily confronting another facilitator. In an example of this 'struggle to come to oneself' I explain what happened for me as I chose to intervene:

> *Megan: Dialogue is all about risk…I risked a lot for intervening. I risked a lot of my fears about it, about what might happen, about how I'd be seen and I had to…just do what I thought in the moment was the right thing to do, regardless of how it was actually seen…we then talked about dialogue as not being the best way of talking about something at all, but just whatever you say, it has consequences, and you can never quite understand what those consequences are. But a lot of the labelling that I was doing, and the expectations I had upon myself, drummed up because, as well, the introduction that I was given was all about how I was doing this PhD in dialogue and I epitomised dialogue, etc. etc. and I was just like…right, oh great! ((sarcastically))…And I put so much pressure on myself and it was very inhibiting….risk is so important if real kind of conversation and real meeting and contact can happen.*
>
> *(Meeting 2)*

Here I realise that dialogue is not some sort of perfect interaction characterised by consensus. It can be challenging, passionate, 'perilous' and dangerous (which is explored in more depth in chapter 8). My experience in the workshop overwhelmed me with the realisation that dialogue, authentic being with others, meant taking risks. For me here it had meant risking being perceived, counter to the way I had been introduced, as 'rubbish at dialogue'. I had a choice whether to play it, as I perceived it, safe behind a façade or whether to intervene and risk others seeing me negatively. My

heart had been hammering but I had acted in the most genuine way I knew how to in the moment of intervention. That intervention had then been seen in all manner of different ways, and was far from 'perfect' as I explain here in my journal reflections:

Interestingly that intervention was then taken in so many different ways around the room with some seeing I was genuinely making a point, but the guy who I was addressing said he felt "squashed" and then another guy suggested a few other things I could have said which would have gone down much better apparently!… Anyway what came out of it was that dialogue isn't about getting it right. There wasn't a right or a wrong intervention – just interventions with different consequences. What was important as [my co-facilitator] pointed out was that I was authentic in it and remained then very open to listening to others' perspectives on it. Really interesting. I can shut myself right down because I am trying to make the perfect intervention. But really I need to take a risk. Dialogue in a sense IS risk. It has to be about taking a risk otherwise nothing of importance is said.

Yesterday I was doing some work for Company X – again at the beginning of the day I was a bit consumed by "I need to say something insightful, I need to be seen as the expert". It is debilitating, however I did in the end see some really interesting stuff which I could reflect back and I was able to notice when my internal dialogue was unhelpful. Confidence seems really important – but not over-confidence – still need the humility and curiosity to learn.

(Excerpt from personal journal 24/11/11)

This event really was a revelation to me. I realised that I had perhaps assumed being in dialogue would be, if not harmonious, epitomising some sort of highly 'skilled' conversation. Yet the event showed me there was not a 'right' response. People took my intervention in such a variety of ways and there wasn't much I could do to manage that. I suggest that this 'bumpiness' is the nature of dialogue, but without risk superficiality will rule. Again, it is an example where I risked being un-confirmed by the group. I fantasised I might say something and then they would all look at me incredulously and with disdain! I then realised that although this actually was unlikely, I should also not imagine that everyone might 'like' my intervention. All I could do is navigate this territory with 'the best of intentions' and be as clear as I can with others what those are.

This ability to avoid drowning in fretful self-monologue, whilst wondering whether I had 'messed up' and whether I would be confirmed following this risky intervention, was referred to in the collage session. Tony introduced a picture of Tiger Woods as

shown here. The group had different interpretations of it but Graham's thoughts echo the points made above:

Graham: There's the Tiger Woods story about if he plays a bad shot, he visualises a line in front of him, and the moment he walks across that line, that bad shot is gone. It's a natural tendency, that if you screw up the first hole, you screw up the next 17, but he actually had the technique of walking past a spot in the grass and that's gone and he starts again…

Megan: 'Drawing a line'; that's a phrase we use quite often, isn't it? I think I had a bit of an insight into what that actually means in reality! ((laughingly))

Graham: I think that's something about forgiving yourself, playing golf is like a war against self-loathing. You can finish a round of golf with a very, very low opinion of yourself. It just trains you to keep trying!

(Meeting 10)

I interpret Graham as suggesting that 'forgiving oneself' is required because of the bumpiness of dialogue that is suggested previously. This bumpiness plays out in how you perceive others perceiving you. The ability to forgive oneself, to remain curious and aspire to authenticity in the midst of facing negative judgement is paramount if I-Thou encounter is to be nurtured. This forgiveness surely must be essential given that the consequences of taking risks are never predictable, multifaceted, constructed in many different ways by those party to the encounter, so therefore rarely could be considered 'right' (or indeed 'wrong').

The CI group transcript data and my first-person data can be interpreted to illustrate just what fragile beings we often are in relating. As Paul summarises:

Paul: It takes courage but it also takes vulnerability; allowing some of yourself to be seen, some of your deeper self to be seen – in my experience when I felt in dialogue with people that's what I felt as well, I felt a kind of vulnerability on both sides. It's hard, we're both scared, but

> *it's ok … also to be able to forgive yourself – don't forget that one; because we forgive others and continue beating ourselves up. And a little bit of compassion towards yourself, self-forgiveness….otherwise you keep going until you've no skin left on your back*
>
> *(Meeting 7)*

Paul suggests that 'allowing some of yourself to be seen' necessitates making oneself 'vulnerable' and he paints the picture of human beings being 'scared'. We then proceed to 'beat ourselves up' but he emphasises that we need to give ourselves compassion. To me this suggests an inherent fragility which we as human beings attempt to protect behind a façade. This fragility is emphasised through the delicate nature with which we care what others think of us and the weariness we face when 'we have no skin left on our back'.

I suggest that this fragility may at times be present in the between space between leader and follower; it certainly infused much of the interaction between myself and members of the group whilst we were constructing leadership (particularly when I, as facilitator, was felt to be leader). Such fragility is perhaps not the preferred way of thinking about 'leaders' who are more often than not presented as hardened and relatively confident beings. That very categorisation of leaders can in turn serve to harden the need to present a façade of strength and make the risk required to 'be' different seem even more terrifying. This will be explored further in the next chapter.

The "we need more energy in the room" key incident

To illustrate some of the quality of being and seeming and to emphasise the dynamic interaction with the other themes developed in this thesis I show my five column analysis of an incident which emerged in meeting 1. It was an extremely memorable moment for me as initiator and facilitator. It was referred back to on several occasions by other members of the group however I imagine it had more impact perhaps on me than on others given my role and specific needs at that time.

As with the incident in the previous chapter, this is taken from the first meeting. It is interesting to note that two of the four key incidents I refer to in this thesis are from meeting 1. The heightened tensions when a group come together, the ambiguity of the situation and the importance placed on interactions because of the way they determine the contract of how to behave might be some underlying reasons behind this. It raises the question of whether dialogue is therefore more difficult, or more unlikely, on first meeting (although Buber gives examples of strangers meeting in dialogue suggesting it might not be quite so straightforward).

To set the scene again, we are about an hour into the meeting and I am beginning to relax just a little. Conversation is interesting and I am starting to feel tentatively confident that the group will choose to meet up again and my PhD research will be underway! I am still guarded; my heart is still beating somewhat faster than normal. I still feel as if I need to be on my 'best behaviour' in that I want to be perceived positively by the group. Just as things seemed to be going 'fine' (although, in hindsight, admittedly perhaps a little polite), Stuart, who had been quite quiet thus far spoke up. In fact, I had been aware of Stuart's presence; I sensed his low energy and I sensed that he was frustrated. I busied myself in trying to pretend this might not be the case; I was scared that I might open Pandora's Box if I questioned him which would distract the group. Naming my concerns felt too much of a risk given the carefully crafted image I was trying to portray of a 'good' facilitator. I was also genuinely unsure as to what might serve him; would he appreciate me challenging him in the group, when he didn't know others well? What was the 'right' thing to do? In the end it was Stuart himself who spoke up:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Stuart	*I've no idea if this is going to be a useful contribution, I'm just going to say how I am, which is I'm frustrated in that I've no idea what this*	This was a 'heart stopping moment' for me. Stuart here is palpably showing his frustration and I see that as a challenge – I need	Dialogue as risk – disclosure Busyness	Facade

	conversation is about really, and of course I recognise theoretically every bit of it, but what are we doing? ….why am I here because I'm too tired to be here, why am I here? … For me [this] says something about the condition of an awful lot of people … I'm not alone in this I suspect. And what's the relationship between the urge to do something useful, the tiredness and the general state of 'the world's fucked up'. I suspect these things are not disconnected. I think if we make cooperative inquiry really clearest like it is in the literature we can be angels on the pinhead. We won't be doing anything useful. ((Pauses)) What I really need to do is go to sleep….	to react, I am after all the facilitator – doesn't that mean I'm supposed to 'deal' with this situation? Make it better??! I must be seen as a good facilitator here! What was going through my mind very selfishly was 'oh God, he's going to leave, they are all going to leave! In many ways Stuart bucks the rules in the group – he is blunt, shows frustration, swears. He is exuding 'negative energy'. But he *is* being authentic. He is speaking how he is and actually it is a relief in some ways because it was probably clear to all of us that something was wrong from his body language.	Worthwhil-eness CI Method Façade Power Rules of the game	

I was overwhelmed at this point with internal dialogue revisiting all the issues this chapter has explored; how I wanted to be seen by others, how Stuart's intervention was 'against the rules', whether I dared risk responding or whether I should hope someone else would step in.

After Stuart's comments there was a brief discussion on the energy levels in the room; the group chose initially to pick out from Stuart's words that he felt 'low in energy'. At the time I felt we were 'busying' ourselves in order to recover from an intervention which we were unsure how to respond to. I then spoke up:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Megan	*….I'm certainly aware that I feel like…oh gosh, right the energy's down, I need to do something. …again it's that sense of responsibility, I feel absolutely responsible for making it work, whatever that means. ..*	Disclosure here helps me and also I think helps the group move on. I wasn't sure what to do so in the end I thought I would just admit that. Interesting that I feel absolutely responsible for it working – maybe similar to the pressure a leader puts on themselves	Judgement – facilitator role Busyness Worthwhil-eness Disclosure	Judgement
Graham	*…Can you say a bit more about your anxiety and what bad thing might happen?*			
Megan	*So there's a practical bad thing which would be that the group would decide not to meet again …. okay if we didn't meet again I'd get another group together I guess. ((laughter)) …*	Showing honesty here and disclosure Humour as important in building rapport and trust	Disclosure	Façade
Stuart	*A group that can be arsed!...*	Glad Stuart is cracking a joke – lightens his presence somewhat in the group		
Megan	*….The other side of the coin is how you would perceive me. So conscious in this whole process around energy is "oh God, if I do do something to get things more energised is that what people are expecting of me?"*	Perceptions of self and façade come up here as well as disclosure. Role theory – what I *think* are their expectations of me Perceptions of others	Disclosure. Façade. Judgement – facilitator	Façade

		role	
	And if I do do that will people think "oh, she shouldn't have done that?" So there's a lot of how I will be perceived by you, particularly as each of you in different ways kind of strike me as experts in various areas, so impostor syndrome is going on; "so you guys have done cooperative inquiry, oh God, they know stuff that I don't, so they're probably thinking "oh well, this <u>never</u> happens in the first meeting"". ((laughs))…in essence I want to be seen as a good facilitator.	as experts and how that affects my behaviour links to power dynamics.

I think this whole piece of me disclosing my vulnerability is very important in this first meeting. If I overdid it though I might end up with them thinking I have no capability. Is there is a level then of authority, of safety, which is useful? | Rules of the game | |
| Richard | *So I think when you said that the energy raised; you're revealing that to the group, yeah. It felt very positive.* | Shows importance of disclosure here to energy and connectedness in the group. I certainly feel better! | Disclosure | Façade |

I tussled with what to say and how to intervene and in the end I just decided to explain the tussle. I felt a huge relief as I did so particularly given Richard's confirming response. Throughout this excerpt there are examples of the façade I am trying to portray as a 'good facilitator'. It feels risky for me to name something that I feel is going against this facade, i.e. that I don't know what to do and I don't know how I should 'raise the energy'. I indicate how complex and instantaneous the processing is; presenting myself, considering possible responses, then wondering how those responses might impact on others' perceptions of me. Richard's comment that the energy then raised led me to think that dialogue could be invited through authentic disclosure. However I am not suggesting at all that such disclosure *inevitably* leads to dialogue. In this situation I was pleased I opened up, but in other contexts perhaps the response to such openness would not be so positive. Even though I felt real anxiety during this incident, perhaps I sensed it to be relatively 'safe' given the context of the

meeting and the impression I had of those present. In addition, although Richard responds to me others do not; I do not have any information relating to what others were actually thinking of me at that moment.

Linking to other themes in this thesis this key incident begins with Stuart reflecting on tiredness and 'the urge to do something useful' spoken of in the previous chapter. Issues of role expectations and power implications are suggested through my comments regarding my perception of others in the group who I see as experts. I feel uncomfortable and worried I'm not 'doing things right' and others in the group would do it better which I refer to, in my first-person reflections, as 'impostor syndrome' (Clance and Imes 1978). This leads to a feeling of powerlessness and dependency on others, issues which will be discussed in the next chapter. The complexity of dialogue and our navigation of what it might mean in the group and what might help (e.g. disclosure) or hinder it along with the 'bumpiness' and conflict inherent in the process are the subjects of chapter 8.

The incident illustrates how some of the themes in this thesis connect. In particular it is offered in order to illustrate the complexity of how such 'being' and 'seeming' play out in encounter between people.

Summary

Friedman, again translating Buber's thinking, summarises the issues surrounding being and seeming which the data in this chapter has, I suggest, illuminated:

> "The tendency toward seeming which mars the life of dialogue has its origin not only in the interdependence and need for confirmation that Buber has indicated, but also in the specific social structures that have arisen on this anthropological base...on the basis of our relative positions in...institutions; in the emphasis on prestige and authority which grows out of our social differentiations...in our unawareness of the extent to which our values and

attitudes arise, not from a genuine relation to truth, but from the social attitudes of the groups to which we belong" (Friedman 2005:146).

I interpret the data presented in this chapter as giving empirical backing and depth for each of Friedman's points; the way in the CI group we built façade, the need we had for confirmation, the organisational rules of the game influenced by role expectations. These issues certainly led me to try to 'seem' a certain way. This process was often unconscious and the manner in which we influence and are influenced by social processes and how we perceive others perceive us could have easily gone unexplored if we had not chosen to reflect on it.

In addition to this the data also highlight the felt sense of riskiness involved in disclosure and going against the 'rules'. It emphasises the importance of how we deal with 'messing up'; whether we retreat even further in order to hurriedly re-build our broken façade or whether we forgive ourselves and face others in the moment authentically in our being. Overall the data led me to a much greater appreciation for the complexities surrounding 'authenticity' and the fragility that appears to be common 'under the surface' for many of us. Chapter 9 discusses both these issues in more detail. In that chapter I will propose that they could have fundamental implications for leader-follower relation and the likelihood of genuine encounter particularly given role expectations relating to 'leader'.

These issues are also explored further in the next chapter in relation to concerns which Friedman alludes to in his comments; that is how power, authority and 'social differentiations' play out and affect turning towards dialogue.

CHAPTER 7: POWER AND JUDGEMENTS: Leader-follower mutuality and the issue with 'leading dialogue'

Introduction

The previous two chapters have both considered some of the assumptions that might be associated with the 'leader' role. This third chapter addresses this specifically with the question 'what was leadership in the group?' It concerns the themes of 'power' and 'judgements'. Attention is given to the implications that different constructions of 'leader' and 'leadership' might have had on dialogue in the CI meetings. It is suggested that constructions of leadership in the group were multi-faceted, dynamic and contextual which may be an important consideration for those wishing to 'lead' dialogue.

To assist this exploration, Buber's concept of 'mutuality' is considered relative to the leader-follower relation. According to Kramer, by mutuality Buber meant "the full, spontaneous, and reciprocal participation of each partner in genuine relationship" (Kramer 2003:204). There has been considerable debate in the education and therapy research fields regarding the effect that role difference might have on mutuality (see Anderson and Cissna 1997). This literature questions whether mutuality is feasible in the teacher-student and therapist-client relationships and by implication whether I-Thou dialogue can be possible. Ashman and Lawler (2008) invited leadership researchers to consider a similar question in the leader-follower context. This chapter begins to formulate a response to them which is expanded upon further in chapter 9.

This response may have repercussions on the quality of leader-follower encounter which, I suggest, have not been considered to date in the RLT literature.

This chapter begins with proposing that a 'traditional' view of leadership as positional, heroic and powerful was apparent in the group. Alternative constructions, which I suggest data show were also apparent in the group, will then be examined which portray a more processural, dynamic understanding of leadership. Finally a key incident is offered in order to examine and illustrate the connections between the themes in this chapter and those themes explored in the others and in order to illustrate a richer picture of our experience in the CI group.

The traditional view of 'leader'; still alive and well?

In chapter 5 I explained how my role as facilitator was equated frequently by members of the CI group to a leader role. I suggest therefore that our recurrent exploration of the impact that this label had on dialogue between us has interesting parallels to the issue of leader-follower dialogue more generally. Below I highlight three assumptions which I propose were evident in the data, namely that the leader is assumed to be positional, heroic and powerful. I suggest these assumptions indicate that in some instances CI members constructed 'leader' through a 'traditional', entity perspective similar to that detailed in chapter 2. In other instances, which will be described later in this chapter, the 'leader' followed more constructionist thinking. In this section however, an important question to consider in relation to RLT and theorising the space between is 'does holding this traditional view mean dialogue between leader and follower might be impossible?'

'Leader' as a positional role

The CI members tussled on a number of occasions with what leadership meant in the group. One opinion proposed was that because I was seen as 'initiator' and 'facilitator' I was therefore also seen as 'leader' as a consequence of my position and role. As quoted in chapter 5, Paul and Richard in meeting 3 claimed that:

> *Paul: You're the boss [looking to Megan]......*
>
> *Richard: ......You [Megan] are in the hierarchical position in my view.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

Being 'boss' as a result of my role was linked with leadership as Paul tries to explain:

> *Paul: I'm trying to distinguish you [Megan] as a facilitator, and as the leader of this group....or are we actually searching for that role in you, trying to assign you the role of leader and you maybe trying to resist that; "I was just trying to be part of the team here", but you're not. Actually you're not.*
>
> *(Meeting 5)*

Paul suggests that the group might be 'searching' for the leader role in me although he is not specific in this excerpt what that role or that need would entail. He perceives I am unwilling to step into this 'leader' role (an issue further explored below). He unequivocally states that I, as facilitator, 'am not part of the team'. Position seems to Paul to intimate inevitable separation and difference which, I suggest, would have consequences on the nature of the leader-follower relation.

Kate, when reflecting back on our CI journey, similarly connects my role with leadership:

> *Kate: You [Megan] very clearly played an important role in convening, to some extent agenda setting, summarising, kind of working the space to give it boundaries and really shaped and held. Yes so that's a really important piece of leadership that you were doing.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

My role encompassed 'convening' and 'to some extent setting the agenda' and Kate saw this as leadership. She also points towards some important aspects of the 'leader'

role such as 'working the space' and 'giving it boundaries' which will be considered further in chapter 9.

Whether I was regarded by others in the group as 'leader' because of my role is an important question to address as there are a number of assumptions that can be associated with having a 'leader' role. On analysing the CI data I suggest that two assumptions commonly identified with the 'leader' role could be interpreted to have existed (which were explored *theoretically* in Chapter 2 but are shown here empirically). These are that leaders are heroic (in particular all-knowing) and that they have power *over* others in the relationship. Both these assumptions potentially could be seen to restrict mutuality and the "full, spontaneous, and reciprocal participation" (Kramer 2003:204) of both leader and follower and they will be explored next.

'Leader' as hero

One macro-discourse related to leaders mentioned in previous chapters connects leaders with heroism. Chapter 2 described how some elements in the leadership literature have portrayed individual 'leaders' as capable of single-handedly eliciting results and driving performance as well as being 'visionaries', 'charismatic' and exceptional communicators. I interpret the CI transcripts as showing some evidence of this heroic image both through stories that the CI group brought into the meetings relating to their own experiences and through their judgments about my role. Richard and Tony reflect on this issue in meeting 6:

> *Richard: …The model of leadership most of us carry is still a heroic one: it's still a 'leader in charge' model…*
>
> *Tony: I'm struck by leadership being oppressive actually…it's about the expectation of others and this sense of leaders being heroic…I sort of arrived [in my organisation] and set about leading this massive change process. So, I appeared to many to be the hero. I probably revelled in that for a period of time….I do feel the weight of expectation that somehow I'm supposed to make it all better, when actually it's ((laughing)) really, really hard to make it all better, because there's so much that we can't control in our world…*

The 'leader as hero' 'model' according to Richard and Tony appears to be firmly established in organisational life. Tony alludes to a paradox; leadership is 'oppressive' particularly because he couldn't live up to others' expectations and yet he 'revelled' in it for a while, a point he came back to later in the meeting:

> *Tony:…Leadership is such an aphrodisiac…through that fog you make bad decisions because what you don't do is listen…you think it's important that you give the answer straight away.*
>
> *(Meeting 6)*

Tony seems to be asserting that if leadership engenders an egotistical 'fog', bad decisions might be made because the leader might not listen to others, thinking they have the capability and power to do it themselves. Additionally the leader might find themselves attempting to live up to the high expectations others have placed on them. His comments suggest that the implications of such heroic leadership are complex. Others' expectations are in one way exhausting and worrying for the 'leader'. At the same time however they might be quite gratifying, conveying onto the 'leader' a sense of importance and honour. Tony acknowledges though that it is impossible for him to meet the unrealistic assumptions placed on him to 'make everything better' because 'there's so much he can't control'. This in turn might imply consequences on the leader-follower relation as follower dependence is replaced potentially with disappointment and the heroic image of the leader is threatened. Tony alludes to this further:

> *Tony:… The ability to share leadership becomes more difficult, because people kind of go "well that's why you're the chief executive"….Leadership becomes quite isolating because people are saying "well that's what you're paid for chum. When it's all going pear-shaped you've positioned yourself knowingly or otherwise as the leader, the hero, the person with broad-shoulders; well I'm going to take a step back now"….A natural reaction is to say "ok then", so I work harder.*
>
> *(Meeting 6)*

Tony appears to feel that the role of 'CEO' is isolating because others choose to step back when things go 'pear shaped'. A consequence Tony refers to in his experience is

that he works harder in order to try to live up to the heroic expectations placed upon him. Perhaps this gives an insight into one reason behind the busyness referred to in chapter 5.

Throughout these excerpts there appears to be a deep-seated assumption that the leader knows, or certainly should know, the answer. I consider this in relation to my experience as 'leader' in the CI group:

> *Megan: Knowing that I was in a group of a few people very experienced in either leadership roles or facilitation…that made it difficult for me to think of myself as leader when I thought I'm in no way superior to the people in the room, and in fact I know less, so therefore how does leadership fit if you feel that you know less?...I think it's the whole picture of leader being right…; the leader knowing, leadership equals knowing, and ((laughingly)) I rarely think I know much at all!*
>
> *(Meeting 6)*

The previous chapter detailed my desire to construct a façade of 'good facilitator'. The excerpt above indicates that one assumption regarding 'good' of which I had been unconscious until this point was that it meant I needed to know more than others. I found it disconcerting to think that others in the group knew more and it led me to consider what is 'left' of leadership if the leader knows less than others? I therefore show that one construct of leadership I am holding is that of 'leader as superior in knowledge'.

The comments above lead me to suggest that heroism implies a very one-sided leader-follower relationship. As Tony mentioned, followers might 'step back'. It implies dependence of one party upon the other. Tony and I both allude to the presence of a distracting self-obsessed inner-monologue for the leader. This could be focused on egotistical preoccupations to do with pride at being 'leader' but also on living up to the often unrealistic assumptions that go with such a title. This links to the drive to 'seem' that was referred to in the previous chapter.

Buber refers obliquely to aspects covered in this section in characteristically emotive language saying:

"I know of "leaders" who with their grip not only cast into confusion the plasma of the growing human being but also disintegrate it radically, so that it can no longer be moulded. They relish this power of their influence, and at the same time deceive themselves and their herd into imagining they are moulders of youthful souls" (Buber 2002:35).

In relation to the CI transcript data these words seem perhaps a little severe in relation to heroic leaders with a lack of consideration of the leader's desire to live up to projections from followers. Buber points to leaders excessively manipulating others and using power dangerously. This leads me to consider how our construction of 'power' might infuse the heroic assumptions placed upon positional leaders. This subject is explored next.

'Leader' as possessing power

The perception and experience of power in the CI group was a point of extensive debate. In some of the conversations group members connected the leader role (and my role) with a particular and important source of power. One interaction in the third meeting humorously illustrates this. The conversation had turned to how we might construct notions of power in our group:

Graham: The question that was going through my mind was what do we mean when we're talking about power in a group like this? If we're talking about a boardroom or work I can immediately understand why power is important. I don't know what it means in a group with this intention.

