Making Sense of Leadership Development: reflections on my role as a leader of leadership development interventions

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ABSTRACT

If we never challenge dominant modes of thinking,

we end up trapped in modes of acting that

may no longer be serving us all that well.

(Stacey, 2011a: xviii)

This thesis advances a fresh perspective on leadership and leadership development, an understanding developed during the course of a longitudinal exploration of the interdependent web of personal and role relationships that constitute my quotidian experience of organisational life. During the past three years, I have been researching my role as Head of Leadership and Organisational Development at the University of Hertfordshire (UH), with a view to making sense of and rethinking leadership and leadership development more generally. This research considers how my own thinking and practice has[1] changed and developed as a consequence of paying attention to and reflecting upon my experience, whilst at the same time locating this sense-making in the broader academic scholarship. Narrative accounts of significant incidents and interactions that I have participated in during this period have been explored extensively in the projects and synopsis contained herein, and shared with colleagues in the learning community on the Doctorate in Management (DMan) programme at UH, as a means of intensifying this sense-making and its generalisability to a community of engaged enquirers.

This study contributes to knowledge and practice in the field of leadership and organisational development (OD). The *contributions to knowledge* emerge in the unique analysis of the political, ethical, and moral choices that management consultants/educators (both internal and external) are confronted with on a daily basis, including an exploration of the shadow side of leadership development, specifically the potential for participants to experience such interventions as a form of coercive persuasion (Schein, 1961) and/or corrective training (Stacey, 2011b). The *contributions to practice* arise in the explication of why and how leaders of leadership development, and the participants with whom they work, need to and might go about developing the reflexive capability, cultural literacy and capacity for practical judgment (Hager, 2000) required to navigate the, often destructive, political processes and multi-dimensional games in which we are all caught up.

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[1] 'Has' rather than 'have' because I see thinking and practice as inseparable, interdependent phases of the same activity. This is something that I will expand later in this thesis.

This research was prompted by a growing disillusionment with the dominant discourse on leadership and leadership development, based as it is on theories, frameworks, tools and techniques that privilege a form of autonomous, instrumental rationality, and deceptive certainty that does not reflect the social, non-linear, uncertain day-to-day realities faced by me and the managers with whom I work. In this thesis, I draw upon my experiences as a manager, leader of leadership development, and a student of leadership development, to problematise the mainstream managerialist conceptions of leadership and organisation that have become part of the organisational habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). The naturalisation of managerialism across the private, public, and charitable sectors in the UK makes it an inordinately difficult ideology to contest without risking some form of exclusion. In this study I explore my experiences of practising and encouraging radical doubt and enquiry, rather than the mindless acceptance and application of conventional wisdom. I draw upon the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al, 2000, Griffin, 2002, Shaw, 2002), critical management studies (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996), social constructionism (Berger et al, 1966), and other scholars critical of managerialist conceptions of leadership and leadership education (Khurana, 2007) to proffer a more reality congruent understanding of leadership and leadership development. The resulting synthesis and sense-making challenge the hegemony of mainstream thought, exploring leadership as a social, relational activity where leaders are co-participants, albeit highly influential ones, in the ongoing patterning of relationships that constitute organisation.

However, I argue that it is insufficient to snipe critically at managerialism from the sidelines, problematising one perspective and simply replacing it with another (Ford et al, 2007), thus leaving managers ill-equipped to navigate the potentially destructive political landscape of day-to-day organisational life. I maintain that the dominant discourse on leadership and organisation is flawed, but in order to avoid exclusion managers must become fluent in the language and practice of the ideology that has come to dominate the vast majority of communities and organisational settings in which they find themselves. Consequently, in this thesis, I challenge management consultants/educators, both mainstream and critical, to employ the same reflexive capacities that they so often advocate and encourage in others. That is, leaders of leadership development, as well as the participants with whom they work, should engage with a polyphony of perspectives, challenge their ways of thinking, and continuously explore the themes arising from the enquiry - *who am I, and what am I doing, who are we, and what are we doing?*

INTRODUCTION

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> I shall talk about France, a country that I know fairly well,
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> not because I was born there and speak its language,
>
> but because I have studied it a great deal
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> (Pierre Bourdieu, 1998: 1)

Over the last thirteen years, organisations have employed me to *transform their managers into effective leaders*. The particulars of this transformation, that is, the difference between leaders and managers and what is meant by effective, are seldom discussed. Rather, it is assumed that there is a shared understanding of who we are, and what we are doing together, as we unproblematically accept dominant conceptions of what constitutes 'effective' leadership and leadership development. Indeed, as outlined in Project 2, following my recruitment, most employers have taken very little interest in what it is that I do on the leadership development programmes that I lead.

Since joining the DMan there has been a movement in my thinking and practice that has revolutionised how I approach, interact during, make sense of, and account for leadership and leadership development. Over the course of my research I have occupied a unique position from which to study leadership development and leadership in Higher Education (HE). As Head of Leadership and Organisational Development at UH, visiting lecturer in leadership on the MBA programme at the UH Business School, and a doctoral student on the DMan programme at UH, I have been able to explore my experiences as a senior manager, a leader of leadership development, an academic (teaching leadership), and a student on a leadership development programme[2]. In addition, I have been able to, i) influence the content of the programmes I am responsible for, ii) collaborate directly with Professors Stacey and Mowles[3] in the development and delivery of new and innovative activities and ways of working, and iii) explore my thinking and practice in collaboration with the participants on the programmes that I lead, and colleagues in the DMan learning community.

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[2] In his recent book, Professor Chris Mowles, Director of the DMan programme describes the programme thus: 'The programme is aimed at supporting programme participants to be better managers, and to expose them to the necessary discipline of academic research (Mowles, 2011: xi). It is in this sense that I consider the DMan to be a leadership development programme, and it is in this light that that I will reflect on my experiences as a student.
[3] The former and current Director of the DMan programme, respectively.

The dominant discourse on leadership and organisation views management as a science, organisation as a system, and leadership as a set of identified skills and competencies that can be developed. The leader is viewed as an autonomous individual who is able to step outside of the system in order to set direction, and guide and control it at will (Stacey, 2010). In this thesis, drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, I present a different understanding of leadership, arguing that the individuals who come to be recognised as leaders are those who are able to 'participate skilfully in interaction with others in reflective and imaginative ways' (ibid: 217). This means accepting the paradoxical nature of the role of leader as in charge but not in control (Streatfield, 2001), becoming more detached in one's involvement (Elias, 1956) in the 'game' (Bourdieu, 1982), making sense of the context in which one finds oneself, living with the uncertainty and anxiety of not knowing that little bit longer, and developing the practical judgement required to assist the groups with whom one works 'to continue acting ethically, creatively, and courageously into the unknown' (Stacey, 2010: 217).

Similarly, I argue that in order to assist leaders in the development of the capabilities described above, leadership development is most useful when it provides a space for managers to develop their capacity for reflexivity. That is, rather than offering instruction in what managers should think, leadership development programmes might help participants to become better at thinking for themselves. Making sense of the role they play in the various communities and situations in which they find themselves involves taking their experience seriously and engaging with and reflexively exploring a range of perspectives. This should include not only mainstream and critical thinking on management and organisation, but also perspectives from the fields of philosophy, sociology, and psychology as a means of locating, understanding, and evaluating what it is that they are co-creating in thinking and practice. Furthermore, I contend that leaders of leadership development are co-participants (albeit highly influential ones) in the ongoing patterning of relationships that constitute the learning communities in which they work. Consequently, they have a responsibility to maintain a reflective and reflexive approach to their own thinking and practice, and to remain vigilant to the potential for idealising particular ways of thinking and working.

I will now briefly explain what the reader can expect to find in the pages that follow. This thesis comprises four projects and a synopsis/critical appraisal. Project 1, is a reflective

autobiographical account of the major incidents and ways of thinking that have come to influence my practice as a manager and leader of leadership development programmes, from early career up to my enrolment on the DMan. Project 2 is an exploration of what it is that I think I am doing when I deliver leadership development interventions. I explore an incident that occurs on one of the programmes that I lead. I start to question the autonomy of leaders and explore an alternative perspective that understands leadership to be a social phenomenon (Griffin, 2002). I also describe the development and introduction of a new programme at UH, *Leadership Experience Groups* (LEGs), a collaborative initiative involving Professors Stacey and Mowles. Finally in Project 2, I begin to engage with other thinkers who are critical of managerialist conceptions of leadership and leadership development (Alvesson et al, 1996, Khurana, 2007). I explore what is it that my employers think they are getting, and I draw on Mead and Hirschhorn to argue that leadership development programmes have become social objects (Mead, 1934) that do little more than provide fun and false certainty as a defence against anxiety (Hirschhorn, 1995).

In Project 3, I explore the events emerging from the dissemination of a paper, written by Ralph[4], regarding what he considered to be the existence of institutionalised bullying at UH. This incident is explored in the narrative entitled *Ralphgate*. I explore my part in this incident and how my own thinking/action as a leader has changed since joining the DMan. Drawing further on Griffin et al (2005), and building on my sense making of leadership from Project 2, I proffer an alternative understanding of leadership, and start to explore the importance of reflexivity. In Project 4, I explore my experience of being a leader of leadership development in UH/HE. I consider further the question *what is leadership development*? I also interrogate further the concept of reflexivity and consider its centrality in the development of the leadership capacities identified in Project 3. And in the synopsis and critical appraisal I review and critically appraise each of the four projects in turn, provide a more comprehensive account of the changes in my practice since joining the DMan, explore and further develop emerging themes, summarise my current sense making of leadership and leadership development, explore in more detail the research method adopted in the development of this thesis, and conclude by summarising the contribution to knowledge and practice that I contend this thesis makes.

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[4] I will use *'Ralph'* when referring to Professor Ralph Stacey as a UH colleague and my second supervisor on the DMan, and Professor Stacey or Stacey, when I am referring to his thinking in the broader academic discourse.

PROJECT 1 (OCTOBER 2008 – APRIL 2009)

THROWING MYSELF INTO THE SEA OF UNCERTAINTY

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> *We shall not cease from exploration*
> *And the end of all our exploring*
> *Will be to arrive where we started*
> *And know the place for the first time*
> (T S Eliot, 1944: 4)

Introduction

I joined the University of Hertfordshire (UH) on 2 January 2007, as Leadership Development Facilitator. By 8 January I had been promoted to Head of Leadership and Organisational Development/Project Manager UH Mindset[5]. Before taking on the role, I entertained the fantasy of being able to call upon academic colleagues to work collaboratively on the leadership development interventions that I would be asked to design and deliver. On starting work at UH, the addition of the project management role, with its objective of *embedding a business facing culture across the University*, led me to test this fantasy by asking colleagues – *"Who should I go to for advice about change management?"* The answer to this question invariably prompted the response, *"Ralph Stacey."* When I mentioned Ralph to the mentor assigned to support me through induction, he tried to temper my enthusiasm by recounting the tale of how, having been invited along to a routine away-day to help with the development of a business plan, Ralph had led the group to question the value of planning. My mentor didn't realise that this only served to pique my curiosity, and I quickly arranged to meet with Professor Stacey.

Meeting with Ralph

I set out for the meeting with Ralph[6] carrying the schedule of the activity we had planned over the next two years in order to effect the required change of culture. I approached the meeting with a mixture of apprehension and excitement, feelings partly attributable to my

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[5]UHMindset was one of six projects that made up the UHEvolution Programme. UHEvolution was a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded project to accelerate the delivery of the University's strategic plan to be the UK's number one business facing University. UHMindset was ostensibly concerned with culture change.

mentor's anecdote about his away-day experience with Professor Stacey, and partly attributable to the reverential way in which some colleagues had talked about Ralph in making their recommendations. Although my original question to colleagues had been *"Who should I go to for advice...?"* In hindsight, it wasn't actually advice that I was after. What I really wanted was validation for the activities we had mapped out for the next two years*,* as whatever Professor Stacey said about our plans, there was little scope to fundamentally change them. If Ralph was about to question the merit of what we had already set in motion, then I would just have to live with this in the short-term and try to change things incrementally over the two-year course of the project.

During the meeting, Ralph scanned the list of activities we had planned and said: *"That's interesting...and that's interesting."* The two activities that Ralph pointed to were the change agent development workshops we had planned, and the focus group sessions we had arranged in order to explore the type of language and behaviours that would be appropriate in a 'business facing' university. I had read some of Ralph's work before our meeting, but during our discussion, he made no reference to the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al, 2000, Griffin, 2002, Shaw, 2002, Stacey, 2007). What he did say was that change would not happen automatically or directly, as a result of the Vice Chancellor's calling for it in an address to staff (one of the communication strands of *UHMindset*), but would rather be played out in the many conversations that would take place in the succeeding days, weeks, and months.

Up to this point in my career, I had never truly questioned the underlying thinking behind my practice. The theories, models, tools and techniques that had underpinned my practice over the preceding twenty years had served me well enough, and when they hadn't reflected my lived experience, I had always been able to rationalise away the inconsistencies. Ralph's comments at our meeting both pleased and disturbed me at the same time. Pleased me because there were at least two strands of our plan that he felt were "interesting", and disturbed me because I had read enough of his work to know that the reasons why Ralph thought these activities had some merit were different from my reasons for agreeing them in the first place. I wanted to able to understand this difference. This meeting with Ralph indirectly introduced me to the theory of complex responsive processes and a different perspective on organisation, leadership and change. This project is a reflection of the movement in my thinking from the start of my career to the present.

Early encounters with organisation, leadership, and change

Within weeks of completing my first degree, in Economics and Economic History, I secured a job as a Management Trainee with the Bradford & Bingley Building Society (BBBS). When I started, there was no management development provided. The trainee development programme consisted of a series of structured workshops to instil the product knowledge and sales skills required of a financial adviser. Within a year I was appointed to the role of Assistant Manager at a new branch in Warrington. I had two direct reports and my development as a leader, up to this point, consisted of what I had gleaned from the managers in the various branches I had worked in during my eleven months as a trainee.

Warrington was a fantastic experience for me. I had an excellent role model in Ian, my line manager. The 'carrot and stick'/'command and control' style of management dominated BBBS at this time, but Ian bucked this trend. He realised that so long as the branch was achieving its sales targets, no-one queried the style of leadership one employed. To my mind, Ian's collaborative management style was much more attractive than that practiced by his peers. It entailed, leading by example, setting a clear direction, breaking down branch targets into individual targets, developing individuals to build the skills, knowledge, and attitude required to achieve their individual targets, providing regular feedback (both formal and informal), and identifying opportunities for personal and professional growth.

In hindsight, I passively accepted that the only way that an organisation could function effectively and efficiently was through classic private-sector managerialism. I understood organisations in systemic terms. That is, I viewed an organisation as a thing (a reified 'it') existing independently of the people who form it. I saw leaders (the Board, Senior Management Team, etc.) as the architects of the system. And as architects, they sat outside of the system to set the vision, mission, and targets, they then monitored performance to ensure that these targets, and hence the mission and vision, were achieved. Senior Management's job, in my view, was to inspire staff to achieve an organisation's purpose by unfolding the enfolded future contained in the vision, mission (the what), and values (the how) that they (the architects) had set out in the strategic plan (blueprint). I considered it my responsibility as a manager in an organisation to do this at a micro level for my own branch and team.

The perspective of complex responsive processes of relating challenges this dominant discourse. Drawing on insights from complexity, natural, and social sciences (social constructionist thought, process sociology, psychology), and group dynamics; the perspective of complex responsive processes maintains that this view of organisation as system obscures the 'complexity and uncertainty we actually experience in our ordinary everyday experience of life in organisations' and posits 'capacities of foresight in leaders that they do not actually possess' (Griffin, 2005, p.4). Stacey et al (2000), argue that organisations are not systems but are the ongoing patterning of interactions between people. They further argue that the movement in thought that eventually led to systems thinking becoming the dominant discourse has its origins in the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth century and the misinterpretation of the thought of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant.

The scientific revolution led to a "movement of thought in which people came to hold that the eternal, timeless laws of nature could be understood, not through revelation but through human reason" (Stacey, 2007: 28). Kant further postulated that humans could understand nature in terms of autonomous systemic wholes, hypothesised to unfold the pattern already enfolded in them in an 'as if' manner (Griffin, 2002: 205). Kant was not arguing that nature was a system, but rather that one could think of it 'as if' it were. Griffin argues that the resultant modelling of nature, 'as if' it were a system, was so successful, that it led to the reification of such models. Reified systems came to be seen as things (Griffin, 2002) that could be manipulated in a linear, cause and effect manner. However, Kant argued that the systemic explanation of how nature functioned could never be applied to humans because humans are autonomous and have a soul. Humans have freedom to choose and so the deterministic laws of nature cannot be applied to rational human action (Stacey, 2007: 33). To resolve the paradox of human freedom (autonomy) and the deterministic laws of nature (determinism) existing at the same time, Kant created the "both...and" way of thinking which is at the very core of systems thinking (Griffin, 2002). Stacey and colleagues take a different perspective, in calling for:

> ...a move away from understanding 'the organization' as a system subject to one kind of causality... and 'the manager' or 'the leader' as the maker of human choices operating according to another causality. We are interested in understanding the process of organizing as the ongoing joint action of communication. We are arguing

that organizing is human experience as the living present, that is, continual interaction between humans who are forming intentions, choosing and acting in relation to each other as they go about their daily work together. (Stacey et al, 2000: 187).

Stacey et al argue that there is no such thing as the organisation, in the sense of an objectified 'it', there is only the ongoing process of people relating to each other in their daily interactions, and as such, no-one can step outside of theses interactions to arrange them, operate on them, or use them (Stacey et al, 2000). This perspective is causing a movement in my thought that already has me thinking and acting differently (something I explore below), but the theory of complex responsive processes did not exist in the late 1980's, when I was trying to make sense of the management position I found myself in.

I supplemented the management development I was getting from Ian as my mentor, by reading. I started engaging with the popular sales and management books that were available in the late 1980s, early 1990s, in order to gain insights into sales techniques, management skills, and how to train and develop my team. The Ken Blanchard series of *One Minute* Manager books, started being published in the mid 1980's, and they stick in my mind as some of the first books I purchased. The ideology outlined in the Blanchard books supported the management philosophy I was developing within my own practice. I aspired to be a collaborative, participative leader. I sought to adapt my behaviour to take account of the needs of the individual, the team, or the task/situation (Action Centred Leadership, Adair, 1988). I was being successful and, not taking any time to reflect exactly what it was I was doing to influence this success, I put it down to the practices I developed whilst working with Ian, underpinned by my reading. I was getting results, and without resorting to the command and control driven philosophy that seemed to pervade the organisation and underpin the management practice of most of my peers. At the time, I thought my approach was something different, but with hindsight it was the same managerialist doctrine but with a kindlier face.

Simon

In its first three years, Warrington branch went from a standing start to being one of the top three branches in West Region in terms of sales performance. This was due in no small

part to the sales that I made during the period, and my reward was promotion to manager of 'my own' branch in Horsforth, Leeds in the April of 1992. At Warrington, Ian and I had been in the fortunate position of being able to recruit our own team at Warrington, and we had very few problems with staff. Everyone in the team seemed motivated, high performing, and we worked well together. Up to this point, my lived experience reflected the management theories on which I was basing my practice. Horsforth, however, was very different. I had three direct reports, two part-time and one full-time. Annie was the longest serving member of staff. She had been at the branch for over five years. She worked part-time and was a strong performer. Sarah was the other part-timer. She had been at the branch for two years, was highly motivated and an excellent performer. Ostensibly, it was Annie's and Sarah's job to serve customers in the banking hall whilst generating sales leads for me and the other full-time member of the branch team - Simon. Simon had been at the branch for almost as long as Annie, seemed de-motivated, and in his performance against sales targets was a poor.

When I took over at Horsforth, the Area Manager told me that my first task as manager would be to "get rid" of Simon (something he hadn't shared with me when I interviewed for the job). This did not sit comfortably with me, and I wanted to give Simon a chance to turn things around. I was also arrogant enough to think that I could 'put things right' if given the chance, and that it was my responsibility, as leader, to do so. In order to deflect my Area Manager's attention from Simon's performance, I adopted the same tactic that Ian had modelled so well at Warrington - get the required results for the branch, and hope this was sufficient to prevent his interference.

Prior to this experience I felt that I had been in control of the results I'd wanted to achieve in life, whether it was in exams, on the sports field, or in work. And on the few occasions where I had been dependent on the performance of others – managing sports teams, and managing some of the team at Warrington – the results had still followed. Simon was the first team member that I had encountered who really didn't want to be doing what he was doing. For the first time in my professional life I had to acknowledge that I was not in control. I had no control over Simon's performance, and *his* underperformance was adversely affecting *my* results.

There was still no formal management development on offer at the BBBS at this time, and I felt that the personal growth afforded by my own study of the available management literature was limited, and it certainly hadn't provided me with a solution to the problem I had with Simon. Consequently, in 1993, I applied and was accepted as a member of the Institute of Management (IM – now the Chartered Management Institute). Through the IM, I discovered that a local university, the University of York, offered a Certificate in Management Studies (CMS). Academic study introduced me to the thinkers and concepts that underpinned the popular management literature I had been reading. Concepts like John Adair's Action Centred Leadership (Adair, 1988), theories of motivation encompassed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954), Herzberg's hygiene factors and motivators (Herzberg, 1968), and an 'explanation' of the difference in my leadership style and that of the majority of my peers - McGregor's Theory X, and Theory Y (McGregor, 1960). I characterised my peers (probably unfairly) as 'Theory X managers', whereas I was patently (in my opinion) 'Theory Y':

> Theory Y assumes people respond better when treated as intelligent adults who desire responsibility, and will grow into high-performing employees if they are given knowledge, skill and the opportunity to exercise them in the right environment. Theory X assumes that people are naturally indolent and uninterested in work. They will get away with doing as little as possible unless coerced to do otherwise. (Porter et al, 2006: 70).

I used my new found knowledge to support Simon, and his performance improved, but it never truly reached a satisfactory level. He would eventually find a role he felt more suited to at Regional Office, and in the interim I made up the sales he didn't/couldn't make. The challenges I encountered in trying to manage Simon never led me to doubt the theories that were driving my behaviour. This was one of the first occasions when my lived experience could not be fully explained by the dominant discourse, but this did not lead me to challenge it. I attributed the fact that my Theory Y style had not managed to turn Simon around to the fact that:

> ... many employees have been conditioned by poor management to conform to the typical theory X worker, and thereby a vicious circle of low trust and self-fulfilling prophesy has been established. (Porter et al, 2006).

The perspective of complex responsive processes draws on the writings of nineteenth century philosophers like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Romantic idealist), and on the sociologists who built on Hegel's work like George Herbert Mead (American Pragmatist) and Norbert Elias. The work of Elias around the themes of identity and power has enabled me to make more sense of my reluctance to question this dominant discourse, as well as to explore more deeply what was going on for me during this experience.

Firstly, my perception of self was wrapped up in my status and professional standing. Looking back, questioning this ideology would be questioning my identity. I had become an advocate of participative management, in contrast to the majority of my peers who, at least to my mind, adopted a directive style. I was a member of the Institute of Management. I was probably one of the first managers within the organisation to obtain a management qualification. I felt like a pioneer for a more professional approach to leadership. The last thing I wanted to do was admit defeat and resort to the bullying tactics my Area Manager was advocating. Elias talks of the difficulty of challenging one's own self-consciousness:

> Criticism of self consciousness, the demand for a revision of the basic form of perceiving oneself and others prevalent in our own society, will meet understandable resistance. The basic structure of the idea we have of ourselves and other people is a fundamental precondition of our ability to deal successfully with other people and, at least within the confines of our own society, to communicate with them. If it is called into question, our own security is threatened. What was certain becomes uncertain...But without throwing oneself for a time into the sea of uncertainty one cannot escape the contradictions and inadequacies of deceptive certainty (Elias, 1991: 92-93).

Rather than throw myself into 'the sea of uncertainty', I put my lack of success with Simon down to his having been 'conditioned' and to some deficiency in my own leadership practice. That is, having followed all of the 'right' steps, steps that had served me well thus far, there had to be something wrong with how I was going about it. I needed the 'deceptive certainty' that the management theories I had been studying afforded, and I rationalised the situation with Simon away with the view that some people simply find themselves in the wrong job.

Secondly, although my decision to support Simon was about adherence to my chosen management philosophy, it was at the same time about the power relations (Elias, 1939) that were at play. For Elias, power is an innate characteristic of human relating. As soon as we enter into any form of relationship with another human being, we automatically constrain and are constrained, and enable and are enabled, by each other. The balance of power shifts between individuals dependent on their relative need for each other. At a group level this constraining enabling dynamic produces power figurations (groupings) in which some people are included and some are excluded. My support of Simon was as much about me being 'included', than it was about me practising Theory Y style management. Simon's connection with Annie and Sarah was such (in Elias' terminology, their 'we' identity was very strong) that any attempt to remove him would not only have contradicted my management philosophy (identity), but would also have potentially led to my 'exclusion'.

Thirdly, pushing this line of thinking a little further, I needed the team's recognition. This was my first time as Branch Manager and although I had formal power, the power afforded by title and position, I wanted to earn the team's respect without having to resort to pulling rank. The title meant nothing to me if the team felt that I didn't merit it. As Griffin argues, 'the leader is as much formed by the recognition of the group as he or she forms the group in his or her recognition of the others' (Griffin, 2005: 10). Annie and Sarah felt that Area Manager's criticism of Simon was unjust, consequently my recognising Simon as a valuable team member was one way of being recognised as a good and fair leader.

In 1998, following two more branch management roles and a role at Regional Office, I was approached by the then Head of Organisational Development at the Bradford & Bingley, and offered a job at Head Office. The BBBS were introducing the formal management development interventions that had been lacking and they wanted me to join the team. The reading and professional qualification I had done gave me a head start in designing the leadership development interventions required in my new role, and my experience as a branch manager enamoured me to the colleagues that attended the workshops that I ran. I was fast-tracked through to the role of Training Manager. Any dissatisfaction between theory and lived experience was pushed into the background as I moved into a different type of leadership role. It was this role that first introduced me to organisational development and change management.

One of my first projects was to support a culture change programme. Tellingly, I cannot recall what we were changing the culture from or to, but what I do remember is that I readily accepted what I was being presented to me by my new, more experienced, work colleagues, and this was being ratified by what I was finding in the literature about change management that I reading at the time. Consequently, I accepted the notion that culture change can be designed and delivered in a systematic, top-down way, so long as you engaged people in the process, communicated effectively, and had suitable mechanisms in place to reward the new behaviours that the organisation was looking to encourage. One of the early models I encountered was Kotter's (1996) eight stage process for effecting major organisational change:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating the guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short-term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

The reason for highlighting the Kotter model, above any other that I have used down the years, is due to the persistence with which it has surfaced throughout my career. Like some perennial bloom (weed?), it has popped up everywhere I have. I next encountered it in my Diploma in Management and Masters in Managerial Psychology studies (see below), it was the default model for change used by Brathay (see below), and it would seem to be a model of change that is accepted in the Higher Education sector, in which I currently work, if a recent article by Ewart Wooldridge CBE, Chief Executive of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), is anything to go by[7]. Wooldridge lists the eight stages (he refers to them as steps) outlined above, introducing them with:

> There are so many theories of change management around that it is impossible to offer one recipe for dealing with current challenges. However, if you can only choose

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[7] The LFHE provides support and advice on leadership, governance and management to UK universities and Higher Education colleges, and the Wooldridge article appears in the current edition of their publication *Engage.*

one I would opt for John Kotter's eight steps for transforming organizations (Wooldridge, 2009, *Engage*, *Winter* 2008-2009: 12).

Using the language of the Kotter model to reflect upon my chance meeting with Ralph, the reason why I had authorised the change agent activity, and the focus groups sessions (the two activities Ralph found "interesting"), was in order to create a 'guiding coalition' and 'communicate the change vision'. Whereas, the reason why Ralph felt they were interesting, was in my view, because they afforded opportunities for conversations to occur where people could start to make sense of their experience in the living present and act into the unknown, the basis of the complex responsive process perspective. Also from this perspective, Ralph's comments about the Vice Chancellor's address begin to make sense:

> Any statements that the most powerful make about organizational designs, visions and values are understood as gestures calling forth responses from many, many people in their local interactions. The most powerful can choose their own gestures but will be unable to choose the responses of others, so their gestures will frequently produce surprising outcomes (Stacey and Griffin, 2006).

In 2001, I took voluntary redundancy from the BBBS in order to return to full time education and complete a Diploma in Management Studies (DMS), at the University of York, followed by a Masters degree in Managerial Psychology at UMIST. The DMS built on the content of the CMS I had completed earlier (but in more detail), and the Masters included Modules entitled *Individual and Interpersonal Psychology, Behavioural Change in Organisations, Organisations and People, Selection and Assessment in Organisations, Research Methods.*

It was intellectual curiosity that drove my return to full-time education, not any conscious struggle with the tension between the theory and my lived experience (although with hindsight this may have been unconsciously driving me). I wanted the 'badge' that I felt gave some legitimacy to my membership of the "trainers' club", just as I'd wanted the badge that conferred membership of the managers' club – membership of the IM/Certificate in Management. Following the MSc, in 2003, I joined the Yorkshire Building Society (YBS) as a Learning & Development Adviser. I was effectively leading the five-strong Management Development Team, as part of the Human Resources Department, at Head

Office in Bradford. Completion of professional qualifications with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), followed (more badges), along with Belbin Team Roles accreditation. The CIPD qualification reiterated a great deal of what was covered during previous courses of study. Concepts such as the learning organisation and knowledge management were covered in more depth than previously, but there was nothing new. I loved my job at the Yorkshire, but I had reached a plateau in terms of what I felt I could offer the role, and what the role could offer me in terms of personal development. The CIPD qualification conferred a further 'badge', but little else. I thought there was something missing. After three very enjoyable years with YBS, I left to join Brathay Hall Trust.

Brathay Hall Trust is a Leadership and Organisational Development Consultancy based in Ambleside in the Lake District. I had a dual role as Learning and Development Consultant and Client Director for the Leadership Development Programme that Brathay ran for a global management consultancy based in the United States. Brathay promised exposure to a new set of ideas and a chance to develop my practice in new ways, and to an extent, it delivered on this promise. However, as mentioned above, the Kotter model of change was very much in evidence in their OD work; and Situational (Blanchard, 1986) and Action Centred Leadership (Adair, 1988) were very much in evidence in their leadership development programmes. Added to this, the *Leadership Development Workshop* (LDW) that I led, although offering some excellent exposure to experiential learning and coaching, was formulaic and safe. I consequently left Brathay to take up my current role at UH.

Evolution Facilitators

One of the strands of UHMindset was the recruitment and development of change agents. There were four phases of 'recruitment' and development. Phase 1 consisted of nominees from Strategic Business Unit (SBU) Heads (Heads is the catch-all term used to describe Heads of School on the academic side, and Directors of Professional Services Departments, HR, Marketing, etc.), Phases 2 and 3 consisted of self-nominated volunteers, and Phase 4 consisted of all of those volunteers from Phases 3 and 4 who were not available for the corresponding development workshops, and (prompted by an email from me) further nominees from Heads who felt that they had too few representatives following the first three phases. Over the four phases of activity some 130 Evolution Facilitators (the change agents recruited in Phase 1 did not like either the term 'change' or 'agent' and decided to

re-title themselves Evolution Facilitators) were recruited. During the subsequent development workshops, Evolution Facilitators (EFs) were invited to identify and subsequently carry-out, a 'Small Step of Change'. A Small Step is something that can be completed within ninety days, is aligned to the strategic plan of the SBU, and is within the individual's control.

Following each phase of activity, Heads were sent an email detailing the members of their teams that attended the Evolution Facilitator Workshops, and the small step of change each person had committed to. Small Steps activity was also regularly highlighted at Heads' Forums, Heads' Conferences, the Vice Chancellor's Address, etc. In addition to this, there was a University wide poster campaign around *Small Steps* and various articles in internal publications – *Horizon, People Development Matters,* etc. Yet, given all of this activity, the feedback I was getting from EFs at the surgeries I arranged and facilitated was that the majority Heads were being less than supportive. I wanted to investigate why this was, so I requested a spot at the next Heads' Forum.

At the next Heads' Forum, I began the discussion by saying that I was there to support the Heads with UHEvolution and their individual change initiatives in whatever way they needed. There were about twenty Heads in the room, it was very hot, and they had just had a frank exchange of views around the challenges of introducing changes to the timing of the academic year. Discussion turned to EF activity and *Small Steps*. A number of Heads complained that they were not aware of the names of their EFs, or the *Small Steps* they were working on.

Before encountering the perspective of complex responsive processes, I had taken it for granted that there was no workable alternative to the dominant discourse of managerialism – the target driven, performance management controlled, method of organisation and management that I had been used to throughout my career, and the *modus operandi* for all of the organisations that I have worked with and for. UH is my first experience of working in the public sector where the hegemony of managerialism is not taken for granted, indeed in some quarters it is avidly resisted. It is only over the last two decades that the public sector has lost the decentralised collegial form of governance that was once the norm. Before this time:

> Public sector governance was characterised by a particular figuration of power relations in which individual professional practitioners, and professional groups, had considerable freedom to make decisions about what they did, and how they did it, in the specific situations in which they operated...The same applied to educational institutions. That power figuration was sustained by an ideology of vocation and professional freedom (Stacey and Griffin, 2006: 16).

Stacey (2006) argues that collegiality is not without its problems, not least of which the difficulty of removing under-performing professionals, but contends that the wholesale adoption of private sector methods of organisation and control has led to:

> ...a corresponding shift in the power figuration, with the power relations now shifted firmly towards the top of the hierarchy of managers and away from the professionals who actually deliver the service. The collegial form of public sector governance has all but vanished, or perhaps more accurately is still practised to some extent in the shadow of the legitimate monitoring procedures (Stacey, 2006: 18).

The goal of UHMindset was to embed a business facing culture across the University. Some Heads did (do) not consider the business facing stance taken by the University to be one that they could (can) easily support. Some still bemoan the centralisation of power and the loss of autonomy that accompanied the rise of managerialism across the HE sector. Targets and league tables can lead to naming and shaming, both internally and externally. On the face of it, when I stood up in front of the Heads at the Forum, what was being presented to them was a colleague offering support for their change initiatives. In this light, the response of some Heads to my gesture, apathy and/or denial that they had ever received any communications about this topic, can be viewed as curious'. However, if one considers my gesture from a different perspective, when I stood up at the Heads' Forum, what was being presented to them was a manager from the centre, championing the business facing message and 'shaming' them for not supporting their staff in their roles as Evolution Facilitators. When viewed from this angle, it is not so surprising that some Heads reacted the way they did.

Making sense of the past

Before commencing the DMan I had never challenged the underlying belief systems and ideologies that inform my practice. On the first DMan residential I was asked what it was I was 'struggling with', as a means of identifying the line of enquiry I might follow in my research. My first reaction was that I wasn't struggling with anything in particular it was the different view of organisations and change that attracted me to learn about complex responsive processes. My early view of culture change was characterised by an initial acceptance that change can be planned, managed, implemented and delivered in accordance with the designs of the senior management of an organisation. My subsequent lived experience was that this view did not take account of the innate irrationality (autonomy) of people. My consequent modified view was that culture change could not be planned, managed, implemented and delivered in accordance with senior management designs. As a bare minimum there needed to be a programme of consultation, engagement, and communication, and even then it was highly unlikely that the culture would end up exactly where senior management planned it to be. This view was ratified by my studies for the CMS, DMS, MSc and CIPD qualifications. The reading and debate I encountered during these years of study acknowledged the fact that the existence of humans in the 'system', made the outcomes unpredictable, but there was no fundamental challenge to the dominant discourse that the organisation is a system, a complex system, but a system all the same.

My time at Brathay further modified this view to see culture as something that is always evolving rather than something that can be planned for and achieved. Senior management might set an initial direction for change, but the final destination might be very different as a result of people trying to make sense of what was being asked of them, or indeed in resistance to what was being asked of them. Furthermore, due to the complexity of most organisations, the chances of creating one single culture would be slim, the probable outcome would be a set of sub-cultures some or none of which in alignment with the original strategic vision of the organisation's leadership. At this time, 'failure' to deliver planned culture change was rationalised as insufficient communication of the change vision, lack of consultation, senior management not 'walking the talk', not having the right people in the 'guiding coalition' (Kotter, 1996), not giving the 'new culture' enough time to bed-in, or for people to move around the change curve, etc.

In summary, one could view my intellectual journey to the point at which I commenced this professional doctorate as being characterised by an acceptance of first order systems thinking (the early years at Bradford & Bingley, up to the point when I became Training Manager), then an exploration of second order systems thinking (MSc and my time at the Yorkshire Building Society), followed by an active exploration (my time at Brathay) and, in lieu of no alternative school of thought, final frustrated tolerance of 'soft systems thinking' (my time at UH, up to meeting with Ralph) with its reintroduction of Kant's 'as if' stricture.

Making sense of the future

If I was asked the question, today, *"What am I struggling with",* I would say that I am struggling to make sense of what it is that I am doing, and being tasked to do, in my day-to-day practice as Head of Leadership and Organisational Development at the University of Hertfordshire, and to understand what is going on in my daily interactions with colleagues across the University. The line of enquiry for my next project will be to explore the implications of the complex responsive processes perspective for the leadership development programmes that I currently design and deliver. These programmes are full of the types of systemic models and theories that I am now questioning, models and theories which have helped, and continue to help participants make sense of the leadership roles they find themselves in. Models and theories which have helped me to make sense of the leadership roles that I have found myself in throughout my career. Griffin (2005) argues that the complex responsive processes perspective highlights the emergent role of the leader, where leaders form and are being formed by the social processes of recognition inherent in their day to day interactions (conversations) with others. Griffin characterises effective leadership as:

> ...participating skilfully in interaction with others in reflective and imaginative ways, aware of the potentially destructive processes one may be caught up in. [In order to] assist the group to continue acting ethically, creatively and courageously into the unknown (Griffin, 2005:13).

It will be my goal to explore, challenge, and test this perspective by reflecting on my own leadership practice and that of the participants I work with daily.

PROJECT 2 (APRIL 2009 – OCTOBER 2009)

MAKING SENSE OF LEADING

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> Change emerges as people interact locally in
>
> everyday situations...in social processes
>
> of communicative interaction, power
>
> relating, and evaluative choice
>
> (Stacey and Griffin, 2005)

Introduction

I have been finding my practice as a facilitator and designer of leadership[8] development programmes increasingly problematic. What is my role as leader of these programmes? What do participants and employers think they are getting? And what is it that I am developing anyway? My current practice is mostly rooted in the dominant discourse which understands management to be a 'science' (Taylor, 1947), and a distinct professional discipline with an established body of knowledge and a defined set of developable skills. This notion of management as a profession is then used to legitimise 'the distinction between managers and managed, while simultaneously emphasising the idea that management is a technical, universal, politically neutral process of getting things done' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996: 26). Indeed, in the dominant discourse it is taken for granted that professional management is not only 'natural' or functionally necessary for the success of organisations, but also for the success of society:

> Our society has in this century become a society of organizations. Organizations depend on managers, are built by managers, directed and held together by managers and made to perform by managers. Once an organisation grows beyond a very small size, it needs managers who practice professional management. This means management grounded in a discipline and informed by the objective needs of the organisation and of its people, rather than management based upon ownership or political appointment (Drucker, in Alvesson and Wilmott, 1996: 25).

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[8] Space does not allow for a discussion of whether leadership and management (development) are different and/or separate/separable. Suffice it to say that the programmes that I am responsible for cover both leadership and management. For the purposes of this project the terms are used interchangeably.

However, the thinking expressed in the dominant discourse does not reflect my lived experience. It was this dissonance that led me to join the DMan and to discover scholars who take a critical view of management (Stacey, 2005, Alvesson and Willmott, 1996, and Khurana, 2007). In this project, I intend to explore how their perspectives are informing both my understanding and practice by reflecting on several narratives taken from my recent experience.

Firstly, I intend to explore my role as a leader of the programmes that I facilitate. Several months ago, I would have described the part that I play, in the leadership development programmes that I deliver, as facilitator. Although, I have always been aware that participants cast me in role of expert, and at times 'guru', I would not have described what I do as leading. However, since *taking my practice seriously* (a concept that I will explore in more detail in a future project) I have started to experience this differently.

Secondly, I have passively accepted that following my initial recruitment the majority of employers hand the responsibility for their employees' leadership development to me, and subsequently take little interest in the detailed content of the programmes they employ me to design and deliver. I have also passively accepted that the participants on programmes (the employees), similarly, hand me the responsibility for their development as leaders, with most (almost all) participants signing-up for programmes knowing little more than the titles of the Modules. For some senior managers/participants the primary concern in procuring/attending seems to be 'ticking the box' that confirms them as responsible employers/qualified leaders. Consequently, there is the potential for leadership development interventions to be played out as a form of game, where provision/attendance on the programme becomes more important that any learning or development that might ensue.

This leads me ask what is it that employers/employees think they are getting when they procure/attend these programmes. In order to explore this, I will compare and contrast my experience of working with my current employer, where I have complete responsibility for the content of the programmes that I design and deliver, with my experience of working with the one employer where not only was responsibility for content retained by senior management, but where they also co-facilitated the delivery.

And finally, I want to explore what is it that I am developing anyway? And how my understanding of what constitutes effective leadership development is shifting, and what impact this is having on my practice.

Stuart

As a facilitator, I had come to think of leading, facilitating, and participating as separate roles that I chose to step in and out of during the course of a given module/programme. I also thought of the style that I adopted as an independent choice that I had made to adapt to the perceived needs of the group. However, the following experience that I had during a Module of C*ore Skills for Leaders* (the programme I developed for the University of Hertfordshire, hereafter UH) has served to highlight three things, i) I alone don't get to choose whether I lead or not, ii) the form of leadership that I provide is not the independent choice that I understood it to be, and iii) I have little control over how this is then perceived by participants.

Core Skills is an eight module programme, spread over twelve months. *Module 5* is concerned with *Leading Problem-solving and Creativity*. I had facilitated this Module from its inception, two and a half years ago, but I felt it was lacking something. So six months ago I had the idea of engaging the School of Art and Design, at UH, to help with the introduction of a creative challenge that would be non-work-based, yet provide the opportunity of exploring creativity and problem solving. A colleague from the School of Art & Design introduced me to an external consultant who has experience in using the creative arts in this way. The consultant, an artist called Martin, works for an independent consultancy that specialises in using the arts in leadership development and change management.

After meeting with Martin and discussing ideas for how the Module might work, I asked him to prepare a session for piloting with the next Group on *Core Skills,* which he duly did. In order to ensure that the Module 'worked', I decided to attend the session and I asked Martin what role he would like me to take – observer or participant. Martin expressed his preference for me to be an active participant rather than an observer, and I agreed. At the time, I did not notice that this posed observation and participation as a dualism. I saw this as an 'either/or' choice and not a 'both at the same time'.

The morning session went well. I joined the group and fell easily into the role of 'participant'. The session consisted of a series of individual, paired and small group work. We engaged in various activities - improvised story-telling, collage, sculpture - as a means of introducing us to, what Martin termed, *investigative enquiry and creative idea generation*. Over lunch everyone seemed happy with the morning session. Some had felt challenged, but felt that their discomfort had stimulated some learning. Everyone was looking forward to the afternoon session. There were eight participants (including me) in attendance. After lunch, we broke into two sub-groups of four. We had a useful discussion about what it meant for us to lead, we chose a topic that we would like to explore further, and we got down to the task that Martin had set for us, designing and constructing an art installation that represented what leadership meant for our sub-group.

It was at this point that I considered what role I should play in this sub-group. Up unto this point I had not consciously appraised what impact, if any, my presence as a participant was having on colleagues. They didn't get a choice whether I participated or not, or once participating, what form this participation would take. At the start of the day I had introduced Martin and the Module, relayed my conversation with Martin regarding my participation, and told them of our decision to have me participating rather than observing.

However, when it came to this particular exercise in the afternoon, I decided to 'take a back seat' for fear of dominating the sub-group. The exercises we had participated in earlier in the day had been mainly carried out in pairs, and the one exercise where we had worked in two sub-groups of four, we had been instructed to carry out the task in silence. Consequently I had participated fully as it was difficult not to in a pair, and the opportunities to negotiate anything less in the sub-group work were constrained by the forced silence. So for this afternoon exercise I expressed my intention to take a step back. My intention was to give some space to the other members of my sub-group. I wanted them to take a lead, and I felt that this would be best achieved via my stepping-back. During the exercise, we struggled to come up with a concept for our installation, and after several interventions from Martin we cobbled something together that would at least afford us the opportunity of saying we had completed the exercise.

By way of contrast the other sub-group seemed to have had fun completing their installation. This was confirmed not only by their post-exercise feedback, but also by the

amount of laughter that emanated from their room during the session. As we reflected on the exercise, both the activity itself and the process/team dynamics within our sub-group, one of our sub-group members, Stuart, said that the reason he felt de-motivated and dissatisfied with the exercise was because I had taken a back-seat. He expressed his frustration by directly addressing me:

> "I was really disappointed that you decided to take a back seat. You are our leader, and I was expecting you to take the lead and give us some direction."

I was quite stunned. I mumbled an apology and expressed my intention to take the role of observer in the future. As outlined above, before commencing the DMan I did not question the thinking that underpins the notion of stepping in an out of roles. I would also have rationalised the difficulties that Stuart and I experienced as a simple case of miscommunication. And finally I would have viewed the leadership style I adopted as an independent choice on my part. I have come to view these three things differently.

When is a facilitator not a facilitator?

In the mainstream management literature the facilitator of leadership development interventions is often cast as the objective designer of the learning process, with the participants either individually or collectively responsible for their own learning (Truelove, 1997). Even when it is acknowledged that the facilitator is a co-creator of learning with the participants, it is still posited that the facilitator is able to step out of the process, at will, in order to objectively recalibrate or redirect the participants' learning experience (Heron, 1999, Bentley, 2000). This is a way of thinking that views the learning process as a system that the facilitator can choose to be part of or not. Following Heron's and Bentley's logic, my decision to step aside and take a 'back seat' can be viewed as a perfectly rational, understandable, attempt to maximise the learning experience of the participants on the programme.

Firstly, I contend that any thought of stepping in and out of roles/participation is problematic. This way of understanding is located in Kantian 'both...and' way of thinking, outlined in an earlier project. One of the founding fathers of scientific thinking is the philosopher Immanuel Kant. In order to make possible the positing of hypotheses about

nature, Kant introduced the notion of human beings thinking of themselves as detached observers of nature, and thinking of the objects that they observed in nature 'as if' they were systems. Objects in nature then, viewed 'as if' they are systems (for illustrative purposes Kant used the example of an oak tree), are the outcomes of predetermined futures that were already enfolded in the parts (acorn) that subsequently unfolded to reveal the whole (acorn to oak tree). Consequently, there is no room for novelty as the object, understood as system and parts, will result in nothing other than what was pre-determined at the outset. That is, it will only ever be a more mature form of itself. However Kant argued that this way of thinking could not be applied to humans, as humans, unlike acorns, are autonomous and have a soul, humans have freedom to choose and so 'the deterministic laws of nature cannot be applied to rational human action' (Stacey, 2007: 33).

Griffin points out the inherent dualism in Kant's way of thinking, where the 'as if' assumption applies to objects in nature, but the same determinism does not apply to autonomous human beings:

> Kant resolved and 'eliminated' the paradox of determinism and autonomy by creating the 'both...and' way of thinking which is at the very core of systems thinking. Kant's resolution provided a basis *both* for the autonomy of nature regarded as systems *and* also for the autonomy of individuals who, with their "mere" reason, could know the appearance of nature and also the actions they themselves should take (Griffin, 2002: 91)

The hypothetical 'as if' dimension of Kant's model has been all but forgotten/ignored across the centuries and in the dominant discourse, as with Heron and Bentley above, the inherent paradoxical tensions in social relations are habitually resolved/collapsed through the use of 'both...and' thinking (Griffin, 2002). Thus a leader is seen to be BOTH part of the organisation (system), subject to causal determinism, AND an autonomous individual who is able to step outside in order to diagnose problems and redirect effort, formative determinism. From the perspective of complex responsive processes, there is no system only the ongoing patterning of local interactions, therefore no-one can step outside of these interactions to arrange them, operate on them, or use them (Stacey et al, 2000).

What I would draw from this is that I am leader, facilitator, and participant *at the same time* - forming and being formed by the interactions that I am engaged in. My trying not to participate in the installation exercise (taking a back seat) turned out to be my most impactful and emotive (particularly for Stuart and me) contribution of the day. Indeed, even if I had physically removed myself from the group in order to observe (which is effectively what I did whilst staying in the group), this would simply have been a different form of participation.

This question of paradox is central to the perspective of complex responsive processes. Stacey describes paradox as 'the presence, together, at the same time, of self-contradictory, essentially conflicting ideas, none of which can be eliminated or resolved' (Stacey, 2007: 15). Bill Critchley, a consultant and lecturer at Ashridge Business School in the UK, having 'studied and worked with Professor Ralph Stacey[9]', identifies four of the common, ever-present paradoxical tensions that people habitually try to resolve (Critchley et al, 2008). They are - forming interactions and being formed by them, maintaining and disturbing relationships, knowing and not-knowing, being in control and not in control. Each of these will be discussed as they arise in the narratives that I relate during the course of future projects.

Secondly, my attempt to 'take a back seat' draws attention to the dynamics of power that emerged in this experience. As stated above, the dominant discourse would have us believe that as leaders/facilitators we can choose to relinquish power and step outside of the 'system' at will. The perspective of complex responsive processes draws on the work of the sociologist, Norbert Elias. Elias argued that power is not something that we can choose to have or not have (Elias, 1939, Elias and Scotson, 1994). For Elias, power is an innate characteristic of human relating. As soon as we enter into any form of relationship with another human being, we automatically constrain and are constrained, and enable and are enabled, by each other. The balance of power shifts between individuals dependent on their relative need for each other. At a group level this constraining enabling dynamic produces power figurations (groupings) in which some people are included and some are excluded, and the potential for co-operation and conflict are present at the same time.

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[9] This is a direct quote taken from Bill Critchley's biography on the Ashridge Consulting website – www.ashridge.org.uk. Bill has also co-authored and published several articles with Patricia Shaw, a founding member of the CMC at UH.

These groupings produce feelings of belonging that Elias described as an individual's/group's "we" identity. In trying to enable Stuart, and the rest of the group, I actually constrained him/them. I did not give Stuart, or the other participants, a choice to include or exclude me, I excluded myself. Far from tipping the power balance in the participants' favour (that is, in Eliasian terms, showing that I need them more than they need me), I inadvertently highlighted how much it remained in my favour (you might need me more than I need you, and yet I'm making a unilateral decision to withdraw) by excluding Stuart and the other participants from any negotiation in respect of the part I would play generally over the course of the day, and specifically in the afternoon exercise.

A further dimension of the power figurations at play in this episode was the feeling of shame that I felt when challenged by Stuart. Elias described shame as a form of defencelessness against the superiority of others (Elias, 1994: 492). In hierarchical terms I do not view Stuart as superior to me, so why might I have experienced feelings of embarrassment and shame? Elias argues that shame-fear is not merely a conflict of the individual with prevalent social opinion, in my case Stuart's, but within his own personality. That is, one sees oneself as inferior:

> He fears the loss of love and respect of others, to which he attaches or has attached value. The attitude has precipitated an attitude within him that he automatically adopts towards himself. This is what makes him so defenceless against gestures of superiority by others which somehow trigger off this automatism within him (Elias, 1994: 493)

My apology, in addition to assuaging the shame that I felt, was also an automatic response to resolve the conflict that had arisen. My thinking at the time, and the thinking contained in much of the dominant discourse is that when conflict arises, it is something 'bad' that has to be 'managed'. Relationships need to be repaired, harmony restored. And even where it is acknowledged that conflict is a natural, useful, necessary phenomenon, for example the 'storming' stage of Tuckman's four stage model of team development - Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing - there is still an assumption that conflict can/must be resolved if a team is to reach the 'performing' stage., and once conflict is resolved, it will remain so until there is a change in the team (Tuckman, 1965).

From the perspective of complex responsive processes the potential for conflict is ever present, and it is not about seeking to avoid or resolve it, but about exploring and negotiating how we should go on together, as it is in the exploration and negotiation of our differences that the potential for understanding and novelty lies (Stacey, 2007). My compulsion to try to resolve/avoid the conflict prevented Stuart and I from engaging in what may arguably have been the most valuable learning opportunity available to us – an exploration of Stuart's dependency, my leadership, and the power figurations at play.

Gesture and response, leadership development as social object, and cult values

Viewing the conflict that Stuart and I experienced as a simple case of miscommunication is a way of thinking that is rooted in the sender-receiver model of communication in the dominant discourse. In this model, thought is encoded into language by one autonomous individual, and then sent to another autonomous individual to be decoded. Any divergence in understanding is categorised as poor communication and the message is recoded and sent back and forth until a shared meaning is established (Baguley, 2009: 11). Viewed from this perspective, one could be justified in thinking that Stuart's 'decoding' was at fault. However, this is not an adequate explanation for what I experienced. I was acutely aware that what happened was more complex than mere miscommunication, hence my mumbled apology and need to explore the episode further here.

Mead proposes a way of thinking about communication that is markedly different from the sender-receiver model. Mead (1934) argues that consciousness and self-consciousness emerge in the conversation of gestures between engaged human beings. Mead does not see communication in terms of sender-receiver. He views communication as one body making a gesture to another body, where the gesture from the first calls out a response in the other, this response itself being a gesture back to the first body that will provoke a further response. Mead posits that meaning emerges in the social act of gesture and response where, in contrast to the sender-receiver model of communication, the gesture can never be separated from the response:

> The response of one organism to the gesture of another in any given social act is the meaning of that gesture, and also is in a sense responsible for the appearance or coming into being of the new object – or new content of an old object – to which

that gesture refers through the outcome of the given social act in which it is an early phase (Mead, 1934: 78)

Mead uses the example of communication between two dogs where a growl from one might provoke a number of different responses in the other. The dog on the receiving end of the growl might fight, take flight, or display submissive behaviour. Meaning arises in the interaction between both dogs where gesture and response are inseparable moments in the social act. Meaning is not transmitted from one dog to be received by the other, it arises in their interaction. However, Mead made the distinction between this example of communicative interaction between animals, where the dogs gesture and respond unconsciously, and communicative interaction between human beings where we have the capacity of calling forth in ourselves the responses our gesture might provoke in others.

Understanding the various responses we might ourselves have to the gesture we are about to make to another, allows us to anticipate, and to some extent predict, the response we might be about to call forth in the other. Mead described such gestures as significant symbols, and these significant symbols make it possible for us, as human beings, to know what we are doing. Mead considered the vocal gesture as the most useful significant symbol, and the development of sophisticated vocal gestures, that is, language, as central to the development of consciousness. This ability to take the attitude of the other allows us to play out the possible outcomes of our actions as private role-plays. Indeed Mead described humans as role-playing animals. However, he was also at pains to point out that his theory is not a form of social determinism. That is, there is no guarantee that the responses my gestures call forth in me, will call forth the same responses in you. This is because the response my gesture calls forth in me is partly the result of my experience of the thousands of interactions that I have had during my lifetime, and the response it might call forth in you in partly the result of your corresponding life experience. And this takes no account of the potential for you to have a spontaneous response to my gesture, something evoked in you for the first time.

In the sender-receiver model, blame for miscommunication is often attributed to one or other of the parties involved. Thus managers might be sent on communications skills courses. In the example with Stuart, it was tempting to see the 'misunderstanding' of my actions as his 'stuff', especially since none of the other participants complained. However,

if one considers Mead's view of communication, then no individual is to blame as neither of us could know what meaning the social act of our gesturing and responding might produce in advance.

Viewed from Mead's perspective, I experience Stuart's reaction differently. My gesture – taking a back seat – was only one gesture in the iterative, ongoing conversation of gestures that had begun five Modules ago. This was the first Module where somebody else – Martin – had been identified as Module Leader. I had attempted to step out of' the leadership role, without any form of negotiation with the participants, and I expected them to accept my gesture as a 'new' gesture and respond accordingly. Indeed, the idea of my gesture to the group being 'new' is problematic, as even my initial gesture to Stuart, and the rest of the group, at our first meeting on *Module 1* of the Programme, was my response to previous conversations of gestures that I had engaged in with previous participants, and Stuart's response was partly a response to the conversations of gestures he had been engaged in with previous facilitators.

Indeed, Mead argues that not only can we take the attitude of the other, but as we interact with many people and come to identify the many different responses that our gestures provoke, as well as our many responses to the gestures of others, we develop the ability to take the attitude of the group, or society, to take the attitude of what Mead called the *generalised other*. And one of the ways in which this ability to take up the attitude of the generalised other manifests itself is in the emergence of what Mead termed social objects.

Mead categorised objects as natural, scientific, or social (Mead, 1938). Natural objects being physical things found in nature, scientific objects being things present in consciousness but not necessarily found in the natural world, and social objects being the generalised tendencies of people to act in similar/familiar ways in similar/familiar situations. These similar ways/situations tend to generate habitual, repetitive, unconscious patterns of interaction. And it is my contention that leadership development programmes have, to a greater or lesser extent, become social objects for participants and facilitators alike. If one takes a look at the marketing brochures of organisations that specialise in the provision of leadership development programmes - development consultancies, training providers, business schools, etc. – then one finds that the content of the programmes on offer differs little. One leadership development programme is much like the rest, so it is

little wonder that participants (even those who have never attended a leadership development workshop before) arrive with preconceived ideas about what role should they play in the learning process, as well as what role the facilitator/leader should play (culled from their experience of previous workshops/facilitators).

Mead further argued that when social objects become idealised, then they become cult values. Mead used the term cult value to describe the idealisations that emerge in social evolution, for example the cult value of democracy, or treating others with respect (Mead, 1932). For Mead, cult values are values stripped of all constraint. If such values are then applied without making any allowances for the specific circumstances one finds oneself in, then those taking such action form a cult that excludes all those that do not comply.

I recognise that the models, theories, concepts, and 'text-book' leadership practice that I present on leadership development programmes are concepts and practice shorn of all constraint (that is, the models and theories that I discussed in Project 1: Adair's *Action Centred Leadership* (1988), Blanchard et al's *Situational Leadership* (1986), MacGregor's *Theory X and Theory Y* (1960), Kotter's *Eight Stage Model of Change* (1996), Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (1954), Herzberg's *Hygiene Factors and Motivators* (1968), etc.). Irrespective of my training room protestations about their abstract and idealised nature, etc., the potential for these models to become cult values remains.

However, there is a great deal of difference between the training room and reality, between the theory and the practice, between what Mead called the general and the particular. Mead referred to this particularisation of the general as the functionalization of cult values. The functionalising of values is the application of cult values in ordinary everyday interactions, and Mead points out that this inevitably leads to conflict that requires negotiation. In the episode described above, the functionalising of my 'cult' leadership practice, caused conflict between Stuart and me. I hadn't negotiated with the group with regards to what role I should play in the Module. I never truly relinquished my role as leader, yet I did not provide any leadership in the installation exercise when it was expected. My functionalised leadership practice had not lived up to the idealisation, little wonder that Stuart felt let down.