Tony: Can I be excused momentarily ((looks to Megan))

Megan: Yeah, yeah, go for it. You don't need to ask me!

((Tony exits the room))

> *Paul: That's a lovely demonstration of power in this group! Tony asked ((nods to Megan)) to go to the loo. So where's the power?!.....I meant that not quite jokingly. I said you're the boss ((looks to Megan)). I actually meant some of that.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

I suggest Graham is proposing that it is clearer why power is important in the boardroom because hierarchical roles imply certain power dynamics. In the CI group, which aspires to 'equality', Graham implies power dynamics are less obviously defined by difference in role. Just as he suggests this might be the case Tony appears to ask me, as 'leader', to be excused. Paul perceives this to imply that, perhaps similar to the boardroom, my role as 'boss' has consequent power implications which are 'demonstrated' in the group. Reflecting back on this incident it is possible of course that Tony turned to me, knowing I was facilitator posing his intention to 'be excused' as a question out of politeness. Whatever actually drove Tony to do this was not explored; Tony had left the room and we had moved to a different subject on his return. Paul however clearly believes this indicates a power difference resulting from hierarchical role with me as 'boss' possessing more power than others. An implication appears to be that I 'call the shots' and others need to ask my permission to do things. This implies decidedly one-sided relations. It again begs the question, if such deep seated difference is inherent even in a CI group comprising experienced senior executives seeking 'equality', how can mutuality ever be possible in any formal hierarchical leader-follower situation?

Buber advises that "if genuine dialogue is to arise, everyone who takes part in it must bring himself into it. And that also means that he must be willing on each occasion to say what is really in his mind about the subject of the conversation" (2002:85). If I am perceived to possess power *over* another individual (as the last example suggests) then perhaps the other may feel inhibited to 'bring themselves' into genuine dialogue. An inference is that their voice possesses less influence than mine as the leader and so the relationship is one-sided. This is now explored in more depth.

The impossibility of leader-follower dialogue?

I interpret the CI data as showing that the traditional view of leader as heroic and superior in terms of possessing more power than others was indicated in our CI group conversations. This suggests an unequal relationship between leader and follower and could be seen to imply a social limitation on mutuality and dialogue.

The entrenched depth of these heroic assumptions leads me to reflect whether it is ever possible to separate oneself from them if one has a 'leader' title:

> *Megan:…Can you ever be un-heroic when the word 'leader' is used? I don't think it's possible….all this writing that's happening at the moment on shared, distributed, pluralistic, servant leadership, it's like 'you've got the word 'leader' in there mate, and you can't get away from the heroic part of that!'*
>
> *(Meeting 6)*

I allude to possible implications for more recent leadership theory which focuses essentially on a portrayal of more 'equal' leader and follower roles. A question I pose is whether our connection between leadership and heroism is just so engrained that any theory using the term 'leader' would find suggesting an alternative kind of dynamic between leader and follower problematic if not impossible. Of course my question is posed within a specific 'Western' national context; in other contexts the understanding of leadership differs (see Wang et al. 2013). Whilst recognising the situated nature of my comments, the implications of them on RLT will be considered further in chapter 9.

Similarly Paul reflects that whilst there is an 'initiator' role then, from his perspective, 'equality' is impossible:

> *Paul: I think it's a great intention to have equality in the room but there never is in terms of the initiator role.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

What neither Paul nor I address is whether power inequality *inevitably* leads to the impossibility of dialogue. Does the construction of leader as heroic and powerful mean

necessarily that dialogue is infeasible? Richard has this to say in relation to this question:

> *Richard: I think there's something there about role. And again I don't want to either/or it; I think we've got to have roles in human organisations. [It's] when the roles and the words that come with the roles take over from the actual connection too far that denies us the possibility. So it's your role as facilitator that got in the way in the sense of you making contact; our roles as intellectual masturbators in that ((laughingly)) first session, how that gets in the way of us bonding.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Richard appears to consider role *is* important, although he doesn't want to 'either/or it', which I take to mean that he recognises the complexity of the implications which relate to role, power and dialogue. He seems to suggest that it is when the roles and 'the words that come with the roles' distract us away from 'actual conversation' that problems could arise. Specifically it might mean that we are 'denied the possibility' of contact. Indeed he considers that my role as facilitator might have 'got in the way' of 'making contact'. This suggests a very important consequence for leader-follower relation; hierarchical role might 'deny' the possibility of '*contact*'. What Richard means specifically by contact is unclear. At the heart of this thesis and the contribution it makes to RLT is the consideration of 'contact' by which *I* mean our sense of relational quality; the sense of our intersubjective connection. Richard may or may not mean this in his words. However he indicates that his sense of 'contact' and 'actual connection' is relevant to 'bonding' and, I imagine, therefore to dialogue.

Richard also indicates that it isn't *just* the hierarchical role that might 'get in the way'. Other more nebulous 'roles' that we take on will also influence 'contact'. His comment about members' roles as 'intellectual masturbators' in the first session references back to the rule of 'having to be clever' and the façade of 'being clever' discussed in the previous chapter. He appears to consider these 'roles' as similarly problematic to 'bonding'. This would imply added complexity to the issue of role and power considered so far. In other excerpts shown in this thesis Richard implies he believes we had moments of dialogue in the CI group. I suggest that if he believes this is possible despite all the different perceived roles in between us then one could not simply

propose that a traditional leader-follower relation was automatically destined to be transactional in nature.

Further adding to the complexity, it appears, from my interpretation of the data, that as well as there being different 'roles' in the group, there were different constructions of 'leader'. These different constructions could suggest strikingly different implications for the possibilities of dialogue and will be discussed next.

An alternative view of 'leader'

I perceive that there were other additional and alternative views of leadership in the CI group which are more in tune with the constructionist view in relational leadership. Namely that leadership is a process; individuals might be perceived as leaders in a variety of different ways by different people in a particular moment and leadership is developed and illustrated between people in a dynamic way. Illuminating this alternative view is a contribution of this thesis which will be discussed further in chapter 9. The implications that this view of leadership have for the possibilities of mutuality and dialogue could be extensive and contrary to those described in the previous section. They are discussed below:

Leader*ship* rather than 'leader'

In meeting 3, as I personally was interested in this question of leadership and mutuality, I specifically ask the group:

> *Megan: What is leadership in this group? What does it mean – if anything?*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

Tony responds using the word mutuality (it is perhaps important to note that Tony is unfamiliar with Buber's thinking and is therefore unlikely to be using the term because

he feels he should be connecting it to theory. I had also not used it to describe my thinking at this stage):

> *Tony: For me it's about mutuality…in this group leadership seems to move around and no-one seems to be overtly looking to take it or have that mantle or whatever.*
>
> *Megan: You say it moves around, I agree, but what do you see as moments of leadership?*
>
> *Tony: When the conversation changes with dialogue. For me when dialogue changes ((murmuring of agreement))….in terms of leadership this is getting away from the hundreds of definitions out there…that's how I see it in this group.*
>
> *Richard: That's a really good definition of it in this group.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

Tony chose to respond to my question not with the 'leadership equates to role' perspective outlined in the previous section. He chose a definition which he sees as perhaps unusual and 'getting away from the hundreds of definitions out there'. He suggests leadership 'moves around the group' and this signals 'mutuality'. He suggests leadership is identified when 'conversation changes'. I take this to mean that anyone in the group might demonstrate leadership when they influence others to change the direction of the conversation. He connects leadership very explicitly with dialogue; leadership is signalled when 'dialogue changes'. This might be seen to lend further support to bringing the two fields of leadership and dialogue together as this thesis does.

In the final meeting I again ask members to reflect on this question:

> *Megan: Recall our time together, what was leadership in this group, if anything? What did you see? Did you experience leadership in this group and if so, how? Why?*
>
> *Paul: Have you got another question? ((laughingly))*
>
> *Kate: Well I think I've seen leadership at different times in different ways…I think there were times when leadership was taken in the midst of conversation by people who stepped into a space and kind of named it and then shaped what then followed for the next whatever. I mean Richard you did that several times. I guess the incident right at the beginning when you*

Kate appears to back-up Tony's 'definition' of leadership here suggesting that 'leadership was taken in the midst of conversation' when people 'shaped' what followed. She gives a specific example which was detailed in the '60 emails' key incident in chapter 5. So leadership appears to have been attributed to those who changed the direction of conversation and influenced the nature of it. Tony and Richard concur with this:

> *Tony: To change the character of the conversation.*
>
> *Richard: It's a nice definition I like that; leadership as the change of character of the conversation.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Seen in this way, as Kate intimates, every member of the group has enacted leadership in this form. Suddenly, therefore, I see the whole concept of leadership as opening up and every member in the group might be seen in this light as a 'leader' and by implication a 'follower'.

A further 'definition' of leadership is provided in meeting 10:

> *Megan: I have a question that looms large in my brain most days: what would it be like to be in dialogue, or what is dialogue? Because when I hold that question it changes my practice.*
>
> *Richard: That's your leadership for me during this process; your dedication to the question which has inspired me at times.*
>
> *Paul: That's a very nice definition of leadership; it's holding somebody's attention for something that is important….very different to what is out there in terms of leadership.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

Richard and Paul suggest that another 'nice' definition of leadership is 'holding somebody's attention for something that is important'. An inference again might be that any one of us in the group might do this; it might not be essentially tied to a particular hierarchical role.

In light of this the leader-follower relation becomes considerably more complex. Paul alludes to this above when he humorously asks "do you have another question?" I interpret him to be suggesting that the response to 'what is leadership' is far from easy or obvious. Kate mentions that she has 'seen leadership at different times in different ways'. This would imply any study of leadership would have to account for the multitude of constructions and how they play out dynamically between people. In many ways this could be seen to complicate leadership research considerably. I propose that Richard illustrates this very well:

> *Richard: It's interesting how when you describe all those things [about leadership] it can become everything couldn't it? And it strikes me that leadership, a bit like authenticity, is something that's created in our world as a kind of a thing which has some substance to it. Because obviously if you didn't send an email [about] when the meeting is going to be then nothing would happen. But then at another level [leadership] kind of falls apart a bit when you really try and poke it very hard in this kind of setting. So part of me has been well, you know, "there's no leadership" and part of me said, "oh don't be so silly, of course there has been". So I'm kind of aware that what this process has done for me has kind of made it more fuzzy at the edges as an idea for us and that has felt healthy.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Richard appears to tussle with the concept of leadership in the CI group. On the one hand he says 'of course there has been leadership' and we wouldn't have got together if there wasn't (in a reference back to my role as leader and convenor of the meetings). On the other hand 'there is no leadership' in this sort of setting and you 'poke it', in other words you inquire into it and it seems to become 'fuzzy' as a concept. Perhaps by this Richard means it is less clear-cut; it is not a simple case of looking for one obvious 'leader', suddenly everyone might lead. If everyone leads then 'everything' becomes leadership and the value of the term disintegrates. However rather than being particularly concerned about this 'fuzziness' he finds it 'healthy'. We did not inquire further into the meaning of his words. I interpret him as indicating that he feels a more processural and fuzzy view of leadership might have more healthy connotations than the heroic model previously discussed. I might even suggest, (whilst recognising this is indeed an inference I am making), that it is a more healthy perspective because

connection and dialogue might become more feasible when those in relation are freed from the power inequalities implied by static leader-follower constructs.

Paul responds to Richard's comments suggesting yet another conceptualisation of leadership in the CI group:

> *Paul: …For me it's a shared leadership…everybody as and whenever it happens for them puts something in there…I don't feel pressurised to invest in here but I also have implicit permission to change something which is implicit permission to be [a leader].*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

Here Paul focuses on 'shared leadership'. Paul implies that 'everybody' has 'implicit permission to be a leader'. I interpret his words as suggesting that as soon as the possibility of shared leadership is entertained the 'leader-follower' relationship changes markedly. In this construction, leader and follower might 'swap' their positions any moment.

I suggest that an implication of the comments in this section might be that it is possible to hold different constructions of 'leader' at the same moment meaning multiple 'leaders' exist at one time in one person's mind. This could also mean that different people within the group might perceive different individuals to be leading and following in the same moment; one person's leader might be another person's follower. Perhaps in this situation individuals could be perceived as more 'equal' in terms of their positional power as a result, or at least power might be viewed as a dynamic attribute (as discussed in the next section).

Buber's sparse use in his writing of the term 'leader' was confined to describing positional roles and therefore he did not entertain the more optimistic implications of such a constructionist view on mutuality. He also, in tune with many other writers on the subject in the education and therapy fields, seemed to infer the possibility of an external objective construction of roles such as 'therapist' and 'client'. I suggest that the CI data would highlight the importance of examining the construction of roles from *inside* relation as opposed to searching for an agreed generalised view. For example, I was unaware of the construction of 'leadership as changing the character of the

conversation' before this emerged from reflection upon our relating within the CI group. It was not an 'objective' description found elsewhere and it held such markedly different implications from the 'leader is hierarchical position' construction which perhaps would have otherwise been assumed upon us externally. The methods I have used have given me access to this *construction from the inside*. First-person and co-operative inquiry (in its full form, see chapter 3) have not been used within RLT to date and the insight obtained through their use points to a contribution that this thesis makes. This will be discussed further in chapter 9.

Power as dynamic and complex

When the CI members considered leader as a hierarchical position, power appeared to be viewed as a somewhat static possession. For example, when Tony asked to be excused, Paul asked 'where is the power?' and intimated that it lay with me. Power and leadership appeared to be intertwined here as it did when I felt others were more expert than me and I questioned as a result what leadership could mean without a sense of 'superiority'.

The CI transcripts however also show how members perceived power in a more complex and dynamic manner. Firstly there was recognition that many sources of power were perceived amongst us in addition to the rather simplistic hierarchical source and these were all playing out in every moment. These included gender, age, physical appearance, sexuality, experience and intellect. For example:

> *Kate: I think it carries a lot of authority to be an older man. And I think the other side of that is – I'm pointing to you [Megan] now – if you're a younger woman, what's leadership for a younger woman? Authority for a younger woman is a whole other ball game.*
>
> *Megan: …I suppose I see my age as less powerful, and I put power on older people.*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

Kate suggests that assumptions regarding power might often be associated with age and with gender. She suggests that power is less easily associated with a 'younger

woman'. This muddies the simplistic inequality presented above. If age and gender also convey (and detract) power this suggests that there could be others in the group who 'had' power rather than it being confined to me as leader. *If* being a leader is associated with those possessing power then suddenly the leader role is opened up to others in the group in different ways on account of these various sources of power. Additionally, my role as 'leader' may be less static if my powerful position is shaken by aspects which are seen to make me less powerful. In a single moment I might be judged by some as powerful through my role, but less powerful through my gender and my age. This may complicate the assignment of an unproblematic and singular 'leader' role.

Aspects of these power dynamics might be more or less visible. Taking the issue of gender further, in meeting 3 I was the only female group member present. I comment:

> *Megan: I'm really curious about forms of power that don't often enter my mind but might be important to others, like gender for example.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

At the time I didn't feel that I was conscious of the effect that my and others' assumptions regarding gender might have on our relationships. After this conversation there were a couple of brief remarks and then we moved on to thinking about other forms of power. In the next meeting, meeting 4, there were two female members present, Kate and I. An excerpt of group reflection is shown below:

> *Paul: It's interesting last time you [Megan] were the only female in the group, and even though we spoke about power, the issue of gender in power didn't come up. So I'm just curious. I'm just noticing that we've got two women in the group, and the conversation does arise.*
>
> *Megan: I mentioned it last meeting.*
>
> *Paul: And we ignored it.*
>
> *Megan: Well, it didn't go anywhere.*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

Paul wonders firstly whether there is a connection between there being a higher female presence in the group and the issue of gender arising. I remind him that it had arisen in the previous meeting but it 'didn't go anywhere'. The inference in my words is that perhaps it didn't go anywhere because the interest in reflecting on it had not been there in meeting 3; perhaps being predominantly a male group we had chosen not to talk about gender as it wasn't foregrounded. Indeed in meeting 3 we had gone on to talk about other forms of power which arguably might have foregrounded more for those present, such as physical size and ethnicity.

An interpretation I have of this exchange is that members of the group may have seen power in different ways; some might have been very conscious of certain power dynamics surrounding for example gender, others might have noticed age more, still others might have been more concerned with power related to formal roles. Possibly members were conscious of a few of these at a moment in time, possibly they became aware of some and less aware of others dynamically, depending in part on the flow of conversation and the context within which they found themselves.

Adding to the complexity, the same form of power might be viewed very differently from different perspectives. For example, some of the examples previously given in this chapter point to others believing I possessed heightened power due to my role. *I* however often did not feel that way at all:

> *Megan: I feel dependent on your help, and I don't like being dependent, that feels really scary…It feels like quite a risky relationship, it doesn't feel mutual, so there's a high risk of that relationship breaking I suppose…I don't feel like I've got any control, limited control, whereas from your perspective it might feel the opposite.*
>
> *(Meeting 8)*

In this way I suggest power is shown to be particularly subjective influenced by one's experience and the assumptions one makes in that situation. In relation to leadership, assumptions that there is 'a leader' who is the powerful one and followers are in a subservient position might be thrown into question. The situation is very much more multi-faceted if, as I show above, 'the leader' perceives followers as more powerful for

various reasons, or if leadership is not simply equated to position, or if one entertains the complexity of differing constructions of power.

The possibility of leader-follower dialogue?

I suggest that if one focuses on the *process* of leadership, where the 'leader' role moves and is perceived differently by different people, there could be more scope for the mutuality Buber says is so important in genuine dialogue. One barrier to leader-follower dialogue which is implied from Buber's work is that of static power inequalities resulting through differences in role. I am suggesting that if power is constructed in a multifaceted dynamic manner where different people might be seen as powerful or less powerful in complex ways, the situation might be less clear cut.

Thus far in this section the leader-follower relation has not been viewed or experienced as a simplistic purposive working relationship in the way Buber and other authors might be seen to portray the therapist-client and teacher-student relation. In response to Ashman and Lawler's questions (2008), this CI data appear to suggest that leader-follower dialogue could be influenced by how we construct leadership and power dynamically in the moment from within relation. This subject will be explored thoroughly in chapter 9.

Finally in this section, the possibility of leader-follower dialogue might also be influenced by another issue. Even if 'leader' is equated to role and even if that person is consequently attributed power, dialogue could be influenced by how that power and leadership is 'used'. This is explained by Paul's response to Tony:

Tony: So how does this power issue affect dialogue? Because I always had a sense there is an equality about dialogue. And you put power in there, and all of a sudden it's more hierarchical.

Paul: Actually I'm not sure I agree. I think you can have a good dialogue even if there's a big power differential but it depends on what you do with power:…[For example, when I met Nelson Mandela] we had a short conversation…and I felt as if there was nobody else in the

> *room for that moment. But at the same time I was totally aware of the man's huge and*
> *immense personal power. And I think what he did, he made me feel worthy in the moment.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

I interpret Paul's words as suggesting that if a 'leader' manages to 'make the other feel worthy in the moment' then there is the potential for mitigating power inequalities. I see Paul as countering an assumption which has run through much of the excerpts and analysis thus far that power is 'bad' for dialogue. As Paul says, rather than seeing it so simplistically, perhaps what is of interest is 'what one does with the power' that one is seen to 'possess'. How though is a leader to 'make another feel worthy'?

Paul provides no clear response to this. In searching the data for a response however I came across Richard's comment in meeting 3:

> *Richard: The issue for me I suppose is what enables my expression of myself....if you're in a*
> *hierarchical position as you are in my view, [looks to Megan], creating structures for me to do*
> *that, then power isn't bad, it's good, it's helpful, it's helping me be me.*
>
> *(Meeting 3)*

I suggest Richard might mean that the leader might be in a position to orchestrate 'spaces' in which others might, in a link back to the previous chapter, feel able to 'be themselves'. Perhaps this is one way to help others 'feel worthy'. Again however Richard provides no neat description of how one 'creates structures' or indeed what 'helping me be me' might look like. He does however refer to the importance of this to him again in meeting 8 giving another clue:

> *Richard: That's a huge tension in the role of the leader in creating a space, but also in letting go*
> *of the space, you know? When to hold on to it and when to let go of it.*
>
> *(Meeting 8)*

I see him now as indicating that part of 'creating a space' is the ability to convene a group but then to be able to give up specific control of that group. In this sense leadership is enacted perhaps in two movements. First in inviting those to meet, creating the logistics for them to do that, perhaps encouraging the atmosphere in which people might feel able to share their views. Second, and linking to a previous

'definition' of leadership, in stepping back to let others 'change the character of the conversation' as they wish.

One further indication of a leadership act which might use power in order to further dialogue could be seen to emerge from this interaction in meeting 11:

> *Kate: To be vulnerable as a powerful person in the room is different to being vulnerable as a powerless person in the room.*
>
> *Paul: That allows you to be open more often, if you have the power.*
>
> *Graham: If you can get them to believe that not knowing is actually an achievement rather than a failure…((laughter))*
>
> *Paul: Well it's really about power, because if you have no power and you say [you don't know] they think you're a prick. And if you have lots of power, you're a guru!*
>
> *Megan:…Yes amazing wisdom! If you haven't got the power and the credibility then it doesn't give you the license to say [you don't know].*
>
> *(Meeting 11)*

I interpret this again as linking back to issues developed in the previous chapter where disclosure was suggested as potentially furthering dialogue. The CI members' comments could be seen to throw a more critical perspective onto this suggestion. They seem to be saying that disclosure, such as the admission that one doesn't know the answer, might be easier to do by someone who is seen to possess power in a relation. This is in contrast to the heroic image painted earlier in the chapter which suggests rather that leaders build a façade of omnipotence which they might dare not dismantle. In comments which could have far reaching implications on thinking regarding authentic leadership, Paul suggests that one might be able to be more authentic and admit one doesn't know if one is powerful. Humorously it is suggested that such an admission might even raise you to guru status, as long as others hold you with a certain level of esteem.

This section has developed an understanding of leadership as constructed in different, complex ways. Similarly power has been portrayed as dynamic and multifaceted. These

issues are presented, entwined with other themes introduced in this thesis, in the key incident below.

The "steering or rowing the boat?" key incident

In meeting 10, when we explored dialogue through collage, one picture was put forward which generated more discussion than any other and it also enabled us to talk in the group about aspects of leadership and power that had not been previously articulated. It illustrates some of the issues examined above in relation to my role, the subjectivity surrounding leadership and the complexities of power.

The picture is shown here. It is of a rowing boat with the cox, presumed in the meeting to be a young female, sitting facing a group of large male rowers in a boat.

It is important before I introduce the analysis of the conversation that ensued to help you to picture the scene as it has fascinating relevance as detailed and developed by Richard.

Door

Richard Graham

Tony Paul

Floor covered with magazines

Metaplan board with CI journey

Megan (sitting on the floor)

Metaplan board with collage

Window
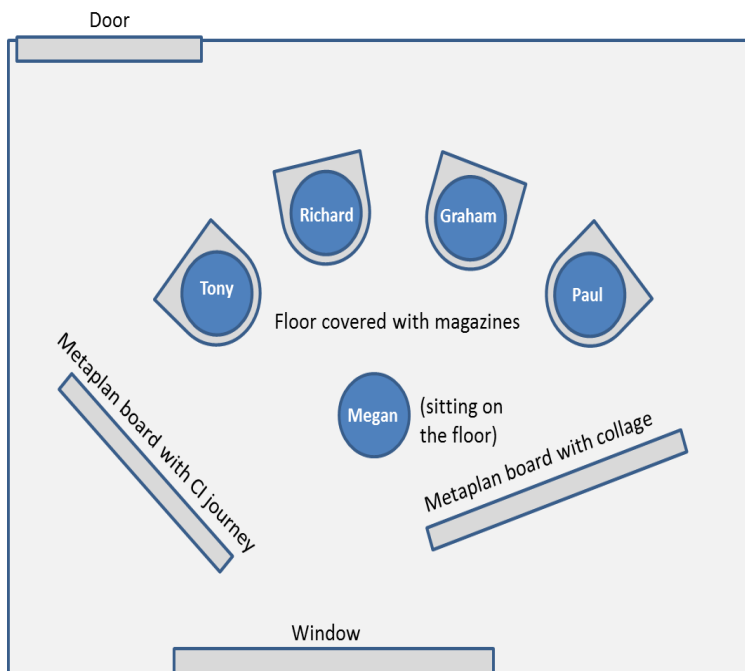
We are sat in a meeting room at Ashridge and as the collage work evolved I sat on the floor to look at the magazines. I remained on the floor but the other members of the group, the four men (the two other women were unable to make the session), sat back on chairs facing towards me as shown.