The emergent nature of leadership

This experience also highlighted the emergent nature of leadership. In the narrative above, there was little Stuart could do to stop me from taking a step back, but there was also little I could do to control whether or not he accepted this. As outlined in Project 1, Griffin (2002) proposes that leaders form whilst being formed in the social processes of recognition that comprise their daily interactions with others. Griffin is not the only thinker and the perspective of complex responsive processes is not the only perspective to hold this view. Mats Alvesson is Professor of Business Administration at the School of Economics and Management at Lund University in Sweden. Alvesson's work is interesting in that he is one of the world's foremost researchers into leadership, and a major contributor to the growing literature categorised as Critical Management Studies (CMS). CMS has grown out of critical theory and the work of the Frankfurt School[10]. It draws on the perspectives of critical post-structuralism, neo-Marxism, and certain branches of feminist thought (Alvesson in Barry, 2008). Alvesson defines CMS as comprising of four elements:

> 1. The critical questioning of ideologies, institutions, interests and identities (the 4 I's) that are assessed to be (a) dominant, (b) harmful and (c) underchallenged. 2 Through negations, deconstructions, revoicing or defamiliarizations. 3 With the aim of inspiring social reform in the presumed interest of the majority and/or those non-privileged, as well as emancipation and/or resistance from ideologies, institutions and identities that tend to fix people into unreflectively arrived at and reproduced ideas, intentions and practices. 4 With some degree of appreciation of the constraints of the work and life situations of people (including managers) in the contemporary organizational world, e.g. that a legitimate purpose for organizations is the production of services and goods. (ibid: 18-19).

Alvesson positions his own thought in the CMS mainstream (what he characterises as a 'moderate version of constructionism' (ibid: 13)). He proffers a similar understanding of the emergence of leadership as that provided by the perspective of complex responsive processes. That is, that a leader is formed by, as well as forming, the social:

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[10]The Frankfurt School refers to a school of neo-Marxist sociology and philosophy which was associated with the early Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt.

> Subordinates have a strong impact on how leadership is shaped...In this sense the subordinates as a collective – sharing certain cultural ideas – 'decides' what works in terms of leadership...the leader is involved in the negotiation rather than the imposing of new or revised orientations on people. (Alvesson, 2002: 107).

One of the implications this has for me as a leader of development programmes is that I cannot control how participants view and interact with me. I alone cannot choose when and when not to lead. I am leader, facilitator and participant at the same time. My surprise as Stuart's reaction is interesting because on reflection I never actually relinquished my role as leader at any time. Even during my 'participation', I was watching the timings, having side conversations with Martin, drawing attention to previous experiences we had had in earlier Modules, and above all, in this episode, I had taken the unilateral decision to take a back seat. With hindsight, Stuart's frustration was one of the things that should have come as no surprise whatsoever.

What do employers and participants think they are getting?

Three of the four employers that I have worked for, including my current one, have left it to me to decide the content of the programmes that their managers experience, rather than seeing this as something we might do together. Indeed, other than taking a passing interest in the feedback sheets that participants complete at the end of a given module (and this was only one employer out of the three), all three employers have no idea what it is that I do, say, promote, decry, and co-create on programmes, or whether what we do together has (had) any material impact on participant's practice. Similarly, participants in these three organisations voluntarily signed-up for programmes knowing little more than the titles of the Modules. I have for the most part experienced this as empowerment and trust in my expertise, but I have also been aware that for some employers and participants the primary objective is to 'tick the box' marked 'provision'/'attendance'. For these individuals, the content of the programme (and by definition what I do) is a secondary consideration.

The approach taken by the fourth 'employer' (a global management consultancy firm, based in the USA), was very different. Not only did the senior management team take a great deal of interest in the content, the general feel, and the immediate feedback from the programme, but they also co-facilitated its delivery. Yet rather than producing a very different experience than the other three, it was ostensibly the same. In addition to this,

senior managers were so concerned with achieving high evaluation scores, that participant enjoyment became the most important consideration. If enjoyment (high scores) resulted from learning, then this was merely a welcome bonus.

My experiences have caused me to ask what do employees and participants think they are getting when they procure/attend leadership development programmes? What do they really want? To explore the question, I will compare and contrast my experience of designing and delivering the programme I run for my current employer (UH), *Core Skills*, with my experience of running the programme that I delivered for the US-based management consultancy, the *Leadership Development Workshop[11] (LDW)*. By way of introduction, I will firstly look at background to and employer involvement in each programme, before turning my attention to participant involvement, and finally programme evaluation.

Background and employer involvement

As noted in Project 1, I joined UH almost three years ago with the specific remit of bringing leadership development to UH. As a starting point, I carried-out some analysis of the former programme that had been offered, *Core Skills for Managers*, by surveying past participants, the line-managers of past participants, and colleagues who had supported the programme as co-facilitators alongside my predecessor. Generally the feedback was that the programme was good, in so far as it went, but it was thought to be 'too academic', had some serious gaps in content, and lacked continuity (as participants could pick and choose which of the five modules they attended).

In developing *Core Skills*, I sought to make the learning opportunities that the programme afforded more experiential. I introduced concepts such as coaching, communication, customer service, and problem solving and creativity. And I encouraged participants to attend all Modules of the Programme, rather than pick and choose. Other than the feedback from the survey, there was very little direction given to me about Programme content. My line manager at the time had expressed her view that she did not have much experience of management/leadership development, hence the reason for my recruitment.

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[11] The title of this programme has been changed in order to provide a degree of anonymity.

I was entrusted with putting together the programme with no interference, input only if I asked for it, and a more than adequate budget.

The history of *LDW* is more complex. *LDW* was the flagship programme for middle managers within the management consultancy. It was a five day leadership programme that had been developed internally. The consultancy I worked for, Brathay had originally (some five years before I joined in 2006) been approached to design and subsequently facilitate a number of experiential exercises that would highlight some of the themes that the programme wanted to explore around teamwork and team leadership. By the time I joined Brathay, they had developed this relationship to become an integral part of Programme Faculty, not only facilitating exercises, but also coaching participants. The Programme Faculty (the Firm adopted the language of higher education to describe the organisational structure of the Programme) was made up of three Brathay Consultants and three Partners from the Firm. Each Brathay consultant was paired with a Partner from the Firm, and each pair was then responsible for one of the three cohorts comprising eight participants. As Client Director, I also acted as Programme Manager, whilst the most Senior Partner in attendance acted as Host.

My induction to Brathay, the Firm, and *LDW* consisted of a very detailed briefing on not only how each exercise should 'unfold', but also what 'enfolded' learning points should/would result. Each exercise had been designed/chosen to illustrate a particular learning point and each learning point was commensurate with one or more of the firm's 5-part model of leadership. It varied from host to host, but what often mattered most was not the learning, but the 'numbers' – the evaluation scores that participants gave at the end of the programme. Out of 5, we had to maintain a 4.6 average, both for the overall programme, and for our individual performance as a Facilitator and Coach. The Firm were strict about the scores attained by both the Brathay Consultants and Partners. Poor scores would mean that Consultants and Partners were not invited back for future Programmes, a fate that befell one of my team during my tenure as Client Director, and one that befell many a Brathay Consultant before my time.

Participant involvement

For the participants, on *Core Skills*, attendance is voluntary. In contrast, participation on

LDW was mandatory. The programme is the final development programme that Middle managers attend before taking, or not, the next step in their career with the Firm - election to Partner. Statistically, 5 out of the 24 participants on each programme will make partnership.

Evaluation

Donald Kirkpatrick suggests four levels of evaluation for learning and development interventions. Level 1 – Immediate response, Level 2 – Knowledge, Level 3 – Behaviour, and Level 4 – Impact on the bottom line (Kirkpatrick, 1959). As it is notoriously difficult to not only measure but also establish a causal link between a learning experience and level 3 and level 4 evaluations, most organisations stop after levels 1 and 2. And in my experience, as the majority of workshops do not readily lend themselves to testing participant knowledge, most organisations' attempts at evaluation stop at level 1. As is/was the case for both *Core Skills* and *LDW*. Both Programmes' evaluations are limited to the immediate feedback ('happy sheets') that participants complete at the end of a given workshop/programme. On *Core Skills* these feedback sheets are used by me as a means of recalibrating and improving the programme, but my line manager does not look at them.

However, as outlined above, the satisfaction scores were crucial on *LDW*. For the Partners that supported the Brathay Consultants on *LDW*, their main concern was high scores, and most Partners seemed to care little whether high scores were attained because a participant felt they had learned something, or merely because they had enjoyed it. The focus on scores, and their importance to Brathay's continued relationship with the Firm, also meant that for me and my Brathay colleagues the line between facilitating learning and entertaining became increasingly blurred.

What's the same, what's different?

Although, there are some fundamental differences between the two programmes – one employer taking an integral role in the design and delivery process, one not, one having mandatory attendance, one not, one taking a great interest evaluation scores, one not - the most striking reflection for me is how similar the two programmes are.

At UH I was allowed to get on with the design and delivery of *Core Skills* with no interference, competency frameworks to satisfy, or expectations re evaluation scores. At the Firm, *LDW* was developed to support the 5-Part Model of Leadership, and my freedom to do anything other than what was expected was constrained by the necessity of achieving the evaluation scores required. Yet, the *Core Skills* programme I developed for UH was hardly discernible in content from *LDW*. Similarly, although *LDW* was mandatory, and *Core Skills* voluntary, I experienced little difference in their engagement levels or perceived learning. And finally, keeping the participants 'happy' was/is just as important to me on *Core Skills,* where it is not a requirement, as it was on *LDW*, where it was.

Of course, the similarity of the programmes is partly due to *Core Skills* reflecting my lived experience at Brathay and the Firm, but I also contend that it is more to do with adherence to the social object that leadership development programmes have become, as outlined above. All of the programmes that I have encountered cover ostensibly the same topics, they have the same mix of case studies, role plays, and experiential exercises, that in effect reflect the established body of knowledge contained in the dominant discourse on leadership outlined in the last project and above. Some employers don't take much interest in the detailed content of the programmes that they procure, yet those that do seem to end up with programmes that look (un)surprisingly familiar. Participants sign up for programmes without knowing the content, and do not complain even when the models and examples used do not reflect their lived experience. Which begs the question, "Why?" What do employers and participants think they are getting? What do they really want?

The relief of anxiety, pleasure, and stability

Larry Hirschhorn, Principal and Senior Research Manager at the Wharton Center for Applied Research argues that part of the answer lies in the anxiety relieving benefits that development programmes confer (Hirschhorn, 1995). That is, it does not really matter what theories and models are offered, just so long as something/anything is being offered. Hirschhorn draws on D W Winnicot's research into mother/baby relationships, and the psychoanalytical concept of the 'transitional object', to offer an interesting perspective to help understand employers'/participants' effective disinterest in the detailed content of leadership development programmes (Winnicot, 1965). Winnicot found that an object such

as a teddy bear can act as a transitional object and help a child deal with separation from its mother.

The child projects all of the feelings of security that it receives from its mother on to the transitional object and thus feels protected in the mother's absence. As the child grows these feelings are no longer projected onto the teddy bear, but are contained within the child's own mind. The teddy bear, in this instance, was the object that helped the child to make the transition from dependency to independence. Hirschhorn argues that the leadership tools and techniques, and the relationship between facilitator and participant serve the same purpose and help the learner to make the transition from dependency to independence (Hirschhorn, 1995).

Hirschhorn argues that these transitional objects also allow managers to avoid the day-to-day anxiety of dealing with their own affects by hiding behind tools and techniques, for example, performance appraisal. Hirschhorn theory is of interest here as it offers a perspective on the encounter with Stuart, that I described earlier. Like Alvesson, Hirschhorn argues that the exploration of the relationship between the facilitator (leader) and participants on a leadership development programme offers a greater potential for learning than the theories and models that are discussed. However, the avoidance of their own affects that managers practice in their day-to-day interactions is reproduced during leadership development ('management training') programmes:

> The management training encounter reproduces this problem. On the one hand the trainer and the students may be able to confront one another directly, discovering how and why they have become obstacles to each other in the learning process. If they succeed, the process of learning about managing becomes the model for managing itself. The students do not learn a technique but learn how to use their own affects to explore particular situations. Supported by a working alliance with the teacher, they learn how to learn. On the other hand, the trainer and the students can avoid this difficult situation by focusing on techniques that delimit the encounter between the students and the teacher. The technique, in controlling the anxiety of learning, then plays a double role: it functions as a fetish, and it masks the real dilemmas of managing. (ibid: 119).

This avoidance was exhibited by Stuart and me. Although we did not hide behind a technique, nor did we take the opportunity to explore the anxiety that Stuart felt during the exercise, nor the anxiety that I felt when subsequently challenged. Hirschhorn (1995) holds the view that most leadership development programmes fall into this trap:

> Ostensibly organizations support management training so that their managers can become more effective as supervisors, planners, and decision makers. Yet learning about management can itself promote significant anxiety. Behind the problems of management there frequently lie difficult interpersonal problems as managers find it hard to evaluate employees, confront peers, or correct superiors. Paradoxically management training frequently conceals and disguises this interpersonal dimension by offering managers a set of techniques and methods with which they can in fact bypass the interpersonal domain...Thus management training functions as a social defense at two distinct levels. It offers defensive techniques, and it functions itself as a mechanism for containing anxiety by in fact denying it. (ibid: 106).

Another method of relieving anxiety is to promote pleasure. Gibson Burrell, Professor in Organisational Behaviour at the University of Warwick, believes that the 1990s saw a return to the post war search for the 'contented workforce' with organisational development attempting to use team building days and outward bound type activity to reintroduce pleasure into the organisation (Burrell in Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 86). This might go some way towards understanding why it seems so important to employers, facilitators and participants that leadership development programmes are 'fun'. Although the need to entertain was explicit on *LDW,* it has been implicit on most of programmes that I have been involved in/encountered. Indeed, one of the first objectives employers often cite when planning a workshop or away-day is that it should be 'fun'. And this is often one of the first objectives that participants identify when asked what they want from an event. And for some participants, it is 'fun' merely to be away from work, "doing something different".

And interestingly, although some Brathay consultants got quite contemptuous about the requirement to entertain participants on *LDW,* it was actually Brathay consultants who initiated this in the first place. Brathay's on-site programmes are suffused with 'fun' activities − boating, climbing, art work, etc. − and their residential programmes often

feature post-dinner evenings in the bar accompanied by the guitar strumming, singing, or stand-up comedy provided by Brathay Facilitators. This is seen as part of the 'Brathay experience', and it might well have been be born of the post war movement that Burrell refers to above, as Brathay opened its doors in 1946.

'Fun' was introduced to *LDW* by Brathay consultants in the form of a competition that came to be known as 'Points'. Over the course of *LDW*, six teams of participants competed for points awarded by the Brathay Faculty. At the end of the week, the team with the most points won prizes. However, it was engineered to ensure a two or three way tie between teams, so on the last night the tied teams would have to perform 'skits' (sketches,), with the winning team being the one whose skit produce the most applause. So rather than being disparaging about the emphasis put on entertainment by the Firm's senior managers, we might have reflected on how we were both forming and being formed at the same time.

Fun and the false certainty provided by idealised models and theories helps to relieve the anxieties of leaders who are struggling to cope with the complexities and uncertainties of their everyday life in organisations, this, in turn, helps to maintain stability and ensure that there is no challenge to the status quo. Yet, as Hirschhorn argues, theses models are also the vehicles that enable managers to avoid the impact their own affects might be having on their leadership practice. What does this mean for me as a designer and facilitator of programmes? If models and theories are merely anxiety relievers and avoidance vehicles, does the actual content of leadership development programmes matter? What is it that I am developing anyway?

What am I developing anyway?

A perspective that is gaining ground in the mainstream literature is that leadership development is about the development of 'character'. Stephen Covey argues that character is more important than technical ability, and mourns its loss in modern culture (Covey, 1988). Peter Senge et al talk about a similar loss of moral compass arguing that 'the old idea that those in positions to influence such organisation's power must be committed to cultivation or moral development has all but gone' (Senge et al, 2005).

More recently, Rakesh Khurana, Associate Professor in Organizational Behaviour at Harvard Business School, criticises business schools for 'demoting managers from professional stewards...to hired hands bound only by contractual requirements and relationships'. In so doing, he argues, 'business schools thus helped create the conditions and standards of behaviour through which the market-based mechanisms of stock options was turned into an instrument for defrauding investors, jeopardising the livelihoods of employees and undermining public trust. (Khurana, 2007: 371). Khurana takes a much less individualistic view of character formation than both Covey (1988) and Senge et al (2005), seeing character as something that is developed through the collective discussion of values and norms. Khurana feels that the development of character was a *raison d'être* for those founding business schools over a hundred and thirty years ago, and calls for a return to this ethos:

> Institutions charged with educating and developing professionals (or leaders for that matter) need to actively shape professional identity – that is, how one conceives of oneself and one's relationship to work. For professions, at their core, involve a complex sense of identity rooted not only in expert knowledge and prescribed forms of practice, but also in commitment to a set of collectively held norms that elevates an occupation to what Weber described as a calling, and that ultimately distinguishes a professional from others who simply employ technical knowledge in particular ways (Khurana, 2007: 371).

Khurana argues that the demise of management and leadership education in the world's business schools, including his own, is characterised by the loss of the meta-narrative of management as a profession, and this, in turn, has caused a drift away from the position of manager as primary link between business and society to one of managers being the "fallible and eminently corruptible agent of shareholders" (ibid: 368). He feels that business schools have lost some of the cultural authority that they once had, and that this lack of cultural authority has negative implications for influencing students' ethical compasses. He argues that if business schools operated more like the professional schools they originally set out to be, then this cultural authority would return along with Faculty's ability to influence the collective ethical outlook (character) of their students. However, Khurana points to one of the pivotal issues facing leadership developers, and a central question of

this project – "What is leadership?" His search for a definitive definition has proved fruitless:

> Despite tens of thousands of studies and writings on leadership since the days of the Ohio State Leadership Studies [1945], several scholarly reviews of the literature on leadership have found little progress since Chester Barnard observed in the 1930s that leadership in general, and particularly the "Great Man" view of the topic popular in his day, was "the subject of an extraordinary amount of dogmatically stated nonsense" (ibid: 371)

Alvesson also points to similar difficulties in defining leadership:

> The diversity of relations, situations and cultural contexts in which superior – subordinate interactions take place means that a coherent definition with universal aspirations may well tell us relatively little in terms of the richness and complexity of the phenomena it supposedly refers to. (Alvesson, 2002: 93).

Indeed, Alvesson argues that in the majority of definitions that he has encountered in the literature, the word 'leadership' can be readily interchanged with terms such as strategy, organisational culture, and social identity, and still make sense. Alvesson's own definition points to the requirement of a leader to make sense of the context that they, and their followers, find themselves in:

> Leadership can be defined as about influencing the construction of reality – the ideas, beliefs and interpretations of what and how things can and should be done in the light of how the world looks (ibid: 114).

Alvesson's own view is very different from the dominant discourse with respect to what constitutes effective leadership. Rather than see leadership as an easily identifiable body of 'expert knowledge and prescribed forms of practice' (Khurana, 2007), Alvesson points to the futility of prescription and points to the improvisational nature of leadership. This, like his belief in the emergent nature of leadership, has some resonance with the perspective of complex responsive processes. Indeed, Alvesson's views resonate with the complex responsive processes perspective in a further three key areas. Firstly, Alvesson points to the

futility of the generalised abstractions contained in the 'recipes' for effective leadership that are offered in the literature and on many leadership development programmes:

> On the whole doing Leadership in a culturally sensitive way calls for interpreting and acting in specific unique contexts, following recipes is seldom productive. Examples should be used to inspire learning and insight, rather than be copied (Alvesson, 2002: 170).

Secondly, he argues that a leader cannot 'stand above' a situation to objectively plan cultural change, positing that "the relationship between leadership and other cultural manifestations is then not 'external' or causal, but intertwined" (ibid: 116). And thirdly, he argues that 'the impact of most managers 'is typically restricted mainly to the people they interact with in everyday life', echoing the view from complex responsive processes that whether Chief Executive Officer, or just starting out on the corporate ladder, one's interactions are local, and the impact on the global will be revealed only by the patterns that emerge in local interaction:

> Cultural meanings emerge, are shaped, maintained and change in specific interactions at the micro-level. But also larger forces – societal, cultural traditions, changes in the Zeitgeist, mass-media impact – strongly affect cultural manifestations at the organisational level (ibid: 170-171).

My personal experiences, outlined in the narratives above, and the thought expressed by Alvesson et al, 1996, Stacey et al. 2000, Griffin, 2002, and Shaw, 2002, have caused a shift in both my thinking and practice. My lived experience of forming and being formed in day-to-day, local interactions, whilst improvising into the unknown, is having a direct impact on my practice as a developer of leadership development programmes, and has led to the initiation of a different type of leadership development offering at UH, outlined below.

Leadership Experience Groups

Eighteen months ago, I was tasked with designing and implementing a development programme for Strategic Business Unit (SBU) Heads. The project surfaced around the time that I was applying for a place on the DMan. The reading I had been exposed to, allied to

my ardent wish not to impose a 'one-size-fits-all' programme on thirty extremely diverse (in terms of background, experience, and exposure to previous leadership development opportunities) individuals, led me look for something different from the *Core Skills/LDW* type programme that I was used to.

The complex responsive processes of relating perspective places conversation at the heart of change (Stacey, 2007: 286), something that had already started to resonate with my own lived experience. This gave me the confidence to engage colleagues from the Complexity Management Centre (CMC), and in particular Professor Ralph Stacey, in the development of what came to be known as Leadership Experience Groups. The purpose of the Groups is to provide SBU Heads with the opportunity of methodically exploring what it means to lead, by engaging in ongoing, reflective conversations about their experience and experiences of leading with a view to gaining a better understanding of their day-to-day interactions.

Each Group is made up of six SBU Heads, and a Convenor drawn from CMC Faculty. Each Group meets at least once per quarter for around three hours. Prior to the first meeting, SBU Heads were sent a document explaining what a Group isn't, and a description of the role of the Convener:

> *What a Leadership Experience Group is not:*
> - *It is not a 'talking shop', although conversation will be at its core.*
> - *It is not an Action Learning Set (Revans); although each member will have the opportunity to discuss what is currently important to them in their role.*
> - *It is not intended to produce action plans, although actions will inevitably follow.*
> *The role of the convener:*
> *The Convener is a participant in the discussion. Their role is not to guide, or 'input', it is for this reason that we have avoided calling them Facilitators. What the Convener will bring will be difference, an outside view, and some structure to the sessions. There will be one Convener per Group, and each Group will have a different Convener[12].*

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[12] This excerpt is taken from the communication sent to Heads of SBU prior to their Conference in March 2009. The document was sent as background information for a planned Conference session to discuss SBU Head development in general and the proposed Leadership Experience Groups in particular.

I had harboured fantasies of a leadership development programme that had no set agenda, no planned input, and no concrete sense or what we might do together. It would be just a group of participants, some planned space in their diaries, and a joint desire to make sense of leading and leadership. The Leadership Experience Groups provided me with the opportunity of living out this fantasy, as convener of my own Group. I had previously facilitated action learning sets, and worked with and coached various groups and teams, but on these occasions, there had always been a structure, a predetermined objective, and set of expected outcomes. This time it was going to be different. As convenors we had agreed not to prepare anything in advance and to take each meeting as it came.

For my Group's first meeting only three of the six members could attend. One of the three attendees arrived at the allotted start time. We struck up a conversation, exchanging views on the recent SBU Heads' Forum we had both attended. The second member arrived about five minutes later and joined us in conversation. The topic moved onto their experiences of the recent SBU Planning Round. SBU Heads had recently submitted their proposed plan/budget for the coming academic year, and conversation turned to their experience of the accompanying 'Challenge Meetings[13]'.

Twenty minutes into this conversation the third and final member of the group arrived, apologising for being late with "Something cropped up". The conversation moved on to how difficult it was to lead in the current environment. Someone remarked that this movement in the conversation would make me happy as we had eventually got around to talking about what we were "here for". I remarked that whatever we wanted to talk about was what we were here for, and encouraged them to explore further the theme they had started. The conversation continued and we covered things like the challenges we faced as leaders (how transparent we should/could be, what to reveal and what to conceal, not only in terms of the information we might share, but also in terms of our own feelings of vulnerability and helplessness), as well as the strategies we employed to cope with uncertainty, and finally how we dealt with people who had not 'bought into' the 'strategic direction'. We came to the end of our three hours. For me, the time had gone quickly.

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[13] Challenge Meetings had originally been introduced as an opportunity for the Heads to meet with the SBU Planning Team in order to 'talk to' their submitted plan and negotiate the resources they would need to implement it. However, a hole in the University's finances meant that rather than being a negotiation, Heads were met with a request from the planning team for budget cuts.

There had been silences and occasions when colleagues had looked to me for guidance, but I had resisted the urge to fill the space or facilitate. I had contributed when I had something to contribute, and I had stayed quiet when I didn't. I had not offered any prescriptions, guidance, models, theories, or 'five step plans' for this or that.

So how would I describe my experience? I felt liberated and naked at the same time. I felt liberated from the need to provide answers to group member's dilemmas, yet naked because if I was not offering answers, then what was I offering? I found it difficult to position (validate) my own insights in the moment. The potential for embarrassment/shame was high. Not that I felt that colleagues would make me feel embarrassed, but as in the situation with Stuart, the potential for shame stemmed from my own attitude to myself, feeling the need to fulfil the social object of the facilitator role by providing the answers. But what I was able to do was to draw attention to the fact that there are no set responses, no enfolded plan ready to unfold, and no way of predicting an unknown future. Since then, we have had two further meetings. Attendance has grown from three at the first meeting, to five at the second meeting, to the full complement of six (seven including me) at the third. Several participants have emailed me to say how much they are valuing the sessions.

A different approach to leadership development

So where is this leading my thinking and practice? If my former approach to leadership development no longer makes sense to me, what approach do I take instead? Khurana (2007) identifies three separate approaches that business schools take to leadership development. Firstly, there are those schools that see leadership as a body of explicit knowledge. Their education is characterised by academic theory and models drawn from the areas of psychology, sociology, and economics. Khurana offers Yale as his example of a business school that takes this approach. The second approach sees education focusing on interpersonal skills and the application of such in small group situations. Here knowledge is seen to be tacit, and acquired through experiential learning and 'hands on' practice. Khurana offers Wharton as his example of a business school that uses this approach. The third approach sees some combination of the previous two, but with an emphasis on personal growth and self-discovery. Khurana sees institutions that use this approach

encouraging students to explore their values and ideals. Khurana offers Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management as a proponent of this approach.

There has been a movement in my approach to leadership development from the Yale approach that characterised my early practice, through the Wharton approach of my 'Brathay years', to the Weatherhead approach of my current practice. From the perspective of complex responsive processes leadership can be characterised as emergent and continually iterated in social processes of recognition (Griffin and Stacey, 2005). A leader is recognised for their ability to articulate emerging themes, take the attitude of others, display spontaneity, and for their capacity for living with the anxiety of not knowing and/or not being in control (Griffin and Stacey, 2005). But how does one go about developing such capacities in oneself and others?

Michael Shiel, a Graduate of the DMan Programme, and a Director at the Irish Institute of Management contends that the role of the leader is to participate in communicative interactions (conversations) with a view to drawing attention to 'surprises, irregularities, and misunderstandings' in order to encourage new patterns of thinking and knowing to emerge in joint exploratory learning (Shiel, 2005: 183). He argues that this means developing a leader's ability to pay attention to the processes of communication, 'as well as being fully present to the changing patterning of the silent conversation with oneself' (ibid: 183). Shiel argues that this entails learning to learn in a new way and points to the fact that the facilitator's role is to model this skill for participants:

> This change in skill is itself a change in the characteristic patterning of an individual's silent conversation. This learning is achieved through the experience of conversation in a group with skilled participants. The role of the teacher is similar to that...for a leader...participating in and contributing to conversation in skilled ways (ibid: 183).

This is how I am currently experiencing my role as a LEG convener, 'participating in and contributing to conversation in skilled ways'. And my ability to do this has grown since commencing the DMan. This is due in part to engagement with ideas that have caused a movement in thinking that has changed my 'silent conversation', but also due in part to taking my practice seriously through the reflective and reflexive method of study, the iterative writing process, and the conversational nature of the residential weekends.

Outside of the complex responsive processes literature, there is some support for conversation being the essence of effective leadership. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) carried out research in a large knowledge-based organisation in an attempt to understand what it is that effective leaders do. They interviewed mainly middle and senior-middle managers, as well as researchers, and several project managers. They also regularly attended the formal meetings of one of the management teams, as well as some informal meetings of managers. What they found was that far from managers\leaders identifying a long list of the type of superhuman traits that can be found in the literature championing charismatic leadership, they found leadership 'conceptualized as the extra-ordinization of the mundane':

1. A lot of 'leadership' (e.g. what people in an organization see as leadership) is fairly mundane, differing little from what other people do, at least at a behavioural level.
2. Fairly mundane acts are given a particular aura and appear to be significant and remarkable when framed as leadership.
3. The significance of the formal position as manager is vital for this framing, thus making the distinction leader/manager problematic. (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003).

However, Alvesson et al seem to be arguing that these mundane activities only become significant and remarkable when framed as leadership, and that as this framing is more readily available to those who hold formal management positions, it is only *managers'* listening, chatting, and being cheerful that is effective. Their research goes little further than a superficial analysis of the data, something they acknowledge themselves, but this then casts doubt on whether what managers do is 'extraordinary', or just mundane. I would agree that a manager's gestures have the greater potential to be responded to differently than those of others, especially when one considers the power figurations at play, but I contend that Alvesson et al underestimate the generic power of communicative interaction as a catalyst for change. Shaw (2002) for example argues that conversation is often viewed as the background that distracts from the focus on more important activities. But she suggests that 'conversation itself is the key process through which forms of organising [organisations] are dynamically sustained and changed' (Shaw, 2002: 10).