The conversation evolved thus, with Paul explaining why he had chosen the picture above:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Paul	I just like the picture. It was about power; the cox really shouting at them while they're rowing….	I'm uncomfortable – the picture doesn't seem "dialogic" to me – one person shouting at others?? What is this saying about leadership in this group???	Power Gender Dialogue	Power
Tony	…. What I thought was it was symbolic of the group. Megan is the only person who can see into the future; all the rowers are going backwards. And then one person in that group can actually see……	I'm finding this really amusing in terms of me being able to see into the future! Not at all how I have felt! Reminds me of the 'impostor syndrome' where leaders are assumed to know the answer whilst what they feel inside is "oh god when are they going to find out I don't have a clue!" I'm	Power Judgement – facilitator role	Power

		feeling very uncomfortable with the way power is being conveyed and I can't quite put my finger on why.		
Megan	… You may have felt like I knew the direction; it didn't feel like that!	Such a contrast! Such subjective views of leadership. The heroic view rearing its head….I'm exasperated - I've been trying to share leadership!	Role Power	Power

I suggest this excerpt shows just how perceptions and assumptions of leadership might have differed between us at times (although we seemed to agree on other occasions on different constructions as explained previously in this chapter). In this example there appears to be an assumption, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, that the leader (me) is somewhat heroic, knowing the direction in which we are headed. And yet I don't feel that way at all. Maybe I sense a pressure to live up to expectations (again mentioned previously) and that is one reason why I am feeling uncomfortable. In a link to the rules examined in the last chapter, I have also been conscious that 'CI should aspire to equality'. This image suddenly seems to bury that possibility. With that burial I wondered how it could be possible for dialogue to happen in such apparently unequal circumstances. The roles we have even in the CI group seem insurmountable in this moment to me.

These were not the only interpretations of the picture however and I was increasingly aware of feeling uncomfortable at the portrayal of the 'little girl cox'. Whilst I began to wrestle with how to articulate this, Richard assisted, taking a risk, which appeared to me to encourage further openness in the group:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Richard	…There's a shadow in there though, because I'm wondering in view of that picture or that interpretation – how do you ((looks to Megan)) feel about that? The cox in the rowing boat?	Absolutely there's a shadow – I am pleased Richard has brought it up. I'm mainly focused at this stage on the picture as a representation of CI, although I sense there is might be more discomfort deeper down….	Power Role CI Method	Power
Megan	Well, what immediately went through my mind is "that's an interesting interpretation of a *cooperative* inquiry!" …because I should be [rowing] in the boat too…. I thought it looked very gendered to me: I'm a little girl at the front and then there's the big guys in the boat…	This is a great example of how a picture opens up conversation in a different way. We discover other stuff through images (presentational knowing)	CI method Power Gender Role expectat-ion	Power
Graham	… She's the head.	There it again – facilitator = leader….grrrr. I really resist this.	Role expectat-ion	Power
Megan	Being a facilitator; no matter how much you try and be in the boat rowing with everybody else, you're regarded as different; you will have a different role.	I get the feeling that some literature on CI by Heron and Reason gives the impression that everyone is in the boat rowing together; all 'equal.' Yet this is not the perception that is coming across now. I start worrying, not for the first time, that I'm 'doing it all wrong' yet I'm confused as to how one might reach the aspiration of equality in CI.	Role expectat-ion CI method Power	Judge-ment

I voice my exasperation around how the suggestion of clear role differential ('she's the head') might be in opposition to the aspiration of 'equality' in CI, which is the reason I am so 'resistant' to it. I think, in hindsight, I spent an inordinate amount of time in the group trying 'get rid' of my power. This I think was driven primarily by an assumption that 'that's what I should do in CI' and also by my own insecurities about taking authority in relation to others whom I saw as 'more expert than me' in many ways, an issue discussed previously in this chapter.

I notice in my first-person reflections that I am still feeling uncomfortable but can't quite yet identify that sense. Richard again provides an observation:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Richard	Like where you're sitting right now.	We are mirroring the seating positions in the room – me on the floor, smaller, lower down, the guys in chairs facing me, above me	Power Gender	Power
Paul	That's exactly what I was thinking.			
Richard	We're all looking that way, you're looking that way. You're a woman with four big blokes. ((Laughter))	Quite 'spooky' how we are physically representing the picture.	Power Gender	

I find it fascinating and somewhat disconcerting how we are mirroring the picture in the room. I find myself at this point becoming acutely aware of gender difference in a way that I had not really done, at least consciously, up to this point. I remember having a very distinct sense that we were teetering on the edge of talking about previously 'unspeakable' issues. This leads me to reflect on how I 'knew' something in my body but it had not formulated itself in my thoughts at this point. This importance of such sensing is referred to more in chapter 8.

Richard once again is the person who is prepared to take a risk. By doing so I suggest he goes against unarticulated 'rules of the game' which might have previously ruled the topic which is about to emerge 'off limits':

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Megan	And the gender piece certainly occurred to me…I was aware about the two people who aren't here are the two women…	Just start to feel now that we might go into hitherto unsaid territory around gender – but I can't put my finger on what exactly and why it feels 'risky' territory. I also note that I find myself wishing to some degree that the other women were present to give their views. I don't feel unsafe in any way, but I do sense a wish in some ways for 'more people on my side' – an interesting phrase.	Gender Power	Power
Richard	There is a shadow here which goes towards the edge a bit. I'm just going to say it anyway. [A colleague of mine] is intrigued by why we're involved; there's been a bit of banter between us; she sees it in a gendered way; there's been a bit of a joke between us. That picture…was really ringing a bell that that's how it might be seen by the outside world, in a very undialogic…	I love this about Richard – he will 'go towards the edge a bit' – he role models dialogue as risk. As soon as he says he is going towards the edge a bit I get interested and curious; know I will learn something but I also feel tentative about what might happen. I am fascinated about the strength of 'unspeakables' even in a group that surely *should* be able to speak more openly about them by now….	Dialogue as risk Power Gender Sexuality Rules of the game	Power
Tony	There is a truth in that …..Megan's cute	Ouch. It is uncomfortable to hear these words – it feels like a very taboo subject. But at the same	Power	Power

		time I am also so pleased we are touching on something that the rules of the game previously said were 'unspeakable'. I'm interested in how this 'attribute' is powerful on the one hand but not on the other ('cute' has connotations of not being taken seriously to me). I experience a whole host of sensations in response to the word 'cute' – some positive; 'cool, they think I'm cute', through to 'bloody hell, that is patronising' and everything in between. I feel like I'm holding my breath, wondering where the conversation will go. I feel extremely present though.	Gender Sexuality Physica-lity Rules of the game	
Richard	Right.			
Paul	I felt the same. People have said to me, "we know why you keep coming back to see Megan". Those things, it's a very sexist piece that's put in front of us.	What an insight into 'outside' conversations! I hadn't clocked this. Again, feeling a real complex mix of annoyance, powerlessness and yet slight pride all at the same time. I kind of sense the whole feminist debate hollering around me. I *should* be very annoyed by this shouldn't I? I feel like I should rise up against such labelling!	Power Gender Sexuality	Power

The conversation above, by mentioning issues related to gender, appearance and sexuality, in my mind went against previous 'rules of the game'. I suggest Richard recognises this with his comment about 'going to the edge'. What we didn't explore is why such issues are so 'unspeakable'. As my first-person comments reveal, I am wondering how such issues ever get inquired into if it has taken this much effort and

time to surface this in a group which has been meeting for over a year and through which I think we became relatively trusting towards each other and close.

Having stated in meeting 3, in a comment shown previously in this chapter, that gender was not an issue I was particularly conscious of, I am given a thorough wake-up call through this exchange. I am led to consider how gender and specifically perceptions of physical appearance and attractiveness have affected members' presence in the group. Acquaintances of Richard and Paul seem to have suggested that they are influenced in their actions considerably by that. It is difficult to assess whether this was the case as they do not address it directly in the exchange.

Tony, in his short phrase 'Megan's cute', summarises his interpretation of the point Richard is making. The moment just following this comment was intensely 'noisy' for me; a myriad of feelings and thoughts went through me. My felt sense in the moment is what I particularly recall. The words 'hit me'; I felt 'shaken' by them by which I mean I felt very awake, very alert and present suddenly. I felt embarrassment at the attention and yet I felt exhilarated by the riskiness that I perceived in the conversation. I was intensely absorbed and excited about speaking about issues which were previously left unspoken. I think in a way I was connecting such riskiness and openness with dialogue. At that moment I felt in dialogue.

However alongside this intense curiosity I was tussling with making sense of the phrase 'cute'. As I mention in my first-person reflection, I felt uncomfortable with it in a way that I might not have done so much with the word 'attractive'. I associated 'cute' with a sense of 'little girl'; I felt it patronising. Part of my struggle I think was due to the lack of clarity around what the other members meant by the term and what connotations it held for *them*. I was finding the language opened up more questions than it answered. I was struggling, and still am, with the questions 'what might that mean for our relation?' 'What implications for dialogue are there of one party being seen as 'cute'?' We partially respond to these questions in the next part of the conversation:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Richard	It's a truth, here isn't it? In the field around this.			
Tony	Surely dialogue is not so pure and untainted that it's not affected by all sorts of things?	Is dialogue 'pure' and 'unaffected' by such 'tainted' concepts as sexuality, gender and power??? Of course not! Have I been searching for an idealistic definition of dialogue? I can certainly say for sure though that I haven't seen any extant literature exploring 'how sexuality infuses dialogue!!'	Power Gender Sexuality Dialogue	Dialogue
Megan	So, that's the shadow...dialogue is not maybe the magical kind of realising connection that Buber was talking about, because we are surrounded by gender, sexuality, power, desire, seduction. And even in the moment of flow in a conversation that's still there.	Aha! I am excited by this insight!	Dialogue Power	Dialogue

The insight I and others appear to draw from this episode is that 'dialogue is not so pure' and 'not the magical kind of realising connection'. We suggest that in conversation issues such as 'sexuality, power, desire, seduction' might be inherent in the space between. Dialogue then might be encountered *with* all that murkiness, and despite it, not in the *absence* of it which I had perhaps assumed previously. This reiterates again the 'bumpiness' of dialogue referred to in the last chapter. It implies that one might need to understand how such issues might be present in relation and

work towards turning to the other even *with* them. This is explored further in the next chapter.

I suggest that this episode shows treating power and constructions of leadership un-problematically is a gross misrepresentation of what occurs in the between space. For example, power is neither 'good' nor 'bad' and the leadership role neither 'positive' nor 'negative'. Indeed the phrase 'cute' is neither 'good' nor 'bad'. The terms themselves are constructed in such differing and often transient ways. This incredible complexity brings me back to having to 'hang on' to the seemingly straightforward advice of keeping an inquiring mind and accepting that the construction of leadership inevitably impacts relating, but in ways that are breathtakingly intricate. Taking interest in this intricacy and risking inquiring into it with others in the moment rather than artificially simplifying and reducing it seems a potentially productive way to forward our understanding of leader-follower relating.

Summary

This chapter has raised the question of whether mutuality is possible between leader and follower. The data I would suggest illustrate different perspectives on the nature of this relationship which have a bearing upon mutuality. If 'leader' is regarded as a specific, static, all-powerful role then it might be regarded in Buber's terms as 'purposive' and mutuality could be problematic. If the focus is rather upon leadership, the complexities of power and the dynamic manner in which perspectives of 'leader' and 'follower' emerge in interactions then mutuality and dialogue are perhaps, on the face of it, more possible. However this implies that status and role difference lead to power inequality which in turn makes dialogue difficult. This straightforward linear logic is deceptive. I interpret the data as indicating that status and role difference are only one aspect of power which is constructed in multifaceted ways. Furthermore power inequality might, rather than exclude opportunities to meet in dialogue, *invite* it depending on how that power is used. For example a powerful positional leader might

use their influence to create spaces for dialogue and role model behaviours which could help to create a conducive environment such as listening and supporting others.

I suggest there are no causal links here and no circumstances which, if replicated, will ensure dialogue between leader and follower. I offer no simple response to Ashman and Lawler's request for an example of leader-follower dialogue that might 'show that it is possible'. Constructions of role undoubtedly play an important part in affecting perceptions of mutuality and yet mutuality is so much more complex than simply a question of role and title. Furthermore the data presented in this chapter also shows that the construction of leadership as a shared phenomenon still does not alleviate the complexities of 'shadow' aspects of the relational space such as power and sexuality.

My experience in the CI group was that despite this complexity, and with the issues mentioned in this chapter infusing every moment between us, encountering each other in dialogue *was* possible. As this chapter has focused on questions of the construction of leadership, the next chapter focuses on conveying more clearly the meaning we made of 'dialogue' and the implications on the leader-follower relation.

CHAPTER 8: DIALOGUE: the sense of relational encounter in the complexity of a moment

Introduction

The previous three chapters have used three different concepts Buber identified as fundamental to dialogue; turning, being rather than seeming and mutuality, as lenses to analyse the data. The themes surrounding these three areas; presence, façade, rules of the game, judgements, role expectations and power, emerged clearly to me through my interpretation of the transcription data. The final theme, 'definition of dialogue', represented in this chapter, I find less easy to articulate and identify. It concerns the *quality* of dialogue. It concerns the sense that we made of the term 'dialogue' individually and as a group and it concerns the challenge of conveying this felt experience of being in dialogue to others. It concerns also how dialogue emerges in the midst of, and despite, the complexity of a moment. I suggest that the analysis in this chapter might invite RLT to further theorise the *quality* of the leader-follower between space. It might do this through examining the sense of encounter between leader and follower; an area little examined to date.

The difficulty in conveying our sense of dialogue is discussed first and is contrasted with the relative ease of conveying one aspect of what we felt dialogue *wasn't*, namely a 'consumer product'. Aspects of our understanding of dialogue are detailed which leads into representations of dialogue as 'locking horns' and as a certain sense of quality connection which might be momentary and fleeting. Finally a key incident called the 'Newton' incident is provided, not just to represent the points in this

chapter, but as a kind of 'finale' which brings together the themes from all four of the findings chapters.

Dialogue; it's difficult to convey

In meeting 4 I ask the group what their understanding of dialogue is. Richard sums up the difficulty we faced in trying to articulate a response:

> *Richard: …We created something between us in some way…that you could call dialogue. But how do I represent that? Because one of the things that's really struck me about this is…it's been surprisingly powerful …. and how difficult it is to explain…*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

Richard here suggests that 'we created something between us…that you could call dialogue'. So he appears to sense that we met in dialogue at times in the group but when asked to describe the knowing that comes out of such an encounter propositionally he struggles saying 'it is difficult to explain'. In meeting 10 he expands on this:

> *Richard: …One of the things I've learnt….I don't have a problem anymore with the fact that dialogue is hard to define on paper…because how can it be defined other than in the moment of dialogue? There's a whole literature around the notion of local, timely, specific knowledge…So that kind of universal definition is part of the problem of a lack of understanding of the <u>doing</u> of it….this group is never the same partly because it's always different people, because it's always in a different place. So dialogue becomes a new thing. I'm totally happy with that.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

He implies that perhaps earlier in our process he found our inability to articulate dialogue problematic but by meeting 10 he 'doesn't have a problem anymore' with its elusiveness. He then appears to suggest that one reason for this impreciseness is the momentary nature of dialogue. 'Different people' and 'different place' means our understanding of dialogue is 'local, timely and specific'. He suggests that a 'universal definition' of dialogue is consequently misguided, driven by 'a lack of understanding of the doing it'. I take him to mean that a general definition cannot account for the

subjective and constructed nature of dialogue which would alter with context. In the same meeting I concur with many of his points:

> *Megan: I started this process thinking that I might add…well, there are writers out there who say dialogue is a murky and contested concept and I thought 'no worries; that's where I'll contribute; I'll de-murkify it!'…But trying to formulate a <u>general</u> definition is a) pointless and b) unhelpful. My understanding of dialogue changes all the time and will continue to change through and past the PhD. <u>And</u>, yet it's quite an interesting and helpful process to pause in the moment and say what it looks like now – which will be different tomorrow.*
>
> *Graham:…I'm sensing we're trying to close it down now, which might be the right thing to do …but this will continue to be a really ambiguous issue.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

The writers I refer to here in relation to dialogue as a 'murky concept' are Deetz and Simpson (2004:152). I illustrate an important aspect of my learning through the CI journey was to realise the dynamic nature of my understanding of dialogue. I recognise that my 'definition' of dialogue is evolving and Graham appears to agree, saying despite our attempts to 'close it down', dialogue 'will continue to be a really ambiguous issue'. I suggest however that articulation of our thoughts at this moment might still be helpful to our understanding and learning.

I see members' comments as suggesting that they saw 'dialogue' to be a constructed term under a constant process of renewal, changing according to the context one was in. If this is the case it would lend support to the constructionist points of view detailed in chapter 2 (advocated for example by Shotter 2006). Interestingly the extant literature tends to focus on either advocating a single definition of dialogue (e.g. Bohm 1996) or several alternative definitions that one should choose from (e.g. Deetz and Simpson 2004). Following my interpretation of the data from the CI group I suggest that these writers dismiss the subjective, ambiguous and *dynamic* nature of the term 'dialogue'. It is perhaps a point that should be made more vigorously in the literature on dialogue. This suggestion will be referred to further in the next chapter.

In meeting 10 Paul continued the conversation and another interesting point emerged; that there is something 'lost' in the process of moving from experience to description

on paper, or, as Heron (1996) would term it, moving from the experiential to propositional:

> *Paul: If you don't see [dialogue] like [a dynamic ambiguous term] what you're doing is you're reducing it to something that you can put on paper, but it's not the thing itself because that is, by definition, impossible….you lose the richness in order to put pen to paper.*
>
> *Graham:…The challenge you've [Megan] got is you've got to portray something to the outside world; what [dialogue] is, and in doing that you will inevitably lose what this is. I think that's a really important thing.*
>
> *Tony:…You somehow have to paint a picture without words…*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

I see the comments above as representing fundamental implications for the attempts at theorising dialogue in the academic literature. If dialogue, when written about, 'is not the thing itself', if indeed it is 'impossible' to represent the 'richness' of dialogue when you 'put pen to paper' and if it is 'inevitable' when you do so that you 'lose what this is' then a number of questions present themselves. How might we convey experiences of dialogue? How might we represent the sense of quality of dialogic encounter? In this thesis I suggest inquiries into leader-follower dialogue and encounter might inform RLT efforts to theorise leader-follower relating. Is the difficulty in conveying dialogue, that the CI members point to, one reason why RLT to date has been so scant in exploring issues of 'quality' and 'encounter' between leader and follower?

Precisely because of this difficulty in conveying dialogue I have employed the use of stories and key incidents and, resonating with Tony's words above, pictures, in an attempt to express the 'richness' of our experience. Whilst tussling with how to verbalise and represent our experiences of dialogue and perhaps because of this tussle, I notice from the transcript data that we seemed to spend more time on describing what dialogue *wasn't* rather than what it was. This is explored next.

Dialogue is not a 'consumer product'

Over half of the pictures in the collage work in meeting 10 featured aspects of what dialogue was *not*. For example some pictures which have been shown in the previous three chapters illustrate façade; the Beckhams smiling falsely for the camera or the man holding himself, showing his strength on the rings. By examining what dialogue wasn't, a key feature emerged which extends the interpretation of Buber's concept of dialogue, has implications for 'leaders' wishing to encourage dialogue and hasn't been considered in depth thus far in this thesis. Richard alludes to this feature in the very first meeting when he commented on what he felt was a common use of the term 'dialogue':

> *Richard: I've had experience of working with people who say that they do dialogue; "we'll come and do dialogue for you" ((laughs)) and I've only ever seen them <u>not</u> do dialogue so that this thing called dialogue becomes a sort of….((trails off))*
>
> *Barbara: A consumer product?*
>
> *Richard: Yes, but a consumer product you never get to see…*
>
> <div align="right">*(Meeting 1)*</div>

Richard here appears to be sceptical that dialogue could be engineered or replicated like a product. This would imply you can't 'will' (to use Buber's phrase explained in chapter 2) dialogue. My interpretation of comments in meeting 7 complements this understanding. We had been discussing the 'messiness' of dialogue and how we could never assume or predict that we would encounter another in dialogue:

> *Paul: So, we're never going to get to the seven steps of dialogue then?*
>
> *Richard: Absolutely. Tweet … 'the five excellent ways of getting dialogue in your life!'*
>
> *Paul: When I came back from [holiday] there was a poster there in one of these wonderful shops that said: 'enlightenment in 24 hours or your money back'. ((Laughter)) I went inside and wanted to buy the poster but they didn't want to sell it to me.*
>
> <div align="right">*(Meeting 7)*</div>

Both Paul and Richard seem to be humorously making the point that there are no 'steps' or 'excellent ways' to 'get dialogue in your life'. There is no process that can get you to dialogue. Richard and Paul appear to think the concept ridiculous and Paul likens it to the absurdness of a poster offering 'enlightenment in 24 hours'.

This bore relevance to me experientially at a recent workshop I was attending on mindfulness. Colleagues sent round a suggested agenda to those participating and one of the points on the agenda read:

Aspirations and Opportunities – (Megan – could you facilitate this as a dialogue?)
(Excerpt of email 19/6/2013)

I had little idea what they meant; facilitating the discussion 'as a dialogue'. How would I do that single-handedly? My first reaction was anxiety; 'they all know I'm researching dialogue, I need to be seen as capable in this area; I'd better make sure there's dialogue!' This kind of reaction was discussed in chapter 6. Then, when I really thought about the assumptions behind the words I realised that to me dialogue was not something I could come and 'do' to others. What my colleague was asking was in my mind simply impossible. In my response via email I briefly commented:

….And facilitating the session as a dialogue....hmmm..... I'm happy to loosely facilitate a discussion and it will be up to all of us if it emerges as dialogue!!
(Excerpt of email 20/6/2013)

I explained this view more fully in the workshop. I realised that a key issue with seeing dialogue as a consumer product was that the mutuality, the joint responsibility for turning to each other in dialogue, was absent. This is not to say my colleagues were wrong in their use of the term dialogue; it was simply different to my own understanding. The different constructions of 'dialogue' held very different implications for how I should act as facilitator and, in my mind, were likely to hold different implications for how we would meet and encounter each other. I suggest the parallel with the discussion on the construction of 'leader' in the last chapter is clear. Being able to discuss what we each meant and then come to an understanding on what was needed in that context was very useful.

I have noticed in my research how many times dialogue is represented, particularly in the popular press, as a kind of consumer product and I refer to this in chapter 2. The data here suggest that this is only one way of looking at it and to some, dialogue might mean much more than this and require significantly different orientation in order to create the space for it to emerge, as Buber comments "how could the life of dialogue be demanded? There is no ordering of dialogue" (2002:40). Extrapolating this into the leader-follower context then it might be reasonable to suggest that a leader might not be able to simply 'have a dialogue' with followers. I suggest that the agency that such intent implies is problematic. The 'leader' and 'follower' relate in a much more complex context where agency alone is unlikely to 'be enough'. This was identified by an external reviewer:

> *Dialogue frustrates people addicted to personal agency because in dialogue you are explicitly dependent on others.*
>
> *(Reviewer 2, 13.4.2013)*

These comments link back to chapter 6 where dialogue was associated with risk as well as chapter 7 which examined power. A positional leader's traditional power and agency are questioned in dialogue; they cannot simply use their 'will' to engage others.

Furthermore, RLT's description of the leader-follower relation as 'dialogic' could be constructed in vastly different ways. The 'leader' and 'follower' therefore might be 'willing' different things which, I suggest, needs to be accounted for.

Dialogue as 'locking horns'

A point I notice from my interpretation of the transcripts relates to the recognition by a number of the group that our dialogue had not always been 'nice', in other words, gentle, polite and harmonious. Rather group members suggested there was an important aspect of risk, challenge, difference of opinion and conflict inherent in our dialogue. Richard uses the term 'crunchy':

> *Richard: Sometimes we've done, I think, some of the best dialogue when it hasn't always been harmonious, when it's been a little bit crunchy.*
>
> *Paul: You're spoiling for a fight, are you? ((laughter))*
>
> *Richard: Well, I'm not, no, but I ... well, maybe I am! ((laughter))*
>
> *Megan: What makes it crunchy? Do you mean different sorts of opinions, or challenges? What's crunchy? I know what you mean, but ... ((laughs))*
>
> *Richard: So, help me? What do you think I mean?*
>
> *Megan: Well, I think it's around naming something that's happening, or naming your reaction to what somebody has said that's not harmonious, that doesn't go with the flow.*
>
> *Richard:…. I think the lead came from people starting to name some of the elephants in the room, some of the deeper, crunchy, I don't know how to …! ((laughs))*
>
> *(Meeting 5)*

Richard explicitly states that dialogue in the group has sometimes come when 'it's been a little bit crunchy'. He seems to then find it difficult to articulate what he means. I suggest the meaning that I make of the word 'crunchy'; situations where we haven't gone with the flow and when 'we've named something'. As I read this I am reminded of one of our 'definitions' of leadership detailed in the last chapter, namely that leadership was enacted when someone 'changed the character of a conversation' and when 'conversation changes with dialogue'. These constructions of leadership and dialogue seem to me to be complimentary. It raises the question to me of how much do I think leadership is about an orientation towards dialogue? Might encountering others or inviting others into dialogue be seen as an act of leadership? These questions invite research into dialogue to inform leadership theory (and vice versa), a proposal which is apparent throughout my thesis.

Richard revisited 'crunchiness' in meeting 10. Linking back to Tony's words in the previous section relating to the use of pictures to convey dialogue, it was through the collage exercise that Richard was able to articulate the meaning of his phrase further. The picture he chose below shows two reindeer locking horns:

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Richard explained:

> *Richard: For me the reindeer are in dialogue. Do you know what I mean?*
>
> *Megan: ….How are they in dialogue with you, Richard?*
>
> *Richard: Well, I think they both know exactly what the meaning is of what they're doing and they're very closely connected in that meaning, and it's inherent as well, it's not conceptualised, it's absolutely visceral and physical. And also it reminded me of some of the key moments in our own journey of being when we've actually taken a risk to...*
>
> *Megan: Lock horns.*
>
> *Tony: Yeah, lock horns a bit.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

Richard speaks of an 'inherent', 'not conceptualised', 'close' connection relating to 'the meaning of what they are doing'. Looking back on these words his specific meaning is difficult to interpret. The meaning *I* place on his words is that those in dialogue are, in the moment of their contact, present to each other. They are both intuitively aware of their inherent connection. Their awareness is visceral; their knowingness is corporeal. Examining Richard's later words regarding 'locking horns', I take this to mean that those encountering each other in dialogue are not shying away from their differences;

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in some ways perhaps it is through the unreserved baring of that difference that 'true meeting' (to use Buber's phrase) becomes possible.

Highlighting this 'locking horns' as an integral aspect of dialogue might be of particular interest when looking at dialogue in an organisational context, and between 'leader' and 'follower'. The 'normative interaction ideal' that Deetz and Simpson (2004) refer to suggests that some constructions of dialogue could privilege empathising, being polite and finding common ground together. This in turn might lead people to form 'rules of the game', similar to those that were identified in the CI group and illustrated in Chapter 6, suggesting people must be 'nice' to each other and must at all costs not be 'offensive'. A consequence then could be that individuals are reticent in speaking their mind; issues are avoided even though they are important to voice in order to invite genuine dialogue.

If the presence of difference and conflict is entertained, then a question to organisational 'leaders' might be how they create safe spaces for such difference of opinion where individuals can confirm the other's right to see things differently and approach such difference with a curiosity similar to that proposed in the previous chapter; where they might "delight... in the difference that makes our encounter with the other rich with possibility" (Deetz and Simpson 2004:152). This reflects a question posed by an external reviewer:

> *Is dialogue about working with difference while seeking connection (not inclusion or exclusion, victory or defeat, conversion or reconversion)?*
>
> *(Reviewer 3, 15.5.2013)*

This balancing act between 'locking horns' while 'seeking connection' will be further explored in the next chapter, along with other implications for leaders.

Dialogue as a *sense* of the *quality* of connection in the present moment

In this section's discussion various attempts to articulate the experience of being in dialogue are presented starting with this by Paul and Richard in meeting 4:

> *Paul: It's a sense of being able to truly express whatever…it's a sense of you switching off so you're just here. And you meet, you genuinely meet folk, and I'm with you.*
>
> *Megan: I felt – the word that is in my mind is alive. I felt really alive.*
>
> *Richard:…Being in a good dialogue is about really being able to connect with people. I notice how I feel present in relation to how connected I feel with everybody….it goes in and out…*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

Reading this transcript the words which really stand out for me because of the number of times they are mentioned are 'sense' and 'feel'. This leads me to suggest, in resonance with my interpretation of the locking horns picture above, that moments of dialogue might be at least as much visceral and corporeal as cognitive. I suggest we might *feel* ourselves to be in dialogue just as we might also think ourselves to be 'in good conversation'.

The other words which I am drawn to in the excerpt are 'present', 'genuinely meet' and 'connected'. Paul appears to suggest the need to be 'just here' and being 'with' the other. Richard's words I see as similarly highlighting 'connecting' with others in the 'present'. This appears to intimate a sense of quality, a depth of meeting and connection which I see as resonating with the way in which Buber describes I-Thou encounter.

In meeting 5, 7 and 11 Kate's articulation appears to pick up on these ideas:

> *Kate: …. It's something about quality actually…it's something about how we might have some quality of connection to each other.*
>
> *(Meeting 5)*

> *Kate: It's not really about words; it's about an experience or quality of experience….I don't know how to explore dialogue other than in relation to each other here.*
>
> *(Meeting 7)*

> *Kate: Well I suppose if people really brought their whole selves into being with each other…they would almost inevitably, it would lead them to disentangling themselves from something that is deeply, deeply mechanistic, alienating, objectifying.*
>
> *(Meeting 11)*

Again 'quality' and 'connection' appear to be fundamental aspects of dialogue. In the final excerpt Kate appears to extend her application of these ideas. She claims that if people could just 'bring their whole selves into being' (which I see as connecting with the emphasis on sensing, feeling and presence mentioned above) then they might 'disentangle' or escape from what is perhaps the norm of 'deeply mechanistic, alienating, objectification'. I think Tony is reflecting on a similar point in meeting 7:

> *Tony: I wonder if you get to a point of dialogue where. ..you can have discussions about the organisation, but in a very different way to the mechanistic, the budget, the strategy, the action plan, the blah, blah. I come away from some of our meetings sometimes – I chair most of them so a lot of it is down to me, I'm sure – feeling quite empty at the end of it. We've got a lot of work done, we've all worked hard, but you just feel a bit kind of like ((sighs)), you know.*
>
> *(Meeting 7)*

In my interpretation of Tony's words I pick up an aspect of sadness, perhaps tiredness at the 'blah blah' that characterises the majority of organisational meetings and leads him to feel 'empty' in his experience. He seems to wonder, almost wistfully, whether dialogue might mean such discussions would be experienced in a 'different way'.

I read Kate and Tony's comments as fundamental responses to the 'why?' of dialogue; dialogue is seen as a possible response to the alienation and objectification perhaps commonly experienced in organisations. I see their comments also as really attuning to Buber's concerns relating to what he felt to be the overwhelmingly transactional, I-It manner of relating in our everyday life, specifically in organisational life:

> "Is [factory and office] irrevocably an alien place? Must henceforth through all the world's ages, the life of the being which is yoked to business be divided in

two, into alien "work" and home "recovery"?...Dear opponent, does the longing already stir in the depths…to fill business with the life of dialogue?" (Buber 2002:42-43).

I will revisit these concerns regarding organisational alienation in the next chapter.

I also suggest that the emphasis of the excerpts above seem to invite RLT scholars to research the *sense of quality connection* in order to conceptualise and theorise the between space more thoroughly. This is also revisited in the next chapter.

Turning to my first-person data on these subjects, an invitation to an action research workshop at Ashridge in 2012 led me to try to articulate my own sense of dialogue into words. I anticipated I would be asked what I personally meant and understood by the term. Relatively easily I wrote the following in my journal:

> *Dialogue: An encounter in the present moment, where there is an honouring of personhood and intent to learn and create.*
>
> *(Excerpt from journal 23/11/12)*

Looking at these words now I would perhaps alter them slightly to:

> *Dialogue: A sensed quality of mutual encounter in the present moment, where there is an honouring of personhood and intent to confirm the other, learn and create.*

Unsurprisingly this concurs strongly with Buber's description of dialogue; after all I was drawn to his work initially because it resonated with my experience.

Members of the CI group had different levels of familiarity with Buber's work and we didn't try to specifically apply or study his work together, yet I suggest that the excerpts shown might indicate that we did agree broadly with his focus on the quality of our encounter with others and on our sense of the depth of our connection. Given the insufficient and intensely theoretical manner in which Buber's work is currently used in the organisational or leadership literature (for example Ashman and Lawler 2008), the empirical examination in this thesis could offer a significant contribution. A feature of the data though I suggest is the way it intertwines the concepts that Buber

spoke of with the incredible complexities of the processes which are occurring in the between space such as power, busyness, expectations and façade. I suggest given this complexity, encountering the other is possible in 'moments' and this fleeting possibility is explored in the next section.

The simplicity of connection in the complexity of a moment

So far in this chapter I have detailed the difficulties in conveying dialogue, the process of determining what it isn't and the tentative common understanding that grew in the group around the term and our experiences of it which, I suggest, resonate with Buber's meaning. I have shown how the group leant away from an idealistic notion of dialogue to recognise 'crunchiness', in other words the conflict, inherent in dialogue. The tensions between the comforting descriptive words 'connection', 'presence', 'genuine' and 'authentic' and the more uncomfortable words such as 'crunchiness', 'conflict' and 'difference' and the 'slooshing' around of issues such as power and busyness will be examined in this section. In particular I explore how, perhaps because of the 'noisiness' between us in terms of power, judgements, anxieties etc. which have been outlined in previous chapters, we experienced dialogue as fleeting.

In meeting 4 Kate reflects on a discussion we had been having in the meeting regarding power, judgements of others and our levels of busyness:

> *Kate: How curious it is really that it takes this much attention and effort for human beings to talk about the stuff that we actually carry around with us all the time. All of the stuff we've talked about in the last hour we have on our shoulders, in our heads, in our bodies, every second of every day really, apart from when you're asleep. And then we dream it…Yet we so seldom talk about it, even in leadership roles and educative roles. I think that is just very amazing…so much of what we talk about is a kind of ritualistic rehearsal of normality around which something else is going on entirely.*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

I see Kate as highlighting the cacophony of issues, the complexity of 'all the stuff' which is present and 'carried around by us', in 'our bodies' as well as 'in our heads' 'all

the time'. She points to a 'noisiness' that is never ceasing; even when we are asleep 'we dream it'. Given that our lives seem so infused with such things it is 'very amazing' that we don't talk about them. She implies that even as 'leaders' and teachers in 'educative roles' we still don't give voice to some of these issues. Disclosure, described as inviting dialogue in chapter 6, seems, according to Kate's words to be a rare occurrence. In what I see as a link to the 'rules of the game' mentioned in chapter 6, she describes the 'ritualistic rehearsal of normality' in 'so much of what we talk about', underneath which 'something else is going on entirely'. I see Kate as painting a picture of 'meetings' which provide little opportunity for turning to the other in dialogue.

Barbara and I refer to this complexity in 'each moment' in meeting 5 when we were reflecting on a key incident which is detailed at the end of this chapter which I have called 'the Newton incident'. Barbara appears to suggest that despite the surrounding complexity, there are possibilities for dialogue evident in each moment of relating:

> *Barbara: … How much different possibilities are present in each moment and really fertile possibilities that you don't necessarily make the choice for and how much the possibilities we choose are influenced by what we privilege or what our constructed view of reality is…that incident just showed me how important to have these times where we just kind of slow down and unpack our behaviour and then see right between us here now what is going on all the time in our normal situation…*
>
> *Megan: One of the biggest things I've learnt over this process is a real insight into how much stuff is going on for everybody in a Nano second in terms of being able to hold a hundred judgements, assessments, possibilities of speaking, misunderstandings and the complexity of how that all plays out in a moment.*
>
> *(Meeting 5)*

I interpret Barbara as proposing that there are 'fertile opportunities' for dialogue 'in each moment' but we often don't 'make the choice' to explore them. She seems to suggest that we are influenced in our choices of what we notice by our personal perspectives on 'reality'. I suggest an example of this might be that if we were absorbed in the need for achieving a specific outcome from a meeting and felt the pressure of time on us we might choose not to speak of power dynamics which could affect our decision making. And yet Barbara points to the importance of 'slowing

down' and 'unpacking' some of the complexity going on 'right between us'. In the excerpt she is not clear why this is important; given the context of our conversations I assume her to mean that it is important in order to invite dialogue and fuller involvement and participation of those present (see the detail of the incident at the end of the chapter).

Graham seems to offer a slightly different suggestion in meeting 10, that despite the complex issues surrounding us, we might somehow 'put them on one side' (rather than necessarily 'unpack' them as Barbara infers) to meet in dialogue:

> *Graham: There's equality in the moment… that bounded time and place, you forget that someone's a director and someone's a receptionist or whatever… you're not denying that, but you're just kind of checking it in at the door….there's all kind of stuff in [this CI group]….but the good bits are probably when we just managed to just put that on one side. It's not to forget or deny it but just kind of put it somewhere over there.*
>
> *(Meeting 10)*

What I take of particular interest from Graham's comments is his focus on 'moments' which pass in a 'bounded time and place'. It leads me again to a picture of dialogue as momentary and fleeting. In the same meeting two pictures were chosen by Paul and Tony which I suggest illustrate this idea:
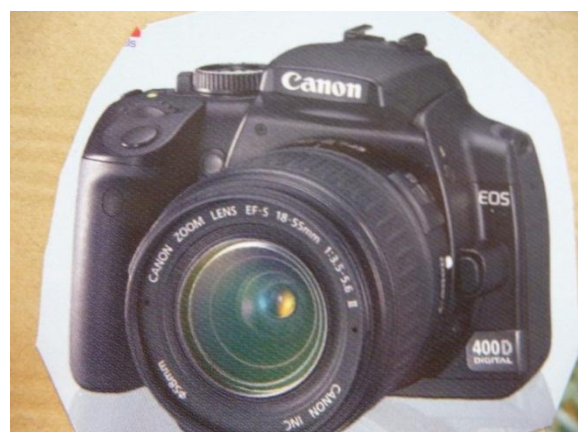
Our reflection on these pictures was as follows:

> *Paul: The watches…I think there's a time element to it…how long can we do this?..*

> *Tony: The other thing with the camera for me is it's a snapshot.*
>
> *Paul: Yes.*
>
> *Tony: A snapshot in time, captures a moment in time.*
>
> *Megan: You mean that you can't maintain dialogue?*
>
> *Paul: …. It's time limited in a way.*
>
> <div align="right">*(Meeting 10)*</div>

Paul asks 'how long can we do this?' I interpret him to be suggesting that dialogue and the turning process it requires, the quality of connection that is inherent in dialogue cannot be maintained for long periods. Only for a moment can we perhaps leave the complex world of power, judgements, emotion, self-dialogue to in order to encounter the other.

Through my first person inquiry exploring presentational knowing, I notice an image constantly returning to me. It is an image which seems to sum up my understanding now of dialogue and our experiences in the CI group of moments of dialogue. The image is of a group of people meeting around the boardroom table, similar to that shown here; a picture that is so familiar in an organisational setting.

The people round the table are there to make decisions together and their organisation and the society they are part of might increasingly need them to think well together. They need to discuss the difficult issues they face and come to the best decision they are capable of. Perhaps they would need to listen to each other and support each other to think creatively in order to do this. And yet, despite the smiles, the politeness, the façade, there is in fact a dynamic, unspoken reality between them encompassing the issues considered in the previous chapters; power, anxiety for example. It is as if there is an unseen swirling sea of issues between them; the elephants in the room that are never referred to because the rules of the game prohibit it. The sea crashes around the table as depicted in the second picture and distracts the individuals disabling them from meeting in dialogue and thinking well together.

And yet despite this there exists the possibility of meeting across this sea. It is not that the sea disappears; those issues of which the sea comprises are always present between people, but perhaps the sea calms momentarily, just enough to allow people to see each other and meet in dialogue as the third picture attempts to portray.

Then just as soon as the sea has calmed and eyes have met in dialogic encounter, it rears again and so the moment of dialogue, when one experiences the other as Thou, passes.

Perhaps Buber would have concurred with my images. He identified with the possibility of "breaking through from the status of the dully-tempered disagreeableness, obstinacy, and contraryness in which the man, whom I pluck at random out of the tumult, is living and out of which he can and at times does break through" (2002:41). Again, I see his words here as implying the momentary, fleeting nature of dialogic encounter.

Dialogue in the CI group in some ways supports an important characteristic alluded to by Rogers and Buber in their famous 1957 'dialogue' (see Anderson and Cissna 1997 and Cissna and Anderson 1994); its momentary nature. But on deeper analysis, the reasons I highlight here for dialogue being momentary encounter are slightly different to those presented by them. Buber and Rogers mainly used the term in relation to issues of mutuality raised through role differences in 'purposive' relationships. I suggest wider issues, which relate more broadly to the complexities of mutuality

between people, are also relevant. This complexity I now illustrate through a key incident below.

The 'Newton' incident

I have coined a key incident that occurred in meeting 5 the 'Newton' incident. It has been one of the most referred to encounters in the group, possibly the most referred to. Aspects of all of the themes described in previous chapters are contained within it and for this reason it is offered here as a kind of 'finale'. But it is more than this; it demonstrates the complexity of the moment and what we learnt as a group when we slowed down and explored what was happening in that moment. Through our exploration I suggest we were able to turn to each other, be with each other mutually. This did not mean that I felt that the complexity magically disappeared as I shall show.

Six of us attended meeting 5. We sat, as usual, in a circle of chairs without a table as shown in the picture.
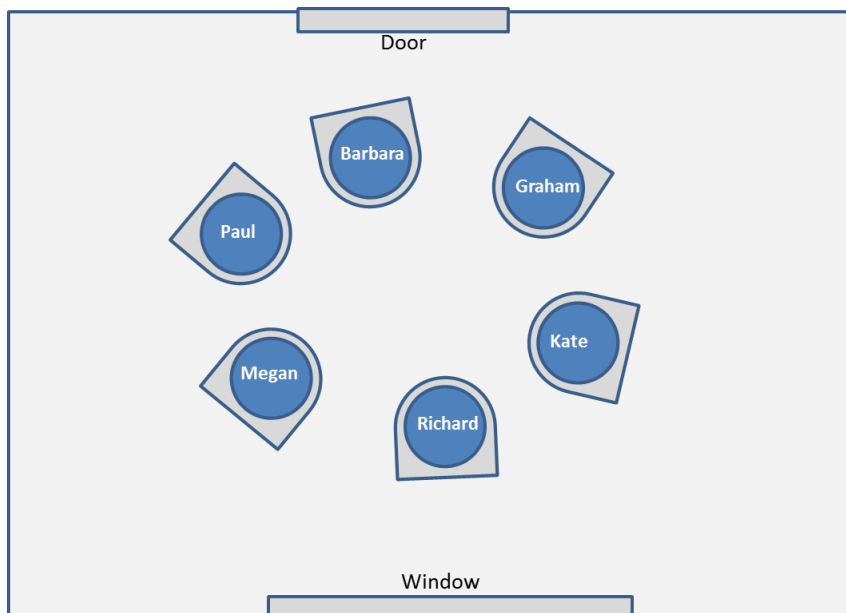
I noticed that I had an agenda at the beginning of the meeting; I wanted to meet my PhD research needs which at the time I assumed meant somehow inviting dialogue

into the group during the meeting. I felt however also that I must not come across as dictating the proceedings; I should facilitate 'lightly' so I could live up to what I understood were the ideals of joint and equal involvement in co-operative inquiry. Looking back I realise I wanted to 'will' dialogue that day and furthermore, I had unconscious and unarticulated assumptions about what would be required to help this dialogue to emerge. This links back to the difficulties discussed in chapter 5 regarding meeting the needs for worthwhileness and the needs emphasised in chapter 6 regarding façade. The balancing act therefore involved seeking a way to meet unarticulated needs in ambiguous circumstances whilst being perceived as a good facilitator!

After a check-in process which lasted about 20 minutes we talked briefly about contracting and then I commented on a conference I had just attended on leadership in professional services; the conversation turned to the meaning of leadership. About 40 minutes into the meeting Richard, referring to the use of the term 'leader', said that there 'is a kind of Newtonian proposition about it all'. He seemed to be alluding to assumptions regarding the heroic control that a leader in this mechanistic view might be seen to possess. After this the conversation emerged predominantly between three members of the group: Richard, Graham and Barbara as shown in the picture.
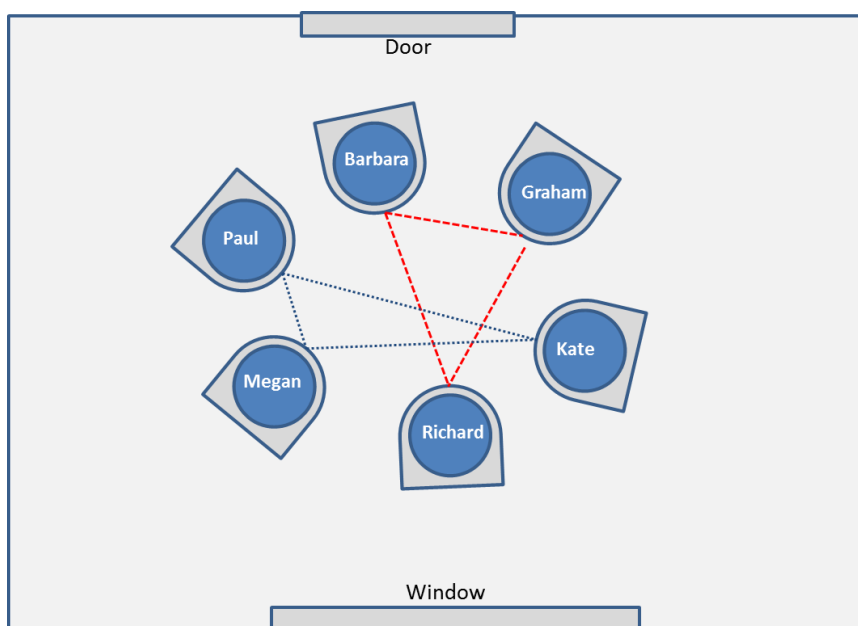
They talked for nearly 20 minutes at a conceptual level about issues concerning the Cartesian way of viewing the world, the Enlightenment and ambiguity and uncertainty. The other three members of the group: Kate, Paul and I said relatively little, (in fact looking at the transcript I said only two words during this time). I noticed myself becoming increasingly disconnected, frustrated and anxious. This was both because I didn't understand some of what was being discussed and also because I felt that the conceptual nature of the conversation would be unlikely to lead us into dialogue. As a result I began to panic that my needs would not be met. I had an opinion that it would be more interesting, useful and informative if, instead of us talking theoretically, we were to apply the concepts to our experience in the moment with each other. So I intervened:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Megan	*I think we need to bring it…I'm losing …((Laughing)) I'm like whoa! I'm feeling a need to stay with that, but bring it here because …I'm not following what you're saying …and so I'm noticing … you're talking about certainty, ambiguity… What does that mean is happening now?*	I am really vibrating with frustration – I cannot see how this conversation will lead to dialogue – it just seems 'clever' and cognitive to me.	Facade Dialogue Disclosure Rules	Rules of the game
Paul	*I think you've put your finger on it… we're talking about all the uncertainty and ambiguity and everything out there and there is a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity in here …. we're obviously avoiding the issue*	I'm glad that Paul agrees. I realise I feel an element of pleasure in 'being seen as right' and at the same time I then feel guilty for being so self-satisfied.	Rules Façade	Rules of the game
Richard	*Which is one way of looking at that conversation that just went on.*	Ah. I can tell Richard is annoyed. He could have kept his annoyance to himself	Disclosure Risk taking	Rules of the game

		– thankfully he didn't.		
Paul	*Yeah I'm not saying that…that's just my experience…..*	I am so much more engaged again in the conversation – my energy has returned. I feel the conversation is risky suddenly but more 'real' and present.	Risk Presence	Rules of the game
Kate	*And I was having similar kind of musings that there is something about certainty, uncertainty right here in…the space here between us and…bits of me would love to jump in and talk about that stuff you [Richard, Barbara and Graham] were talking about, which I found very exciting and at the same time it seems that there are other places I could do that…*	I'm feeling a bit arrogant now again: 'I've done the right thing interrupting, I had the nouse to see what was happening – aren't I clever' which is interesting as that was what I was 'accusing' the others of doing…	Rules of the game Façade Dialogue Power	Rules of the game

This excerpt in particular emphasises a difference in perspective around 'what this space is for' and connected with questions around 'what does dialogue mean and how is it experienced?' Paul, Kate and I seemed to share a sense that the conceptual conversation was too distant, not 'real' enough. I certainly had made assumptions about what was going on for the other three. I had assumed they were having an 'interesting' conversation and perhaps I was judging that they were attempting to 'be seen as clever' in a link back to this 'rule' examined in chapter 6. Fundamentally I realise I had an assumption that if people are having 'intellectual' conversations, as I perceived this to be, they 'can't be in dialogue'. My belief is deep; I remember feeling that I was undoubtedly 'right' in it. My frustration is linked to anxiety around meeting my needs and more generally having a 'worthwhile' meeting. I was feeling that others would leave this meeting decidedly under-whelmed having had an 'interesting intellectual' discussion but one which we could have had in many other contexts. In other words, I was worried there was nothing 'special' about it. Dialogue, for me

therefore, at this moment, required a more 'real' conversation. Without this the meeting as I saw it would not be 'worthwhile'. This pressure was picked up on by an external reviewer as important:

> *Notice how the drama triangle plays out in dialogue – 'I need to rescue this dialogue'… The tyranny of 'proper' dialogue.*
>
> *(Reviewer 2, 13.4.2013)*

The 'tyranny' of my aspirations for something 'different' than what was occurring and the pressure I felt as I increasingly wanted to 'rescue' the situation took me further away from the others and into incessant internal-monologue.