Alvesson (after Jeffcut, 1993) argues that in the literature on organisations there are three identifiable styles of writing – tragic, ironic, and pragmatic (Alvesson in Barry, 2008: 22). 'Tragic' authors concentrate on the dark side of organisational life – organisation as prison, and Alvesson places the CMS literature in this category. Ironic writers focus on the irrational, complex, uncertain, ambiguous nature of organisations – organisation as circus. And those taking a pragmatic stance take a practical, down to earth, how-do-we make-this-work attitude to organisations – organisation as production system (ibid). This is of great interest for me as it is helping to locate my thinking about the perspective of complex responsive processes and why I am finding myself drawn to it. I contend that the perspective of complex responsive processes draws on thought and practice (via the reflective narratives) that combines all three styles – tragic, ironic, and pragmatic. Alvesson points to the benefits for CMS of engaging with other styles (perspectives):

> One possible bedfellow here is the ironic genre pointing at the confusions, ambiguities and irrationalities of organizational life, key qualities becoming significant when the sceptical author (often an ethnographer) moves behind the façade of rationality, order and control – possibly also moving beyond the beliefs of Foucauldians and others about Discourse being in control (apart from triggering a little resistance). Another possibility is to take also the production and outcome-related considerations and worries of organizational participants seriously, acknowledging their importance and legitimacy (ibid: 23).

I would contend that the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating already does engage, draw on, and incorporate thought from all three styles (perspectives). This is something that I will explore in more detail in Project 3.

Conclusion

Employers and participants trust me to provide their leadership development programmes. For the most part, they take little interest in the content of these programmes assuming that i) there is an accepted definition of effective leadership that I, as an expert, am obviously working to, and ii) there is an accepted set of leadership skills that I, as an expert, am obviously working to develop. Employers and participants do not need to take an interest in the content, as they employ me to do this for them. And in order to fulfil their

expectations (the social object, that leadership development programmes have become), I offer the models and theories that abstract reality, mask uncertainty, and help leaders to act into the unknown, thus potentially reducing anxiety.

However, as Alvesson (1996) and Khurana (2007) point out, there is no generally accepted definition of leadership. Consequently, there is no generally accepted set of skills on which to base leadership development programmes. And Hirschhorn (1995) warns of the potential for training interventions to mask managers' true affects and thus prevent any exploration of the real dilemmas they face. In addition to this, my lived experience, and that of programme participants, reflects the improvisational nature of leadership, the uncertainty inherent in moving into an unknown future, and the anxiety that this has the potential to provoke.

My involvement in the DMan, and resultant engagement with the perspective of complex responsive processes, is having a fundamental impact on my own practice as a leader and facilitator of leadership development programmes. Taking my practice seriously and contributing to conversations in a more skilled way has changed the way that I am participating in C*ore Skills*, in the Leadership Experience Group, and in my daily interactions with colleagues. In Project 3, along with the other areas of research identified above, I will explore how I am experiencing these changes, and just as importantly how I perceive these changes are being experienced by colleagues. My character is forming and being formed in the programmes that I deliver. How do I introduce changes that might challenge the social object whilst at the same time continuing to meet participant and employer expectations? And if this means working in ways that no longer make sense to me, what are the implications of this for my own identity as a leader, facilitator, and consultant?

PROJECT 3 (OCTOBER 2009 - APRIL 2010)

THE CHARISMATIC ACT: LEADERSHIP AS PROCESSES OF COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION

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> *When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts.*
>
> Ethiopian Proverb
>
> Taken from *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James C Scott, (1990)

Introduction

In an earlier project, I outlined the conception, birth, and early growth of a leadership development initiative at the University of Hertfordshire (UH) designed to provide the thirty Heads of Strategic Business Unit (SBU) with an opportunity to reflect upon their experience and experiences of leadership, the aptly named Leadership Experience Groups (LEGs). In this project, I intend to explore a personal narrative of events emerging in this process as the catalyst for the further sense making of the concept of leadership, my own leadership practice, and the impact that the movement in my thinking is having on the leadership development programmes that I design and deliver.

The patterns of interaction unfolding in this narrative contain many of the characteristics that James C Scott, Professor of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale University, describes in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* his study of confrontation 'between the powerless and the powerful' throughout history, politics, and literature (Scott, 1990). Although my reflections below could be more accurately described as a study in confrontation between the powerful and the very powerful, Scott's research provides useful parallels for the location of my own thinking. Scott's interest in the arts of resistance grew from his studies of life in a Malay village, where he observed that 'the poor sang one tune when they were in the presence of the rich and another when they were among the poor. The rich too spoke one way to the poor and another among themselves' (ibid: ix). Scott noticed how he also carefully measured what he said to 'those who had power of [him] in some significant way', before seeking the company of someone to whom he could safely voice his 'unspoken thoughts' (ibid: x). He subsequently turned his attention to these 'offstage' conversations, researching the 'hidden transcripts' of dominant and subordinate groups, as a means of gaining new insight into power, domination and the arts of resistance:

A comparison of the hidden transcript of the weak with that of the powerful and of both hidden transcripts to the public transcript of power relations offers a substantially new way of understanding resistance to domination (ibid: xii).

Scott argues that social science generally focuses on the 'official or formal relations between the powerful and weak'. He contends that although this focus does not necessarily result in conclusions that are 'false or trivial', it 'hardly exhausts what we might want to know about power' (ibid: 14). Scott describes four varieties of political discourse practiced by subordinate groups – i) the 'public form of discourse' that 'flatters the self-image of elites', ii) the 'hidden transcript', iii) the 'disguise and anonymity' that takes place in the public view, but is 'designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors' (for example, gossip, rumour, euphemism, jokes, songs, etc.), and iv) 'rupture', when the hidden transcript is made public (ibid: 19). One of Scott's goals was to better 'understand those rare moments of political electricity when, often for the first time in memory, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publically in the teeth of power' (ibid: xiii). Scott considers incidents of 'rupture' to be 'charismatic acts' that emerge in the social interaction between dominant and subordinate groups:

Charisma is not a quality...that someone possesses in any simple way, it is...a relationship in which engaged observers recognise...a quality they admire. ...Understanding a charismatic act...depends upon appreciating how [the] gesture represent[s] a shared hidden transcript that no-one...had the courage to declare in the teeth of power (ibid: 20).

And it is a 'charismatic act of rupture', a sharing of the hidden transcript in the teeth of power, that sparks my reflections here, as I find myself caught up in both the public and hidden transcripts of the 'dominant', AND all 'four varieties of political discourse practised by the subordinate groups' involved in the episode described below as '*Ralphgate'.* Consequently, I intend to use my experience as the catalyst for the exploration of three related themes. Firstly, I intend to explore the figurations of power (Elias, 1990) emerging in complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al, 2005) in this incident, with a view to enabling my further sense making of the concept of leadership. Secondly, I intend to consider my own leadership practice throughout this episode, exploring how an understanding of respective ideologies (as 'contradictions between our various acts of

thought' (Stacey, 2003)) helped me to negotiate my way through the 'infrapolitics' ('the unobtrusive realm of political struggle' (Scott, 1990)) of day-to-day interactions with colleagues, and the role of gossip in creating and sustaining ideology, thus 'reinforcing power differences' (Streatfield, 2001: 89). And finally, I intend to explore the impact that the movement in my thinking and practice is having on the leadership development programmes that I am responsible for, and how this is influencing the direction of my research.

'Ralphgate'

Each of the five LEGs comprises six SBU Heads and a group convenor. Four of the five group convenors, are staff attached to the Business School at UH, the fifth one being me. Professor Ralph Stacey, as well as being a convenor for one of the LEGs, also acts as supervisor to the convenors. The first LEG meetings were convened in April/May 2009, and then 'quarterly' thereafter – June/July, October/November, December/January. There is a whole group review planned for February 2010, and it is this upcoming event that prompts me to reflect on the incident that occurred following the LEG supervisory meeting in October 2009.

Supervisory meetings tend to follow a pattern, in which each of us reflects upon our experiences of convening our respective groups. Typical themes arising in these reflections are: attendance (which group members did or did not attend), topics discussed, and level/quality of reflexivity exhibited by the group. In general, attendance varies, conversations tend to revolve around the external constraints that group members find themselves subject to, and reflexivity is low/superficial. My LEG experience is that narratives shared are rarely explored. My invitations to engage in further sense making are most often met with a mix of 'solutions' and gainsaying 'war stories', before the conversation moves on to the next narrative. I have wondered about introducing something to generate a different type of conversation – for example, an article, or a guest speaker - but have resisted the impulse for fear that this would (further) consolidate the group's view of me as leader rather than convenor. A week or so after our last supervisory meeting, Ralph sent the LEG convenors the following email:

Hi all

I have written a report on my recent experiences and sent it to my group. You can pass it on to your group if you wish. I will be talking to the Vice Chancellor about it and have distributed it more widely so it is in the public domain of the University.

Regards

Ralph

My predilection for checking my mobile phone for email messages at all times of the day and night, meant that I received Ralph's email, and accompanying attachment, that very evening. However, as my mobile device does not facilitate the opening of attachments, all I had was Ralph's message and the title and size of the 'report' – 'Institutionalised bullying.docx (30kb)'. My initial reaction was a fusion of shock, curiosity and excitement, a combination of feelings and emotions which manifested itself in my laughing out loud. How widely had Ralph distributed this report, I wondered, what on earth had he written, and what reaction would it have amongst colleagues he had 'more widely' distributed it to? I was not going to be able to open the attachment until I got to my office computer the next morning.

On Monday morning, I printed off a copy of Ralph's report, and read it. At a DMan residential the previous weekend, Ralph had shared with the group the frustration he had experienced in attempting to challenge a new procedure that had been implemented at the University as a result of the introduction of a new Finance System. From the opening words of Ralph's report, it appeared that the difficulties he was experiencing had not abated. In his report Ralph challenges the 'forms of highly centralised government control that follow the ideology of managerialist corporate governance' resulting in the 'largely unconscious processes we are all colluding in that produce a culture of enforced conformity' (Stacey, 2009). Ralph goes on to suggest that in enforcing such conformity the University reduces the essential 'difference, even deviance' that is required to bring about the *real* innovation and change that 'expensive change programmes and fancy sounding initiatives, such as UH Evolution [and] Fit4Future' fail to, and describes these programmes as 'spin' (ibid).

As I was/am at the centre of both of these programmes, as a member of the core team on each project, something Ralph would be well aware of from our previous conversations and from his reading of my research projects on the DMan, the 'dismissal' of these projects as 'spin' made uncomfortable reading for me. The first strand of my discomfort stemmed from my fantasy that Ralph's assessment of the success or otherwise of these initiatives was in some small way informed by the opinions I had shared with him. The second strand came from the fact that someone I admire greatly had 'dismissed' programmes that I have worked on for the last three years as mere 'spin', and very expensive spin at that. And as I read Ralph's report, the third strand of discomfort arose from the fact that in front of me, less than two feet away, sat the two awards we had won for the UHEvolution Project that I had been Project Manager for - UHMindset. The irony of the awarding body being the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) was not lost on me.

In his paper, Ralph is at pains to point out that he does not view the emerging pattern that he is experiencing in his daily interactions with colleagues as anything that any one of the participants intended:

> We are all acting with the very best of intentions, not out of malice. But as our best intentions play into each other there emerges a pattern none of us really want. The pattern I am referring to can only be described as 'institutionalised bullying', which I think is being covered over by euphemisms such as 'business-like', 'UH Evolution' and 'Fit4Future' (ibid).

What I make of this is that Ralph does not consider himself to be a victim of bullying, nor does he consider the individuals with whom he interacted to be bullies. However, what he is suggesting is that in not allowing and/or feeling able to question new policies and procedures we (the people that make up the patterns of communicative interaction we know as the University) run the risk of silencing legitimate dissent leading to - i) dissent being driven underground only to resurface as acts of resistance, and ii) almost forced reduction of the very diversity and difference that sparks innovation, something the 'UK's Number 1 Business Facing University' has as one of its core values (*Innovation, Creativity, and Professionalism*). The thing that struck me most on first reading was Ralph's use of the term 'Institutionalised Bullying'. This was bound to be provocative especially since Ralph had reiterated the fact that the University had recently came 15th in a University league

table for bullying behaviour, a result that the Senior Management had energetically played down at the time. It was also a phrase that might particularly provoke a response from my manager, and sponsor for LEGs, the University's Director of Human Resources (HR).

I had a lot to ponder. 'Institutionalised bullying' is a phrase that can provoke anxiety for HR Directors, conjuring thoughts of employment tribunals, union battles, bad press, and media 'witch hunts'. I imagined that when my manager found out about Ralph's report, with its accusation of institutionalised bullying, she would be angry, embarrassed, and concerned. Ralph had sent his report directly to the Vice Chancellor (VC), and the VC would probably see accusations of 'institutionalise bullying' as the Director of HR's remit. I further imagined that as sponsor and participant in LEGs (roles she had expressed some ambivalence to) my manager would not be pleased to see that Ralph had sent it to members of his LEG, let alone that he had encouraged the other convenors to do the same. As initiator, procurer, and budget holder for the LEGs should I/could I suggest/demand that the convenors do not distribute Ralph's report? It was only a matter of time before she knew of the report. Should I inform her of its existence? And not only her, as a member of the senior management team in HR (Lead Team) was it my responsibility to bring it to the attention of my colleagues, as both a forewarning for something they might be asked about, and, more importantly, as something we should all be concerned about from an employee well-being point of view?

I had meetings all morning that Monday, and our regular weekly Lead Team meeting scheduled for the afternoon. My line manager was not due to attend the Lead Team meeting, and as I didn't want to broach the subject of Ralph's report in her absence, I decided to wait until I had had chance to speak with her before raising the issue more widely. With regard to the wider dissemination of the report to the LEGs, all bar one of the convenors had only recently met with their group, and it would be three months before the next round of meetings. This, I thought, bought me some breathing space. However, before the end of the day a colleague from *Fit for the Future* came to tell me in hushed tones that Ralph Stacey had sent a report to the Vice Chancellor (VC) outlining his frustrations with the new Finance System. My colleague had been sent a copy of Ralph's report as the VC wanted him to work with Finance Department to look into Ralph's problem. I didn't reveal that I already had a copy of the report, and as he furnished me with a (further) copy, I acted as if I was seeing it for the first time.

This was a new twist. If the VC had sent Ralph's report to my colleague, then he had most probably sent a copy to my manager, as Director of HR. I was due to lead a Workshop all day Tuesday, so Wednesday was going to be my first opportunity of speaking to my manager. By the end of Monday, my assessment of the situation was a) My manager probably has a copy of Ralph's report, b) she does not know that a colleague has given me a copy (and he won't tell her, as the hushed tones used in passing it to me suggest this is 'our secret'), and c) she won't know that Ralph has sent it to his LEG and the convenors. I didn't have to decide what I needed to reveal or conceal until Wednesday, so I decided to concentrate on my Tuesday workshop and put 'Ralphgate' to the back of my mind. However, the 'plan' didn't quite unfold in this way. There was a further twist that I hadn't bargained for. As mentioned above, one of the LEGs had not managed to meet during the previous quarter, and their convenor, Chris, sent his group members the following email along with accompanying attachment on Tuesday morning:

> Dear Colleagues,
>
> I have set up a new doodle link with some dates at the end of Nov beginning of Dec for you to fill in: http://www.doodle.com/
>
> I am also attaching a paper that Ralph wrote to the Vice Chancellor following some recent difficulties he has had in the university.
>
> Best
>
> Chris

The fact that Ralph's report had now been distributed to more than one LEG was more than enough cause for concern, but this was far outweighed by the fact that my manager is one of Chris's LEG members. Chris's action set off a flurry of emails. - Chris and my manager, Ralph and my manager, my manager and me. As the emails became successively longer and more intense, I maintained a level of detachment that both pleased and surprised me. Only one of the emails had been sent directly to me, the rest I had been copied in to. And the content of the one email that had been sent directly to me and copied to Ralph, by my manager, was arguably more for Ralph's 'benefit' than for mine. My

detachment stemmed from the fact that there was little I could do about Ralph's paper being 'out there', indeed, my response to Ralph's gesture was that this might act as a catalyst for the very conversations we had initiated the LEGs to promote. (And I saw the gesture that Chris made in attaching Ralph's report to his email as something he had done to provoke a response in his LEG, and not something he had done believing it might cause problems for me. A fact borne out by the email Chris sent the following day (Wednesday):

Hi Kevin,

I was thinking of you yesterday around the kerfuffle between [my line Manager's name] and Ralph and thought that you might be feeling a bit exposed. I was interested that she thought to write to you about the distribution of R's paper as though you were somehow responsible for it. Are you ok?

C)

As outlined above, Scott describes four types of political discourse practiced by subordinate groups – the public, the hidden transcript, disguise and anonymity, and rupture (Scott, 1990: 19). It is interesting to note that in this case it is only when rupture (when the hidden transcript is made public) occurs/threatens that my manager is moved to act. That is, knowledge that there is a hidden transcript that accuses the University of institutionalised bullying is not deemed of itself to be sufficient motive for action, it is the potential for it to go public that galvanises flurried activity. Indeed, the scenario at UH is even more complex than the one Scott describes, as Ralph is himself a senior figure at the University. What Ralph is doing is not only making the hidden transcript public, but he is also lending it a legitimacy that a more junior colleague would be unable to.

Not wanting to wait until Wednesday to respond to my manager, and feeling that I didn't have sufficient time to craft a measured email response, I took a chance on catching her in her office, during the afternoon break in my workshop. As I entered my manager's office, I adopted a very jovial attitude to the whole affair, inviting her to join me in viewing Ralph's wider distribution of the paper much as parents might view the utterance of their own child's first swear word. My manager reiterated the assertion she made in her email to me (with Ralph copied in), namely that in sending out his report Ralph had abused his position

as convenor and supervisor of the LEGs, and that convenors should not bring their own 'problems' to LEGs. She added that she knew that I would not agree with this. I said that I was not sure what I made of Ralph's forwarding his report to all convenors to share with their groups, I would have to reflect on that, but I did view convenors as participants in LEGs, and as such felt they had every right to share their own leadership experience and experiences. I had to get back to my workshop, so we agreed to talk about this in more depth at my one-to-one in week's time.

At my one-to-one we had a very open discussion, where we agreed to disagree about whether Ralph was right or wrong to forward his paper to all convenors, and whether what he did constituted an abuse of his position. She requested that I send a survey to all Heads in order to gather their quantitative as well as qualitative feedback regarding their participation in LEGs. During previous one-to-ones my manager had shared her doubts that she was getting any "value" from her participation in LEGs. She had also shared that some colleagues had told her that they felt the same. But this was the first time she felt compelled to request the gathering of evidence. I expressed the view that many of the benefits from the LEGs might not be tangible. I was also bold enough to ask her not only whether a lack of tangibles might cause her to reconsider her sponsorship of LEGs, but also whether she would welcome such an outcome. I was impressed by her honesty in answering "Yes" to both questions.

Challenging my manager in this way is not something I would have done before joining the DMan, two years ago. Then I would have complied with her request and hoped for a survey result that would guarantee the continuation of LEGs. Similarly, my manager did not simply exercise her prerogative to veto the spending of any additional time/money on LEGs (beyond the one year/budget that we had originally agreed). Scott contends that hidden transcripts arise in processes of communicative interaction and power relations, and that they share three generic characteristics:

> First the hidden transcript is a social product and hence a result of power relations among subordinates. Second, like folk culture, the hidden transcript has no reality as pure thought, it exists only to the extent it is practical, articulated, enacted, and disseminated within the offstage social sites. Third the social spaces where the

hidden transcript grows are themselves an achievement of resistance; they are won and defended in the teeth of power (Scott, 1990: 119).

Ralph's use of LEGs as a vehicle for dissemination identifies (confirms?) LEGs as a 'social space where the hidden transcript grows', leaving me in the position of having to defend them 'in the teeth of power' (ibid: 119) by challenging my manager. Stacey views communicative interaction as the 'process of people holding each other accountable for their actions in some way' (Stacey, 2003). He argues that it is in this process that people recognise their interdependence, and the consequence of that interdependence, is that 'the behaviour of every individual is both enabled and constrained by the expectations and demands of both others and themselves' (ibid: 122). For Stacey, then, communicative interaction is a 'process in which people account for their actions and negotiate their next actions. This is a political process, the exercise of power' (ibid: 122). The perspective of complex responsive processes draws on the thought of sociologist Norbert Elias (1970) and his relational view of power as 'ongoing processes of configuring power relations between people' (Stacey, 2007: 353). This is a very different view of power than that contained in the mainstream literature on management and organisation. In the next section I intend to compare and contrast the relational perspective with that contained in the dominant discourse with a view to exploring how this contributes to my understanding of the concept of leadership.

The hidden transcript

Power as fluctuating processes of social interaction and interdependence

I find that the way power is explained in the mainstream literature problematic as it provides me with little understanding of what I experienced with my boss, and colleagues, as described above. For example, Jeffrey Pfeffer (2010a), Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Stanford University, is just about to publish his latest book, *Power: Why Some People Have It – And Others Don't.* As a precursor to this he has penned an article for this month's *Harvard Business Review*, in which he describes power as 'the ability to have things your way' (Pfeffer, 2010b: 87). He then goes on to describe eleven things 'powerful people do...to advance their agendas' (ibid: 87-92). He explains:

Power is the focus of teaching at Stanford – and not just power as a spectator sport. I aim to give my students the insights and tools that will enable them to bring about change, get things accomplished, and, not incidentally, further their careers. The learning occurs through studying powerful people, mining social science's understanding of human behaviour and practicing (ibid: 86).

Pfeffer's understanding of power is representative of explanations found in the mainstream literature. He builds on the work of Stuart Lukes (1974, 2005). Lukes also sees power as 'an ability or capacity of an agent or agents, which they may or may not exercise' (2005: 63). That is, for both authors, power is identified as something that an individual (or group) has, and then can choose to wield, or not, at will. This understanding of power is extremely unhelpful as it implies that those with power can simply command those without power to do their bidding. This way of thinking is often exhibited by participants on the leadership development programmes that I lead when they share their bafflement at team member's resistance, and they cannot understand why their direct reports do not simply do what is asked of them without any fuss. This often leads them to conclude that they have particularly dysfunctional team members, rather than leading them to reappraise their understanding of power.

As stated above, Elias (1970) argues that 'one can only understand many aspects of the behaviour or actions of individual people only if one sets out from the study of the pattern of their interdependence, the structure of their societies, in short from the figurations they form with each other' (ibid: 72). I contend that this is true for the behaviours and actions of the protagonists in the above narrative. That is, in order to make sense of some aspects of their behaviour it is necessary to take into account the figurations, and in this instance the figurations of power, forming and being formed in the day to day interactions leading up to and following the exchange of emails.

In making his argument, in the 1970s, Elias was countering a charge that was persistently levelled at sociology, namely, that as a discipline it has nothing distinctive to offer from the fields of say 'biology, psychology, or history'. Supporters of this charge argued that since these disciplines comprehensively study the individual, and society is made up of individuals, then the social can be more than adequately explained 'in terms of the psychological or even physical characteristics' of said individuals (ibid: 72). Elias uses the

term 'atomism' to describe this view, taken from the physical sciences, that one can understand a 'composite unit' (society) by studying its 'constituent parts' (individuals). However, Elias argues that:

> [T]he more closely integrated are the components of the composite unit, or in other words the higher the degree of their functional interdependence, the less possible it is to explain the properties of the latter only in terms of the former. It becomes more necessary not just to explore a composite unit in terms of its component parts, but also to explore the way in which these individual components are bonded to each other so as to form a composite unit (ibid: 72)

Indeed, Elias argued that the exploration of the structure of the composite unit becomes a study in its own right. Consequently, sociology cannot be reduced to those other disciplines because the 'figurations of interdependent human beings cannot be explained if one studies human beings singly' (ibid: 72). Elias also points out that although he rejects 'atomism', his view should in no way be confused with some form of metaphysical 'holism'. He accepts that it is difficult to understand why the figurations arising in our interdependence, the intertwining of our 'actions and experience', are relatively autonomous from the findings we get if we investigate individuals in isolation, but he is keen for this not to be reduced to a holistic 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts' type argument (ibid: 73).

In making *my* argument, I am countering the view expressed in the dominant discourse that the actions and behaviour of leaders (individuals) can be understood solely by reference to their personal psychology (Pfeffer, 2010b), and that power is 'the possession of position and/or resources' (Burnes, 2000: 176), something that individuals or groups can independently choose to wield, or not, at will (Lukes, (2005). Lukes updated his original work (1974) to add that power is something that individuals, or groups, can choose NOT to wield, as well as wield (2005: 63). Elias sees power relations as an 'integral element of all human relations', and 'whether power differentials are large or small, balances of power are always present wherever there is a functional interdependence between people' (ibid). Elias sees power as a structural process, not a reified 'it':

We say that a person possesses great power, as if power were a thing he carried about in his pocket. The use of the word is a relic of magico-mythical ideas. Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another, it is a structural characteristic of human relationships – all human relationships (ibid: 74).

If one views power as a structural characteristic of all human relationships, then one cannot choose to use or not use power, as Lukes suggests, the power differential will have an impact on our interactions with others whether we want it to or not.

Game models

Elias posited that the negative connotations power has for many people is partly due to the fact that during the development of human societies power ratios were extremely unequal, and those with what Elias termed 'greater power chances' often exercised them in a brutal, unscrupulous manner, to the extreme of taking another's life . Consequently, Elias utilised game models to illustrate the processual nature of power relations and the complexities brought about by the tangle of interdependencies we all find ourselves in, as a neutral method of exploring what can be an emotive concept. Elias describes a succession of game models ranging from the relatively simple two-person games (Game models 1a and 1b), through multi-person games at one level (2a to 2d), to multi-person games on several levels (3a and 3b). In the organisational context, Elias saw the superiority exhibited in the game models as analogous to the ability of one person to constrain (or enable) the actions of another through the withholding (or granting) of something they require, thus creating dependency. He termed the differential in dependency between individuals (players) the 'power ratio':

Whose potential for withholding what the other requires is greater? Who, accordingly, is more or less dependent on the other? Who therefore, has to submit or adapt himself to the other's demands? In more general terms, who has the higher power ratio, and can therefore steer the activities of the other side to a greater extent than they can steer his own…? (ibid: 79).

In an earlier iteration of this project, I laboured to unpack the fluctuations in the figurations of power relations between myself and some of the protagonists in *Ralphgate*. In my

attempt, I utilised the game models that Elias describes to build from the 'two person' game being played out by my manager and I, building to the multi-person games at several levels that I am involved in. However, my initial analysis missed the whole point of Elias' argument, namely that in the interdependent social context we find ourselves in, it is impossible to untangle the complexities of the multi-player games on many levels. Looking back on this now, what I ended up doing was akin to what authors in the dominant discourse do when they seek to understand an individual's actions by exploring their personal psychology in isolation. My argument here is not that power relations alone determine one's actions in day to day interaction. I'm not even arguing that they were the most important element in the explanation of the evaluative choices that I made in my interactions with my manager. What I am arguing is that, in the dominant discourse, the role that power plays in the choices that people make, if explored at all, is often reduced to explanations that are analogous to the two person game models that Elias describes. Not only that, but as Elias puts it:

> ...the whole trend of our reflection, the whole traditions of our conceptualisation, is so much attuned to...*Zustands-reduktion*...It means the reduction in thought of all things that you observe as being dynamic to something static. Our whole conceptual tradition, particularly our philosophical tradition, pushes our thinking in that direction and makes us feel that one cannot come to grips with observed happenings as flowing events in speaking and thinking (Elias, transcript from an interview with Gouldsbloum on Dutch TV, 1969).

The reductionist view of power contained in the dominant discourse does not account for the 'flowing events' that happened between me and my manager. Not only do I ask her to account for her actions, but also, rejoining the narrative above, I only agree to her request to gather qualitative evidence on condition that we do not send a survey immediately, via email (email surveys usually garner poor response rates), but rather we ask colleagues to complete it during the LEG whole group review we have planned for the morning of February 9th 2010. Since commencing this project, the 9th February has passed, the whole group review has taken place, surveys have been completed and analysed. All but two Heads want to continue with their participation in LEGs. If one analyses the actions of my manager in isolation, that is, if one reduces the 'dynamic to something static', one would be forgiven for concluding that my manager is one of the two Heads to opt out of LEGs.

However, she isn't. My manager is sponsoring the continuation of LEGs and has chosen to continue her own participation in them. As Elias so succinctly puts it:

> The other side of the coin is that the course of the game itself has power over the behaviour and thought of the individual players. For their actions and ideas cannot be explained and understood if they are considered on their own, they need to be understood and explained within the framework of the game (ibid: 96).

This dynamic view of power has important implications for sense-making of leadership in organisations, as although Scott's research into the arts of resistance dealt mainly with extreme scenarios, like slavery, or totalitarian regimes, he was also keen to show that domination in any context has the potential for generating resistance:

> Even in the case of the contemporary working class, it appears that slights to one's dignity and close surveillance and control of one's work loom at least as large in accounts of oppression as do narrower concerns of work and compensation (Scott, 1990: 23).

Consequently it should come as little surprise to the above mentioned participants on the leadership programmes that I run when coercion (or the potential to coerce) leads to a break down in relating, catalysing the development of a hidden transcript and other forms of resistance:

> The hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling, it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low profile stratagems designed to minimise appropriation. In the case of slaves, for example, these stratagems have typically included theft, pilfering, feigned ignorance, shirking or careless labor, foot-dragging, secret trade and production for sale, sabotage of crops, livestock, and machinery, arson, flight, and so on (ibid: 188).

It is also important to note here that Scott is not saying that the hidden transcript is the truth, or that all resistance is 'justified':

> Power relations are not, alas, so straightforward that we can call what is said in power-laden contexts false and what is said offstage true. Nor can we simplistically describe the former as a realm of necessity and the latter as a realm of freedom (ibid: 5).

Consequently, whether out of fantasy, malice, or the necessity for survival, false accusations can also emanate from the hidden transcripts of subordinates. For example, managers on my programmes often relate tales of members of staff making 'false accusations' of harassment and bullying, or going off on long-term sick leave in order to avoid disciplinary procedures for poor performance. Of course, such stories, as part of the off-stage transcript of the dominant, might also be false.