However Richard, Barbara and Graham then went on to explain to us their experience. Through their explanation I suggest that they show the importance of naming rules of the game and having the space where those rules are challenged. If Richard and Graham had not taken a risk in the group by challenging our perspective perhaps we would not have learnt together, I would have held onto my views of 'proper' dialogue and perhaps the opportunity for dialogue would have closed:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Richard	*And that <u>was</u> right here, right now. ..We create a sense of the conceptual not being right here, right now… what I had an experience of was quite a lot of contact here [pointing between himself, Barbara and Graham] and quite a lot of contact there [pointing between Megan, Paul and Kate]… that <u>was</u> right here, right now, you know?*	I realise suddenly that my view of what dialogue means is not shared and I face the interesting prospect of 'being wrong' and learning. I'm curious by this. Also aware of the inclusion / exclusion power dynamic Richard refers to	Dialogue Power Rules	Rules of the game

Graham	*For me it felt very relational. So I'm finding out things about Barbara … actually finding out quite a lot about what's important to you [Barbara] in that conversation … that doesn't feel a necessarily bad thing….*	Yes, I have an insight here into what was going on under the surface of the subject matter.	Dialogue Judgements	Dialogue
Richard	*…So …in dialogue terms there was a real connection here [between himself, Graham and Barbara]and there was ..a connection here [Megan, Kate, Paul] that was unstated or it was non-verbal, it was a silent connection*	It dawns on me now my own assumptions and preferences – I suddenly realise that in their world they were engaged in dialogue. I had just assumed the contrary.	Dialogue Judgements	Dialogue
Megan	*…it feels like there's a tension between talking conceptually and then talking at an emotional level and actually…I have an assumption building up that the conceptual isn't 'deep enough'.*	I voice the assumption and question my understanding of dialogue. I don't feel the need to defend myself here – just looking to learn. This says something about the environment we have as a group i.e. to a degree it is 'safe'.	Dialogue Assumptions Disclosure	Dialogue
Barbara	*Yes absolutely.*			
Megan	*…so it's interesting for you to say that that, for you, was…*		Dialogue	Dialogue
Richard	*Was a deepening…*		Dialogue	Dialogue

The subjectivity of experiences and constructions of dialogue is emphasised here. Graham felt the experience was 'very relational' whereas I had not experienced it like that at all. It is the disclosure, the confrontation of difference and the lack of defensiveness that leads to us learn together. In a link back to the previous chapter, my 'external' assessment of the quality of dialogue was in contrast to the understanding of experience from within relation in between the other three. Sitting watching the other three I made 'outside' assumptions about the nature of their experience. However their descriptions of their experience from the 'inside' were very different. It showed how important it was to inquire into the experience from within the relation.

Linking back to chapter 6, in the moment of realising I have misunderstood the situation I am resisting the temptation to retreat into façade building. However I find that the conversation then tests this resolve further:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Richard	*…In the spirit of wanting to move that way……whatever that way is ((laughing)) I felt really angry when you [to Megan] said what you said. Really angry. I'm feeling it right now in the tips of my fingers like rage actually…I felt like I was really enjoying that conversation and I felt like I was slapped for in some way transgressing some kind of rule, which of course is hugely my stuff … But there was a definite sense of a broken rule and I noticed…a script that came out after that, "Well I've been here every bloody session. I think I*	I feel, as usual when I feel blamed for something, very anxious; I don't like the attention aimed at me or feeling like 'a bad facilitator'. The words 'rage' and 'slapped' are very strong, but I *was* feeling superior. Through my / our actions there were rules being developed and when transgressed there was 'punishment'. Richard discloses his feelings with intent to learn and reflect rather than blame or make me	Role – facilitator Expectations Disclosure Rules of the game	Rules

	should know…whether it's alright to talk about that kind of thing." You know, all that pomposity, it was great actually, I quite enjoyed that! ((laughing))	look silly so he really opens up the dialogue and the 'realness' between us.		
Graham	*..When you [Megan] were talking about intellectual elegance I was thinking, "Don't talk to me about intellectual elegance, I've been a [senior executive] for 15 years, if you want intellectual elegance I'll give you intellectual elegance."…the conversation we were having felt like it was from the heart. It was a real kind of exploration of each other's views on the world and you just said 'stop doing it now, I want you to do something different'.*	Amazing the animosity going on internally even in a group with such history and closeness. I notice now I feel defensive. I feel like the original intervention is turning into something out of my control – I didn't mention the words 'intellectual elegance', Paul did, but the words have now been assigned to me. My initial inquiry question has now been translated as 'stop doing that, I want you to do something different'. Reminds me of ladder of inference (Senge) I can feel the level of misunderstanding escalating.	Judgement Role Dialogue Rules of the game	Rules
Kate	*….So I have one observation, one question. The observation is we're immediately into the territory of what it's okay to say and not okay to say here. So we're right now in the rules…*	Kate's interested observation helps me to remain curious; I'm working hard at remaining so though!	Rules of the game Role Power	Rules

Richard and Graham refer to their feeling of transgressing some sort of rule. They both display a very real emotional response to the feeling of being 'slapped' and being told

'to stop doing something'. I had not realised consciously that I had formed assumptions, which were then translated by others into rules, around what it means and what it takes to meet others in dialogue. We are immediately confronted with the question Kate formulates 'what is it ok to say and what is it not ok to say here?'

I struggle at this point to stay 'in dialogue'; my need to be seen as a skilled facilitator, (the façade spoken about in chapter 6), is haunting me and I am struggling silently with my indignation that I am being unfairly represented as the third column indicates. I can sense the internal tussle I am experiencing between focusing on myself (by both 'telling myself off' for getting it 'wrong' and feeling indignant towards others) and the will to stay curious and learn.

Kate intervenes with comments and questions. These serve to help me to focus outwards rather than inwards; to turn to others rather than become trapped in self monologue. The conversation moves towards another important theme in this thesis, namely power and the issue of role:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Kate	*…. the other question really was …to both of you two [Richard and Graham] who felt something, is that because Megan said it? Is that something about Megan's role in this?*	I felt like Graham's intervention was a bit harsh on me – perhaps this might be because my role might lend towards me 'getting the flak'?	Rules of the game Role Power	Power
Barbara	*….actually it's your [Megan's] inquiry group and you're the facilitator and you've got appropriately a kind of power in that and it needs to be exercised…the whole circle wasn't all engaged and I think it just needed to be flagged*	Any intervention is impossible to be received without the role that goes with it – especially so of the 'leader' or 'facilitator'. The words 'your inquiry' frustrate me – it's CI! Reinforces my perception of equality	Dialogue Role – facilitator Power Method - Contracting	Rules

	up…	in CI being an aspiration which is so difficult to achieve		
Paul	*I was okay when you expressed your needs ..that's fine by me even though I've got huge issues around authority…The way that you work doesn't make me feel as if you're an authority <u>over</u> me…*	So there something in the way I work that means Paul doesn't feel that I am exerting undue or unwelcome power over him…	Power Role	Power

I see these comments as indicating that power and role expectations are seemingly omnipresent between us. Kate suggests through her initial question that I am seen as powerful through my role and that it might affect how others respond to me. According to Barbara this power 'needs to be exercised'. She thinks everyone 'should be engaged' and that I might rightfully use my power to intervene if this isn't the case. Her words could be seen to imply that she thinks dialogue requires involvement and engagement from everyone; this assumption, or 'rule' is not questioned in the group. Rather Paul chooses to respond to the question regarding my role and power and indicates, in a link back to the previous chapter, that it is how I *use* my power that is important. He seems to suggest that I don't work in a way that makes him feel I have 'power over' him and therefore, I infer, am not restricting dialogue.

These references to inclusion and power again highlight that the 'equality' that the CI process strives for can be problematic. Perhaps an organisational context might be similar; attempts at shared leadership might also be problematic if in the end people still think it's the 'leader's' project and some are closer to that than others. Perhaps also this 'equality' is influenced, as chapter 7 highlighted, by the way in which the 'leader' is perceived to use their power.

In the final excerpt from this conversation Kate continues:

Speaker	Transcript	First-person reflections and memos	Initial themes	Final themes
Kate	.. I wanted to both applaud your [Richard, Barbara and Graham] conversation and say, "this is not how I want to be spending my couple of hours here" … it has to be okay for me to speak my space here just as it has to be okay for you to speak yours and isn't it interesting how we're just beginning to encounter our differences here? That it's easy for us to focus on sameness and … it seems really important that we find our difference and make it okay for us to be different … what a lot of unpacking that takes…	I like Kate's assertion here but it is spoken in a measured interested way so, for me, it lands well.	Method - contacting Dialogue Rules	Rules of the game
Barbara	…. only in slowing it down do I realise I had different impulses going on in that conversation …	Only by slowing down can we see the extent of our judgements and in-the-moment dialogue.	Judgement Busyness Dialogue CI method	Dialogue
Graham	… I'm actually really enjoying this, it's taken off for me, there's a lot of energy and it doesn't feel like an elegant conversation it feels like a real one.	I too feel energised and interested.	Dialogue	Dialogue
Barbara	…the cool thing for me was then we didn't separate, we lent in and tried to understand…without it being a perfect process; I mean that it's kind of bumpy.	I like the observation that dialogue is 'bumpy' – another reiteration of dialogue not being 'idealistic'.	Dialogue CI method	Dialogue

The conversation ends with the suggestions that dialogue might be 'bumpy' and that 'encountering difference' might lead to 'real conversation' both of which have been examined in this chapter. Perhaps this key incident was attributed with such importance because it was difficult; it involved tension, difference and disclosure of emotion. But despite the 'rough seas' existing in the between space, we came through the incident through 'slowing down', calming the water, in order to see the 'impulses' at play. From a first-person perspective approaching difference and turbulence with curiosity and openness helped me to stay in dialogue. I suggest that in disagreeing with each other we were nevertheless confirming the other's right to be different. As Kate commented 'it has to be okay for me to speak my space here just as it has to be okay for you to speak yours'. I regard this incident as an example of where we managed this tension. By focusing in on a moment between us, by resisting the temptation to construct and then protect façades and by continuing to inquire in order to learn I felt that we travelled closer to dialogue. Linking back to my current understanding of dialogue then I felt it was an example of 'a sensed quality of mutual encounter in the present moment, where there is an honouring of personhood and intent to confirm the other, learn and create'.

Summary

I propose this final findings chapter has illustrated how the CI and first-person data contribute in three key ways to understanding 'dialogue' and also what might occupy the between space referred to in relational leadership.

Firstly, dialogue is possibly a 'murky' concept for good reasons. Its essence is difficult to convey and the subjectivity of the term is an important feature of it. This has not been fully appreciated in much of the academic literature which focuses rather more on trying to define it tightly, or offer categories in which one's perspective could fit. I suggest the data point to the benefits of keeping the concept in some ways 'murky'; resisting strict categorisation by recognising difference in understanding and openly

exploring these differences. I also suggest that other ways of conveying dialogue such as storytelling or images might serve to extend our ability to describe dialogic moments rather than the predominant reliance on propositional statements.

Secondly the data emphasise an aspect of Buber's understanding of dialogue around which he is often misunderstood. This is the conflict and difference inherent in dialogue. Buber was not advocating 'niceness' and finding 'common understanding'. He was advocating the delight inherent in the inquiry into difference. This may well have implications for 'leaders' creating space for dialogue with 'followers' which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Finally I interpret the data as supporting empirically Buber's emphasis on presence, mutuality and connection as key aspects of dialogue. I suggest it illustrates in particular the possibility of dialogic moments which occur despite and with a cacophony of issues which are going on at an often unconscious level between people. This could be seen to support both Buber and Roger's ideas on 'dialogic moments' and provides rare empirical examples of how these moments emerged and were negotiated in practice.

The next chapter seeks to provide an overarching analysis of the findings from the past four chapters. It will also articulate the contribution that this thesis offers to RLT.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTION

Introduction

The preceding four chapters have detailed my interpretations of data arising from first-person and co-operative inquiry methods. These methods have been employed in order to explore how Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue might inform the theory and practice of relational leadership. Four main findings have been proposed. Firstly, 'turning' and therefore the quality of encounter could be affected by levels of busyness and the ensuing assessment process. Secondly, the pressure to 'seem' rather than 'be' may strengthen the construction of a façade which might be dismantled in part through disclosure, even though this may feel extremely risky. Thirdly, mutuality between leader and follower may be crucially influenced by the way in which 'leader', 'leadership' and 'power' is constructed in the between space. Finally, ineffable dialogic moments may occur through sensing a particular quality of encounter amidst a turbulent sea of complexity.

This chapter focuses on connecting these findings back to the RLT literature in order to discuss and articulate the contribution that this thesis makes both theoretically and practically. It begins by detailing meta-observations of the findings in relation to predominant assumptions in RLT. These assumptions are then discussed in relation to Ashman and Lawler's (2008) call for research on I-Thou dialogue in leadership contexts which is central to this thesis. This then leads me to propose that the leader-follower between space has been inadequately understood or explored within RLT. Consequently, I articulate this thesis' main contribution to theory; the identification of an additional trajectory for RLT in pursuit of a theory of leader-follower encounter

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which could better conceptualise and convey the *quality* of relating in the between space.

The practical implications that the findings in this thesis suggest for co-operative inquiry and for those practicing and teaching leadership are also discussed. The limitations of the findings and suggestions for further avenues for research conclude this chapter.

Discussion of findings

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue can inform the theory and practice of relational leadership. Through interpreting the data using Buber's work and articulating findings I have identified a number of significant issues with the way leadership and dialogue are predominantly portrayed in the RLT literature and more widely in scholarly leadership research.

These issues will be discussed now in three sections:

1. Limiting assumptions about who 'leaders' are
2. The partial portrayal of the processes involved in the construction of leadership
3. Simplistic assumptions about the nature of 'dialogue'

Taken together these issues hold significant implications for the portrayal and understanding of the leader-follower 'between space' in RLT. This will be highlighted through examining them in relation to Ashman and Lawler's (2008) work. The implications these issues have for those wishing to enact leadership effectively will be explained.

Limiting assumptions about who 'leaders' are

Table 2 identifies four predominant assumptions that I argue are apparent (although not ubiquitous) in the RLT literature. I argue that their prevalence is especially noticeable in entity based research, however they are also discernible in constructionist research despite frequent stated attempts by scholars in this area to study leadership differently. These assumptions are linked to relevant references in the discussion below and the alternative views offered in this thesis are explained in detail.

Table 2: Limiting assumptions about who 'leaders' are

	Limiting assumptions about who 'leaders' are	Alternative view offered through interpretation of findings in this thesis
1	Individuals can be identified as 'leaders' for the purposes of research by examining their **role**.	Leadership is not only attributed to individuals because of their formal roles. Leadership is constructed in other ways. Therefore individuals who are not holding specific 'leadership roles' might be regarded as 'leaders' and they should be accounted for more extensively in RLT research.
2	There is a **single** 'leader' in a relationship.	We are capable of generating and holding multiple constructions of leadership in the same moment. We can then identify different people as 'leaders' for different reasons and then change these views dynamically. The way in which we do this is influenced by context. Examining only one individual as 'the leader' gives an extremely restrictive and static view of the leadership phenomenon.
3	The leader is 'special' and **heroic**.	The 'leader' may often be vulnerable and fragile. They can be distracted away from relation through their desires to live up to a heroic ideal. If leadership can be attributed to more than one individual in a moment then identifying one person as special and heroic is partial and problematic in that it dismisses others as incapable and our view of the leadership phenomenon is restricted.
4	Leaders, leadership and the 'between space' are effectively studied from the 'outside' by an **external** researcher.	It is essential to study leaders and leadership from *inside* relation in order to appreciate the complexities of the experience of encountering the other in the between space where leadership is being constructed.

Firstly, 'leader' is often equated with positional role in RLT as well as in the wider leadership literature. Entity based RLT seems overwhelmingly and rather un-problematically to ascribe leader status to a single individual because they hold a hierarchical position (as for example in LMX theory, Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995). In the CI group members did attribute leadership to me as a result of my role however that was only one of many ways in which leadership was seen to operate and to be constructed in the group.

Constructionist scholars apparently "recognise leadership wherever it occurs" (Hunt and Dodge, cited in Uhl-Bien 2006:654) and should therefore be interested in conducting research which invites the possibility of studying leadership outside of formal roles. Why therefore do RLT constructionist researchers often seem preoccupied with examining leader-follower relating empirically through individuals who, by their title or position, are somehow preordained to be a 'leader' (for example Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011, Ospina et al. 2012)? Restricting research in this way implies similar ontological bases to those writing from an entity perspective; namely that one can identify and agree who 'a' leader is and by deduction there is some sort of tacit understanding of what 'leader' means. Kort (2008) points out this limitation and suggests that "we must determine what leadership is independently from claims about leaders and followers that arise on the assumption that leadership relations occur within formal hierarchical structures" (2008:425). My data offers significant empirical backing to her suggestion; if I had simply explored leadership in terms of my role as leader the data concerning the different ways of constructing leadership and the complexity of processes in the between space may have remained hidden. For example, the construction of leadership as 'changing the character of a conversation' and the resulting implications for how we sensed mutuality in the group may have not been identified.

Secondly, perhaps as a consequence of this assumption that a person is the leader because of their role, is the assumption that there is only *one* leader in the relationship. This translates into research methods which focus on 'one side of the

coin'; either the 'follower' or, more likely, the 'leader'. In the CI group I observed that in a single moment, multiple constructions of leadership can co-exist both between and within individuals. Furthermore these constructions were dynamic. For example at one point in the meeting I may have seen Richard as a leader because he took a risk and named a previously unspoken 'rule of the game'. At the same time I may also have seen Tony as a leader because I connected his role as CEO of a large organisation with being 'a leader'. Then five minutes later I might be attributing leadership to Graham as a consequence of him role modelling disclosure in the group and then Kate because she brought the conversation back to the important question we were trying to address. Identifying a single leader then proceeding to focus on just that person quashes any possibility of exploring the dynamic nature of leadership constructs. It also completely misses and renders unimportant the leadership shown by others.

Thirdly, despite advances in recognising the dangers inherent in the portrayal of heroic leaders I still observe an *idealised* depiction of them. An example, (one of many), of this in the leadership literature would be Caldwell et al. (2012) who passionately claim that "leaders who inspire others to leave a legacy and to make a commitment to create a better world demonstrate the leadership nobility that makes leaders not only trusted but revered" (2012:182). A number of authors such as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2012), Badaracco (2001), Collinson (2005), Gemmill and Oakley (1992), Grint (2005), Meindl et al. (1985), Morris et al. (2005) and Turnbull James and Ladkin (2008) are interested in the predominance of such an idealistic, 'heroic' portrayal of leadership, why it gets reinforced and the implications this way of constructing leadership has on our relationships. Some of my interpretations of the data from the CI group echo their palpable frustration with the vice like hold that the construct of 'leader as hero' has in many aspects of organisational life. As chapter 7 explained, the heroic construct seemed 'alive and well' in relation to some attributes that I was credited with as a consequence of my facilitator role in the CI group. We interpreted this as signalling a perhaps unconsciously held belief that, as 'leader', I knew our future direction, that I 'called the shots', that I was the expert and that permission was required from me for certain decisions (perhaps even going to the toilet!). This

idealised view of me as leader has the 'heroic lustre' Alvesson and Sveningsson warn against (2012:204).

It is this heroism that RLT constructionist scholars Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) similarly seek to avoid in their work by focusing on the 'everyday' and 'mundane' aspects of leadership. However, whilst they admonish the focus on heroic leadership in the literature I am left with an impression that there is a somewhat different, but nevertheless still idealised picture, of who a leader is and what a leader does in their writing. This is possibly because, although recognising some were more successful in their role than others, they appear to start with an assumption that the Federal Security Directors (FSDs) were automatically 'leaders' because of their role and through them leadership could be studied. However it may also be because the FSDs are portrayed in rather sweeping, somewhat 'saintly' language as formidable experts in relationship management. For example, "FSDs see themselves as being accountable to others….and more importantly, accountable to themselves" (2011:1440) and "we found FSDs not only showed concern for staff and stakeholders, but also colleagues" (2011:1438). Cunliffe and Eriksen do not engage with any to-ing and fro-ing or tussling of leadership between FSDs and their stakeholders. By their own admission they do not explore in depth how those in relation with FSDs constructed leadership and how these constructions might have been different or dynamic. Whilst advocating the importance of relational leadership rather than individual heroic agency, ironically they position the singular leader as rather superhuman in terms of their relationship skills. RLT might be warned therefore against unwittingly retaining the heroism of the leader via a different route, i.e. via the heroic abilities of leaders to relate to others.

The heroic view of leaders encompasses an expectation that leaders are perpetually confident, in control and strong. This view has been questioned by a number of scholars such as Nicholson and Carroll (2013), Sinclair (2007) and Taylor (in press and 2013). My data offers such scholars empirical evidence for their suspicions. I would imagine (and hope) that you as the reader have not examined this thesis' data and emerged with a view that I, in my 'leader' role, reflected the constantly confident,

coherent, in-control and morally superior persona often awarded to the heroic leader. My overriding experiences of 'being leader' involved intense fragility, vulnerability and uncertainty. This is not a picture commonly portrayed of leaders in the extant literature and yet it certainly was my experience and was the experience at times of others in the group who held positional leader roles in their own organisational contexts (see for example Tony's disclosures in chapter 7 that "there's so much that we can't control in our world…").

Finally, a predominant assumption within RLT is that the 'place' from which leadership can and should be studied is from the 'outside' looking in on the leader-follower relation. A number of RLT constructionists scholars point in their work to the importance of identification of constructs from *within* relation. Fairhurst (in Fairhurst and Antonakis 2012) calls for research using different, perhaps less traditional methods in order to achieve this. In particular she asks for further participation of the researcher in the subject of inquiry in relational leadership. Barge joins her claiming "that this is relational leadership's next great challenge…to shift from talking about the way that leadership is constructed, to developing practices that help leaders to anticipate how they might act within an unfolding situation and to be present in the situation" (Barge 2012:138). Following Shotter (2004, 2006) therefore, these authors argue that because construction of leadership occurs in and through relating, then examination of those constructs should necessarily access the thoughts and senses of those *inside* the relationship whilst in the moment of relating.

I agree with their observation *however* I struggle to see constructionist scholars who have actually used novel methods in response (see Bathurst and Ladkin 2012 and Ladkin 2013 for exceptions). Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) claim they shed light on "the mundane and imaginative work that goes on *within* the complexity of [leaders'] everyday relationships" (2011:1430, italics added) yet their method involves ethnography and interviews leaving them, however alert and observant, unavoidably external to the relation they seek to explore. Ospina et al. (2012) use co-operative inquiry to challenge "the separation between the researcher and the researched"

(2012:266), yet they appear to choose what Heron (1996) would call an externally initiated, partial co-operative inquiry; it is unclear how the facilitator's experience is included as data. A consequence of these efforts I would argue is that the tussle that is involved in emerging construction and meaning making between those in relation is lost. So much of my insight into what it was to be within a leadership dynamic and what leadership meant to me came from my first-person data. The CI method and our ability to notice key incidents enabled the group to pause and examine what was happening right at that moment for us in relation. These were our most powerful moments. From that position we were more able to articulate what it was that was happening that could be referred to as leadership. Much of this might have been invisible to an external observer and certainly to a researcher who interviewed each CI member in turn after the meeting.

My objection to these limiting assumptions regarding 'leader'; the obsession with external examination of the heroic individual occupying the hierarchical role, is that they lead to an extremely partial view of what constitutes 'effective' leadership. Research focusing on individuals in specific roles at specific moments in time implies that leadership is the domain of only a few in certain positions. In this way it disables others outside of these roles; it discounts their contribution to effective leadership and must surely shut them out from helping to address complex issues faced by our organisations in the twenty-first century. I suggest this is an extremely important concern; given the enormity of the issues we face I argue we simply cannot afford to do this.

In addition, despite constructionists' stated aims in opening up leadership to focus attention on the space between, in practice, empirical based research has still retained an overwhelming preference and obsession for 'one side of the coin', i.e. the person in a higher positional role. This means that inevitably the between space is still under-theorised and little understood. Whilst research focuses on individuals from an external perspective explorations into what it is like to be *within* leadership relation will be missed. Again, our view of leadership is partial and our ability to suggest what

effective leadership might be diminishes. This thesis has sought to convey the complex, messy, energetic and 'colourful' space between in a way that research to date in RLT has not been able to access, in part because of the limited way 'leader' is constructed and studied.

The partial portrayal of the processes involved in the construction of leadership

The second issue illuminated through the findings in this thesis relates to the limited portrayal of the processes involved in the construction of leadership in RLT literature. Table 3 shows predominant assumptions regarding the processes of leadership construction and an alternative view offered through the interpretation of the findings in this thesis. I will address each assumption in turn along with relevant references in the discussion following this table.

Table 3: The partial portrayal of processes involved in the construction of leadership

	Predominant assumptions regarding the processes of leadership construction	Alternative view offered through interpretation of findings in this thesis
1	Research examining the between space should focus on specific linguistic processes.	Leadership is constructed through language *and* through our embodied sense of encounter intertwining. Processes are subjective, complex, multifaceted and dynamic and the picture is 'messy' not neat. In addition to attempting to fragment and simplify processes it is also important to consider and convey this holistic picture.
2	The processes inherent in the construction of leadership are 'smooth'; leadership is conflict-free or conflict experienced is unproblematic.	The between space where leadership is constructed can be 'bumpy' and 'crunchy'. Leadership inevitably encompasses navigation of difference, personal anxieties, misunderstandings and judgements.

3	The construction of leadership is affected by a number of macro-discourses particularly power. 'Leaders' are seen to 'possess' power.	The 'possession' of power is complex and subjective. An additional important discourse regarding 'busyness' and 'worthwhileness' might infuse the leadership relation and hold important implications regarding the quality of encounter.
4	A 'leader' can influence processes of relating and instigate desired responses in 'followers'.	A leader's ability to rely on agency to achieve certain results is questionable. The sheer complexity of processes in the between space mean that although there may be consequences resulting from specific leader actions, those consequences are unpredictable and ambiguous.

Research examining the construction of leadership has considered unconscious group-level processes (Fitzsimons 2012), aesthetic processes (for example Sinclair 2013) and bodily senses and perception (see Bathurst and Cain 2013, Bathurst and Ladkin 2012 and Ladkin 2013). However research focuses predominantly on linguistics, such as 'linguistic performances' (Barge 2012) and linguistic processes of stakeholder engagement and 'dialogue' (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011). *Advancing Relational Leadership Research* (Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012) chooses to emphasise linguistic work and encourages further use of methods such as discourse analysis and coding. This may represent an assumption that linguistic processes are more important or the focus on linguistics may be a consequence of methods employed. It could also be because representing non-linguistic processes in propositional form is inherently more difficult (as I have discovered in presenting this thesis).

Authors such as those mentioned above have tended to address specific aspects of the 'complexity' in between people relating (aesthetics *or* linguistics for example). In doing so processes are presented as somewhat 'neat', isolated and fragmented. Even Shotter (2006), who conveys the dynamic, unpredictable, emergent process in the between space focuses in his writing on the complexity of *linguistic* dialogue and he therefore only illuminates a limited aspect of the space between. The felt sense of the between space which infuses relationality is to some extent 'disappeared' (however Shotter refers to this more explicitly in his 2011 article on embodiment). In a different attempt to tackle this terrain, Ladkin (2013) describes this felt sense of relating using Merleu-

Ponty's ideas on 'flesh' and perception in order to render "the invisible intersubjective relations at the heart of leadership more visible" (2013:320). However Ladkin's empirical evidence is limited and focused on perceptual rather than linguistic processes. This means that bringing to life this 'energy force' and appreciating its depth remains problematic.

The data presented in this thesis attempts a context sensitive holistic perspective of the processes at play in the between space without seeking to highlight or focus on any one in particular. This is a unique undertaking within RLT. Issues of language, miscommunication and ambiguity of terms and anticipations of what might be said in response to one's own comments have been revealed. However our feelings in the group have also been portrayed along with the importance of our felt sense in coming to understandings of leadership and dialogue. I have sought to present the cacophony of micro-processes which are dynamically evolving in every moment in the between space in this thesis. Whilst other scholars have spoken of the aspiration of conveying this 'messy' (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011) space, I would argue their attempts have been partial mainly due to the methods they have employed. To fragment the between space, for example by using a limited conceptualisation of dialogue (see below), achieves a deep exploration of specific processes. However, it is *also* important to convey how processes are interdependent, intertwined and embedded. If the latter is not done then our understanding of the leadership phenomenon is surely simplified and partial.

To risk over-emphasising this point, if one paused the action in the CI group at a point where I am talking with another member of the group, in other words if one were to 'explode the moment', I would perhaps describe the 'noisyness' in my mind. Perhaps I would explain how my 'knowingness' in the moment is a symbiotic entwinement of felt-sense and cognitive process. I might be feeling vulnerable whilst wondering what the other person meant when they referred to 'leadership'. The other person is also likely to be responding relationally to me through their mind and body in the same moment. Take the action a second further on and different things come up in our

minds and bodies, influenced by what has just gone on the moment before and our anticipations of what is about to come about. We sense this in the space between us. Add another person or two to the conversation and this 'noise' and sensation explodes. Our sense of being in relation as a group becomes so multi-faceted and dynamic. I refer to this learning in the final meeting of the CI group:

> *Megan: So even in this moment right now, (I call it exploding the moment), it's wondrous what's going through all of us even now that we've been meeting over all this time and space. So issues around personal anxieties, role expectations, judgements, the 'need to be seen as', understanding what rules there are in the room that one needs to keep to, imagining whether one can bear the risk of going against that and what would happen if we did. It's all there in pretty much every moment from what I can see. And not only is it all there but it's all there all at the same time but different in everybody's mind and body so it's enormously, beautifully complex.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

I am trying to convey in my words above this 'noise' and 'messiness' of the in between space. I have been led to this appreciation of complexity through Buber's expansive understanding of dialogue as intersubjective encounter and meeting. Stimulated by his words I have questioned how the between space has been recognised to date in RLT. I do not see others successfully conveying the extent of energetic activity colliding in the space between. There is limited debate regarding how this complexity culminates in a dynamic sense of the quality of our 'meeting'. These concerns have been a challenge to me throughout this research and I speak of them again later in this chapter.

The second predominant assumption in relation to processes in the between space relates to conflict. The data presented in my thesis illuminate the inherent conflict we often experienced together in the group. Occasionally this conflict surfaced through disclosure and was explored in depth. It was highlighted as an inevitable and necessary aspect of the between space through which leadership is encountered particularly if those present aspire to dialogue. This acceptance and appreciation of conflict being an aspect of leadership perhaps counters the often rather romantic and simplistic overtones of authentic and servant leadership (for example Mazutis and Slawinski 2008 and Russell and Stone 2002 respectively). This literature can represent conflict (if

representing it at all) as 'bad' and harmony as the preferred (and indeed possible) state between leader and follower. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2012) criticise this romanticism in leadership studies by which they mean the "idea of leadership as being about conflict-free, positive relations involving authentic individuals interacting positively and productively" (2012:205-206). This thesis backs up their observation by giving an empirical view of the discomfort, or, as one participant said, 'crunchiness' of being within a leadership dynamic, striving towards dialogue.

Thirdly, I wish to consider how micro-processes might be impacted by macro-level discourses and suggest an additional focus for study in this area. By macro-level discourses I refer to ways of thinking about certain issues that are 'taken for granted' at a broader societal level and that infused our relating in the CI group. I mean therefore to critically acknowledge and confirm the embeddedness of leader-follower relating within a wider social context and indeed recognise that the CI meetings were fundamentally rooted in a particular socio-cultural moment in time.

Such macro-level discourses are numerous, and although there are risks associated in generalising them, I am choosing to point in particular to discourses on 'power' and 'busyness'. These emerged as especially important issues which impacted upon processes of relating in the CI group. Indeed the words 'power' and 'busyness' were frequently used in the meetings.

Taken for granted assumptions regarding power are often surprisingly unquestioned particularly in entity based leadership literature (see the critique offered by Collinson 2005 and Gergen 1995). Where power is considered it is often in sympathy with French and Raven's work (1959) which regards power as a personal possession (e.g. Hoogervorst et al. 2012) and leaders are seen to have power and followers do not. Although the CI group members did speak of others 'possessing' certain 'types' of power these became more or less relevant only in the context of relating with others and through the processes described previously in this section rather than in the perhaps more one-dimensional manner implied by French and Raven inspired research.

As the group concluded, I only 'possessed' power as facilitator if I and those in the group decided to construct my role in such a manner. I only diminished my sense of personal power if and when I chose, in relation to others, to construct being female, and being relatively young, as meaning reduced power (see Kate's comment on this in chapter 7). We suggested our 'choices' in this construction process were influenced by macro-discourses on the subjects. One example might be the social discourse which has traditionally ascribed leadership with 'maleness', recognised by Kate and Richard in meeting 4 (see Fairhurst 2009, 2012). Another example of relevance is the "rhetoric of leadership [which] is especially favoured for talking about the ways superordinates may achieve power over subordinates" (Hosking 1995:56). The point here is that leadership is infused with issues of power due to macro-level discourses on the subjects and traditional views of who leaders are and what legitimate action in the context of leadership looks like. CI members' views would complement writers within RLT such as Fletcher (2004) and Fairhurst (2009) who emphasize the importance of these macro-discourses on the relational processes between leader and follower, for example Richard summarised:

> *Richard: There are inherent ancient structures of power in our culture which are very associated with face, with body, with role, our position in the family and culture. Very, very gendered. …And implicit.*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

As well as pointing to the way our relations in the CI group might have reflected social discourses on power, group members pointed to the complexity inherent in the way power was constructed, negotiated and navigated in the between space. Power issues became more or less relevant only in relation to others; we noticed different aspects of power at different moments, ascribing power to various others in an emergent, dynamic, ever changing manner. Paul reflected this in meeting 4 when considering power in relation to his daughter as his business partner and power in relation to his position as father:

> *Paul: There's a totally different power constellation. So I think it's all very contextual.*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

This observation would concur with Hammond et al. (2003) that "linear, possession-based notions of power [are] incomplete" (2003:143), so any simple conclusions about the way in which discourses of power were influencing how we constructed leadership together, or how we encountered each other in dialogue, are inadequate. Suffice to say, the way in which we perceived power in the group was inevitably influenced by macro-level social discourse on issues such as gender. This infused the way in which we constructed leadership in the CI group by affecting the processes of perception and judgement of 'how we spotted leadership in others'.

A further social discourse became apparent in the group and I believe affected specifically the processes of turning that I described in chapter 5; that is of 'busyness'. I wish here to reflect on how macro level discourses on such things as 'busyness', 'efficiency', 'productivity' and 'worthwhileness' might impact upon processes in the between space of relational leadership. This links to Turnbull James and Ladkin's (2008) reflection that the "larger organisational and cultural environment prevalent within the 21st century Western world [is one] in which activities must be 'purposeful' from their outset" (2008:30). The impact that such discourse has on relating is alluded to by Kate in our final reunion meeting in a comment first detailed in chapter 5:

> *Kate: … We have kind of come back and that hasn't always been easy, because we've carved out this space and you go, "Right I've carved it out; it had better be good", you know, I need it to….it's hard to be here; I need it to kind of deliver for me.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

It was not an easy decision for Kate to prioritise the CI meetings; she was concerned that they may not 'deliver' for her and she was not alone; I have given other examples of how this pressure came up for others members of the CI group. There appeared to be a common need to assess our choices of where to spend our time along a spectrum of 'worthwhileness'. This need was instigated by an understanding that we were busy individuals and therefore had to 'make the most' of our time. It was clear when we reflected on this that what constituted 'worthwhile' or 'delivery' or 'making the most of' differed for each of us but generally we used the terms to denote a requirement for meeting and furthering our own personal agendas. These personal agendas differed

from Richard's, who wished explicitly to build his network within Ashridge through the group, to Tony who wished the group to somehow lend insight to his challenges as CEO in his organisation. From my perspective of course I had an underlying need for the group meetings to be worthwhile in the context of 'providing good data' for my PhD.

Of interest here is the effect this common 'need to feel productive', i.e. achieving tangible outputs for oneself, might have on the processes between those in relation and how this insight might lend itself to extant literature. In my first-person reflections I note I felt a responsibility to make things worthwhile for others, to 'deliver' for others. This made it difficult for me to 'turn away' from self-focused monologue. Similarly, from the other point of view, and as Stuart indicated in chapter 5, a worry about whether he is using his time appropriately leads him to a feeling of being elsewhere, distracted and distant from others.

My analysis portrays this relationship where both parties are distracted by self-monologue and both are consequently finding it difficult to be present as each engages in a process of assessment of the other and the context. Specifically, Buber described the likely encounter to be I-It rather than I-Thou as the process of turning to the other might be affected (Buber 1958).

As 'busyness' was such an important discourse in the group it indicated that it could have very real effects on relational processes between leader and follower. However, within the field of RLT there is no reference to the effects that pace of life and busyness might have on the quality of leader-follower interactions either theoretically or empirically. Any effect it might have upon the construction of leadership is unexplored. Even within the entity based writing, which explores such things as the degree of trust between leader and follower, there is no obvious mention of the implications of having one's attention distracted by busyness and the assessment of worthwhileness. This gap is surprising. The reason it is surprising, as well as its obvious relevance in the CI group, is whenever I have spoken of this pressure to others in the classroom in the course of my teaching I have quickly received signs of understanding

and acknowledgement of the importance of the issue. This is particularly the case for those in leadership roles. At Ashridge a very common reason participants or coachees give for not undertaking desired actions resulting from leadership development programmes is 'lack of time'. I am arguing in this thesis that this perceived lack of time may have wider ramifications for the way we relate to others in the moment which should be given more extensive coverage in RLT.

On examining the wider leadership literature, the fact that leaders feel they are busy is a common theme and practitioner advice abounds. Popular books such as *Crazy Busy* by DeYoung (2013) focus on the effects that our excessive work schedules have and how an individual might effectively work and think in such an environment. Meredith Fineman (2013) comes closer to some of the findings developed in this thesis as she brings attention to the 'need to be seen as busy' which is referred to in chapter 5. She says that one of the consequences of this need is that our relationships are deteriorating as we are so busy bragging about how busy we are that we have no time to talk about real issues. Her emphasis though is on better time management and, in essence, changing the popular discourse away from lionising busyness.

These are different points to the emphasis in this thesis which is about how our social discourse relating to 'the need to be busy' might translate into perceived stress. This stress in turn might distract those in relation away from turning to each other in the moment, leading consequently to I-It encounters. There are some explorations of this in relation to health care and the effect that nurses' busyness may have on the relationships and care provided to patients (for example, Nagington et al. 2013). However the way in which busyness leads to assessment of worthwhileness and the consequent objectification of the other goes unmentioned. I have found no academic studies within the wider leadership literature which explore this aspect.

Whereas the discourses associated with leadership and power are presented somewhat in RLT, issues regarding busyness and worthwhileness are therefore little theorised or empirically shown. They do however suggest potentially important influences upon leader-follower relating particularly in relation to understanding the

quality of leader-follower encounter. I suggest this as an extension to RLT in this area and propose that this may be an area of fruitful further research (see below).

The final assumption in relation to leadership construction processes considered here relates to leader agency. An implication of the complexity of the processes in the between space is that any specific action undertaken by 'the leader' is unlikely to result in a predictable response. Leader agency is therefore questionable. No matter how emotionally intelligent (Goleman 1999) and present one might be, the data indicate that it is simply impossible to know how interventions of yours or others have been interpreted and how that is then affecting others' response and then how you are likely to respond in turn to that! Underneath the language so much more is going on as Kate's comment, detailed in the previous chapter, articulates:

> *Kate: How curious it is really that it takes this much attention and effort for human beings to talk about the stuff that we actually carry around with us all the time. All of the stuff we've talked about in the last hour we have on our shoulders, in our heads, in our bodies, every second of every day really, apart from when you're asleep. And then we dream it…Yet we so seldom talk about it, even in leadership roles and educative roles. I think that is just very amazing…so much of what we talk about is a kind of ritualistic rehearsal of normality around which something else is going on entirely.*
>
> *(Meeting 4)*

Through the myriad of processes in the between space relation emerges and unfolds. We 'carry' 'on our shoulders, in our heads, in our bodies' this crescendo of processes in the between space. Our lack of sight of some aspects of them and the inherently relational manner in which our responses then emerge renders simplistic views on agency problematic. Fairhurst and Grant (2010) claim social constructionists "eschew a leader-centric approach in which the leader's personality, style, and/or behavior are the primary (read, only) determining influences on follower's thoughts and actions" (2010:175). My interpretation of the data in this thesis supports this view.

Empirically therefore, in a link back to the previous section, the interpretation I have of the data presented in this thesis casts considerable doubt on the 'heroic leadership' literature which implies that there is 'a' leader and that leader can, through their own

agency, read a situation effectively, act alone and then affect others in a causal, relatively straightforward manner. This highlights the dubious nature of claims such as this from Avolio and Gardner (2005) that "our central premise is that through increased self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling, authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in followers" (2005:317). The entity based writing which classifies a 'type' of leadership such as authentic, transformational, servant and spiritual informs us about some aspects of leader-follower relating. However I am arguing that the agency assumed in much of it, the assumption that the leader can un-problematically create a specific desired response in another simply through his or her own action, must be viewed critically. As my analysis shows it must be considered in relation to the multitude of processes in between those relating. This would enable us to see that the leader's behaviour is only one aspect of the context and others, such as personal insecurities and misinformed judgements, might lead to entirely different unpredictable responses.

To summarise, I have in this thesis identified assumptions relating to processes in the between space which seem to predominate in the leadership literature and within RLT. These include assumptions that linguistic processes of leadership construction should dominate, that processes should be investigated in isolation in order to simplify the between space, that processes are generally conflict-free, that power can be seen as a possession, that 'busyness' does not impact on relation and that the leader's agency determines follower response. Research which adhered to these assumptions would result in a partial view of the leadership phenomenon. In particular the conceptualisation of the between space would be very limited. Rather than conveying the quality of the between space that I have sought to emphasise in this thesis it would restrict and simplify our understanding of relations. This in turn holds implications for our ability as scholars to assist those wishing to enact leadership roles effectively.

Simplistic assumptions about the nature of 'dialogue'

In addition to highlighting problematic assumptions relating to leadership in the literature, my interpretation of the data in this thesis points to a number of assumptions regarding dialogue. These hold implications for RLT given the interest in dialogue within this field. The table below summarises these assumptions and they are discussed further below with reference to existing leadership literature.

Table 4: Simplistic assumptions about the nature of 'dialogue'

	Simplistic assumptions about the nature of 'dialogue'	Alternative view offered through interpretation of findings in this thesis
1	We can and should define dialogue as a static concept.	Whilst it is useful to explore and articulate our understanding of dialogue, representing it as an understood, agreed and static term is misrepresentative. Understandings of dialogue are nuanced and dynamic. Adhering to restrictive categorisation of the concept limits our understanding of it.
2	Dialogue is harmonious.	Dialogue necessarily explores difference. Conflict is inevitable and taking risks essential.
3	Dialogue is 'elegant' and skilful.	Dialogue is never 'perfect' due to our subjective understanding of it. Our interventions in dialogue will always have unknowable subjective consequences.

Firstly, there appears to be an assumption in literature relating to dialogue that either there is a common understanding of the term, or that there are differences but those differences can be categorised into specific groups. Senge (2006) for example, whilst explaining elements of his definition of 'dialogue', seems nevertheless to assume a pre-ordained and universally shared meaning for the word. Somewhat more expansively, others are occupied with recognising and then squeezing the different definitions of dialogue into hopefully exhaustible categories (Deetz and Simpson 2004, Stewart and Zediker 2000). Even when authors recognise that there is more than one 'definition' of dialogue I see them as failing to appreciate sufficiently how we might

feel-our-way towards an understanding of what it is to be in dialogue and how that understanding is never complete.

Deetz and Simpson (2004) warn 'dialogue' is a 'murky' term and seem to imply in doing so that it could and should be 'cleaned up'. They go on to suggest three different constructions and advocate that two of these (emphasising linguistic processes) are 'better' than the other. My interpretation of data in this thesis suggests rather multifaceted, multi-layered, nuanced, emerging constructions where 'better' is also a matter of contextual personal construction in relation with others. Restricting our understanding of 'dialogue' to linguistic exchange and assuming this understanding is common and straightforward may be misrepresentative. Dialogue in the CI group encompassed our 'sense' of the 'quality' of our 'connection'. Rather than having fixed, shared, articulate conceptualisations we recognised how our understanding of dialogue continues to emerge and change.

Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) and Ospina and Sorensen (2006) both refer to relational leadership as 'dialogic'. The former authors go some way to explaining their understanding of dialogue (thereby tacitly recognising there might be different views) as a linguistic emergent process, along the lines of that proposed by Bakhtin (1981). The latter authors do not detail in depth what they mean by dialogue however from reading their work I would presume them to be using a similar Bakhtinian definition. Given interpretations offered in this thesis, I suggest that if RLT writers are to persist in advocating 'dialogue' as an essential aspect of the phenomenon of leadership then there needs to be a greater appreciation of the plethora of meanings of the term. Without such an appreciation dialogue might only be regarded as a linguistic process which could in turn limit scholars' inquiry into the space between, as explained in the previous section.

Secondly, conflict is perhaps recognised more extensively within the dialogue literature than in the leadership literature however the implications that engaging in conflict have on those in dialogue are, I suggest, unappreciated. In other words, conflict is still regarded relatively unproblematically and issues such as the deep

personal sense of risk, the yearning for confirmation despite difference and the sheer difficulties of going against rules of the game are little theorised. For example Isaacs mentions conflict in his book (1999) however he focuses predominantly on the difference between dialogue and 'arguing' (1999:179) rather than the personal and intersubjective sense of conflict and our response to it. This focus on conflict as something which is explicitly seen through the voicing of different views and 'management' of those different views appears to predominate. In contrast, the first-person and CI group data interpretations offered in this thesis convey how encountering others in dialogue could be experienced as an emotional roller-coaster ride; the tussle between giving in to self-monologue versus turning to the other and the tension between presenting a façade to others and risking 'being'. This is a broader view on conflict and I suggest it emphasises how inherent conflict is in relation, the corporeal sense one has of it and how 'management' of it requires perhaps more than 'listening', 'suspending judgement' and taking turns to speak.

Finally, connected to the point above, even when dialogue is recognised as inevitably engaging in conflict, it might be easy to reach the conclusion on reading the literature that dialogue requires 'skilful' and 'elegant' conversation. Authors such as Isaacs (1999) and Senge (2006) do not seek to convey it in such a way but I suggest that their language (for example Senge refers to 'the art of talking together' in the forward of Isaacs 1999) and the way they omit conveying intricately what it is to *be* in dialogue might lead to that assumption. I analyse this assumption in chapter 8 in my reflections on the dialogue workshop I co-facilitated. I explain how I found myself unable to determine a perfect intervention which would appeal to all those present and be interpreted as 'dialogic'. Rather I refer to the process of taking risks, of attempts to read the situation, of intervening and then coping with the array of different responses to that intervention. I notice the importance of having to manage my own emotions in response to criticisms from others. There was no 'right' intervention, no 'dialogic way of doing things' simply because inevitably what I did would be interpreted differently by different people. 'Elegance' in this situation is impossible. I suggest that appreciation of this subjectivity in the literature on dialogue is limited, perhaps

because very detailed explorations from *within* dialogue are limited. To me this has resulted in an unarticulated 'rule' being conveyed that dialogue is skilful and one's interventions might be assessed as either 'dialogic or not'.

In summary, in the CI group we felt our way towards greater understanding of what 'dialogue' meant to us. We held different understandings of dialogue which were contextually situated and we are still now developing our meanings of the term. We experienced our dialogue as necessarily encompassing risk, difference and feeling one might have 'messed up'. I propose that the implication of this is that describing leadership as 'dialogic' or suggesting leaders should be 'dialogic' must be done with more appreciation of the plethora of never-finalised meanings that *both* the terms 'leader' and 'dialogue' convey. It must also be done with an appreciation of the anxieties and ambiguous consequences inherent in dialogue. In short, the ambiguity of actually practicing 'dialogic leadership' (Nielson 1990) or orientating towards others dialogically within a leadership dynamic (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011), I suggest, should be appreciated in more depth within RLT.

This discussion section has examined three key issues relating to predominant assumptions. These issues have been uncovered through using Buber's work as a lens to interpret the data. The first issue related to limiting assumptions regarding who 'leaders' are, the second to simplified conceptualisations of the processes of leadership construction and the third to simplistic assumptions about the nature of dialogue. I have explained how each of these assumptions inevitably restricts our view of the nature of leadership and the between space. In the next section I explore the implications of this through responding to Ashman and Lawler's (2008) call for research relating to I-Thou dialogue in a leadership context. I will show how the response to Ashman and Lawler might look very different if one were to adhere to the assumptions discussed thus far or whether one were to respond using the interpretation offered in this thesis.

A response to Ashman and Lawler (2008)

Ashman and Lawler's (2008) call for research to examine the possibility of I-Thou dialogue between leader and follower was and always has been a key text and one of the original driving forces behind this research. This paper is examined now, in the context of the above issues, to illustrate the problems encountered when assuming simple, singular constructs of 'leader' and 'dialogue' and in order to summarise the implications of a more complex holistic view of the processes of leadership construction. I provide, as far as I can see, the only response to their call, however my response may not be the one they might expect.

The issues above question the very basis of Ashman and Lawler's (2008) attempt at finding a 'yes or no' answer to their key question of whether mutuality and therefore I-Thou dialogue is possible between leader and follower. To put it simply, the implications of my interpretations discussed above lead me to respond that 'it depends'. It depends upon the complexity of how *those within relation, at that moment in time*, perceive the other and perceive leadership. Furthermore their sense of this is likely to change dynamically. If, at one moment one perceives the other as 'the leader' and themselves as 'the follower' and they equate this to meaning that the other is, for example, legitimately superior, heroic and possessing coercive powers over them, then one might assume mutuality, and dialogue, to be problematic. If on the other hand, as shown in my analysis, they perceive themselves to both be 'leading' in multi-faceted ways through the process of their relating, then perhaps they may also assume mutuality to be more balanced. *And*, they may hold both these seemingly opposing constructions in the same moment, as indeed I and others in the CI group purportedly did. This is far from a straightforward response therefore to Ashman and Lawler (2008) who seem to assume in their paper that 'leader' is simply the person in a higher hierarchical position and that both leader and follower together know, agree and would be able to identify what 'dialogue' was if it indeed occurred.