Stacey contends that 'leader-managers' as 'particularly influential participants in ongoing conversation' can choose to dominate, by 'cowing others into submission', but he argues that this leads to 'repetitive stuck conversations' that will eventually lead to collapse (Stacey, 2010: 157). So in the days leading up to *Ralphgate*, Ralph refuses to provide information for the new finance system, information that is already held on the old one. When he is not given satisfactory explanation for why he has to do this, and told he has to comply, his frustration causes him to write and disseminate his report. If one agrees with Stacey's view that effective relationships are built on recognising our interdependence, continually holding each other accountable for our actions, and negotiating the next steps (Stacey, 2003: 122), then it becomes impossible to hide behind the rules and regulations, or the 'system', or to justify one's actions with "because I tell you to", unless of course one's intention is to cause a breakdown in the relationship.

As stated above, my own leadership practice has changed since joining the DMan. For example, in the narrative above, i) I hold my manager accountable for her actions and negotiate my next steps, something I would not have done two years' ago. This not only maintains our relationship, but also keeps alive the possibility of open communicative interaction in the future. ii) I openly show dissent, albeit after having been invited to do so, in disagreeing with her assessment of Ralph's misuse of LEGs, we agree to disagree. We then explore our differences with regard to the gathering of feedback, and work through the conflict to negotiate a way forward into an unknown future. iii) Possibly the biggest change in my practice, since joining the DMan, is improving my capacity to 'sit in the fire'

(Mindell, 1995). This phrase was first uttered by Chris (my first supervisor on the DMan), whilst inviting me to stay a little longer with the anxiety provoked by challenge, difference, and potential conflict, rather than defaulting to my habitual reactions - attempting to defend myself, and/or attempting to avoid/resolve the conflict, thus closing down the opportunities for exploration. I feel that I have improved my capacity to live with uncertainty that bit longer, and this is enabling me to have more productive encounters like the one described above.

There are two further aspects of power relations that I want to give some further consideration to in this project, for whilst writers in the dominant discourse might seek to explain surprises, such as my manager's 'about face', as the irrational quirks of individual psychology, the perspective of complex responsive processes, builds on the work of Elias and seeks to understand them through exploration of the wider social processes of relating:

> If we want to have a deeper insight into the dynamics of organizational life and why it produces surprises, then we must be sensitive to the ordinary organizational reality of inclusion, exclusion, gossip and ideology (Stacey, 2010: 187).

Consequently, in the next section I intend to firstly explore ideology, and how an understanding of the respective ideologies of each of the protagonists in *Ralphgate* might have helped me to negotiate my way through the infrapolitics of daily interaction. And secondly, the role of gossip in creating and sustaining such ideologies. Ideology and gossip are aspects of the political discourse that Scott categorises as 'disguise and anonymity' (Scott, 1990).

Disguise and anonymity

Ideology

Stacey contends that 'a key aspect of ideology is the binary oppositions that characterize it and the most basic of these is the distinction between 'them' and 'us'. Ideology is thus a form of communication that preserves the current order by making the current order seem natural' (Stacey, 2003: 125). He further contends that 'it is in engaging with the

contradictions between our various acts of thought that we begin to make more sense of what we are doing together (ibid: 1-2).

I contend that an understanding of the history of another's thinking/practice is something that can contribute to a better understanding of the (habitual) choices we make in given situations. Bourdieu (1972) used the term habitus to describe habitual social customs and ways of thinking. Bourdieu sees habitus as something that possesses a person rather than something that a person possesses 'because it acts within them as the organizing principle of their actions' (ibid: 18). I am not suggesting that it would ever be possible for me to fully understand the habitus of those involved in *Ralphgate* (my manager, Ralph, my *Fit* colleague), nor am I claiming that this is the 'organizing principle of their actions', but I am arguing that an evaluation of the ways of thinking they have been exposed to was useful to me in maintaining inclusion and choosing the gestures and responses that I made (at least initially) in the ongoing iterative processes of communicative interaction.

Managerialism/Human Resource Management (HRM)

One way of understanding my manager's actions is as a reflection of the managerialism that is at the core of the HRM profession to which we both belong. As well as working with my manager, on a daily basis, for the previous three years, we both studied for our professional qualifications in HRM with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Tom Keenoy is Professor of Management at the University of Leicester, in the UK. He contrasts the slow development of HRM in the US (that saw it 'seamlessly incorporated into management thought') with its explosion into British Universities in the mid-1980s (Keenoy, 2009: 456). Keenoy (quoting Marciano, 1995) attributes the coining of the term HRM to Peter Drucker, as early as 1954, but notes Jacques (1996) argument that its cultural origins are to be 'found in the ideas which emerged from the historical conjunction of scientific management, the employment managers movement and industrial psychology' in the US between 1900 and 1920 (ibid: 456). Keenoy argues that during the 1980s HRM replaced what had been known in the UK as Personnel Management almost 'overnight', and in doing so it transformed 'the language deployed to analyze employment relations'.

Whereas Personnel Management had confined its field of interest to the 'operational' aspects of employment relations – recruitment, selection, training, remuneration (including wage systems) and bargaining with trade unions, HRM expanded to include the 'strategic' aspects of 'management policy and practice, strategic planning and business process, employee resourcing and development, work and work organization, organizational culture, motivation and performance, as well as employee relations and employment regulation' (ibid: 454).

Around the same time in the UK, a newly elected Conservative government, led by Margaret Thatcher, championed the rise of the 'market as the 'political and ethical touchstone of socio-economic regulation [where] trade unions were marginalized and increased unemployment was regarded as an acceptable "cost" of restructuring' (ibid: 456). This was in stark contrast to the 'post-World-War-II pan-European consensus' for 'full employment as a fundamental social "good"' (ibid: 457). Consequently, in the 1990s when my manager was studying for her qualifications in HRM she would have been presented with a very different view of the profession than of her predecessors ten years earlier:

> In contrast to the analytical frameworks which HRM came to replace, the fundamental discursive shift involved the replacement of a 'pluralist' framing of issues (in which the employment relationship is understood to involve, articulate, and institutionalize differential interests) with a "unitary" framing of the issues (in which all members of an organization are assumed to have mutual interests) (ibid: 460).

HRM and the practice thereof became little more than a specialist branch of managerialism which sought to 'motivate and/or control employees to ensure predictable behavior in uncertain times'. From this managerialist perspective, one could view Ralph's behaviour as 'unpredictable', and a threat and a challenge to managerial control. Consequently, one could view my manager's actions as seeking to not only to control Ralph by silencing him on this occasion, but also to establish future predictability by labeling his use of LEGs as 'misuse' with a view to shaming him into compliant rather than deviant behaviour in the future.

Another aspect of managerialism/HRM is the compulsion to measure everything in order to ensure that every activity is 'adding value' to the organization. Keenoy contends that HR practitioners were as excited as university researchers by this development:

> …for HR practitioners it offers the possibility of empirically demonstrating that HR practices "add value" to the organization to legitimize their claim to a distinctive "professional" contribution and underpins their ambition for a "strategic" role in business decision-making. Without such endorsement, the HR function might be reduced to an administrative support function of questionable legitimacy. It is little surprise proponents refer to the HR performance project as the search for the "Holy Grail" (ibid: 461).

Thus from this perspective it might come as no surprise that my manager asks for evidence that LEGs are adding value, both of us knowing that when this Holy Grail does not materialize, she is in a strong 'evidence based' position to call a halt.

Systems thinking

In trying to better understand my *Fit* colleague's perspective, it might be useful to consider his training as an engineer. My colleague spent ten years in the automotive industry working for the Ford Motor Company before joining UH as a lecturer in Automotive Engineering. During his later years at Ford, my colleague was part of the Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) team, charged with improving the efficiency and efficacy of Ford's manufacturing processes and procedures. It was this experience that brought him to the attention of the VC when he was looking for someone to project manage a global UH improvement programme entitled *Fit for the Future*. As a member of the *Fit for the Future* team, I have worked alongside him for over a year now. During this time we have had several conversations about 'practice' and I have shared with him a number of articles outlining the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating. Following a fact finding visit to a former Ford colleague, my colleague bought copies of a book his friend recommended and distributed one to every member of the *Fit for the Future* team. The book was one that I had come across before and, indeed, one that Ralph has made reference to in his most recent work (Stacey, 2010).

The book, entitled *Systems Thinking in the Public Sector: The failure of the reform regime…and a manifesto for a better way* (Seddon, 2008), is written by Professor John Seddon, Managing Director of Vanguard Ltd (a consultancy specialising in organizational change) and a visiting professor at the Lean Enterprise Research Centre, University of Cardiff. In his book, Seddon rails against the target driven, regulation hampered, specification burdened bureaucracy resulting from public sector reform in the UK:

> If investment in the UK public sector has not been matched by improvement it is because we have invested in the wrong things…We think inspection drives improvement, we believe in the notion of economies of scale, we think choice and quasi-markets are levers for improvement, we believe people can be motivated with incentives, we think leaders need visions, managers need targets, and information technology is a driver of change. These are all wrong-headed ideas (Seddon, 2008: iv).

Seddon calls for the scrapping of targets and the development of a new ideology based on systems thinking that reduces 'failure demand' and meets customer needs by increasing 'value work' ('the thing that matters to the customer) (ibid: Chapter 5). Failure demand is work created by a poorly designed system that results in employees having to carry out unnecessary extra steps in order to meet customer needs, so, my colleague having to meet with Ralph is a example of failure demand, where my colleague has to do extra work that would not have had to be done had the system been designed to enable it to accept existing employee (DMan Faculty) payment detail from the old finance system. My colleague often quotes Seddon, particularly in relation to increasing 'value work' and reducing 'failure demand'. Interestingly, the systems that Seddon describes, for the most part, are business processes, not social processes. The perspective of complex responsive processes would not have difficulty with the way Seddon uses the term system to describe workflow.

However, my colleague does not use this term unproblematically, from the perspective of complex responsive processes, as he sees the organisation (and patterns of human interaction) as a system. With his background as an engineer, and many years working to improve auto-motive, and more latterly, university systems, it is of little surprise that he makes the evaluative choice to focus on the aspect of Ralph's report that is useful to him,

the negative feedback (failure demand) that is necessary from a systems dynamics point of view to enable him (as an outside controller) to fix the problem and thus bring the system back to equilibrium.

Complex responsive processes of relating

Ralph's ideological views, expressed in his writing, my interactions with him, and the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, have been accounted for elsewhere in this and previous projects, and space does not afford another précis of any length here. Suffice it to say that Ralph makes the evaluative choice to write and disseminate his report as a means of firstly, drawing attention to 'what it is we are doing [at the University] and why we are doing it', secondly as a challenge to the 'culture of enforced conformity' ('institutionalised bullying') which Ralph believes is 'blocking innovation and change which relies essentially on difference, even deviance', and thirdly as a proposal for a more useful way of 'thinking together about what we are doing and why we are doing it' as the 'only way to produce reasonable and lasting changes in what we do' (Stacey, 2009).

An ideology cocktail

The evaluative choices that I make (am making) throughout this incident could be understood as taking into account all three of the ideologies I am ascribing to my manager, my colleague, and Ralph, respectively - the managerialist (HRM) practice of leadership/governance that I have been a part of for 12 years, the systems thinking informed organizational development and project management roles I have carried out for 4 years, and the complex responsive processes perspective that I have been exploring for 3 years (18 months of which have been as a researcher on the DMan programme). I feel that my understanding of the ideologies at play has been useful in that it has helped me to make sense of the context that I have found myself in and this, in turn, has helped me to gesture and respond to colleagues in ways that maintained my inclusion in the various **groups** we find ourselves part of.

So with my manager, I begin by jovially scoffing at the antics of the maverick academic, thus maintaining continued inclusion in the **professional support** group of colleagues at the University. I then empathise with her, as a fellow **HR** professional, over the anxiety

provoking consequences of accusations of institutionalised bullying, before drawing on **CIPD** evidence of the lack of efficacy of email surveys, in order to counter her request for immediate qualitative feedback regarding LEGs. With my *Fit* colleague, we concentrate on the inadequacies of the new finance **system's** data migration capabilities. With Ralph, and my **DMan** colleagues, I enter into an ongoing exploration of the sense I am making of this episode from the perspective of **complex responsive processes**, of which this project forms a major part.

Gossip

At various points during *Ralphgate,* and in the aftermath, I have experienced my interactions with colleagues as a form of gossip, the hushed conversations and blind copied emails from my *Fit* colleague, the behind closed doors conversations with my line manager, writing this project and the private conversations with my colleagues on the DMan.

Scott describes gossip as 'the most familiar and elementary form of disguised popular aggression' (Scott, 1990: 142). The anthropologist Max Gluckman described gossip as 'among the most important societal and cultural phenomena' (Gluckman, 1963: 307). He was one of the first researchers to identify the positive virtues of gossip, arguing that gossip helps to 'maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups (ibid: 308). Gluckman described gossip as a 'culturally controlled game with important social functions', and he listed the 'rules' of 'gossipship' as:

i)   one gossips about others with whom you have a 'close social relationship'

ii)   gossip excludes as well as includes, as only the accepted members of the group are granted the privilege to gossip

iii)   one must engage in gossip in order to remain an accepted member of the group (ibid: 313).

Gluckman concludes that gossip adds to group cohesion if the group is united by a 'sense of community' that is based on the 'successful pursuit of common objectives'. However, where no such unity or success exists gossip 'accelerate[s] the process of disintegration' (ibid: 314).

Rosnow and Fine (1976) make a clear distinction between rumour and gossip, defining rumour as 'a process of communication that is constructed around unauthenticated information'. Scott (1990) argues that what distinguishes gossip from rumour is the fact that gossip 'consists typically of stories that are designed to ruin the reputation of some identifiable person or persons' (ibid: 142). Rosnow argues that the function of gossip is threefold - to share information, to influence, and to entertain (Rosnow, 1977). Noon et al (1993) provide a working definition of gossip as 'the process of informally communicating value-laden information about members of a social setting' (ibid: 25). They stress that gossip has the potential to 'change the structure of the group' consequently a potential gossiper has several questions to ask, and choices to make before sharing:

> What makes the information worth passing on? Who should I tell? How should I tell it? These decisions will be informed by the actor's judgement regarding other questions. What implications will this information have for myself? What are the possible effects for the person the information is about? How will the receiver(s) react? What are the wider implications for the reference group's structure or survival? The decisions made will, in turn, be reliant upon the individual actor's perceptions of the group's values, individual relationships and structure, and will be mitigated by his or her own personal values and relationships. As such, the power relationships, be they formal, informal or both will be of crucial concern to the gossiper's conscious decision (ibid: 29-30).

Gossip sits at the heart of *Ralphgate*, something I explore below, and it is something that I have also felt myself falling into in the writing of the project, that is, engaging in gossip with my immediate audience - Chris, Ralph (key protagonists in the narrative, as well as being my first and second supervisors for the DMan), Eric, and Marion (two DMan colleagues who along with Chris and I make up our learning set). So, Eric and Marion know Chris and Ralph (as their first and second supervisors on the DMan, also), and in addition to this, Chris knows my manager, and Ralph to a greater or lesser extent knows all of the protagonists in the narrative. Thus my writing and sharing of this project satisfies all three of Gluckman's 'gossipship' rules as outlined above – i) I am gossiping about others that the audience all, to a greater or lesser extent, have 'close social relationships' with, ii) I am 'including as well as excluding', as my audience is limited to DMan colleagues, and iii) I did feel pressured by DMan supervisors/colleagues to explore this narrative, and drop the

original one that I recounted in the first draft I made of this project. So it did feel that, to some extent, one of the reasons for engaging in gossip was 'in order to remain an accepted member of the group'. Noon et al assert that:

> For the individual gossip can be a powerful tool. It provides a person with the opportunity to pass on information about key members of an organization, with the potential to influence opinions and attitudes. One's own position may be enhanced because one is seen as a gate-keeper of 'important' information, and because the gossip might seek to lower the prestige and standing of the 'victim' in relation to oneself as gossiper. In this sense, gossip may be related to careerism within organizations, gossip is a central feature of networking as one seeks self-promotion, information control, and the denigration of competitors (ibid: 34).

I would build on this to add that it is not only through the 'denigration of competitors', that one can affect power relations ('lower the prestige and standing of the 'victim' in relation to oneself'), what Elias and Scotson refer to as 'blame gossip', one can also do this by praising someone within the group, thus increasing your prestige with that person and/or the remainder of the group, what Elias and Scotson called 'praise gossip' (Elias and Scotson, 1994). For example, when I shared an earlier draft of the above narrative with Eric, Marion and Chris, Marion, on reading the email from Chris inquiring after my welfare, felt moved enough to respond directly to Chris in her email response to me (extract):

> Chris – I am so impressed by your email to Kevin in the midst of all this...

My 'praise gossip' may or may not have improved my 'prestige and standing' with Chris, but it most certainly improved Chris's prestige and standing with Marion, and one can see how power ratios might shift if one's dependency for praise or approbation from another grows.

Turning to the social processes of relating described in the narrative, I want to look at **three of the ways** in which gossip is employed. **Firstly, it is used as an effective means of inclusion and exclusion.** Elias and Scotson (1994), in their study of Winston Parva, show how the 'established' inhabitants of the original village used gossip to create and maintain a distance from the inhabitants of the new estate, the 'outsiders'. In the narrative there are

a number of occasions when gossip is used in this way. i) Following Chris's distribution of Ralph's report to his LEG, my manager emails me, copying Ralph in, to vent her disapproval of Ralph's behaviour. This is the electronic (modern) version of two members of an established group gossiping about an outsider deliberately within their earshot, thus avoiding (whilst inviting) direct contact. As Scott argues, 'when the victim is not too powerful, the gossiper makes sure that he knows he is being gossiped about, one might give people hard looks or perhaps cup one's hands to a friend's ear. The purpose is to 'punish, chastise, or perhaps even drive out the offender' (Scott, 1990: 143). Indeed Stacey argues that 'such gossip and other ways of talking attribute 'charisma' to the powerful and 'stigma' to the week, so reinforcing power differences (Stacey, 2003: 125) He also points out that '[e]ventually, however, the weak or marginalized groups will probably retaliate with what may be thought to be unreasonable vigour (ibid: 125) ii) In both my initial conversation with my manager following the flurry of emails, and my subsequent one-to-one, I endeavour to maintain my ('established') status by engaging in jovial banter (gossip) with my manager about ('outsider') Ralph's 'antics'. iii) My *Fit for the Future* colleague, unaware of my knowledge of and involvement in the situation, shares Ralph's paper with me as an established member of the *Fit for the Future* team and blind copies me in to his email communication to CEG following his meeting with Ralph.

Secondly, gossip is used as an act of resistance and a challenge to managerial authority. Noon et al (1993) argue that gossip serves 'as a process whereby managerial prerogatives are challenged and the management's ability to control the organization is undermined':

> The erosion of management 'image' and respect through the gossip process also challenges manager's authority, and it creates problems for managers, as they seek to implement their plans, particularly those involving change (ibid: 32).

Stacey acknowledges gossip as one of the 'subtle acts of resistance' that people engage in when feelings of 'frustration, anger, rage and…cynicism' are provoked (Stacey, 2009). Ralph's report is certainly an act of resistance (although one might not describe it as 'subtle'). In addition, his dissemination of the report to LEG convenors, and Chris' subsequent dissemination to his group, causes ripples of gossip across the LEGs about 'institutionalised bullying' and the merits or otherwise of the new finance system. And prior to the whole group discussion on the 9th February, I share with my LEG my concerns about

my manager's request for quantitative evidence, implying that a lack of same might signal the demise of LEGs, causing my group to co-create a whole panoply of tangible benefits that hadn't been identified before.

Paradoxically, gossip has the potential to both undermine and maintain managerial authority at the same time, as gossip also acts as a safety valve for employee unrest helping to 'perpetuate the organization by protecting it from direct challenge and attack' (Moore, 1962). One could argue that in Ralph's case the ability to gossip (disseminate his report and share his views with the VC, my manager, my *Fit* colleague, LEGs, etc) was/is a sufficient enough outlet to assuage his frustration, and keep him (and the colleague with whom he shared the report) from taking any further action, at least for the moment. Thus any attempts by management to eradicate gossip in organizations might prove counterproductive, and as Noon et al (1993) conclude, 'the removal of gossip from any social setting is not feasible unless there is a complete ban on all forms of communication' (ibid: 32). In the light, my manager's change of heart in continuing her support and involvement in LEGs could be seen as a very astute political move by a member of the 'dominant' Chief Executive's Group (CEG).

Thirdly, gossip is used as a means of maintaining group values, cohesion and identity. As noted above, Gluckman (1963) found that gossip played a vital role in group formation, as well as being integral to the maintenance of 'the unity, morals and values of social groups' (ibid: 308). Scott sees gossip as a 'technique of social control among relative equals' (Scott, 1990: 143). Stacey argues that gossip 'sustains ideology, which generates processes of inclusion and exclusion, which sustain identities, all of which sustain patterns of power relations' (Stacey, 2010: 187). The gossiping (informally communicating of value-laden information about members of a social setting - the working definition established earlier) contained in the email correspondence and one-to-one conversations of the protagonists in the narrative above is an example of gossip creating and sustaining the individuals ideologies of the individual senders. Thus my *Fit* Colleague concentrates on the system, my manager concentrates on Ralph's 'stepping out of line' by misusing LEGs, and Ralph points to the importance of taking seriously the complex responsive processes of relating we are all involved in on a daily basis.

Conclusion

So where is this leading my thinking/practice, and what implications does this have for my future research? In this section I intend to review the contribution that the perspective of complex responsive processes is making to my understanding of leadership, and the impact this is having on my thinking/practice as a leader and designer of leadership development programmes.

Leadership as complex responsive processes of relating

From the perspective of complex responsive processes 'the role of the leader emerges and is continually iterated' (Griffin, et al, 2005:10) in 'social processes of recognition' (Griffin, 2002). Griffin et al further argue that what is being recognized is the leader's ability to 'articulate emerging themes', or to 'deconstruct and so present anew' themes that have become highly repetitive thus enabling the group to take the next step (2005: 10). I feel that this was what Ralph was attempting to do in writing and disseminating his report. He was articulating the emerging themes that had been expressed by participants in his LEG, and was drawing attention to the repetitive patterns of behaviour that he termed institutionalised bullying with a view to inviting conversation that would enable the University to take the next step. He was no doubt frustrated with his own personal experience of the new finance system, but it was the hidden transcript that Ralph was drawing attention to, through the exposition of his own personal experience.

As stated above, Ralph's actions are a good example of what Scott describes as a charismatic act of rupture, when the hidden transcript is made public in the teeth of power (Scott, 1990: 19). And although Ralph's initial audience was senior management (CEG and SBU Heads) and selected colleagues, it had (still has) the potential of reaching a wider public, both internal and external. I agree with Scott that one does not need to exhibit charisma in order to commit a charismatic act of leadership. Indeed, I would argue that it is through charismatic acts that charismatic leaders emerge. For example, it would be easy (accurate) to describe Ralph as a charismatic leader, but I would contend that this charisma emanates from the consistent, compulsive, charismatic acts of rupture that Ralph is in the habit of committing – whether it be challenging the hegemony of the dominant (discourse), or articulating the concerns of his LEG participants by exposing their hidden transcript to a

wider University community. Space does not allow a considered exploration of the assertion made here, but it is a line of argument that I intend to return to in Project 4.

However, this is also a good example of the emergent nature of leadership and exemplifies the notion of leadership emerging in social processes of recognition. Ralph's is seen by some senior managers (the Vice Chancellor, and my manager, for example) as a 'trouble-maker' rather than a leader. Thus they do not see his report as an articulation of something they need to act on; they see it as something they need to sweep under the carpet. Elias contends that part of the framework of the game is the 'never-ending vigilance of the upper-level players and the closely woven net of precautions serving to keep them [the mass of lower level players] under control' (Elias, 1970: 89). Such 'vigilance' was exhibited by the VC and my manager in how they dealt with Ralph's report. Firstly, the VC asks my colleague (Project Manager for *Fit 4 the Future*) to meet with Ralph in order to sort out the problem with the finance system, presumably hoping that resolution of the problem might see an end of the complaint. Secondly, my manager concentrates on what she sees as Ralph's 'misuse of the groups' rather than his accusation of institutionalised bullying. And thirdly, the VC meets with Ralph, listens to what he has to say, and subsequently declares the 'matter closed' at a CEG meeting.

Following his meeting with Ralph my colleague sent an email to members of CEG, and blind copied me in. In his email, my colleague identifies a number of areas where he agrees with what he feels are Ralph's points about the inadequacies of the new Finance system, concluding with the comment: *"Overall I did not engage in any discussion about his use of the term institutional bullying".* Ralph's leadership is misrecognised by all three, and that closing email comment is a good description of all three interactions between Ralph and the VC, Ralph and my manager, and Ralph and my colleague.

Turning to my own leadership practice, Griffin et al contend one is more likely to be recognized as a leader if one has:

- an enhanced 'capacity to live with the anxiety of not knowing and not being in control. [Here] the leader is recognized as one with the courage to carry on interacting creatively despite not knowing', (Griffin et al, 2005: 12).

- an 'ability to recognize and articulate the generalizations, the wider social patterns or social objects, which are being particularized in the interaction', a 'capacity for taking the attitude of others' (ibid: 11).

- a 'greater spontaneity than others', where 'spontaneity does not mean impulsiveness but rather acting imaginatively, and this involves reflection. Reflection may be understood as a kind of involved detachment' (ibid: 11).

In the interactions with colleagues, described above, I exhibited the traits that Griffin points to above. As stated earlier, I feel that I have developed my capacity to live with uncertainty that bit longer, to 'sit in the fire', explore, and negotiate the next steps into the unknown. Before joining the DMan my first reaction to Ralph's report would have probably been 'what does this mean for me'. However, when I did receive and then subsequently read the report, my reactions where, shock, curiosity and excitement followed by an assessment that this might be just what was needed to generate the types of discussion that LEGs had been created to provide the space for. And I exhibit the 'courage to carry on interacting creatively despite not knowing' (Griffin et al, 2005: 12), in my interactions with my manager, and we negotiate our next steps.

My exploration of how an understanding of ideology helped me negotiate my way through my interactions with colleagues, shows a capacity for 'taking the attitude of others', the 'wider social patterns' or 'social objects', to the 'inclusion-exclusion dynamics created by particular ways of talking' (Stacey, 2003: 125), for example managerialism/HRM, systems thinking, and complex responsive processes. Indeed, I think that my engagement with thinking that challenges the dominant discourse – complex responsive processes and critical management studies (CMS) has helped me to de-naturalise the managerialist ideology that had become part of my habitus, this, in turn, contributed to my challenging my manager/the dominant discourse. The movement in my thinking also helped me to understand Ralph's/Chris's dissemination of Ralph's report to LEGs as an invitation to engage in conversation rather than a personal crusade/attempt to cause problems for me with my manager.

As stated above, I had a calm detachment throughout my interactions that both pleased and surprised me. The kind of 'involved detachment' that Griffin et al (2005) identify above. Detached involvement is central to the research method on the DMan, and a pre-requisite

for taking our practice/experience seriously. What Stacey has lately come to describe as 'abstracting' from our 'immersion' (Stacey, 2010). Where immersion describes being absorbed in the 'game' and abstraction means 'reflection or meaning making' (ibid: 110). Griffin summarises the capacities that one recognised as a leader displays as an '*enhanced capacity to think, feel, reflect and imagine*' (Griffin et al, 2005:12, emphasis in original). However, he also points out that although 'particular individuals have particular tendencies to act, formed in a life history of acting':

> One cannot identify the attributes of some individual and then conclude that one with the requisite attributes will perform effectively as a leader because how the leader performs will depend just as much on the kinds of recognition, the kinds of response of others (ibid: 12).

The implications for leadership development

So what does this mean for the leadership development programmes that I design and deliver, and my future research? Well I contend that the ability to reflect, to abstract in our immersion, is the capacity that is key to the development of the other leadership capabilities that Griffin et al identified above. I am currently trying to encourage this in the programmes that I lead, and this is something I intend to explore in detail in Project 4. This is by no means a new topic in the dominant discourse on leadership development, so this exploration will involve the critiquing of mainstream views on reflective practice (including Scharmer, 2009). This will also involve an exploration of the wider discourse on what constitutes effective leadership development (Armstrong et al, 2009), including a critique of the contributions that CMS (Alvesson et al, 1996) and the perspective of complex responsive processes has made in this area (Stacey, 2010, Griffin, 2005, and Shiel, 2003).

Scott argues that the hidden transcript 'exists only to the extent it is practical, articulated, enacted, and disseminated within the offstage social sites' (Scott, 1990: 119). Similarly, Stacey argues that 'ideology exists only in the speaking and acting of it' (Stacey, 2003: 125). I contend that this has implications for leadership development. As outlined in Project 2, many managers attend leadership development programmes but find it difficult to put their movement in thinking into practice. Leaving aside, for the moment, the problematic nature of suggesting that thinking can be split from practice, and that any movement in

thinking/practice isn't one and the same thing, managers who are not continuing to speak and act their new found ideology beyond the confines of the 'classroom' might well find that it does not exist. Indeed, colleagues in my learning set on the DMan report this very difficulty, and are often envious of my ability to introduce initiatives at the University that draw on not only the thinking contained in the complex responsive processes perspective, but also the Faculty – Chris and Ralph being involved in LEGs. Consequently I am able to speak and act complex responsive processes beyond the confines of the DMan residential and learning set conference calls. Consequently, I intend to explore the feasibility of working with a leader and their team in order to make collective sense of how they go on together. This will entail reflecting upon my own experience in groups and the contribution that group analytic thinking makes to leadership and leadership development (Bion, 1961, Dalal, 1998, Stacey, 2003: and Shiel, 2003).

And finally, at a recent Complexity and Management Centre (CMC) Conference, Ralph recounted an experience he had working with a group of senior leaders. After listening to narratives of what they thought they were doing on a day-to-day basis, Ralph provoked anger amongst the group by suggesting that what they did on a day to day basis was talk. Protestations that this did not take account of the many meetings they attended, reports they wrote, and emails they sent were met with Ralph's assessment of 'more talking, talking on paper, and electronic talking'. Ralph was not trying to disparage what these leaders were doing, what he was doing was inviting them to reflect on the fact that if what they did was talk for a living, then it becomes very important to become good at talking. Consequently I intend to return to the theme of what it means to add skilfully to conversations (Shaw, 2002, Stacey, 2010), including the coaching conversation (Lee, in Griffin et al, 2005).