For two years in the co-operative inquiry group we meandered around trying to articulate what we constructed to be dialogue and leadership and whether any of

those aspects of construction might be shared with others *and yet we still did not settle on single static constructions* of the terms*. As I complete my PhD I note that my constructions continue to develop; my learning inquiry into 'what is dialogue' and 'what is leadership' is ongoing. This dynamic articulation process and the sense we have of being 'in it' goes, I feel, unappreciated in the extant literature.

I suggest that the points emphasised above contribute towards the extensive debate within the education and therapy scholarly literatures regarding I-Thou dialogue that Ashman and Lawler refer to (see for example Blenkinsop 2005 in relation to the education field and Adame and Lietner 2011 in relation to therapy). As referred to in chapter 2 Buber's concepts are covered far more extensively in these bodies of literature than they are within the leadership field. The plethora of articles and books however converge on a basic question which is repeated by Ashman and Lawler (2008), namely 'is I-Thou dialogue possible between people in these roles?' In the texts which I have examined I am yet to find an appreciation for the complexities described in this thesis. I suggest to researchers in these literature areas, as I suggest to those in the constructionist area of RLT, that the nature of the question could change in order to further theorise the issue. Perhaps questions which might further the debate would be: 'How does one experience being *in* these relations?' 'How do those in relation construct their roles dynamically and how does this affect the quality of relation in the between space?' and 'What are the implications that different constructions might have on the quality of relation and on dialogue in the moment?'

What is important, I suggest, is not to try to prove if dialogue is possible or not from an external observer perspective. What is of interest is discovering from inside relating, what sense the parties are making of such terms as dialogue, leadership and mutuality. If they hold intentions for enacting these states then how they 'feel their way' through the implications of all the differing constructions that they might hold in the same moment becomes important. What is also of interest is then how those in relation come to sense the *quality* of their encounter dynamically which will be referred to in more detail later in this chapter.

Overall implication: The partial conceptualisation of the between space

Predominant assumptions that leaders are 'special' individuals in certain positions, that processes of leadership construction can be studied from the outside and that they are best considered and focused upon in isolation to other processes, fundamentally limits our understanding and appreciation of the leader-follower between space. Similarly assumptions that the construction of leadership is 'dialogic' and that dialogue pertains to linguistic processes alone might also lead to a restricted view of what happens in between leader and follower.

In this thesis I could have examined attributes of the relationship between me as facilitator (as a proxy to 'leader') and others in the group. I could have focused in on our linguistic exchanges to identify how we constructed leadership. This could have produced some interesting (albeit I suspect familiar) data. However I suggest data gained through such an exercise could not have alluded to what it was like to *be* in an evolving leadership dynamic. It would be unlikely to tell me anything of the myriad of other leadership constructions, their implications and the way they are evolving in the between space in the moment. Specifically, determining to study leadership using first-person and co-operative inquiry methods, which in many ways oppose traditional methods, has illuminated the "poverty" of our current conception of leadership in scholarly research (Turnbull James and Collins 2008:6).

I would argue that on reading the current scholarly literature in RLT one would form a partial view of the between space. This is inevitable given the focus on certain individuals as leaders, certain processes as important in leadership construction and certain views on what dialogue in the between space encompasses. By turning some of the predominant assumptions in the literature on their head, by examining leadership in non-hierarchical forms, by attempting to convey complexity rather than fragmented processes and by engaging in the subjectivity of dialogue this thesis conveys some of the sense of being in the complex moment of relating in amidst of turbulent contextually situated processes. It is this richness that much of the RLT literature

seems to somehow dampen down with its focus on particular specific processes and its predominant preoccupation with linguistics.

A common theme is therefore emerging: the rather one-dimensional somehow bland perspective on relational leadership represented in RLT literature compared to the tumultuous and complex experience of being within a relational leadership dynamic in the CI group. Along with this lack of elaboration is an absence of inquiry into, or articulation of, the felt quality of encounter between leader and follower. If the quality of encounter might be seen to influence in any way issues such as the effectiveness of decision-making or our sense of fulfilment in work then this absence may be problematic. Whilst we have a simplified and restricted view of the between space we risk simplifying the task of leadership and what it might take to lead effectively. We surely then underestimate what it takes to creatively address the issues we face this century.

Extending our understanding of the between space by regarding it as a place where we 'sense' the 'quality' of our 'connection' with others is the focus of the next section. It is the foundation of my contribution to Relational Leadership Theory.

Contribution: Towards a theory of leader-follower encounter

Using Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue has allowed attention to turn towards the nature of leader-follower relation. His work conveys to me the depth and the richness of our intersubjective encounter. Consequently it has helped to illustrate how RLT is lacking coherent attempts to convey and theorise the *quality of that encounter* and the holistic nature of it. The danger with this omission is that the implications relational quality might have upon issues concerning leadership effectiveness, such as creative decision making or fulfilment at work, are unappreciated and unaccounted for.

I suggest that two contributing factors, relating firstly to method and secondly to difficulties in articulation, have encouraged RLT to circumvent these important aspects

of relational leadership (which Buber's ideas certainly emphasise). The contribution of this thesis to RLT lies in illuminating relational quality and recommending an exploration which would lead towards a theory of leader-follower encounter. This will be introduced and detailed below.

This thesis makes a contribution to RLT by conveying empirically the more holistic, dynamic, sensed quality of the between space leader and follower. In doing so it uncovers a significant gap in constructionist RLT research to date; that of the sense of quality of leader-follower encounter. Quality has been examined by entity based RLT researchers but not by constructionists to date.

It may be helpful here to bring Tsoukas' work (1994) back into the discussion which was mentioned in chapters 2, 3 and 4. Using the work of Pepper's *World Hypotheses* (1942), Tsoukas discusses the different approaches to obtaining formal knowledge in management studies. Within his categorisation, my research in this thesis might be regarded as 'contextual', namely I am interested in a pattern of study more than discrete 'facts' and change and novelty are fundamental features of my work. Importantly, in the context of this discussion, he explains (in a quote also referenced in chapter 3) that in contextualism:

> "Every event, specified at a particular point in time, can be apprehended in terms of…quality and texture. Quality is the intuited wholeness of an event: texture is the details and relations making up the quality. We understand events by grasping intuitively the whole pattern (a face, a mood, a song, a painting, etc.), and when we wonder why we are so sure of our intuitions we start analysing their texture" (1994:767).

I suggest RLT to date has been more interested in describing the texture of relational leadership; for example the specific processes at play and the specific constructions involved. As a consequence the sense of quality of encounter between leader and follower has somehow evaporated.

I propose the quality of encounter would be an additional fruitful focus area for researchers. Linking back to Figure 3 in chapter 2, this area could take its place within the RLT literature as illustrated in Figure 13. Representing it as a separate stream of work in the diagram is done in order to clarify how quality has been 'left out' of constructionist RLT to date. It is *not* meant to imply that quality might be explored in isolation to the other areas of focus. Inevitably quality would encompass issues of constructs, processes and practices; questions surrounding each of these issues are major features of this thesis and a key aspect I have emphasised regarding relational quality is our *holistic* sense of these issues.

Figure 13: Mapping my contribution to RLT
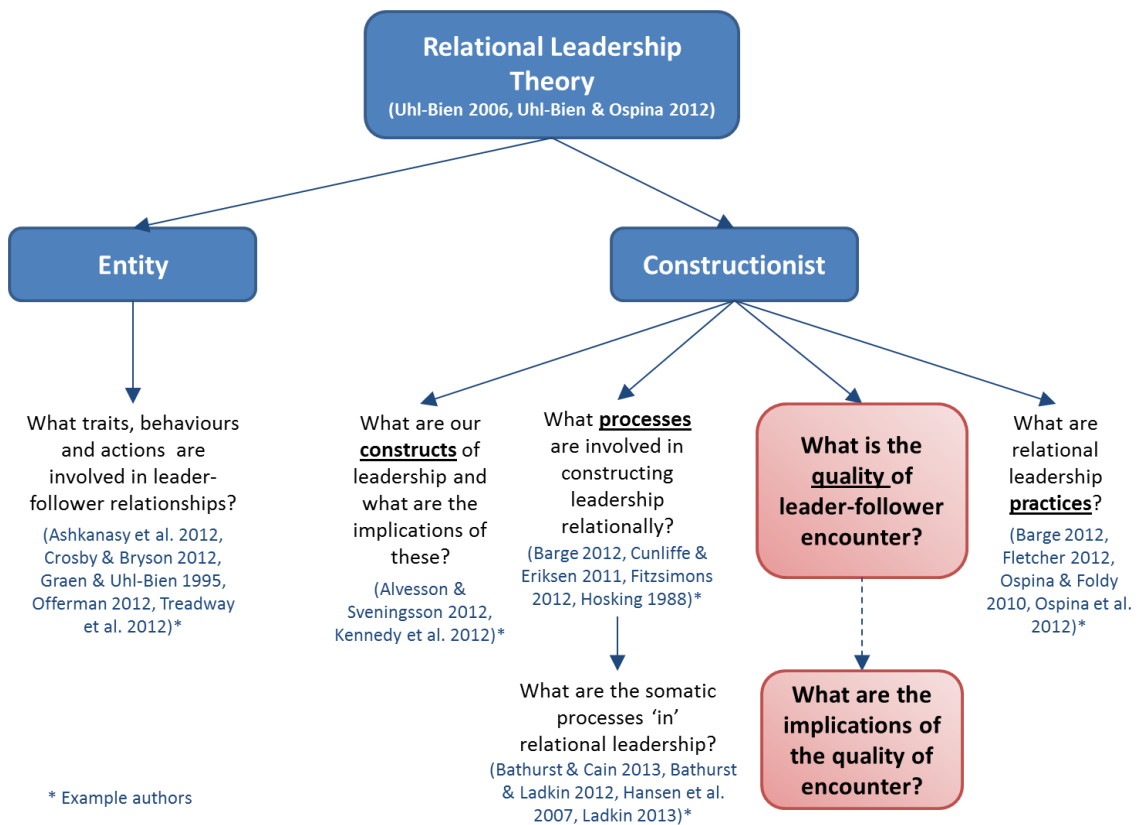
The two highlighted areas in Figure 13 I suggest lead towards a *theory of leader-follower encounter* which I will explain further below. In making this suggestion I am attempting to bring out from the shadows the vibrancy of what it is to be in the midst

of relating in a leadership dynamic in order to examine the implications that the quality of encounter might have. Given my interpretation of the data in this thesis there may be implications for example on leader-follower creativity or leader-follower fulfilment at work.

Focusing on quality does not refer 'just' to conveying our responsiveness in and to language in a processural sense and it is not 'just' confined to our felt-sense. I am attempting to encourage something more holistic than this. As I will explain, I make this suggestion not knowing how possible it is to achieve; but I am extending an invitation to the field to see what might happen if we tried to access such a holistic picture.

Hansen et al. (2007) provide me with some confidence in this rather bold invitation. They claim that "leadership research has been watering down the rich phenomenon of leadership" (2007:544). They then go on to say:

> "Leadership is a vibrant bright orange, and we are amazed at its resilience in the face of leadership studies hammering it into a shapeless, hapless, colorless, life-less condition" (2007:545).

The language used by Hansen et al. is encouragingly similar to the feedback I received from Richard in relation to my conference submission (and detailed in chapter 3) who admitted to:

> *A yearning for something of the rich, deep, dark red reality of real contact and emotional depth that we have (I have) experienced at times… a recollection of real intimacy and connection that built and built….*
>
> *(Email extract, 3/4/2012)*

An invitation to explore a theory of leader-follower encounter would attempt to turn our attention onto aspects of the quality of our experiencing of relational leadership in the moment in order to bring out its 'vibrant bright orange' or 'rich, deep, dark red' colour.

Why a theory of leader-follower encounter is important; the contribution to RLT

To provide clarity in relation to the contribution a theory of leader-follower encounter might make to RLT this section specifically considers what it might address that is not being addressed, or is unlikely to be addressed within the current confines of RLT.

A theory of leader-follower encounter might serve to point the way to two main areas which RLT has left relatively in the shadows. Firstly, the implications that the *quality* of our leader-follower 'encounters' in organisations might have on our ability to provide creative solutions to the dramatic issues that we face as a society in the twenty-first century. Secondly, and ultimately, the implications that the *quality* of our encounters might have on how we come to know what it is to be human.

I am suggesting that the use of the word 'encounter' might entice researchers into these two inquiry areas in a way that 'relational' might not (and indeed so far has not). Indeed, I am using the term in an intentional link back to Buber's work; Kaufmann in his later translation of *I and Thou* (1970) translates '*Begegnung'* as 'encounter' (rather than Smith's 1958 translation of 'meeting'). Buber is therefore understood by Kaufman as saying 'all actual life is encounter' (1970:62). By 'encounter' Buber means "the event that actually takes place when one steps into a mutual relationship and reciprocally meets Thou in the present moment, whole person to whole person" (Kramer 2003:43) . I am using 'encounter' in this sense and suggest it could re-focus researchers in four main ways:

1. 'Relational' so far seems to have directed researchers more towards a conceptual and external view of relating; the 'to-ing and fro-ing' 'tennis match' between individuals. 'Encounter' might conjure up a sense of a moment of meeting through which those party to it are inevitably changed *energetically*.

2. 'Relational' invokes more the generalised processes and practices of leadership whereas 'encounter' might attend to the unique, contextually dependent, fleeting phenomenon of leadership.

3. 'Encounter' might move researchers towards a richer picture of what it is to be in the moment of relation. In this way it could direct more attention to the between space than has been afforded through RLT.

4. 'Encounter' might invite attention not towards *either* cognition *or* aesthetic, but both, symbiotically; the whole. In essence then, 'encounter' might persuade researchers to attempt a more holistic rich picture therefore of the phenomenon of leadership dynamic.

The reason for suggesting a focus on encounter is to extend RLT in order to theorise the way leadership is constructed and suggest practical implications, particularly in relation to addressing the critical challenges of this century. Beyond the implications for specific leader-follower relating this issue has potential ramifications for the manner in which we engage with each other in organisational settings more generally. Additionally, given the extended periods of time we spend in organisational settings, it is important to consider ramifications on our experience of life more generally as human beings.

The members of the CI group indicated that the felt pressure of limited time and the need to meet and beat targets are amongst the common anxieties experienced by those wishing to take up a leader role. Furthermore, these anxieties might leak out into relating with followers. The CI group felt that 'spaces' for dialogue within a leadership dynamic may be few and far between in organisational settings (see again for example the picture stating 'create your own spaces'). A feature of organisational life is the frequent meetings which tend to be orchestrated by 'leaders' through agendas in an attempt to drive specific outcomes in a bid to be (and to seem) productive, in other words 'worthwhile'. The quality of encounter in these meetings is dubious and this becomes self-fulfilling as articulated by Kate and discussed in chapter 6:

Kate: Since I've been back at work, I've been in several meetings where I've been stunned by the rubbish quality of conversation that's happened in the meeting. And I've become preoccupied in those situations with what's my part here, what am I doing to …? Is it there are

immense amounts of mistrust in this room? Why is there a great absence of serious encounters with each other? Am I prepared to step into some space? And I mostly decide I'm not! ((laughs)) Which of course tells me everything about what everybody else is doing.

(Meeting 8)

There is little space to discover more about the persons who are engaged in meeting one another. This was illustrated in Paul's reflections about a CEO he had worked with who did not know his direct report of four years had any children. I interpret his story as meaning that discovering the depth of the person we are meeting, through opening up less structured space for conversation, may help us to turn towards them and appreciate them in a way we hadn't before, which would then affect the quality of dialogue and effect 'good work'. This perhaps would be quite a change however to organisational norms as Tony reflects:

Tony: I'm guessing our meetings are no different to many others, they're so choreographed. That's what gets in the way [of dialogue] I would suggest.

(Meeting 12)

If we are predominantly engaged in transactional meetings in our organisations, driven by a fear of 'not wasting time', accepting of 'rubbish conversations' in 'choreographed' rituals what are the implications for our relations and what are the implications of that in turn? What are the implications on tackling creatively critical challenges together? Buber states that genuine dialogue requires mutual, present *encounter*. If he is correct and if we are unable to access space for such relating in organisations, then the variety of activities which rely upon dialogue according to some authors, including the development of creative solutions to pressing global issues (see Senge 2006 and Isaacs 1999) may prove elusive. This is why RLT needs to be further conceptualising this area and offering practical advice to those wishing to 'lead' others in engaging with these issues.

A further fundamental point relates to Buber's plea that without encountering Thou we cannot know what it is to be human. I am suggesting that we may be rapidly creating alienating organisational environments which reinforce fragmentation and

'mismeeting' (Buber 1958). I see Tony as alluding to this in his words referenced in chapter 8:

> *Tony: I wonder if you get to a point of dialogue where. ..you can have discussions about the organisation, but in a very different way to the mechanistic, the budget, the strategy, the action plan, the blah, blah. I come away from some of our meetings sometimes – I chair most of them so a lot of it is down to me, I'm sure – feeling quite empty at the end of it. We've got a lot of work done, we've all worked hard, but you just feel a bit kind of like ((sighs)), you know.*
> *(Meeting 7)*

In an environment like the one Tony describes we fail to experience the full extent of our being-in-this-world. We miss the knowledge of what it is to realise our inherently relational nature with those around us and the implications of that relationality. One might surmise that the consequences of this might range from a depleted sense of fulfilment to a grossly reduced sense of ethical relation with one another. I propose that this is also why an exploration of leader-follower encounter is important.

The business ethics literature skirts around some of the issues regarding the quality of our encounter with others. In the face of corporate scandals and the need to address pressing social concerns some authors in this field have indeed turned towards the importance of how members of organisations relate to each other when making such decisions. Hancock (2008) provides an exploration into an ethics based on recognition; an ethics which is both intersubjective and embodied. He critiques the popular deontological and utilitarian ethics schools arguing:

> "By simply reducing the ethical to either abstract and legalistic schemas, or individualized qualities of behaviour or presentation, both fail to consider the temporal, spatial and embodied nature of such intersubjective encounters" (2008:1357).

Borrowing the term 'corporeal generosity' from Diprose (2002) he argues that relationality must play a far greater part in determining an ethics of organising. However what Hancock does not focus on are issues which might draw us away from being present to such relationality; issues such as the pace of life and busyness. He also

does not convey in any depth what it would be like to relate in such a way with others. The 'nature of intersubjective encounters', in other words, is not theorised or richly articulated. A theory of leader-follower encounter might assist in extending such work.

To summarise, I propose a theory of leader-follower encounter might direct attention towards conceptualising, theorising and conveying the quality of relation between leader and follower. It might illuminate the complexity and richness of the experience of being in relation. Through doing this we might be encouraged to inquire into the nature of our encounters in organisations and how the quality of these encounters might influence our abilities to address complex issues together. We might also be led to consider how the nature of our encounters leads us towards or away from understanding the depth of our intersubjective relation more generally, and with it our knowledge of what it is to be human.

What specifically would a theory of leader-follower encounter attend to?

This thesis' contribution lies in its attendance to the five areas detailed below. I suggest that a theory of leader-follower encounter would seek to extend these further.

1. **Illuminating the complexity of the moment of leader-follower encounter** in an attempt to illustrate the multi-faceted and multi-layered quality of the between space. This thesis has explored and conveyed a more holistic and dynamic view of what it is to be in relation and used novel methods to do so. However researchers might extend understanding through examining leader-follower encounter in different contexts and they might search for other novel ways of conveying it (see the next section). This might be a formidable challenge because using language to identify 'the between space' necessarily separates 'it' into a thing which exists discretely, in between separated individuals. Our use of language fragments our world and our experience (see Bateson 2000). Articulating the dynamic energy in the midst of encounter as an un-separated

field, as an extension if you like of those meeting, might require assistance from methods outside of spoken or written language (see below).

2. **Descriptions of the quality of encounter.** Recognising the challenges of language a theory of leader-follower encounter might nevertheless examine how our felt sense with others might be described in qualitative terms. For example, this thesis has used Buber's words in exploring whether we see our 'meetings' as 'transactional' or as 'genuine'. He uses the terms 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' to convey quality; a theory of leader-follower encounter might search for other ways to describe difference. In doing so it might offer more expansive means of conveying the multitude of ways we experience leader-follower relating.

3. **The implications** of our sense of the quality of our leader-follower encounters on our societal, organisational and individual reality. What does it mean for us as human beings if our leader-follower encounters with others are overwhelmingly transactional rather than genuine? What does it mean if our meetings are seen as 'choreographed' and our conversations generally 'rubbish'? This thesis has examined implications of these issues on dialogue, but what else might they mean in relation to our ability to creatively and sustainably address issues we face in the twenty-first century?

4. **Construction of leader and follower**. Linked to the above point on implications, this thesis has examined the way our sense of leadership encounters informs our constructs of leadership and followership. It has further examined how our predominant ways of constructing leader and follower influenced, in turn, the quality of our encounters. A theory of leader-follower encounter would seek to extend this perhaps by exploring constructions of leadership in different contexts.

5. **The macro social constructs and discourses** which might hold implications on the quality of leader-follower encounter (for example further work on busyness

and the discourse of productivity that this thesis has identified and the implications of continuing to hold onto the image of leader as hero). This would complement current work in RLT which examines how macro discourses (gender, power etc.) affect the way we construct leader and follower (currently the way they affect the *quality* of encounter is left unexplored).

How could researchers develop a theory of leader-follower encounter?

For reasons previously described, a theory of leader-follower encounter would likely need to consider novel research methods. In particular researchers would be interested in methods which allow the formulation of rich descriptions of the leader-follower encounter in the moment. They may also be interested in methods which approach quality in non-linguistic ways for the purposes given above. The following might be fruitful avenues to explore:

1. **Methods encouraging different expressions of knowledge.** Using Heron's concepts (1996), different *presentational* routes into exploring and expressing our 'knowingness' might be useful in deepening our articulation of leader-follower encounter. This thesis has used key incident stories and collage but further metaphorical work with pictures or drawing, photography, dance or drama, could be productive (see Reason and Bradbury 2008a).

2. **Methods including first- and second-person data.** These methods have been used in this thesis and I suggest that they hold potential for accessing deeper aspects of encounter in the moment than other methods where researchers are more external and separated from the phenomenon of interest. In addition, co-operative inquiry, as shown in this thesis, might offer useful insights into non-hierarchical leadership dynamics and could be explored in different contexts (for example a group could be formed of peers inside an organisation).

3. **Analysis using 'lenses'** through which one might form constructs of the quality of relation within a leadership dynamic. This thesis has used Buber's concepts of mutuality, confirmation and inclusion as lenses to access what is indeed rather 'slippery' territory (Ladkin 2013:323). Other writers who have a particular interest in aspects of the between space of encounter might lend insight to empirical data through a similar process of 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1989) to the one described in this thesis. For example, Merleau-Ponty's work on 'flesh' and perception has already been used by some authors trying to convey the between space more fully (Bathurst & Cain 2013 and Ladkin 2013) and I imagine there is further scope to extend this. Gendlin's concept of 'focusing' (2003) examines our intuitive felt-sense of a situation and might be of interest in relation to leader-follower encounter. Sheldrake's concept of 'morphic resonance' (2009) might also be of interest in shedding light on aspects of the between space in encounter.

To summarise, I am suggesting that a theory of leader-follower encounter would encourage RLT into the unexplored territory of relational quality, acknowledging that it would require novel methods in order to do so. A focus on quality enables RLT to paint a richer picture of what our sense is to be in leader-follower relation. In doing so it invites us to consider the implications that the quality of our encounters is having on our ability to address the concerning issues that face us this century. A theory of leader-follower encounter might invite those wishing to practice leadership to consider their assumptions regarding 'what it takes to lead' and in doing so I suggest that it might lead us to consider, much more fundamentally, what it is to be human in our organisations with others.

I have discussed my findings and presented my contribution to RLT through the invitation to interested researchers to consider developing a theory of leader-follower

encounter. I now consider, in the remainder of this chapter, what implications this work has for leadership practice, the co-operative inquiry method and for leadership development. I then clarify the limitations of this research and summarise my suggestions for further research.

Implications for leadership practice

When considering the implications on leadership practice this thesis presents and how these implications connect with extant literature, an image came to mind of an ice-berg. On the surface there are perhaps a number of relatively noticeable implications for leaders. These are the behaviours leaders might display in order to encourage (but by no means ensure) dialogue. However under the surface there may be other implications which are more complex. These complex implications are more in tune with the constructionist and relational ideas put forward in this thesis and are perhaps more difficult to translate into practical 'things to do'. I am not alone in noticing that whilst 'entity' research can produce some relatively clear suggestions for leaders, constructionist research is inevitably vaguer (see Day and Drath 2012 and Fletcher 2012).