PROJECT 4 (APRIL 2010 - OCTOBER 2011)

BECOMING REFLEXIVE

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> *We must not begin by talking of pure ideas – vagabond thoughts*
> *that tramp the public roads without any human habitation –*
> *but must begin with men and their conversation*
>
> (Charles Sanders Peirce, 1958: 8: 112)

Introduction

Who am I, and what am I doing?

I had originally intended to explore further in this project three of the emerging themes from my earlier work on the Doctorate in Management (DMan) programme, when a question posed by the external examiner at my progression viva shifted my locus of enquiry. The examiner asked me whether I was looking at leadership and leadership development in the context of Higher Education (HE), or more generally. In earlier projects, I haven't explicitly explored the HE context that I find myself in, but reflecting on the examiner's question I realise that taking my experience seriously obliges me to explore my experiences as a leader of leadership development in HE, and to consider what influence the University of Hertfordshire (UH)/HE context has had on the development of my thinking over the last four years. This shift in focus consequently brings me back to my original research question – *who am I, and what am I doing?*

Becoming academic?

Recently, I was a member of the facilitation team at a workshop for the Professional Strategic Business Unit (SBU) Heads at UH. This workshop had been arranged as an opportunity for Professional SBU Heads (along with selected members from their respective senior management teams) to discuss how they might go about improving business processes and reducing the cost of the central services that they manage. The discussion was led by a guest speaker, a UH doctoral graduate in engineering, and the current Corporate Director for Resources at a County Council in the South. Prior to the meeting, participants were sent an email detailing Carlton's experience 'in the field of lean

thinking in the public sector' and were given the reassurance, if any were needed, that 'his presence will provide some useful external perspectives on the...challenges we face'.

I was there in my capacity as a core member of the Improvement and Planning Office (IPO), and my role was to support the logistical running of the event. I anticipated encountering thinking based on the ideological premise of organisation as system, (something that, as discussed in earlier projects, I now find problematic), but I also anticipated resisting the temptation to challenge such notions in deference to the role I had been invited to play, rather than any fundamental disinclination to dissent. However, during the course of the three hour meeting, I found myself intervening on two separate occasions, interventions that I would not have been moved to make before joining the University/DMan.

My first intervention arose during a discussion of how we might position ourselves in the University marketplace in the event of a removal of the UK governmental cap on tuition fees. Amongst the mainly Professional group of staff, there were three 'academics' – the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC), a Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC), and a former Head of School. I sat quietly through the perennial debate of whether or not students should be viewed as customers, with the majority view being that whatever term we use matters little so long as we accept that as a University we *are* a service provider. Then something in the conversation moved me to interject. Our guest speaker said he was feeling "guilty" about removing an item from his *PowerPoint* presentation due to lack of space, a bullet point about 'Learning for Learning's Sake'. One of the participants at the table, on which I was situated, muttered something about this being a "red herring", and I found myself feeling tremendously provoked. Consequently, I waited for an appropriate gap in the conversation before asserting that we should be mindful not to lose sight of 'learning for learning's sake' as this might well impact on the recruitment and retention of academic colleagues who may have very different views than those expressed here. This intervention surprised me on two counts. Firstly, I was surprised by the strength of feeling that compelled me to speak out. And, secondly I was surprised by the reaction of colleagues, particularly 'academic' colleagues. Far from acting as a 'call to arms', my input provoked the former Head of School to assert that academic colleagues are not all 'tank top and sandal wearers' and, gesturing towards the screen on which the *PowerPoint* slide was being projected, he added that the "majority of academic colleagues would have no problem in agreeing with all of the bullet points up there".

My second intervention came at the end of the workshop when I found myself, in plenary, writing up suggestions for what we should "Stop Doing" on a flip-chart at the front of the room. The Director of Marketing suggested that we should "Stop talking and start doing". There was a murmur of agreement around the room before the Director of Estates rejoined with "I couldn't agree more. In fact, I think we should stop all of this...consultation". This was met with laughter prompting him to continue: "I'm not joking, I've banned consultation". I found myself saying out loud that I could understand where the Directors of Marketing and Estates where coming from, but for me 'talking' is 'doing', and our not paying attention to this might have been a prompt for the negative comments recorded by colleagues in the recent Staff Survey (May 2010), when asked for their views about change processes and communication across the University, amongst other things.

During my four years at UH, I have been involved in many conversations of this nature, especially during the first two years as Project Manager for *UHMindset*, the culture change programme discussed in Project 1. Four years ago, I would not have made the interventions that I did at the meeting of Professional SBU Heads. Reflecting on the micro-interactions described in the above narrative, it is obvious that the UH/HE context that I find myself in is having a fundamental impact on my thinking as action, on who I am, and what I am doing, in short, on my identity. However, drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al., 2000, Griffin, 2002, Shaw, 2002, Stacey, 2011a), I contend that the patterning of the (global) context that I find myself in is inseparable from the (local) micro-interactions themselves. That is, my identity is, paradoxically, forming the local and global patterns of interaction that I am involved in whilst being formed by the same global patterns of interaction that one could describe as the UH/HE context that I find myself in, and local micro-interactions of day-to-day organisational life, *at the same time*. In an earlier draft of this project, I described this process, this shift in my identity, as *becoming academic*, then, *becoming collegial.* However, neither descriptor adequately reflects the change in my experience of self and others' experience of me. I feel that a more accurate description is *becoming reflexive,* a process that is being greatly influenced by my involvement in the leadership development programme in which I am a participant - the DMan programme.

If posed the external examiner's question now - *"Are you looking at leadership development in the context of Higher Education (HE), or more generally?"* - I would answer

that I am looking at supporting the leaders that I work with to develop the reflective and reflexive capacity required to make sense of their day-to-day experience (the context in which they find themselves), and to answer for themselves the questions - *who am I, and what am I doing*? Moreover, to support them to become aware of their habitual patterns of thinking/acting in order to ensure that they do not remain caught in 'dominant modes of thinking' that leave them 'trapped in modes of acting that may no longer be serving [them] all that well' (Stacey, 2007: xiv/xv).

Consequently, the first part of this project contains an exploration of the HE/UH context in which I currently find myself (including a brief review of how this has been taken up by authors in the mainstream and from the perspective of complex responsive processes), followed by an assessment of the impact this is having on my identity and practice as a leader of leadership development programmes. The second part explores leadership development in HE, as coercive persuasion (Schein, 1989), as identity regulation (Alvesson et al, 2002), as identity construction (Carroll et al, 2010), and as a space for reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2010, Stacey, 2010). The project concludes with some thoughts on the implications of my argument for leaders and leaders of development (programmes).

The HE/UH context in which I find myself

Same difference – my introduction to the University of Hertfordshire

The traditional characterisation of the difference between a public sector university and a private sector organisation sees university management and governance founded on principles of collegiality, and private sector management and governance founded on principles of managerialism (Watson, 2009). Consequently, the introduction of managerialist principles into university governance and management has, for some, been a cause of great anxiety as identities are challenged (Stacey, 2010). On commencing work with the University, the Deputy Vice Chancellor whose corporate responsibilities included Human Resources/Staff Development informed me that my experience of working in and with 'big business' had been a major factor in my appointment. I was coming from what was ostensibly a private sector/business background, and she and the recruitment panel felt that I could make a significant contribution to the University's mission to become

business facing and *business like*, not least, by bringing the University's management population into the 'twenty-first century'.

The DVC had chaired the interview panel that I had to face to secure the job, the other two members being the then Head of Staff Development, and the then (and still current) Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Law, and Education (HLE). The interview was the final element of a full day of varied assessment and selection activities. For the most part, it was unremarkable and predictable, however one question posed by the Dean of HLE stuck with me: *"The successful candidate will have to work with Professors and senior academics across the University, how do you think you will cope with this?"* The DVC implied that I had been employed because I brought *difference*, yet my interpretation of the Dean's question during the interview was not "What do you offer that's *different*?" but rather, "Do you think you will be able to fit in here, do you think you will be accepted by the academic staff, could you be/become one of us?", that is, "What do you offer that's the *same*?"

Collegiality and Managerialism in HE/UH

Although there are significant differences between universities and businesses in the private sector, it would be an oversimplification to describe universities as purely public sector organisations as their constitutions afford them a level of autonomy that is not shared by other types of institution in the public sector (Watson, 2009). This autonomy extends to their ability to make strategic and operational decisions not afforded to, for example, schools and hospitals. However, as Deem et al point out:

> Although formally retaining a significant degree of institutional, managerial, and organizational autonomy in the arena of knowledge work...UK universities have discovered that they have become subjects of and targets for the 'audit culture' and related 'transparency' regimes that have come to dominate most aspects of public life and provision in the UK and notably in England (Deem et al, 2007:2).

Deem et al carried out extensive research into the effects of managerialism on UK universities as part of the Economic and Social Research Council funded project [14] 'New

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[14] The remit of the project was to examine the extent to which 'new managerialism' was perceived to have permeated the management of UK universities. The first stage of the research used focus group discussions with academics, managers and

managerialism and the Management of UK universities' (1998 – 2000). They define managerialism as 'a broad ideological movement that has been highly influential in all modern societies since the late nineteenth/early twentieth century onwards' that 'regards managing and management as being functionally and technically indispensable to the achievement of economic progress, technological development, and social order within any modern political economy' (Deem et al, 2007: 6). Deem et al make the distinction between the terms 'new managerialism' (NM) and 'new public management' (NPM). They define NM as 'an ideological configuration of ideas and practices recently brought to bear on public service organisation, management and delivery, often at the behest of governments or government agencies', and NPM as 'forms of administrative orthodoxy about how public services are run and regulated' (Deem et al, 2005: 219). They further argue that theorists of NPM reject the link with NM because it is seen as an ideology of 'the New Right', whereas 'the range of political persuasions of western governments adopting 'new public management' is much wider than this'.

Deem et al trace what they argue are NM's three stages of development, from neo-corporatist, through neo-liberal, to neo-technocratic (Deem et al, 2007: 6-12). They argue that neo-corporatist managerialism was prevalent from the end of WW1 up to the 1970s, and was a blend of 'Keynesian economic policy, state welfarism, political pluralism, industrial tripartism, and Fordist-style management'. They argue that the innate instability of neo-corporatist managerialism led, in the 1970s and early 1980s, to a form of neo-liberal managerialism which was pro-market and pro-consumer, where 'free markets and private business enterprise were regarded as universal and infallible solutions to the governmental and organizational problems that beset advanced capitalist societies'. They further argue:

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administrators from UK learned societies and professional bodies to find out what respondents perceived was currently happening to the management of universities. The second stage involved semi-structured interviews with 137 manager-academics (from Head of Department to Vice Chancellor) and 29 senior administrators in 16 universities. These included several pre-1992 universities, that is, higher education institutions with a charter to award degrees, ranging from redbrick and civic institutions to 1960s universities, and a number of post-1992 universities, which were formerly polytechnics under the control of local government but which became independent incorporated institutions in 1989 and universities in 1992. The interviews explored the backgrounds, current management practices and perceptions of respondents. In the final stage of the project, case studies of the cultures and management of four universities enabled comparison of the views of manager-academics with those of academics and support staff, including secretaries, library staff and technicians (Deem et al, 2005).

By rigorously imposing market forces, business discipline, and managerial control across the full range of public sector service provision, neoliberal Managerialism's strategic intention was to weaken, if not destroy, the regulatory ethic and architecture that had protected unaccountable professional and administrative elites under the rule of neo-corporatist Managerialism (ibid: 9).

Deem et al argue that the rise of neo-liberal managerialism was ushered in under the auspices of Margaret Thatcher (UK Conservative Prime Minister 1979-1989), and that the third and final form of managerialism – neo-technocratic managerialism – was a development brought about under Tony Blair (UK Labour Prime Minister 1997-2007). Deem et al argue that neo-technocratic managerialism places a 'greater faith in 'metrics' than it does in 'markets'', as it 'strives to integrate the rationality of strategic managerial direction and localized managerial control with the reality of national and international competition within a globalized market for public service provision' (ibid: 11). They further argue that this form of managerialism, more than any other, blurs the boundaries between public and private forms of service provision and highlights the contradiction between 'an ethic of civic responsibility' and 'an ethic of private accumulation' (ibid: 12).

For the purposes of this project, the term managerialism will subsequently be used to denote NPM and all forms of NM – neo-corporatist, neo-liberal, and neo-technocratic. However, I feel that it has been both useful and important to trace the evolution of managerialist thought over the last hundred years, and to draw attention to the fact the rise of managerialism in the UK HE sector during the 1980s and 1990s is merely the most recent, albeit the most influential, incarnation of a growing pressure to introduce the practices of private enterprise into the public sector, an evolutionary process that started way before Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, as illustrated by the US academic Thorstein Veblen writing in 1918:

It appears, then, that the intrusion of business principles in the universities goes to weaken and retard the pursuit of learning, and therefore to defeat the ends for which a university is maintained. This results... [in] the imposition of a mechanically standardised routine upon the members of staff, whereby any disinterested preoccupation with scholarly or scientific inquiry is thrown into the background and falls into abeyance (Veblen, 1957: 165).

Consequently, to view managerialism as a static discourse, distinct from other forms of organising like collegiality, is to ignore the evolutionary and social processes that have patterned what I would describe as the *amalgamation of ideologies* that exists in HE today: amalgamations that not only differ in constitution between each university, but also between the different groups within each university, a contention that I explore below.

Deem et al are somewhat more tentative in their attempts to situate and define collegiality. Indeed, the majority of survey respondents and focus group participants in Deem et al's study are only able to define collegiality by describing difference and loss, that is the difference between what exists now and what went before, and the perceived loss of things that were highly valued, like tradition and trust (Deem et al, 2009: 112). Deem et al conclude that:

> The suggestion made here is that the value of collegiality…lies in the quality of relationships that it espouses which are deeply meaningful for many. However, the ambiguity of the term makes clearly articulating its meaning problematic (ibid: 112).

This characterisation of university governance as an ongoing tension between collegiality and managerialism is not confined to mainstream literature and thought. Stacey (2010) explains collegiality by describing how 'professional groupings' within public sector institutions 'tended to govern themselves through collegial and often rivalrous negotiation. Central management in these institutions was rather weak and often had great difficulty in exercising any form of detailed control over the professional groups. In other words public sector governance was characterised by a particular figuration of power relations in which individual professional practitioners, and professional groups, had considerable freedom to make decisions about what they did, and how they did it, in the specific situations they operated in' (ibid: 21).

I am not the first DMan student to explore the HE context that they find themselves in. Michael Monaghan describes his experiences on becoming a Dean of Faculty at an Irish university during a time of major change (2007). Monaghan explores a five year period when the University moved from what he describes as a collegial form of decision making to one that he characterises as managerial. Monaghan citing Oxford and Cambridge as examples of universities where collegiality can be found 'in its most undiluted form',

defines collegiality as a 'culture...where the individual academic makes choices about the way courses are taught, reflects privately on the teaching and selects a research area which reflects the interests and passion of the individual' (ibid: 14).

Monaghan, echoing my own experience following my first management appointment, goes on to describe how, on taking on the role of Dean, he embarks on study for a Certificate in Management as a way of making sense of the administrative role he has taken on (ibid: 12). He embraces the new 'managerialist ideology' that he has been exposed to in his studies and wishes he had 'the power to make decisions without having to engage in endless persuasion and debate in attempts to gain 'consensus'' (ibid: 55). Indeed, this frustration with the pace of collegial forms of management is shared by many academics writing about HE:

> The inherent disadvantages of collegial decision-making, added to its poor fit with mass higher education's swift rate of change, the obligations of external accountability, a different and more varied academic workforce and the need to explore new funding sources invite us as leaders to consider alternatives [that]...must avoid the hobbling effects of unresponsive and irresolute decision-making processes (Ramsden, 1998: 24).

And it is arguably frustration with the 'hobbling effects of unresponsive and irresolute decision-making processes' at UH that is at the heart of both the Director of Marketing's plea to "Stop talking and start doing", and the Director of Estates' decision to 'ban' consultation, as described in the narrative above. Monaghan's involvement in the 'consultation' phase of 'a major re-structuring exercise at the university which was led in a very determined way from the top of the organisation, heavily supported by consultants' where the 'eventual outcome (at least on paper) differed very little from the president's initial vision', causes him to question his initial fervour for managerialist doctrine. He concludes that neither form of governance is right or best (my words), universities are places where 'collegial and managerial values...co-exist, even if that co-existence is marked by tension and conflict from time to time' (ibid:120).

Leadership development in HE

The examiner's question prompted me to take a look at the leadership development literature and provision specifically aimed at leaders within HE. A fairly comprehensive review of the literature and an exploration of the most recent research into leadership and leadership development in HE, leads me to conclude that notions of leadership and leadership development in HE differ little from the mainstream bar the addition of a liberal sprinkling of terms like collegiality, autonomy, and consultation. This is a finding that is best summed by a paragraph in the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) report, entitled *Effective Leadership in Higher Education*, published in 2009:

> Quite why there is such a close symmetry between the findings reported here and the models like those of Kouzes and Posner and Locke [framework for senior leadership in organisations] is itself an interesting question. One possible reason is that there are fairly universal leadership actions that are desirable and undesirable and that higher education institutions are not as distinctive in this regard as we sometimes think we are. Another is that leadership researchers ask questions and their respondents give answers that are consonant with leadership ideas and themes of the day (Bryman, 2009: 67).

Vagabond thoughts...

One way of understanding the quote that opens this project, made by the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1958), is as a caution against getting caught up in abstract conceptualisations that have little connection to our day- to- day experience. At times, I have felt the above exploration of collegiality and managerialism moving further away from 'men and their conversations' towards the 'vagabond thoughts' of 'pure ideas' (ibid: 8: 112). For the majority of colleagues at UH, the terms collegiality and managerialism have little meaning. And even amongst the minority of colleagues for whom these terms/ideologies do have currency, I have yet to experience anything approaching an unequivocal definition of either, echoing the ambiguity in defining collegiality that Deem et al speak of above. For instance, my sense making of the conflicts in HE, that Deem, Stacey, and Monaghan attribute to the tension between the ideologies of collegiality and managerialism, is that they differ little from the conflicts that I experienced in the private,

mutual, and charitable organisations in which I have previously worked, and that I would attribute to the tensions between the ideologies of devolved and central decision making. The anthropologist, James C Scott, in his book *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Scott, 2009), points to the fact that government, in its widest sense, is a relatively recent development:

> Until shortly before the Common Era, the very last 1 percent of human history, the social landscape consisted of elementary, self-governing, kinship units that might, occasionally, cooperate in hunting, feasting, skirmishing, trading, and peacemaking. It did not contain anything one could call a state. In other words, living in the absence of state structures has been the standard human condition (ibid: 3).

Drawing on Scott, I contend that ideologies of central 'control' and governance, including managerialism, are latter day incarnations of modern state 'enclosure'. That is, efforts 'to integrate and monetize the people, lands, and resources of the periphery so that they become, to use the French term, *rentable*...to ensure that their economic activity' is 'legible, taxable, assessable, and confiscatable or failing that,' replaceable 'with forms of production that are' (ibid: 4-5). At the Bradford and Bingley (private), and the Yorkshire Building Society (mutual) it was the salespeople who were the 'periphery' requiring reigning in, at Brathay (charity) it was the corporate consultants, and at UH ('public') it is the academics. This is not to deny the fact that distinct ideologies can (and have) come to dominate at particular points in time, but I contend that they are (and have been) variations of the above theme, and as such they are not (nor have they been) pure, uncontested, or fixed. Indeed, indicative of this last point, for Monaghan in 2007, collegiality and managerialism are 'co-evolving and co-existing' (Monaghan, 2007), for Deem et al in 2009, collegiality and managerialism are battling it out for supremacy (Deem et al, 2009), and for Stacey in 2010, 'the collegial form of public sector governance has all but vanished' (Stacey, 2010: 22).

I am not offering my opinions here as any more reality congruent or insightful than those of Deem et al, Monaghan, or Stacey. Rather, I am arguing that the sense each of us is making of the HE (and more specifically for Stacey and I, the UH) context in which we find ourselves is *sense for us,* and is therefore greatly influenced by our current way of thinking, thinking developed in complex processes of social interaction played out over the whole of our

respective lifetimes. Consequently, in this next section, as a means of exploring how such differing views develop, I intend to explore further the thought of authors that I have drawn on in previous projects - sociologist Norbert Elias, anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, and philosopher George Herbert Mead - to explore some thoughts on how we (humankind) have come to think how we think.

A detour via detachment - how we have come to think how we think

In his article, *Problems of Involvement and Detachment,* the sociologist Norbert Elias (1956) traces the development of human thought and feelings about the natural world, from the 'magic-mythical' understanding of primitive societies, to the 'scientific' understanding of post industrial societies, a process that we remain oblivious to today for the most part. He argues that such 'forms of thinking' were only made possible by the capacity that humans have for taking a 'detour via detachment' (ibid: 229), that is, noticing/reflecting our emotional/intellectual absorption in the present moment, and questioning what it is we are doing/thinking. However, whereas detachment, observation, and experimentation provided humankind with an anxiety reducing level of control over (understanding of) natural forces, Elias argues that this has only served to exacerbate the difficulties we face when trying to control (understand) the social processes we are caught up in.

Elias further argues that it is difficult to apply the 'conceptual tools' and 'basic assumptions' of natural science to the social sciences, that is, it is difficult to have the same degree of detachment when contemplating the social processes that we are all involved in due to the fact that we are participants and observers at the same time, and 'under these conditions the members of such groups can hardly help being deeply affected in their thinking about social events by the constant threats arising from these tensions to their way of life or to their standards of life and perhaps to their life':

> Their experience of themselves as upholders of a particular social and political creed which is threatened, as representatives of a specific way of life in need of defence, like the experience of their fellows, can hardly fail to have a strong emotional undertone (ibid: 236).

Similarly, the anthropologist turned sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1972) used the term *habitus* to describe people's habitual social customs and ways of thinking. Bourdieu contends that habitus is something that possesses a person rather than something that a person possesses 'because it acts within them as the organizing principle of their actions' (ibid: 18). And in his efforts to describe the same phenomena, the philosopher, George Herbert Mead (1934), described the general tendencies for large numbers of people to act in similar ways as social objects. From the perspective of complex responsive processes, social objects are seen as 'patterns across a population which are emerging and being sustained in local interaction' (Stacey, 2010: 164). Stacey proffers the UK National Health Service (NHS) as an example of a social object, 'that is, as generalized tendencies of large numbers of people to act in similar ways in similar situations' (ibid: 211). However as Stacey points out:

> ...there is not one monolithic social object but many linked ones. Each hospital, for example, is to some extent a distinctive social object, as are groups of different kinds of medical practitioners and managers in that hospital. There are, therefore, many social objects, many generalised tendencies for large numbers of people to act in similar ways in similar situations, many games in which people are pre-occupied (Stacey, 2010: 211).

Building on these thoughts, I am arguing that to explain what was happening at the Professional SBU Heads' meeting as a manifestation of the tension between the ideologies of collegiality and managerialism is too reductionist and over simplistic. Indeed, I posit that it is just as problematic to describe what is happening across HE/UH in these same terms. I contend that in order to make sense of what is happening in the local and global contexts one finds oneself in, one must explore how notions of habitus, ideology, and social objects are being taken up in local interaction. Drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes:

> People are interacting with each other according to patterns, themes, habits or routines, which they may spontaneously adapt at a particular time according to the contingencies of the particular situation they find themselves in. All of this reflects their own personal histories and the histories of the local groupings and wider societies they find themselves in (Stacey, 2010: 161).

Context then is merely one of the many elements that influence our thinking/action and the patterning that emerges in of our day-to-day experience. As outlined above, global contexts comprise many local contexts, many 'games' in which we are all pre-occupied (Stacey, 2011a: 412). Consequently, in the leadership development programmes that I lead, rather than looking at leadership development in the context of HE (the examiner's question to me in my progression viva), I am looking at leadership development more generally as a space where leaders can be supported and encouraged to develop the reflective and reflexive capacity required to make their own sense of the contexts in which they find themselves (local and global). I am encouraging them to take their day-to-day experience seriously and to start to answer for themselves the questions - *who am I, and what am I doing, who are we and what are we doing*? Moreover, I am supporting them to become aware of their habitual patterns of thinking/acting in order to ensure that they do not remain caught in 'dominant modes of thinking' that leave them 'trapped in modes of acting that may no longer be serving [them] all that well' (Stacey, 2007: xiv/xv). These themes will be explored in more detail below.

Ideologies of leadership

In Project 3, I described the mix of ideologies that contributed to my own agency as an ideology 'cocktail'. However, I now feel that this does not adequately reflect the processual nature of ideological development. Elias (1956) used the term 'amalgam' to describe 'group-images, those, for instance, of classes or of nations, self-justifications, the cases which groups make out for themselves', saying that they 'represent, as a rule, an amalgam of realistic observations and collective fantasies (which like the myths of simpler people are real enough as motive forces of action)' (ibid: 236). This has resonance for me, as I experience the leadership ideologies espoused by the managers that I work with across UH as mixtures of 'realistic observations and collective fantasies'. And a mismatch often exists between the collective fantasies (the idealised theories of leadership articulated by leaders on the development programmes I lead) and the realistic observations (the narratives of day-to-day experience shared on these programmes). In short, there seems to be a mismatch between what managers, informed by the idealisations contained in the dominant discourse, think they 'ought' to be doing, and what they find themselves 'actually' doing.

Ken Green, Professor of Applied Sociology of Sport at Chester College of Higher Education, experiences a similar mismatch 'between, on the one hand, philosophies which have been articulated by academic philosophers seeking to define what they consider to be the 'essential' characteristics or nature of physical education (PE) and, on the other hand, ideas about PE which are held by teachers who have the practical task of teaching PE within school' (Green, 1998). Green identifies a 'gap' between what PE teachers 'ought' to be doing, according to the 'academic philosophy' of PE, with what they find themselves 'actually' doing (Green, 2000: 109), which echoes my experience with participants. He posits that this 'theory-practice' gap is sustained by the resilience of the ideologies that PE teachers develop long before entering the profession. From the perspective of complex responsive processes, I would question the dualism that Green creates between theory and practice, however, his assertion that academic philosophies compete with resilient ideologies that have been forming since childhood, resonates with my own experience, as outlined above.

Green adopts Elias' term amalgam, referring to the mix of ideologies that act as the motive forces of PE teachers' actions as 'amalgam philosophies'. Although, as outlined above, I experience the ideologies of leadership expressed by managers as mixtures of 'realistic observations and collective fantasies', I find Green's use of Elias' term 'amalgam' problematic. Building on Elias and Green, I contend that a more apt description is *amalgamation*. An amalgamation maintains the processual and dynamic nature of ideology, a fundamental tenet of Eliasian figurational sociology, whereas amalgam, being the result or consequence of the process of amalgamation, denotes stasis. This shift is a subtle, but very important distinction that Green overlooks in his haste to adopt the exact same term that Elias first used.

An amalgamation of ideologies

Before going any further, I want to pause in order to establish a working definition for a term that is central to my argument here, at that is ideology. Green rejects the term ideology, replacing it with 'philosophy'. Taking the definition of philosophy that the philosopher Anthony Flew gives as - 'an aphoristic overview that usually embraces both value-commitments and beliefs about the general nature of things' (Flew, 1984: vii) – Green adds parenthesis in order 'to indicate that this represents a sense which shares more

in common with a taken-for-granted, everyday usage, as one's view of 'how things should be' (Green, 2000: 110). It would appear that one of the reasons Green rejects 'ideology' is because definitions of the term have 'developed away from...evaluatively *neutral* conceptions' to incorporate 'evaluatively *negative* connotations' (emphases in original) (ibid: 111). Yet he variously states that "These 'philosophies'...are in reality more *ideological* than philosophical" (emphasis in original) (Green, 2000: 111), and "PE teachers' 'philosophies'...represent an amalgam of various ideologies" (Green, 2003: 116).

From the perspective of complex responsive processes, ideologies are the 'evaluative themes', as the 'basis of our choices of actions', paradoxically forming and being formed in human interaction as norms and values are functionalised (Stacey, 2011a: 381 & 382). Ideology can therefore 'be thought of as an imaginative 'whole' – that is, simultaneously the obligatory restriction of the norm and the voluntary compulsion of value, constituting the evaluative criteria for the choice of actions', where norms are 'themes of being together in an obligatory, restrictive way', and values are 'themes organising the experience of being together in a voluntary compelling, ethical manner'.

I find this understanding/definition of ideology most useful as it maintains the paradoxical relationship between the 'ought' and the 'is', between norms and values, something that Green collapses to the 'ought' ('how things should be') in his definition of 'philosophy'. In summary, I posit that my own 'motive forces of action' are born of an *amalgamation of ideologies.* That is, an amalgamation developed over the course of my lifetime and incorporating ideologies (comprising of values and norms) that one might associate with collegiality, managerialism, systems thinking, complex responsive processes and critical management thinking. Similarly, I experience the views expressed by the managers that I work with on leadership development programmes, their realistic observations and collective fantasies, as amalgamations of ideologies.

Ideology, power relations, and themes of inclusion and exclusion

Green's description of PE teachers' ideologies as a 'mishmash of views...sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory, frequently ill-thought-through and typically confused' (ibid: 124) has resonance with my experience of the views expressed by the leaders at the meeting of Professional SBU Heads. For instance, the colleague who

described 'learning for learning sake' as a 'red herring', later challenged the facilitator's assertion that we should eliminate all spending that does not add value with: *"Some of that* [spending] *is our academic colleagues doing something they like to do which might not mean adding value to someone getting a degree, but we have to keep them happy and here.",* the Director of Estates announced his ban on consultation, and the Director of Marketing and Communication called for less talking. One could make a case for these being three clear examples of contradictory, ill-thought through, and confused thinking, respectively. One could even argue that the Director of Marketing and Communications' contribution, given his role, is an example of all three.

However, it is also worth noting that the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies of thinking did not undermine what was arguably a 'concerted' and successful attempt to establish/maintain an ideology and shared identity. And this highlights a crucial aspect of organisational context, indeed any context, power relations (Elias, 1978). The context that one finds oneself in will inevitably and undeniably influence how one thinks about and 'does' leadership, but if one accepts that ideology only exists in the articulation and acting of it in social processes of local interaction (Stacey et al, 2008), then power relations, that is the degree to which one is enabled or constrained by others, or indeed enables or constrains others (Elias, 1978), play a pivotal, arguably *the* pivotal role, in determining which ideologies come to dominate (at least in public).

Thus where the power ratios are very much in one's favour, for example where one is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an organisation, then there is greater potential to impose one's own way of thinking about and doing leadership on others. Whereas where the power ratios are very much in others' favour, for example where on is a very junior member of staff, then there is much less potential for imposing one's own way of thinking/acting on others. This arguably explains why Michael Monaghan has less success implementing managerialist principles, as Dean of Faculty, than does the University's President and why Green finds that the biggest single influence on a PE teacher's actions is their Head of Department's attitude to PE (Green, 2002: 72). Perhaps it is the reason why I considered self-silencing at the meeting of SBU Heads.

Another important aspect of power relations that Elias and Scotson draw attention to is the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Elias and Scotson, 1982), where those finding the

power ratio to be in their favour have greater influence over who's in and who's out, a concept that I explored more fully in Project 3. Briefly here, in their sociological study of a Leicestershire town, Elias and Scotson, found that the power ratio between what they termed the 'established' community (the families that made up the original population of the town) and the 'outsiders' (those families that moved into the area after the second world war) favoured the established. That is, the established were able to decide who was 'in' and who was 'out'. This meant that, even though the 'outsiders' came from, ostensibly, the same socio-economic backgrounds, and to all intents and purposes could not be to told apart when observed working side by side in the local factories, the 'established', through the use of 'praise gossip' and 'blame gossip', respectively, were able to elevate the 'established' and denigrate the outsiders, to the point where the outsiders themselves began to question their own worth in comparison to the established. Stacey cautions that 'if we want to have a deeper insight into the dynamics of organizational life and why it produces surprises, then we must be sensitive to the ordinary organizational reality of inclusion, exclusion, gossip and ideology (Stacey, 2010: 187).

This concept of inclusion and exclusion goes some way to explaining the former Head of School's 'we're not all tank-top and sandal wearers' contribution, at the meeting of professional SBU Heads. The former Head is a member of the Leadership Experience Group (LEG) that I convene, and his comment seemed at odds with conversations we had had both in the LEG and on a one-to-one basis. Following the meeting, I made the effort to enquire about his apparent 'u-turn', on the question of learning for learning's sake, and found that rather than agreeing with 'their' sentiment, he was attempting to prevent professional colleagues from discounting the contribution that academic colleagues make to the University's commercial success. I see the former Head's intervention as a plea for inclusion, or at any rate, as a defence against exclusion, and the contributions from colleagues, described above, as the patterning of amalgamations of ideologies articulated in complex responsive processes of communicative interaction between interdependent individuals competing for recognition in the evolving figuration of power relations that constitute the infrapolitics of organisational life.

The former Head's behaviour illustrates the paradoxical nature of the amalgamation of ideologies as motive forces of action. In a bid to be accepted as part of the 'established' group, he seemingly dismisses 'learning for learning's sake' and champions an ideology that

runs counter to the values he has shared with me in private conversation. Yet I contend that rather than seeing one as 'right' and the other as 'wrong', or one as the 'public transcript' and the other as the 'hidden transcript'. The former Head is oblivious to the contradictory nature of his position. He is embracing the new administrative role he finds himself in, whilst maintaining his academic identity, at the same time. Ian Burkitt argues that 'to become an individual self with its own unique change identity, we must first participate in a world of others that is formed by history and culture' (Burkitt, 2008:1):

> We are elements of our culture, time and place, and can never be abstracted from the social world. Even if we move from one culture to another, we simply swap one social formation for another, and it is doubtful whether we can remove every last trace of the culture of our formative years. Like the languages we learn as children, elements of it are always there ready to appear spontaneously when called on (ibid: 16).

This is useful in making sense of my experience of UH/HE. The vast majority of middle and senior managers in Professional SBUs have private sector backgrounds. We may have moved from 'one culture to another', but one could argue that we have not had much of a 'swap' when it comes to the 'social formation' in which we find ourselves. For example, I find myself working in a senior management team of Human Resource (HR) professionals whose 'formative years' were spent in the private sector. In addition, we were all recruited to bring difference; indeed, we have all been particularly tasked with transforming the culture of the University to become 'business like'. This, what Green described above as the resilience of ideology, may also go some way to explaining how collegiality retains its grip on Monaghan (2007: 120), Green's PE teachers retain the attitudes to sport that they developed as children (ibid: 70), and for the majority of my career I maintain a way of thinking that owed as much to my sense making as an adolescent than it did to any/all of the ideologies I have encountered in the organisational contexts in which I have found myself.

As outlined in the introduction, I would no longer describe my recent experience as either *becoming academic,* or *becoming collegial.* This would not only be too simplistic an understanding of how identity is at the same time forming and being formed in social processes of communicative interaction, but it would also confer an unrealistic degree of

influence to the global (the UH/HE) context that I find myself in. My identity, as the amalgamation of ideologies that are my motive forces of action, has certainly evolved during my time at UH, but by far the biggest single influence has been my participation in a leadership development programme - the DMan. Stacey describes the DMan approach thus:

> The reflexive, reflective approach ...as a research method is much more than 'simply research'. It is also an indication of how leader-managers might conceive of themselves as 'researchers' using this method to explore who they are and what they are doing together as well as who they wish to become, and what they would like to do together. The approach is not simply research, because at the same time, it is the exploration of the fundamental questions of strategy – the strategic exploration of identity (Stacey, 2010: 224).

If anything, I would describe what I am currently experiencing as *becoming reflexive*. My understanding of the purpose of leadership development has shifted. I no longer think of what I am doing in terms of *leading leadership development programmes,* rather I am *developing reflexivity*, both my own, and hopefully that of the participants with whom I work. Consequently, in the remainder of this project I intend to, firstly, explore how other thinkers have characterised the purpose of leadership development as coercive persuasion (Schein 1999), identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), an emancipatory space (Ford and Harding, 2007), a space for the construction of identity (Carroll and Levy, 2010), and an opportunity to develop reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2010). And, secondly, to conclude with an exploration of the contribution that the perspective of complex responsive processes/reflexivity (Stacey, 2010, 2011a) makes to this discourse, how this is informing the sense I am making of my role as developer of leadership, and what this means for leaders and leaders of development (programmes) more generally.

Rethinking leadership development

Leadership development as coercive persuasion and identity regulation

Edgar Schein (Schein in Levitt et al, 1989), writing in the 1960s was one of the first authors to describe management development as 'a process of influence', a space where 'an

organization can influence the beliefs, attitudes, and values (hereafter simply called attitudes) of an individual for the purpose of "developing" him, i.e., changing him in a direction which the organisation regards to be in his own and the organization's best interests' (Schein in Levitt et al, 1989: 421). Rather than 'starting with assumptions about learning and growth', Schein took the position that management development might just as readily be viewed from the perspective of 'influence and attitude change':

> Building on this base can be justified quite readily if we consider that adequate managerial performance at higher levels is at least as much a matter of attitudes as it is a matter of knowledge and specific skills, and the acquisition of such knowledge and skills is itself in part a function of attitudes (ibid: 421).

Schein coined the phrase 'coercive persuasion' to describe development interventions designed to bring about attitudinal change (ibid: 426). He contends that the management development programmes that come closest to replicating the optimum conditions for coercive persuasion are the programmes that 'remove the participant for some length of time from his normal routine, his regular job, and his social relationships (including his family in most cases), thus providing a kind of moratorium during which he can take stock of himself and determine where he is going and where he wants to go' (ibid: 433).

This has a particular significance for me when I consider the leadership development programme that I described in detail in an earlier project. *LDW* is a five day programme specifically designed as the 'moratorium' that Schein describes. A place where, in this instance, an Engagement Manager would be whisked away to enjoy the five-star luxury of a ski or beach resort as an opportunity to 'take stock of himself and determine where he is going and where he wants to go' (ibid: 433). Indeed, *LDW* was purposefully positioned at that point in an Engagement Manager's career when they would be considering whether to further commit to the firm by joining the race to become Partner. The formal and informal conversations that they were invited to join over the five days were designed to provide them with information that would help them with this decision - what it means to be a Partner, what one is expected to do, how one is expected to be, what one's chances of succeeding might be, etc. At the time, this did not strike me as unreasonable. These individuals were being highly remunerated and the expectations that the Firm had of them seemed to be a just and fair 'trade off'.

Schein goes on to compare and contrast the types of 'coercive persuasion' witnessed in convent schools (during the training of novice nuns), and in Korean prisoner of war camps (during the 'thought reform' of political prisoners), with the types of 'coercive persuasion' seen in organisations (during the induction and development of managers) (ibid: 426-427). He conceptualises learning as a dimension, with 'organizationally driven' learning on the one extreme and 'individually driven' learning on the other. He characterises organizationally driven learning as 'coercive persuasion', the 'socialisation [of individuals] into specific attitudes' (Schein, 1961), and individually driven learning as 'generative' (Senge, 1990):

> Generative learning by the individual requires free choice of exit if and when cognitive redefinition becomes painful. When organizations demand such redefinition as part of culture change programs they are de facto creating a situation of coercive persuasion (Schein, 1999: 163).

Using these definitions, *LDW* is an interesting proposition: a programme specifically designed to give participants a 'free choice of exit' should the 'cognitive redefinition' required to make Partner become too 'painful' seems 'generative'. However, for most the choice of 'exit' was anything but 'free'. The many benefits that came with 'membership' of the Firm, not least amongst them salary, became 'golden handcuffs'. On average, only five of the twenty-four participants on any one LDW programme made Partner, and it was the Firm that made the 'choice of exit' for the majority of the remaining nineteen.

In recent years, thinkers taking a critical perspective on management, for example, Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott have continued to explore 'how employees are enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives' (2002: 619). Alvesson et al regard 'identity regulation as a pervasive and increasingly intentional modality of organizational control' (ibid: 622):

> Identity regulation encompasses the more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction. Notably, induction, training and promotion procedure are developed in ways that have implications for the shaping and direction of identity (ibid: 625).

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that in organisations, 'identity is viewed as central for issues of meaning and motivation, commitment, loyalty, logics of action and decision-making, stability and change, leadership, group and intergroup relations, organizational collaborations, etc. (ibid: 1163- 1164). They see identity as a process of 'becoming' rather than a static way of 'being', echoing my attention to *becoming* earlier. They use the term 'identity work' to describe 'people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (ibid: 1165). They argue that identity work is 'grounded in at least a minimal amount of self-doubt and self-openness, typically contingent upon a mix of psychological–existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them' (ibid: 1165).

Drawing on Giddens (1991), Alvesson et al argue that identity is 'assembled out of cultural raw material: language, symbols, sets of meanings, values, etc. that are derived from the countless numbers of interactions with others and exposure to messages produced and distributed by agencies (schools, mass media), as well as early life experiences and unconscious processes' (Alvesson et al, 2002: 626). This social constructionist view of identity formation has a great deal in common with Eliasian figurational perspectives of the self. In addition, Sveningsson and Alvesson's conception of 'identity positions' – 'a process in which individuals create several more or less contradictory and often changing managerial identities...rather than one stable, continuous and secure, manager identity' (Sveningsson et al, 2003:1165) - has a great deal of resonance my conception of leadership identity as an amalgamation of ideologies.

Alvesson and Willmott do acknowledge that consideration of the 'oppressive effects' of 'concerted' forms of control should be balanced with 'consideration of expressions of employee resistance and subversion of such control'. Indeed, they argue that it is in this 'tension', between organisational forms of identity regulation and 'other intra and extra-organizational claims upon employees' sense of identity, that the 'space for forms of micro-emancipation exist', one such 'space' being the management/leadership development intervention itself (Alvesson et al, 2002: 619).

I agree with Alvesson et al's caution concerning the capacity for 'resistance' and 'subversion', but in my experience leader resistance often has more to do with the dogged

persistence of long standing ideologies than it does with *workers rising up against the oppressive ideologies expressed by a managerial elite.* Ken Green found in his studies with PE teachers that 'whilst development and change continued to be a feature of the emerging and developing 'philosophies' of teachers in this study, so was the marked persistence of long-standing ideologies' (Green, 2000: 125). And if one accepts that a leader's amalgamation of ideologies/identity is forming whilst at the same time being formed in social processes of communicative interaction (Griffin, 2005), then it is not only the persistence of one's own long-standing ideologies, but also the long-standing ideologies of those with whom one interacts on a daily basis. Thus my experience of many of the participants on the leadership development programmes that I lead is that significant movements in thinking are seemingly 'lost' in the hiatus between modules as old ways of thinking are re-established following re-immersion into the day-to-day activity and social interaction of organisational life.

A space for emancipation

Alvesson et al are not the only thinkers in the Critical Management Studies (CMS) tradition exploring ways of creating spaces for micro-emancipation in leadership development. Ford and Harding, for example, describe their attempts to bring 'the emancipatory potential of their work' to mainstream leadership development programmes, with the intention of encouraging 'participants to challenge some of the taken-for-granted, hegemonic concepts of leadership and introduce them to other ways of seeing, interpreting and understanding themselves and their work organisations' (Ford et al, 2007: 475).

However, rather than being the unmitigated success they had hoped for, Ford and Harding recall, firstly, their difficulties in trying to denaturalise one dominant way of thinking, only to find themselves substituting 'one hegemonic practice for another'. Secondly, their naivety in assuming that their 'position as critical management thinkers gave [them] a stronger ethical stance than mainstream trainers', and thirdly the impotence of their approach in helping 'participants [to] find a more emancipatory voice' (ibid: 476-477). They conclude that it was the *method* rather than the content that was useful for participants and facilitators alike, and they call for:

...more critical, reflexive and dialogical programmes that recognize the importance of emotional investment by both participants and trainers, which engage with managers' embodied experiences as they construct their realities (ibid: 488).

I concur with Ford and Harding's conclusion that central consideration in leadership development interventions should be 'managers' embodied experiences as they construct their realities', a central tenet of method on the DMan programme. The reflexive, dialogic, sense making approach that they recommend reflects the way in which I have been working with participants in the *Leadership Experience Group,* discussed in previous projects, and on the leadership programme that I lead at UH, *Making Sense of Leading.* However, there is a fundamental difference between my thinking, informed by the perspective of complex responsive processes, and that of Ford and Harding, as illustrated in the following narrative.

A reflexive dialogue at UH

When I developed *Core Skills for Leaders* a few months after joining UH, three and a half years ago, I included in *Module 1* a session designed to explore the topic of vision, mission, and values. Then, the question that exercised both myself and participants during this session was not whether it was legitimate to expect staff to 'buy-in to' the University's espoused vision, mission, and values, but rather whether the espoused vision, mission, and values were ones we felt comfortable buying-in to. Three years on, the programme does not include a specific session exploring vision, mission, and values, but the topic still normally arises during discussions around the question of "What is leadership?" As it did recently, when a new Group joining the newly titled *Making Sense of Leading...*programme debated whether there is a difference between leaders and managers.

Six of the eight participants (me being the ninth) expressed the view that leaders set the vision mission and values of an organisation, and moreover followers expected/needed them to do so. I summarised that what I thought I'd heard was that they felt it was not only important that a leader set the vision, mission, and values for an organisation, but also that staff expected/needed them to do so. Nods and verbal agreement rippled through the group. So I challenged them with, "OK. So what's ours? (Pause) What is the University's vision and mission?" Silence ensued, to be broken after a few moments by one of the

participants proffering – "Isn't it something about being *business facing*?" I replied that it wasn't any longer, *business facing* had been a component of the previous one, but it had changed with the launch of the new Strategic Plan in May 2010. No further suggestions were offered, so I pushed a bit further by asking them what the UH values are. Silence ensued once more.

Picking up a copy of the University's current strategic plan, I read out the vision, mission, and values. One of the Group is a Lecturer in Marketing at the Business School, and she exclaimed "Ah, yes, but they are not memorable, they need to be catchy, and we should have communicated them more". I said that that may be so, and I pointed out that every member of staff had had a copy of the strategic plan sent to them in April, accompanied by a letter from the Vice Chancellor, and in addition to the plasma screen announcements, communication from the Chair of the Board of Governors, the website, etc. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor had personally visited every Strategic Business Unit in order to launch the Strategic Plan and join discussions about what the new vision, mission, and values might mean at a local level. I reassured them that it was not my intention to shame them into memorising the University's vision, mission, and values, but rather to point out that the fact that they do not know them doesn't seem to be having any material impact on the 'fantastic work' that they do on a day-to-day basis, and to the quality of interactions they are having with colleagues.

I went on to share the critical management perspective (Wilmott, 1993), the complex responsive processes perspective (Stacey, 2007), and an example of 'best practice' from the dominant discourse (a Harvard Business Review case study of a US company that spent millions of dollars developing and successfully disseminating their values – Respect, Integrity, Communication, Excellence – across the organisation. The company in question was Enron, and several years after the case study was published the world at large found that not everyone in the organisation had been 'living the values' (Tourish and Vacha (1995)), as well as my own experience from the perspective of having been heavily involved in the development of the University's Strategic Plan and subsequent 'roll-out'.

As previously stated, I recount this narrative not merely as a means of illustrating the movement in my thinking that has occurred since commencing the DMan, but also to highlight one of the differences between Ford et al's approach to leadership development

and my own, informed by the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating. They describe the intention behind their critical management approach to leadership development thus:

> The encouragement of self-reflexivity and critical questioning of taken for granted aspects of the experiences of both participating managers and facilitators of development programmes may facilitate a determined critique among managers that can lead to resistance to organizational control (ibid: 489).

As noted above, unlike Ford et al, I am not seeking to emancipate participants from 'organizational control', but from 'dominant modes of thinking' that might be leaving them 'trapped in modes of acting that may no longer be serving [them] all that well' (Stacey, 2007: xiv/xv). During the first two thirds of my career as a leader of leadership development interventions, I have been an advocate of the managerialist doctrine that dominated my reading and studies. Consequently, until recently, I have (unreflexively) designed and delivered leadership interventions that have differed little from what Schein and Alvesson, respectively, describe above as programmes of coercive persuasion and identity regulation. In this project, and elsewhere, I have been exploring how since joining the DMan programme, and encountering the perspective of complex responsive processes, I am thinking/working differently. I see leadership development as space for leaders to explore and make sense of what it is that they actually do on a daily basis, and why they do it. And interestingly, there are CMS thinkers who are working similarly, seeing leadership development as a space for sense making/identity construction without the explicit emancipatory overtones (Carroll et al, 2010).

Leadership development as a space for the construction of identity

Carroll and Levy (2010), for example, describe leadership development as 'a site, discourse, and series of practices that equips us to work with identity, in fluid, dynamic, and plural ways' (ibid: 211). They challenge what they consider to be the rather slanted view of leadership development in social constructionist literature as a means of 'identity regulation and control'. Although not wishing to diminish the 'importance and centrality of identity regulation', Carroll et al argue that leadership development also provides opportunities for identity construction, positing that 'the broader social constructionist

agenda would be furthered by recognising identity as a project as well as a product in the context of leadership development' (ibid: 212). Employing Daudi's concept of a 'space of action', they see leadership development as a space where participants take a 'conscious decision to be the subject that decides as opposed to an object that is decided on' (Daudi, 1986). Carroll et al argue that the 'capacity to maintain alternative narratives becomes a vital dimension of leadership development (and indeed leadership) for both participants and those facilitating their development', enabling them to remain '"the subject who decides" what constitutes the identity choices available'. Their focus is on:

> ... reframing leadership development as an identity space that involves paying attention to the types of communication that construct participants as conscious subjects with the capacity to exercise choice (Carroll et al, 2010: 212).

I find Carroll and Levy's assertion that one can become 'the subject who decides' problematic as it implies a degree of *individual* determinacy that I contend is at odds with the social constructionist conception of identity as something that is forming whilst, at the same time, being formed in the *social*. However, I agree with their view of leadership development as a space for identity construction rather than regulation. As my own identity, my amalgamation of ideologies, becomes increasingly influenced by involvement in the DMan, I find myself including more opportunities for managers on my programmes to i) explore their own agency, ii) to develop their capacity to reflectively and reflexively make sense of their day to day experience (the realistic observations), and iii) to challenge their taken for granted views on leadership and organisation (the collective fantasies).

Rather than simply offering an alternative hegemony, the trap that Ford et al (2007) found themselves falling into, Carroll et al argue 'that space of action offers the opportunity to identify (accept and work with dominant discourses), counteridentify (negate the dominant discourse), and disidentify (replace the dominant discourse with an alternative discourse) with discourses on offer or "managerial formulations of identity" (Homer-Nadeson, 1996: 50)' (Carroll et al, 2010: 215). They contend that current social constructionist approaches to leadership development remain intent on the destabilisation of dominant discourses, leading to "perspective-limiting assumptions" (Kayes cited in Gray, 2007: 496). They call for an approach that is both focused on exposing the dominant discourses and on liberating

alternatives (Carroll et al, 2010: 217). In this next section, I intend to engage with the thinking of a practitioner who is attempting to do just that - Professor Ann Cunliffe.

Leadership development as an opportunity for reflexivity

Cunliffe is ASM Alumni Professor at the University of New Mexico. She provides participants with opportunities to contemplate the philosophical questions evoked by leadership (Cunliffe, 2009b: 91). For Cunliffe, this involves contemplation of ways of 'being and acting in the world', 'of making sense of experience', and of examining the issues 'involved in acting responsibly and ethically' (ibid: 93). Cunliffe et al have recently employed the term 'relational leadership' (Cunliffe et al, 2010) to describe their way of working with participant 'accounts of what they do, how they talk about their relationships with others, and what they identify as being important in their conversations with others', they describe relational leadership:

> Not as a leadership theory or analytical model, but as *action guiding anticipatory understandings* (Shotter, 2009), reflective insights that will allow leaders to become aware of the importance of their conversations and interactions with others. We suggest that these practical insights will help leaders become more reflexive and ethical in their everyday relationships with others (Cunliffe et al, 2010: 98).

Drawing on Heidegger (1966), Cunliffe et al (2005) define reflection ('calculative thinking' for Heidegger) as 'reflecting on a situation to understand what is really going on and to develop theories to explain that reality'. This involves categorisation and closure without questioning the 'assumptions underlying actions' (ibid: 227). Reflexivity ('meditative thinking' for Heidegger) on the other hand, is 'concerned with understanding the grounds of our thinking', which means 'engaging in the reflexive act of questioning the basis of our thinking, surfacing the taken-for-granted rules underlying organizational decisions, and examining critically our own practices and ways of relating with others' (ibid: 227):

> Reflexivity, therefore, goes beyond calculative problem solving toward exploring tensions and recognizing the ephemeral nature of our identities and our social experience...how we contribute to the construction of social and organizational realities, how we relate with others, and how we construct our ways of being in the

world. By doing so, we can become more creative, responsive, and open to different ways of thinking and acting (ibid: 228).

Same difference – a reprise

Cunliffe's approach has similarities with the way that I have been working with the Leadership Experience Groups (LEGs) over the last two years, as described in previous projects, and how I am currently working with participants on *Making Sense of Leading*, as described above. In addition to this, I agree with Cunliffe et al's assertion that working in this way can provoke anxiety:

> ...if one's continued employment, promotion and pay raises depends on meeting system requirements and rules, then to question existing ways of doing things can be an isolating activity. One can be accused of not being a team player, or of stirring up trouble Becoming self-reflective and being critical of, and changing, bureaucratic goals and practice - can cause anxiety and stress (ibid: 236).

Elias draws attention to the courage required to 'hold up...a mirror in which [the group] can see themselves as they might be seen, not by an involved critic from another contemporary group, but by an inquirer trying to see in perspective the structure and functioning of their relationship with each other' (Elias: 1956: 236). I now understand my interventions at the meeting of SBU Heads as an attempt to hold up the mirror, a potentially high-risk strategy, as Elias points out:

> There is, in fact, in all these groups a point beyond which none of its members can go in his detachment without appearing and, so far as his group is concerned, without becoming a dangerous heretic, however consistent his ideas or his theories may be in themselves and with observed facts, however much they may approximate to what we call the " truth " (ibid: 236).

Cunliffe recalls her initial fear that working in this way would lead to rejection by 'students [who] come into the course expecting to be given tools to simplify their lives in the form of leadership principles and techniques' (Cunliffe, 2009: 87). The start of each new group provokes similar anxiety for me, not least because on *Making Sense of Leading* participants

are also initially looking to me for answers, for hints, tips, models, and techniques that will reveal to them 'how to do' leadership. In the early stages of the programme, participants often question the practical application of our way of working. At this stage, reflection is often disparagingly dismissed by some participants as 'navel gazing'.

Indeed, such criticism has been levelled more generally at the perspective of complex responsive processes, by authors such as Zhu (2007). Zhu criticises the perspective of complex responsive processes for its 'theory-practice imbalance', for its lack of practicality (ibid). And this is arguably what the Director of Marketing was getting at with his call to "Stop talking and start doing". However, I concur with Stacey when he contends that there is nothing more practical than developing one's reflexivity:

> For me, nothing could be more practical than a concern with how we are thinking...the most powerful 'tool or technique' available to managers, indeed to any human being,..is the self-conscious capacity to take a reflective, reflexive stance towards what we are doing. In other words, the most powerful 'tool' any of us has is our ability to think about how we are thinking (Stacey, 2011a: 5).

Cunliffe's fears that challenging students' existing ideologies/identities would lead to her rejection proved unfounded, and this has been my experience, so far, on the leadership development programmes that I lead. The sense I made of this, in an earlier draft of this project, was that I had mitigated the risk by remaining as impartial as possible. However, Cunliffe makes no secret of her CMS credentials, and this appears to be no less accepted and acceptable. This causes me to think that 'acceptance' has more to do with power relations than it does with the impartiality of the facilitator/lecturer. Students/participants are in part deferring to the 'expertise' of the Professor/Head of Leadership and Organisational Development, as well as to our 'authority' as leaders.

And this highlights a major difference (deficiency) between Cunliffe's thought and my own, informed by the perspective of complex responsive processes. Cunliffe et al, state that their 'preliminary study...did not explicitly address questions of power, identity, nor the relationship between leaders and organizational circumstances' (Cunliffe et al. 2010b: 33). However, as outlined above, I contend that it is impossible to make sense of what is happening in local interaction if one is not taking into account the themes of power,

identity, and organisational context (the global). This may go some way to explaining why Cunliffe has an idealised view of what is happening for the managers she works with. For example, she does not consider that the leaders she works with may consider the models of leading and organising contained in the dominant discourse to be both natural and ethical, or that they might question the ethics but continue to manipulate those who work with them for their own selfish ends, or indeed, that they might well question the ethics but continue to collude with colleagues in order to avoid exclusion. As Stacey argues:

> ...reflexivity is not simply an individual activity dependent on that individual person's history alone. This is because we are always members of a community that has a history and traditions of thought...[it] therefore involves being aware of the impact on how one thinks of both one's personal history and the history and traditions of one's community (Stacey, 2011a: 33).

Another difference between my thinking and Cunliffe's, indeed between CMS and complex responsive processes, is the treatment of paradox. Cunliffe's only mention of paradox (in the writing of hers engaged with here) appears in her references (Cunliffe et al, 2010b). Stacey argues that there are a 'number of ways in which we deal with the contradictions we encounter in our thinking' (Stacey, 2011a: 35). We can see them as dichotomies, an either or choice, dilemmas, a choice between two equally unattractive alternatives (but still providing an either or choice), or dualisms, the choice becomes 'both...and', where 'instead of choosing between one or the other, one keeps both but locates them in different spaces or times'. He argues that all three approaches follow Aristotelian logic 'which requires the elimination of contradictions because they are a sign of faulty thinking' (ibid: 35-36).

Paradox on the other hand is 'a state in which two diametrically opposing forces/ideas are simultaneously present, neither of which can be resolved or eliminated'. Unlike the CMS thinkers, including Cunliffe, who look for Aristotelian 'either...or' or 'both...and' solutions to the paradoxes of organisational life, the perspective of complex responsive processes draws on Hegelian dialectical logic to maintain and work with them (ibid: 35). For example, 'organisations have to control what their employees do, but they have to give them freedom if they want to retain them and if they want them to deal with rapidly changing circumstances' (ibid: 36). Paradox helps me to make better sense of the seeming contradictions inherent in my own amalgamation of ideologies, and those of the individuals

and communities in which I live/work, without feeling the need to resolve or eliminate them in the way that Green and Cunliffe do on occasion.

Conclusion

Who am I, and what am I doing? A reprise

My sense of self, my identity, the answer to my *"Who am I?"* question at the beginning of this project, is shifting. The sense that I am currently making of this movement is that I am *becoming reflexive* and helping others on my leadership courses to do the same. Over the last three years I have developed my capacity to make sense of the amalgamation of ideologies that are my motive forces of action, to 'recognise that the approach I am adopting is the product of who I am and how I think...the distillation of my personal history of relating to other people over many years in the particular communities I have and do live in' (Stacey, 2011a: 33). This is helping me to take my experience seriously, that is, to pay attention to, and thereby make better sense of, the part I play in the political processes of gesture and response that constitute day-to-day experience. My interventions at the meeting of Professional SBU Heads were evaluative choices that were paradoxically forming and being formed by both the reflexive assessment of my embodied reactions to the gestures of colleagues and the amalgamation of ideologies that are my motive forces of action, at the same time.