I begin with some of the more straightforward suggestions (by which I mean those that are relatively easy to explain, rather than meaning they are easy to put into practice). Firstly, the hierarchical leader may be in a position of authority and visibility from where he or she might role model certain behaviours and attitudes to others which could in turn invite dialogue. These might include holding an orientation towards curiosity and demonstrating a balance between advocacy and genuine inquiry (Senge 2006). They might also include role modelling a level of disclosure of personal fragilities which could encourage more open conversation by others.

To reiterate, the suggestions above may appear rather straightforward however this thesis has illuminated the hidden complexity inherent in them. For example, I am not

dismissing the deep sense of personal risk which might accompany a leader's attempt to disclose more or keep open to learning from others.

Secondly, as chapter 7 details, a positional leader might use their power to create spaces for dialogue (see Deetz and Simpson's work on 'forums' and 'voice', 2004). These spaces would perhaps be less structured than the traditionally choreographed organisational meeting, although the leader would need to show sensitivity for the anxieties that this might provoke. In these spaces those present might explore more about each other and what they think about certain organisational issues without the need to provide a list of action points at the end that 'prove' the meeting was worthwhile.

Thirdly, a leader, positional or not, might take an interest in inquiring into and encouraging conversation about the 'rules of the game' present in the organisation and the implications of these rules on the way people relate to each other (see Mazutis and Slawinski 2008 and Ospina et al. 2012 on 'reframing discourse'). Such rules may be implicit and difficult to speak about as shown in chapter 6 and therefore require a felt sense of safety to engage in, which in turn might be assisted by the leader's capacity to role model these sorts of inquiry and disclosure orientations.

Fourthly, and perhaps in conjunction with the point above is that a leader, again positional or not, might encourage inquiry into the quality of encounters within their organisation (and indeed beyond with customers, suppliers etc.). They might instigate conversations regarding the transactional nature of work life and any need for more genuine encounter in order to simply raise people's awareness of the issues and implications of the way they are with others (the distinction Buber draws between 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' 1958).

Finally, a leader might introduce more conversations which inquire into the construction of leadership and its meaning within the organisation. What is regarded as leadership? Who are the leaders? What are the implications of these views? Again, this is far from a simple process. I imagine that some of the more difficult-to-describe

constructions might be hidden from view (in chapter 7 I showed how in the CI group our construction of leadership as changing the character of a conversation was discovered only after our lengthy interactions and rigorous reflection on our time spent together).

These points above describe fairly obvious (although far from straightforward) 'things a leader could do' that might be inferred from the findings of this thesis. There are a number of less easily articulated inferences however which could be even more significant for those stepping into leadership roles, hierarchical or otherwise. Barge (2012) goes some way towards articulating these. He suggests that:

> "If we think of conversations as unfolding, then leaders need to be able to position themselves in three ways: (a) they need to be able to develop anticipations of what might happen that help guide their subsequent actions; (b) they need to be present in the situation connecting to what is unfolding in the here and now; and (c) they need to develop the ability to look back on the conversation and reflect on what has transpired and what they had learned from the process" (Barge 2012:120).

Barge I think here recognises that what happens between leader and follower is enormously complex with many micro-processes at play. To extend his suggestions, I propose that a leader needs to be able to appreciate that complexity and be present in the moment by living through, in essence, an action research orientation in order to encourage perpetual learning (see also Shotter 2004, 2006); reflection-in-action according to Schon (1987).

Furthering Barge's suggestions I would add that a leader must be able to recognise, and be comfortable with the limits to their own agency in a situation which is something that goes against the majority of heroic leadership literature and social discourse. Rather than focusing on 'levers' they might pull to change the organisation and those in it (see Kotter and Cohen 2002), they might focus more on disrupting problematic rules of the game or arranging times for new conversations to emerge and

allow them the scope to flourish (see Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011, Quinn 2000 and Shaw 2002).

Finally, some of the points and most of the authors referred to above, focus very much on linguistic dialogue and because of this I would add, from the findings in this thesis, that it may be helpful if the leader becomes also sensitive to their somatic sense in the moment. They could become interested and curious about their sense of the *quality* of their encounters in addition to what is said and engage others in similar inquiry. This is in tune with advice from Gendlin (2003) and Ladkin (2013) but suggests perhaps a wider, more holistic perspective on quality encompassing the sense of intersubjective encounter.

In summary, it is when the theoretical and empirical findings get translated into practical advice for 'leaders' that there is some danger in leaving the complexity and quality of the between space unrecognised. The 'advice' offered above is far from simple, because the leader-follower dynamic, in turn, is so far from simplistic in practice.

Implications for the co-operative inquiry method

Co-operative inquiry "is a vision of persons in reciprocal relation using the full range of their sensibilities to inquire together into any aspect of the human condition with which the transparent body-mind can engage" (Heron 1996:1). Heron's words echo a philosophy based on dialogue and "fully reciprocal relations" (1996:3) between co-researchers. Given that this thesis has been engaged in exactly this philosophy I suggest that it might hold a number of implications for those seeking to initiate, facilitate and participate in co-operative inquiry groups.

The implications might be viewed similarly to those for leaders above in that there are some practical 'things a facilitator could do' as well as the rather less easily articulated implications that evolve from taking constructionism and relationality seriously. Issues

mentioned above regarding perpetual learning, agency, anticipations and appreciation of quality are relevant within the context of co-operative inquiry. To these I would add a number of specific practical implications and suggestions.

The first implication relates to the impossibility of reaching the implied standards set by Heron in his seminal book. On reading this I was overwhelmed with the 'rules' that I perceived to be inherent within co-operative inquiry and indeed it was this realisation that led us to discuss the broader 'rules of the game' in the CI group during meeting 8. As I mentioned in my check-in to that meeting, I had at that stage, redefined co-operative inquiry 'as a whole load of shoulds'. By this I meant to convey my bewilderment and anxiety in relation to my sense of 'getting it wrong' specifically in relation to setting up a group which was 'equal' in its desire to research, analyse and determine findings from the research. My experience rather was of a group of people who had different commitment levels, were after different things and certainly didn't share my need to analyse and determine findings in the same way as I did. My experience was also of a group where, as described above, our relating was infused with power dynamics. We were certainly not 'equal'. Co-operative inquiry should retain an *aspiration* of equality whilst engaging and inquiring deeply into the inequalities inherent in the group and the implications these might have on the process of action and reflection. This inquiry is not undertaken in order to dissolve the inequalities. They are unavoidable aspects of group work. It is undertaken in order to retain critical and rigorous reflection and, through the surfacing of the issues seek to diminish some of the distortions that they might lead to. By presenting a rather idealised view of what co-operative inquiry should look like, there is a danger of 'disappearing' the existence of such 'negative' issues wrapped up in power inequalities and difference, as Stuart aptly reflected:

> *Stuart: I think if we make co-operative inquiry clearest, like it is in the literature, we can be angels on a pinhead; we won't be doing anything useful.*
>
> *(Meeting 1)*

The second point regarding implications for co-operative inquiry relates to the initiator or facilitator role. It recognises the particular influence that person might have whether they like it or not (a reference to my failed initial attempts at trying to 'shake off' the leadership role ascribed to me). In discussions relating to power in the CI group I realised I had held an assumption that power on the whole was negative, in other words I held connotations of 'power over' (see Gergen 1995). Now, at the end of the CI journey, I see the possibilities of 'power with' (see Fletcher 2003). A facilitator might use their influential position to role model certain dialogic orientations which could in turn influence the manner of relating within the group. They might do this in the following ways, some of which echo the points in the previous section:

Firstly, the facilitator might choose to disclose certain vulnerabilities which might invite an openness and authenticity in the group and a lowering of the barriers of role difference, as discussed in chapter 6. In particular they could choose moments to bring out into the open uncertainties around how they should be facilitating and progressing the inquiry. I noticed that when I risked being seen as 'an inexperienced (read inept) facilitator' by admitting I wasn't sure what to do, it relieved my fretful internal dialogue and often led to useful discussions in the group (for example when Stuart mentioned the energy was low in the first meeting). The CI group members also reflected that it gave them permission to 'not know' and so disrupted some of implicit rules that strengthened facades such as 'the need to be seen as clever'. There is clearly a contextual caveat to this; I am suggesting disclosure *can* be appreciated in this way however an appreciation of context would be essential in order to anticipate the implications of one's disclosure.

Secondly, the facilitator could role model rigorously and passionately holding the question of inquiry. This was identified as something the other members in my CI group appreciated and is accounted for in chapter 7.

Thirdly, the facilitator might structure the meeting with an appreciation of the tension between creating space for emergent dialogue and the need to set some boundaries to contain anxiety. This tension is referred to in chapter 5 in the discussion surrounding

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agendas and the implications on the quality of relating. It could be useful for the facilitator to openly invite conversation around the structure of the meetings in order to attempt to negotiate differences in personal preferences on the matter.

Fourthly, the facilitator might invite a check-in process at the beginning of a meeting. Group members stated that they found this useful. This involves each person in the group voicing what they are bringing into the room at that moment; this could include external preoccupations, desires and concerns for the meeting. The check-in process enabled those at the meeting to become more present, to gently bring themselves into relation and to orientate themselves towards each other and perhaps away from the busyness they faced externally (see Bathurst and Ladkin's advice on 'expressing readiness to begin', 2012).

Fifthly, the environment is crucial for co-operative inquiry and should be discussed in the group in depth. This includes not only the physical location but also the set-up of the room. All environments will have implications; having our CI meetings at Ashridge meant that we were in a beautiful, serene environment where we were able to relax to a degree however Graham, for example, was least connected to Ashridge as a place of work or study; the feelings engendered through the location may have been different for him as a result. It is possible that location invites some in and might lead others to feel excluded. Concurring with McArdle (2008), the set-up of the room is also likely to influence dialogue in the group. I chose to set up chairs in a circle with no tables, similar to McArdle. I think this encouraged more open conversation than round a table (as I became acutely aware of in meeting 8 when we changed location and sat around a table outside). Environment matters and it matters in complex ways which will be different for different people. Therefore it is worthwhile considering this openly as a group.

Finally, as part of the data gathering and analysis process this thesis has explored key incidents in depth. As a group we 'exploded the dialogic moment' in that we paused some exchanges which we sensed were important relationally, and discussed them as a group and in depth. These discussions often felt risky but through them we were able

to access some of our differences. As such they were crucial in inviting closer dialogue between us. These incidents (similar to Shotter's 'scenic moments' 2010 and Cunliffe and Eriksen' 'rich points' 2011) gave us insight into the complexity of our relating. They gave us an appreciation for the fragilities, intentions and anxieties between us. A co-operative inquiry group seeking to deepen dialogue might wish to similarly pause and reflect on important moments.

Implications for leadership development

Although not a focus of this thesis, I cannot help, given my job in designing and running leadership development programmes, but briefly mention some of the implications that this work suggests for leadership development. Many of the implications run directly on from the points raised in the previous two sections.

Firstly, the skills which run alongside some of the behaviours and orientations mentioned above should perhaps be emphasised. They include attempts to reduce leader self-obsession, still the mind, become mindful, build confidence in order to 'be' more than 'seem', recognise and anticipate effects of power dynamics, role modelling curiosity, a thirst for learning and an inquiry orientation. Work could focus on sitting with the paradox of sameness and difference in relating; exploration of the inherent relational nature of being as well as the mindfulness required to appreciate the uniqueness of the other.

Although some of these skills are becoming more recognised and more accepted in leadership development (Kennedy et al. 2012, Turnbull James and Ladkin 2008), they are still, in my experience, regarded as somewhat avant-garde. Furthermore, such skills are unlikely to be learnt in a three day short 'boot camp' for managers. They may develop rather more in the long term, within organisations, in the setting of on-going action research (see Coghlan and Brannick 2010), or in one to one coaching within a trusted relationship.

Overall, the findings in this thesis and indeed within the constructionist camp of RLT suggest that leadership might, as well as being an individual positional role, be regarded as more of a group endeavour. Whilst much traditional leadership development remains steeped in the fantasy of inflated individual agency, lionising the role that a hierarchical leader has in the organisation, encouragement of orientations which could invite a more dialogic attitude might be stifled.

Limitations

A number of limitations of this work have been recognised throughout the thesis. Perhaps one of the most important of these is the limitation of the written word. I have found my attempts at putting my knowledge of leadership and dialogue into a propositional format for this written thesis often frustratingly limited. The phenomenon of dialogue and relational leadership, particularly when examined from a more holistic view including one's felt sense, is difficult to convey. It is for this reason that key incidents and pictures are included to attempt to access and communicate the experiences of the CI members and my learning in more depth. However, this still may come across as rather a moderate description.

Another important limitation of this work relates to my inevitably partial perspective and interpretation of events. On several occasions despite my rigorous first-person reflections, I missed something that another person was experiencing, only finding out about it by chance. An example of this is Tony's admission that he had felt anger during the '60 emails' key incident. Members of the group did not perceive this response and it surprised them when Tony spoke of it. This is what my thesis points to; the complex and noisy in between space which we cannot hope to unpick and know the extent of. Attempts through rigorous first-person inquiry and through building an environment in the CI group which we felt to be challenging and critical as well as supportive were important mitigating factors to this partiality. Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating that this thesis contains, within the first-person data, my own

interpretations; other CI members may remember, very differently, significant elements of the occasions I refer to.

Excerpts from the transcripts of the CI meetings convey the skill of the members of the group at expressing themselves, empathising with others, courageously disclosing or taking risks and illustrating authentic presence with others. I fully acknowledge and admire their skills and some members of the group were and are experienced facilitators. This could be seen as an advantage as well as a limitation of the work presented here. It allowed for some extraordinarily frank and quite risky conversation to emerge, which directly led to the insights in this thesis. It also raises a question relating to what additional issues of interest might be revealed when exploring similar ground in a group where facilitation and emotional intelligence might be less practiced.

The CI group, although representing diversity in gender and ethnic background nevertheless was situated within the UK and I would suggest this context led to a broadly 'Western' attitude towards issues such as leadership. For example, I referred in chapter 5 and 7 to the way in which leadership was linked to a heroic ideal including issues of 'productivity' and 'worthwhileness' and how perspectives might be changing in relation to the 'equality' of leader and follower. Such values and perspectives are recognised to differ across national and cultural boundaries. This thesis has sought to explore a particular CI group in a particular context in depth. In doing so inevitably care has to be taken in generalising to other contexts. It is suggested below that it would be interesting to conduct further research in other contexts to explore implications of issues such as cultural assumptions on the findings detailed in this thesis.

Calls for further research

This chapter has suggested five areas which represent avenues for further research:

- Illumination of the complexity of the moment of leader-follower encounter through non-linguistic presentational forms such as art, music or dance.
- Searching for alternative descriptors which are used to convey the quality of encounter.
- Exploring the implications of the quality of leader-follower encounter on societal, organisational and individual reality in alternative contexts, e.g. within a specific organisation or within a different cultural context.
- Inquiring into how the quality of encounter might influence our constructions of leader and follower and vice versa, again in alternative contexts.
- Examining the macro social constructs and discourses which impact upon the quality of leader-follower encounter with deeper inquiry into the effects of 'busyness' and further examination of other impactful macro-discourses.

This thesis has explored and conveyed findings in each of these five areas. The subjects however have been little researched elsewhere and thus there are extensive opportunities to extend the contribution that this thesis makes. In particular, as mentioned above in the section on limitations, this thesis has explored data from a specific CI group situated within a specific context. It would be interesting to explore how groups in different contexts would respond to similar questions of inquiry.

In addition to this suggestion, in the course of interpreting the findings in this thesis, there have been content areas which have not been explored in depth simply because I have made choices on where to focus. Further research into them might deepen our understanding of the space between leader and follower.

The first area is power. The way in which power was constructed in the group and the complexities of these multiple constructions in the moment led me to think that the space between leader and follower might be seen as a constant flux state of power dynamics. Some of these were explored in this thesis but there is further scope to explore how power is socially constructed from *inside* relating in the moment and the implications this might have on the felt sense of encounter. Specific issues relating to

perceived gender or cultural power differences could be examined in depth in relation to how they impact upon the quality of encounter. This suggests perhaps a similar first-person inquiry or CI group method might be of interest.

Secondly, I suggest to those researching dialogue within an organisational context that further empirical work examining dialogue in a Buberian sense rather than simply the linguistic basis that predominates might be a welcome addition to theory in this field. Necessarily such research would have to explore a more holistic sense of how those in relation felt they were 'connecting' and thus would lead to explorations of how linguistic and non-linguistic processes intertwine.

Thirdly, this thesis is unusual in that it presents views of leadership in a non-hierarchical context. There is a dearth of literature looking empirically at leadership in these contexts and I would invite further exploration of this. What other ways do we construct leadership in these contexts and how driven are we to seek a form of positional leader even in 'peer' contexts (for example, 'facilitator as leader')? How entrenched and how dominating is the connection between leadership and position and what does that mean for how we relate?

Fourthly, mutuality has been an important concept in this thesis and holds implications for the quality of leader-follower space. However there are very limited accounts of how mutuality is constructed in the between space and such accounts might further our understanding in RLT and indeed in the social construction of leadership. How then do we sense a mutual relationship and what are the implications of a relation being regarded as mutual?

Finally, in reviewing this thesis with Graham, a CI member, two areas were identified that would be useful to explore further. The first of these is the role that humour plays in dialogue and indeed in leadership. The key incidents represented here all encompassed elements of humour. Further research could explore how we use humour in dialogue and leadership and how it might affect the quality of our

encounters. Are both dialogue and leadership constructed to be 'serious' endeavours? If so, what might the implications of that be on our encounters?

Graham and I also discussed a question which was voiced in the CI group but not explored in depth; how does the history of our relationship influence the leadership relation and dialogue between us? If we have known each other for an extended period how is the quality of our encounter different to when we meet for the first time? This is not seeking for a yes / no response to whether 'dialogue is possible when you first meet someone'. I suspect the issue to be much more contextual and subjective, however the influence of the history and nature of our previous relation might have significant implications on how we encounter one another in leadership relations and could therefore be a subject of future research.

The next, closing chapter of this thesis offers a final conclusion and a short personal reflection on the PhD journey.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

Concluding summary

The question directing this thesis has been 'how does Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou dialogue inform the theory and practice of Relational Leadership?' The application of novel methods (first-person and co-operative inquiry) in a different context (a non-hierarchical, peer setting) has enabled me to contribute towards the conceptualisation of the 'between space' where leadership is constructed.

RLT to date has focused on articulating leadership constructs, processes of leadership construction and relational leadership practices. The limited range of methods used in the field and the difficulty in conveying non-linguistic as well as linguistic processes holistically have contributed to this preoccupation. Whilst entity based RLT research has explored 'quality' through its intense examination of LMX theory, constructionist scholars have chosen to overlook issues of quality. Questions relating to what it is like to *be* in an emerging dynamic leadership relation and how one senses the nature of that relation have not been raised or addressed. Consequently, our understanding of leadership as a relational phenomenon remains partial. The implications that the quality of our encounters and our appreciation of the complexity inherent in the between space during such encounters has on how we choose to enact to leadership effectively are dismissed.

This thesis contributes by highlighting these issues and articulating a clear path for further research which could develop a theory of leader-follower encounter. It is hoped that this will provide assistance to those wishing to address the pressing issues that we face in the twenty-first century by encouraging genuine dialogue. Furthermore it might encourage us to pause to consider the implications that the nature of our

encounters in our work-life have upon us as human beings wishing to know what it is to be fully human.

A brief personal reflection….and a call to action

The journey contained within this thesis has been an inspiration and a passion to me over the last four years which, along with the subject matter contained within it, is extremely difficult to convey simply in words. In some ways I feel I can only convey it in the moment, through my eyes meeting your gaze (see Heron 1970).

As I have been writing up the thesis in the last few months I encountered a problem; how and whether to convey why I am *consumed* by the subject and experience of dialogue. I think perhaps I will turn to a transcript of words spoken to my co-operative inquiry group in our reunion meeting for help and I will not seek to unpick it line by line for analysis. It is still a poor attempt to put into words my deep preoccupation, but I feel this thesis is the beginning of something rather than the end so my search will continue:

Megan: So I kind of think my PhD, you know you can read it at various levels, but at one level it's a passionate plea for organisations to inquire about how people meet - or not. And I think this is the thing that really hits me with the pace of life, with the level of busyness, with our expectations around what 'directors of finance' do and what 'chief executives' <u>must</u> be like, all of that, coupled with our own incredible fragilities when you look at it - I think a lot of the transcripts bring out how amazingly fragile we are as individuals in terms of our need, as Buber would say, to be confirmed by others. So much of what we're doing, <u>even</u> in here [right now in this meeting], is around seeking confirmation and so when you talk about what hinders dialogue out there, it <u>is</u> all the pace of life and the busyness and it's at various different levels. It's <u>also</u> the fantasy, at a very macro level, the fantasy that we operate as individual beings as opposed to being very, very common and the same….

Kate:….I want to take you back to your tears and I mean I don't want to. What's that that's really important to you there? Is it important? What is it?

Megan: That's a very good question and I think it's essentially why I'm doing the PhD that I'm doing.

> *Kate: And, ((said humorously)), for the tape, Megan's crying.*
>
> *Megan: ((laughs))…….I think I've always been led into the world of dialogue and empathic resonance because… I suppose I'm searching for what it means to be a human being in this world with others and really being one. I've always said that one of my greatest fears in a way is that I go through life playing the game and not having been human and not knowing what that is. And, for me, being human is knowing what it is to be in relation to others and nature….*
>
> *….And what I see, in my own experience, and with people in the classroom; I just don't see us getting closer in our organisational settings to encountering and appreciating and marvelling in each other. I don't see it; I see no space available for it. I see so many things that are leading away from the spaces where we [can meet in others in dialogue]…..and following Buber [I'm] not at all suggesting that we should be in some sort of glorious connected harmony…..the transactional way of being is required for us to also be human in so many ways. But a place devoid of knowing Thou? That is a place where we don't know what it's like to be human…..I think we have issues in our world that demand this level of [connectedness] and thoughtfulness.*
>
> *Because we need this connection, this depth of connection and thoughtfulness to stand any hope of dealing with these issues….I don't see us moving towards it I see us moving away and that's what the thing is about. That's the nub of it. And it comes back I suppose to me as a person, I see myself moving away from it and desperately think….No.*
>
> *Kate: I think that's beautifully said and I completely agree with you and I think that in a sense what you're articulating is what I was grappling to say because to me that's not just about interpersonal psychology or how we show up as human beings in groups with each other, it's about much bigger questions to do with the human relationship with each other and with our world and how we have lived that and I think that's everything from business to politics to international relations to how we sit together in rooms. It's like all there, in that piece.*
>
> *(Meeting 12)*

Fleetingly I realise and encounter Thou and through doing so glimpse the tragedy of our confused, alienated and separated world. If we were to truly realise our relational beingness it could not fail to lead us to approach important issues from climate change and terrorism to organisational diversity and individual fulfilment in a different way. How on earth do we tackle these issues without this realisation? At the end of this thesis I feel somewhat overawed at the deep complexity of meeting the other as Thou but at the same time, I have glimpsed the possibility of dialogue and once glimpsed it

becomes part of my being-in-the-world-with-others. I close with Friedman's advice as it echoes where I am at and articulates the direction of my future work:

"We must follow Buber in not underestimating the obstacles to the life of dialogue, but we must also follow him in refusing to magnify them into an inexorable fate"

(Friedman 2005:146)

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APPENDIX: Email invitation

From: Megan Reitz/Ashridge
To: x
Cc:
Date: 08/09/2011 09:34
Subject: Leadership and dialogue co-operative inquiry

Hello everyone

Thank you for showing interest in my research around leadership and dialogue. I know that some of you are still figuring out whether to be part of this inquiry group however knowing that meetings can take a long time to set up, I wanted to see whether I can perform a miracle by getting a slot when, if you do happen to be interested, we could all come together for an exploratory workshop. I am looking at some time in October and November here at Ashridge. The purpose of this would be to:

- introduce the research done to date and some proposed inquiry questions
- meet each other and discuss experiences and perspectives on leadership and dialogue
- figure out who would like to be part of an inquiry group going forward and what you would like from the group
- work out dates for meeting up

Just to reiterate that there is no obligation to be part of the co-operative inquiry group ad infinitum if you come along to this workshop. In fact you don't ever need to see anyone again if you don't want to (although I'm sure the stimulating conversation will entice you...) That also goes for the duration of the project - if at any time you feel you cannot continue you can withdraw at any time. For those that do take part I imagine (although we all need to contract round this) that we might meet up for about 3 hours every 2 months or so at Ashridge for a period of about 6 months to begin with (so 4 meetings) and longer then if we are all enjoying it and learning lots!

So, here goes. I would like to know your availability on the following dates and have set up a poll to try to make the process easier on Doodle. Please follow this link and just tick which you can make

http://doodle.com/3dnxm9xz399xkbna

3rd October, 31st October, 2nd November, 3rd November, 10th November

Thank you. I really look forward to seeing you

Kind regards

Megan