Consequently, my answer to the second half of the question – *"What am I doing?"* – is that I am *developing leaders' reflexivity*. That is, rather than (coercively) persuading, regulating, or replacing one discourse with another, I am creating opportunities for the managers with whom I work to: make sense of their amalgamation of ideologies and those of the communities in which they live/work, to question and challenge the taken for granted truisms contained within the dominant discourse on leadership and organisation, and to pay attention to, and thereby make better sense of, the part they play in the micro interactions that comprise their day-to-day experience. In short, I feel that the most useful thing that I, and all of those involved in developing leaders, can do is to help leaders to develop 'the most powerful 'tool or technique' available...the self-conscious capacity to take a reflective, reflexive stance towards what we are doing...to think about how we are thinking (ibid: 5).

SYNOPSIS AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL

RETHINKING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

(T S Eliot, 1944:4)

Introduction

Since joining the DMan, my thinking and practice as a leader of leadership development programmes has fundamentally shifted. In the preceding projects I have been exploring my role as Head of Leadership and Organisational Development at the University of Hertfordshire (UH), with a view to making sense of leadership development and leadership more generally. This approach is commensurate with the research method employed on the DMan, based as it is on the principle that generalisable knowledge arises in the exploration and sense-making of personal experience. Thus 'research data' takes the form of narrative accounts of the significant incidents that arise in the micro-interactions that comprise one's quotidian experience of working together with others in organisational settings.

The emergent nature of experience means that there can be no predetermined blueprint for one's research as there is no way of knowing in advance what significant incidents will occur during the three year duration of the programme. This is aptly illustrated above, where my intended research themes for Projects 3 and 4 were superseded by *Ralphgate,* and the external examiner's question at my progression viva, respectively. Consequently, in this synopsis and critical appraisal I will highlight, critique, and further develop the thinking and practice that has directly contributed to the sense-making of leadership and leadership development presented here. I will also explore my use of personal narrative as research method, and conclude with a summary of the contribution to knowledge and practice that I contend this thesis makes.

A REVIEW AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF PROJECTS 1 – 4

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> *Those essential activities by which we distinguish*
>
> *ourselves from other animal species... all have*
>
> *in common a withdrawal from the world as it*
>
> *appears and a bending back toward the self*
>
> (Hannah Arendt, 1977: 39)

Introduction

In this section, I will undertake a reflective and reflexive review of my research to date. Taking each of the four projects in turn, I will draw attention to those elements that contributed significantly to the sense-making and argument presented later in this synopsis and, at the same time, I will critically appraise my earlier thinking and practice.

Reflections on Project 1 – Throwing myself into the sea of uncertainty

In Project 1, I described my early management career, and my transition into leadership and organisational development. I also outlined the many professional qualifications that I pursued along the way. I interspersed this personal and professional history with three narrative accounts of my experience – *Simon, Meeting with Ralph*, and *Evolution Facilitators*. The two themes that are most pertinent to the development of the thinking presented here are i) the naturalisation of managerialist conceptions of leadership and leadership development, and ii) my nascent awareness of personal narrative as a catalyst for reflexivity and sense-making. I will now explore each of these themes in turn.

i) Managerialism: the only game in town

In the twenty year period between accepting my first management role and enrolling on the DMan, I worked as a manager in four organisations, across four sectors (private, mutual, charitable, and public), and three industries (finance, management consultancy, and Higher Education). I studied for three professional management qualifications, at two (of the then) top ten business schools in the UK, and I was an active member of three professional bodies – the Institute of Management (IM), the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

I now understand the dominant way of thinking about leadership, leadership development and organisation that I encountered continuously throughout this period as *managerialism*. I use the term 'dominant' as Stacey uses it, that is, not to imply that there is a single discourse that everyone accepts, but to 'identify the discourse about organizations which reflects the most powerful ideology displayed in organizational practice and research as well as management education' (Stacey, 2010: 10). I say 'now describe' because before joining the DMan I did not think of this 'particular belief [in]…the unique ability of managers and leaders to intervene in organisational life to bring about intended consequences' (Mowles, 2011: 14) as a *way of thinking,* for me it was simply the *way things were*. With hindsight, alternative perspectives were available to me during this period[15], but I was oblivious to them. And I argue that this remains the case for the vast majority of managers with whom I work. In the UK, over the last forty years, managerialist conceptions of leadership, leadership development and organisation have come to dominate thinking, education, and organisational practice across the private, public, mutual and charitable sectors. The ideology of managerialism has become *naturalised.* Indeed, I contend that managerialism has become part of the organisational *habitus* (Elias, 1991, Bourdieu, 1977), something I explore further below.

Project 1 initiated a period of significant uncertainty and anxiety for me. As described in the narrative *Evolution Facilitators*, I was specifically employed to bring "business like" ways of working to UH, and to support the University in its mission to become the "UK's number 1 business facing University". Yet, following engagement with Professor Stacey and the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al, 2000, Griffin, 2002, Shaw, 2002) I began to question the very principles on which my understanding, my expertise, and my day-to-day practice were founded. The doubts had started a year or so before my *Meeting with Ralph*, but it was only during my research for Project 1 that I began to appreciate how destabilising my involvement in the DMan might prove. And this leads me to the second important theme arising in this project, my nascent awareness of personal narrative as a catalyst for reflexivity and sense-making.

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[15] Indeed, since joining the DMan I have discovered that Hugh Willmott, a leading figure in Critical Management Studies (CMS) was at Manchester Business School when I was studying for my Masters

ii) Starting with experience, reflexivity, and getting to know oneself through the other

Re-reading Project 1, I was once again struck by how readily abstract and idealised categorisations of management render opaque the intense emotional, political and ethical challenges of day-to-day organisational life. This is illustrated by the experience that I described in the narrative entitled *Simon*, where I was asked to "get rid" of a member of staff who was deemed to be under-performing. My initial sense-making of this episode, drawing on the dominant discourse, reduced it to little more than an academic debate between differing management styles, thus closing down further enquiry and obscuring the visceral mixture of anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and relief that I experienced in resisting what I considered to be the unjust, bullying approach to this situation proposed by my Area Manager. My later sense-making was much more congruent with my recollections, and on reflection this was because I started with my remembrance of the actual experience, adopted a reflexive approach in my sense-making, and drew on alternative perspectives.

At the time, starting with the actual experience seemed to be the difference that made the difference to my understanding, and I immediately began to encourage participants on my leadership development programmes to do the same. However, over the course of the next two projects, I became aware of the importance of reflexivity and engaging with the other in this process. Babcock (1980) describes reflexivity as 'the capacity of language and of thought - of any system of signification - to turn or bend back upon itself, thus becoming an object to itself and to refer to itself'. She goes on to argue that 'by virtue of this reflexive capacity, the individual is able to understand and adjust to the social process, to modify his future behavior, and to modify the social process itself' (ibid: 2). In addition, it was the encounter with different perspectives that helped me to locate my own thinking. Reflexivity and engagement with other perspectives were to become central themes in my research, something that I will explore further in the sections on C*hanges in my practice and Research method,* but it is interesting to note their presence in Project 1.

Reflections on Project 2 – Making sense of leading

Clarification of my research question, at the start of Project 2, signalled the commencement of research into the specific areas of leadership development and

leadership[16] in UH/HE. As noted above, research on the DMan starts with paying attention to what it is that we are doing as we go about our daily work. What I referred to above as starting with experience, and what is more commonly referred to on the DMan programme as *'taking one's experience seriously'* (Stacey et al, 2005). In taking *my* experience seriously, in Project 2, I realised that as a facilitator of leadership development interventions what I actually do is *lead.* Although it seems unremarkable to me now, this was a very significant shift in my thinking at the time. It meant that I started to pay attention to my involvement as a *participant*, albeit a highly influential one, *in the co-creation of the learning experience,* rather than regarding myself as someone who stood outside in order to direct and control it. This is very different from mainstream conceptions of facilitator as objective observer and autonomous expert. The elements of this project that were to become critical to my research are i) my initial sense making of leadership and organisation, drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, ii) my engagement with other critical perspectives, particularly Critical Management Studies (CMS), and iii) the exploration of what it is that participants and employers expect of me as a leader of leadership development. I will now reflect on each of these in turn.

i) Leadership and organisation – a complexity perspective

Exploration of a challenging encounter that I had with a participant on *Core Skills for Leaders*, described in the narrative entitled *Stuart,* saw me further problematising dominant views of leadership. Drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes I argued that organisations are not systems, but rather complex patterns of local and global interaction between people that leaders cannot step outside of in order to orchestrate the achievement of predetermined visions and/or change cultures (Stacey, 2010). This view was congruent with my experiences in this incident, and with Griffin's (2002) conceptions of leadership as an emergent, social, relational phenomenon. Leaders are co-creators, albeit highly influential ones, in ongoing patterns of organising, where futures are paradoxically predictable and unpredictable, certain and uncertain, stable and unstable at the same time. So rather than controlling people and outcomes, leaders participate 'skilfully in interaction with others in reflective and imaginative ways... [to] assist the group

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[16] Throughout the Projects, I use the terms 'leadership' and 'management' interchangeably. This is something that I have come to view differently, but for consistency, I will stick with using the terms interchangeably until I have had the opportunity to explore this theme further, below.

to continue acting ethically, creatively and courageously into the unknown' (Griffin, 2005:13).

I also contested the understandings of power, communication, and conflict found in the dominant discourse, with their attendant idealised and abstracted prescriptions for success. So rather than viewing power as something that one possesses, I take up Elias (1939) who argues that power is an innate, dynamic, processual characteristic of all human relating. Instead of accepting the sender-receiver model of communication (Baguley, 2009), I take up Mead's (1934) theories of consciousness and communicative interaction, encapsulated in his understanding of the processes of 'gesture and response'. I also problematise the conception of conflict in the dominant discourse where it is so often seen as something that can and ought to be resolved in order that harmony may ensue. From the perspective of complex responsive processes the potential for conflict is ever-present, and it is not about seeking to avoid or resolve it, but about exploring and negotiating how we might go on together, since it is in the exploration and negotiation of our differences that the potential for understanding and novelty arises (Stacey, 2007). Finally, in my sense making of this narrative, I questioned the usefulness of mainstream models, theories and prescriptions for success – the *n* step models for this, and the *n* stage processes of that. I all but dismiss them as abstractions and idealisations that, when shorn of all constraint, have the potential to become what Mead (1934) terms 'cult values'. My participation in the programmes that I lead has influenced me to reconsider my view of mainstream tools and techniques, and this is something that I will explore below in the sections *Changes in my practice* and *Making sense of the context in which one finds oneself*.

ii) Leadership and organisation – a critical perspective

In was in this project that I first drew on the work of thinkers who are most often associated with Critical Management Studies (CMS), in particular the work of Professor Mats Alvesson. Alvesson sees leadership as an emergent phenomenon and points to the futility of prescriptive recipes contained in mainstream management literature. He also sees leadership as improvisational in nature, and points to the local nature of leadership stating that: 'the impact of most managers is typically restricted mainly to the people they interact with in everyday life' (Alvesson, 2002: 170). He also problematises 'the idea that management is a technical, universal, politically neutral process of getting things done'

(Alvesson et al, 1996: 26). Alvesson's/CMS thinking has many similarities with the perspective of complex responsive processes. I concluded that leadership is an emergent phenomenon, co-created in social interaction, and I identified, amongst other things, the importance of a leader's capacity for 'adding skilfully to conversations' (Shiel, 2005).

On reflection, my desire to find thinkers and ways of thinking that were critical of the dominant discourse, other than the perspective of complex responsive processes, was a defence against my own anxiety. Firstly, having so readily naturalised managerialist conceptions of leadership in the early part of my career, it was a defence against the anxiety of simply replacing one hegemonic perspective with another (Ford et al, 2007). Secondly, as described in the narrative, *Meeting with Ralph,* Professor Stacey's views receive a mixed reception at UH, introducing other similarly critical perspectives into the programmes that I lead, was a defence against the anxiety of 'Ralph's views' being seen as unique and idiosyncratic and thus marginalised or dismissed.

iii) Leadership development – what is it that I am doing?

In Project 2, I explored an aspect of my experience that had often intrigued me, namely why is it that employers and participants take little interest in what it is that I actually deliver on the leadership development programmes that they have commissioned or enrolled on? I hypothesised that for most employers/employees leadership development interventions have become social objects. I used the term 'social objects' as Mead uses it. Mead (1934) describes social objects as the tendency for large numbers of people to act in similar ways. Hence a birthday party can be thought of as a social object. So even before we arrive at a birthday party, we have a very good idea of what is likely to happen and what role we are expected to play in the proceedings. Similarly, managers attend development programmes with the expectation of being given tools and techniques that will enable them to become effective leaders. Exploration of the thought of Hirschhorn (1995, drawing on Winnicott, 1965), and Burrell (1996), led me to conclude that leadership development interventions can be understood as social objects where fun, and the false certainty provided by idealised models and theories, help to relieve the anxieties of leaders who are struggling to cope with the complexities and uncertainties of their everyday life in organisations.

Re-reading this project, it was interesting to 'relive' my experience at Brathay. On reflection the experience of having my expertise as an educator relegated to (a very poor) second place behind my performance as an entertainer on *LDW* was one of the main reasons why I left Brathay. Bourdieu's concept of *illusio*, 'the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing the game is "worth the candle"' (Bourdieu, 1998: 76 -77), is helpful here:

> When you read, in Saint-Simon, about the quarrel of hats (who should bow first), if you were not born in a court society, if you do not possess the habitus of a person of court, if the structures of the game are not also in your mind, the quarrel will seem futile and ridiculous. If, on the other hand, your mind is structured according to the structures of the world in which you play, everything will seem obvious and the question of knowing if the game is "worth the candle" will not even be asked. In other words...the *illusio* is the enchanted relation to a game...the product of a relation of ontological complicity between mental structures and the objective structures of social space (ibid: 77).

In putting entertainment before learning the host partners that I worked with on *LDW* inadvertently drew my attention to the structures of the game, that is, the *illusio* that I had been complicit with during my career to date. For the first time I began to wonder whether what I was doing was 'worth the candle'. As noted in Project 2, this disillusionment did not stop me from continuing to play the game, but it most certainly influenced my decision to join the DMan. It also meant that when tasked, part-way through Project 2, with developing a programme for Heads of Strategic Business Unit (SBU) at UH, I endeavoured to initiate a different kind of leadership development intervention – *Leadership Experience Groups (LEGs),* as described in Project 2 and in the *Changes to my practice* section below.

Reflections on Project 3 – The charismatic act: leadership as processes of communicative interaction

In Project 3, I explored the events catalysed by the dissemination of a paper that Ralph had circulated regarding what he considered to be the existence of institutionalised bullying at UH. This incident was explored in the narrative entitled *Ralphgate*. Ralph's paper touched a number of communities in which I am a prominent member. I explored my part in this incident and how my own thinking and practice as a leader has changed since joining the DMan. My understanding of the many and varied constituencies involved in this incident

helped me to make sense of the political context that I have found myself in. And this, in turn, helped me to successfully participate in what unfolded in ways that not only maintained my inclusion in the various communities and relationships in which I find myself at UH, but was also was influential in averting the potential cessation of LEGs as 'social spaces...won and defended in the teeth of power' (Scott, 1990: 119). Drawing further on Griffin et al (2005), and building on my sense making of leadership and leadership development from Project 2, I concluded that the individuals who come to be recognised as leaders are those who have:

- an enhanced 'capacity to live with the anxiety of not knowing and not being in control' (Griffin et al, 2005: 12).
- an 'ability to recognize and articulate the generalizations, the wider social patterns or social objects...a 'capacity for taking the attitude of others' (ibid: 11).
- a 'greater spontaneity than others', where 'spontaneity [means] acting imaginatively, and this involves reflection...understood as a kind of involved detachment' (ibid: 11).

I described the many and varied ways of thinking to which I am exposed at the University as an *ideology cocktail*, and maintained that the eclectic mix of communities in which I am involved contributed to my 'capacity for taking the attitude of others', and living with the 'anxiety of not knowing and not being in control' that little bit longer. I concluded that a capacity for reflexivity is the key to the development of these capabilities. This was something that I started to provide opportunities and support for in leadership development programmes, see C*hanges to my practice*, below. One of the things that I didn't go far enough in exploring in this project was the improvisatory nature of leadership and the ineffable quality of the practical judgement that I exhibited in this episode. I intended to explore this in Project 4, but, as described above, this was superseded by events. I draw attention to this here as a prime example of something that didn't show up in my projects, but was explored in practice - see *Changes in my practice*, below.

Reflections on Project 4 – Becoming reflexive

In Project 4, prompted by the examiner's question at my progression viva, I re-focussed my attention on leadership development in HE. I outlined the findings of the comprehensive literature review and internet search that I conducted, and concluded that mainstream and

academic conceptions of leadership development in HE are almost indistinguishable from those of any other sector. I compared and contrasted my own sense making, of the collegiality versus managerialism debate, with the views of Rosemary Deem et al (2007), Ralph Stacey (2010), and Michael Monaghan (2007). Themes of identity, power, recognition, and inclusion and exclusion resurfaced. I argued that to explain what is happening across UH/HE as a manifestation of the tension between the ideologies of collegiality and managerialism (Monaghan, 2007) was reductionist and over simplistic.

On reflection, I collapsed what I now consider to be very real and present ideological differences between collegial and managerialist forms of governance into a battle over devolved and central decision making. The ideological differences are fundamentally about the purpose of universities/HE. Thus the main purpose of university education from a managerialist perspective is arguably control, efficiency and the production of graduates who can make an effective contribution to the economy. Whereas from a collegial perspective the main purpose of university education is inquiry into the human condition and the development of graduates who know how to think. To reduce these fundamental differences to a battle over central or devolved decision making is to ignore the shift in power/purpose that has occurred over the last two decades in HE, a shift in favour of professional managers and away from academics.

I went on to argue that the context that one finds oneself in will inevitably and undeniably influence how one thinks about and 'does' leadership, but if one accepts that ideology only exists in the articulation and acting of it in local interaction (Stacey et al, 2008), then power relations (Elias, 1978), play a pivotal, arguably *the* pivotal role, in determining which ideologies come to dominate (at least in public). I maintained that in order to make sense of what is happening in the local and global contexts in which one finds oneself, one must explore how notions of habitus (Bourdieu, 1972), ideology, and the social object (Mead, 1934) are being taken up in local interaction. I argued that the sense each of us is making of the HE (and more specifically for Stacey and I, the UH) context that we find ourselves in is *sense for us,* and, as such, it is greatly influenced by our current way of thinking, thinking developed over the whole of our respective lifetimes.

I also explored further the question what is leadership development? To do this, I engaged with a wide range of thought considering, in turn, leadership development as coercive

persuasion (Schein, 1999), identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), an emancipatory space (Ford and Harding, 2007), a space for the construction of identity (Carroll and Levy, 2010), and an opportunity to develop reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2010). I expressed the view that all of these conceptions have some resonance for me, but I argued that what I was seeking to do in the programmes that I lead was to create opportunities for leaders to develop their capacity for reflexivity. Since completing Project 4, Stacey (2011b) has taken up the theme of leadership development as coercive persuasion/corrective training in his own work, and this is something that I will explore further below.

My conclusion at the end of Project 4 was that people who emerge as leaders have the capacity to make sense of the contexts in which they find themselves (local and global), as well as to take their day-to-day experience seriously and think about how they are thinking. Moreover, to become aware of their habitual patterns of thinking/acting in order to ensure that they do not remain caught in 'dominant modes of thinking' that leave them 'trapped in modes of acting that may no longer be serving [them] all that well' (Stacey, 2007: xiv/xv). I reiterated my conclusion from Project 3, that developing the capacity for reflexivity is the key. Drawing on Stacey, and his notion of abstracting from our immersion, I argued that 'the most powerful 'tool or technique' available to managers, indeed to any human being..., is the self-conscious capacity to take a reflective, reflexive stance towards what we are doing. In other words, the most powerful 'tool' any of us has is our ability to think about how we are thinking' (Stacey, 2011a: 5).

Since completing Project 4, my research has continued and my thinking has moved on in several respects, not least in relation to my conception of the amalgamation of ideologies. This will be explored below in the section on the themes arising in this reflection and critical appraisal where I will consider 1) the development and persistence of *habitus, 2*) what it means to make sense of the context in which one finds oneself, 3) leadership and management, same or different, debate, and 4) leadership development as coercive persuasion/corrective training. However, before this I want to set out a more coherent record of the changes that have occurred in my practice during the course of this research, as the snapshots that I have been able to provide thus far do not give an accurate sense of the dramatic shift that has occurred, a shift that has been as much a part of the development of the arguments contained within this thesis as the written projects.

CHANGES IN MY PRACTICE

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> *We must not begin by talking of pure ideas –*
> *vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads*
> *without any human habitation – but must*
> *begin with men and their conversation.*
> (Charles Sanders Peirce, 1958: 8: 112)

Introduction

It should be noted that the Cartesian split of thinking and practice that I exhibit here is purely a literary device adopted for clarity and ease of reading. As noted above, I view thinking and action (practice) as inseparable phases of the same, social activity. The changes outlined below did not develop in the autonomous, linear, deterministic (*I thought this, and then I did that*) fashion presented here, but rather they emerged in social processes of interaction in which thinking and action were paradoxically forming and being formed, informing and being informed by each other, at the same time.

Background

As Head of Leadership and Organisational Development at UH, I am responsible for the content of the leadership development programmes that I manage. Over the last three years, I have been able to experiment without fear of interference, sanction or censure. I have also been able to collaborate with Professor Ralph Stacey and Professor Chris Mowles on the design, development, and delivery of both the *Leadership Module* of the Business School's *MBA Programme*, and the *Leadership Experience Groups* (LEGs) described in Project 2. In this section, I will explore the development of just three of the programmes that I lead – *Core Skills for Leaders/Making Sense of Leading,* the aforementioned *Leadership Experience Groups*, and *Responding to the Challenges of Leading.* I have chosen these programmes as representative and illustrative examples of how my research has influenced my practice and vice versa.

Core Skills for Leaders

Starting with experience – from Learning Review to Community Meeting

As described in Project 2*, Core Skills for Leaders* is an eight module programme of mainly one day workshops held at six week intervals. A group consists of up to twelve, mainly middle managers, and is a mix both academic and professional staff. At the time of writing, sixteen groups have completed the programme, and Groups 17 and 18 are underway. The first change that I made to *Core Skills for Leaders* was to replace the *Learning Review*. *Learning Reviews* entailed sitting as a whole group in a circle at the start each workshop in order to review what learning participants had put into practice in the intervening six weeks between modules. Even before joining the DMan I was finding these sessions problematic. My opening question - *"What have you been doing with this stuff since our last session?"* - not only seemingly provoked anxiety, but also generated fictional tales of application as a defence against the potentially shaming effects of having to admit that very little had been 'done with this stuff'. The initial change that I made was to replace this question with a general enquiry around what had been going on for participants since we last met. The intention was to encourage participants to start with experience, as I had done in Project 1, as a means of opening up enquiry. The *Learning Review* quickly became something akin to the *Community Meetings* that form part of DMan residential weekends, where the whole cohort regularly come together to make sense of what is happening for us as a group. There is no agenda, conversation and structure emerge.

Getting to know oneself through the other

Following Project 1, I introduced a different exercise at *Orientation* in order to encourage participants to think about their thinking. I asked participants to record the incidents and people that have influenced how they have come to think about leadership. By way of introduction to this exercise I shared my own experiences and aspects of the *Simon* narrative from Project 1. I have been using modified versions of this exercise for over two years now. For some, conversations still seem to resemble 'CV sharing', but for most, it has become an opportunity to think about how they are thinking, with many participants tracing their thinking and practice back to childhood, and early experiences of managing and being managed.

From Community Meetings to 'Leadership Experience Groups'

Following the commencement of my involvement as a *Leadership Experience Group* (*LEG)* convener, the *Community Meetings* at the start of each module started to take the form of a mini *LEG,* where the first hour was spent sharing experiences and experience of leading. Conversations slowly shifted from moans and groans and problem solving, to exploration and sense-making of the paradoxical tensions we face as leaders. Concepts like gesture and response (Mead, 1934), power relations (Elias, 1972), and inclusion and exclusion (Elias and Scotson, 1984) were easily grasped by participants, and readily accepted as useful. This space for reflection at the start of each module very quickly became a space of sense-making, enquiry and exploration.

From Core Skills to Making Sense of Leading

Following Project 2, I changed the title of the programme from *Core Skills for Leaders* to *Making Sense of Leading*. I was uncomfortable with the illusion of false certainty that the title *Core Skills* seemed to engender. I wanted a title that reflected the inherent uncertainties of leadership and generated an anticipation of exploration, rather than an expectation of discovery. It was at this time that I also started to directly introduce thinking from the perspective of complex responsive processes, CMS, wider social constructionist thinking (Berger et al, 1966), and process organisation studies (Hernes et al, 2010). On reflection, my intentions in introducing critical perspectives were initially emancipatory. I use emancipatory in the critical sense of denaturalising dominant views of leadership and organisation. I initially wanted to prove managerialism 'wrong'. However, as outlined above, not wanting to fall into the trap of simply 'replacing one hegemony with another (Ford and Harding, 2007), I sought to problematise and denaturalise managerialist thinking without necessarily dismissing it. The American pragmatist philosopher, William James, argues that the 'true opposites of belief are doubt and inquiry, not disbelief' (James, 1982: 158). Rather than seeking to prove managerialism wrong, I want to open up enquiry.

Taking experience seriously

During the development of Project 3, as a means of encouraging participants to take their experience seriously, I began to explore what was happening between us on the

programme. I had joined a monthly Consultants' Forum at the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) in London, and this, in addition to my engagement with Faculty who work from a group analytic perspective on the DMan programme, influenced me to start drawing attention to group processes (Bion, 1961). So, for example, whilst awaiting latecomers at the start of a module, we might explore the responses that are open to me as a leader of the programme, what feelings this provokes for participants, what the implications of our gestures/responses might be in terms of power relations and notions of inclusion/exclusion. These conversations often move on to discussion of the similar situations that participants face with other groups with whom they interact. Participants often comment that this is one of the most challenging and useful aspects of how we work together. Challenging and useful because they are not used to working through affect, even though it is something they encounter daily.

Responding rather than reacting, and holding a creative space

Around this time, in order to support the development of reflexivity and practical judgement, I engaged a mediator/consultant and professional actors to explore experientially with participants on the programme what it might mean to respond rather than to react. Working collaboratively with the actors, participants are encouraged to develop the capacity to become more detached in their involvement with a view to developing an awareness of the 'triggers' that lead to what might be unhelpful automatic reactions rather than more helpful considered responses. Additionally, in the *Stuart* narrative in Project 2, I described working with an actor, on *Module 5 – Making Sense of Leading...Problem Solving and Creativity*. Since joining the DMan this module has evolved significantly. After sharing with Martin my emerging understanding of leadership, from the perspective of complex responsive processes, we have started working together differently to provide a space where participants can experience living with uncertainty, holding a creative space, and improvising into the unknown.

Tools and techniques: from abandonment to repatriation

By Project 4, rather than simply dismissing mainstream models and theories, as I had done in the first eighteen months or so of my research, I started to encourage participants to critically compare mainstream tools and techniques with their lived experience in order to

identify what, if anything they found generalisable. It was also becoming apparent that participants needed/wanted tools and techniques, not merely as a defence against anxiety, but as a catalyst for thinking/action. Toulmin (2001) makes a distinction between 'the conceptual grasp of a theory, the techniques we master as ways of dealing with practical problems, and the private perceptiveness needed to put such techniques to use in a variety of situations' (ibid: 179). Similarly Hager (2000) describes this 'private perceptiveness' as 'practical judgement'. Tools and techniques can be utilised in diverse ways - as rhetorical devices used to persuade, social defences against anxiety (Hirschhorn, 1995), and instruments of disciplinary power - but for inexperienced managers they have a usefulness that I cannot deny. Indeed, as I argued in Project 1, the tools and techniques that I encountered in my early career might not have done my lived experience justice, but in lieu of nothing else, I found them helpful. Tools and techniques can be useful in helping participants to gain 'a conceptual grasp of a theory'. For example, a flow chart of a process for appraisal meetings, a checklist for the development of a project plan, or a technique like 'world cafe' for catalysing conversation during a team meeting, can provide the 'theoretical knowledge' required to move from 'novice to competence' (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2009: 10).

However, they also create the illusion of instrumental rationality and may not reflect the reality of what actually emerges in the appraisal, planning session, or team meeting. The challenge is to ensure that tools and techniques do not become idealised and/or reified, thus masking affect, side-stepping contestation, and closing down enquiry and conversation. When it comes to developing practical judgement required to move from 'competent to expert' (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2009: 10), tools and techniques have limited usefulness, which is why I we continue to invest time and energy in taking experience seriously, reflexivity, and engaging with alternative and/or critical perspectives on *Making Sense of Leading*. Managerialism has become the dominant ideology in UH/HE, and the managers who attend the programmes that I lead need to be well versed in the language and practices of this perspective in order navigate the politics of everyday life and maintain inclusion. Indeed, there are many participants for whom managerialism makes sense, and I do not consider it my role to persuade or dissuade, but rather to draw attention to our actual experiences and explore a range of perspectives to aid sense-making and support managers to develop a reflexive capacity to enable them to think for themselves.

Accreditation

More recently *Making Sense of Leading* has become an accredited programme. Participants can now work towards a *Post-Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management* assessed and accredited by the Business School at UH. Assessment is based on reflective narratives of experience written by participants, and their capacity for reflexivity. Indeed, the development of the capacity to be reflective and reflexive is the now the one and only stated aim of the programme. The first cohort graduated in July 2011, and having 'supervised' a number of the portfolio submissions it is extremely gratifying to see participants drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes, as well as orthodox and critical perspectives, in their sense-making.

Leadership Experience Groups

As outlined in Project 2, my involvement on the DMan was influential in gaining both Ralph Stacey and Chris Mowles' agreement to play an active role in the development of *Leadership Experience Groups* (LEGs). Briefly again here, LEGs are opportunities for managers to come together to share their experience and experiences of leading. All thirty Heads of Strategic Business Units (SBUs) at the University were invited to join a LEG. A LEG consists of six SBU Heads who get together once per quarter. The LEG is not an action learning set, to which managers bring problems with the expectation of finding a solution. It is an opportunity for senior managers across the University to take a reflective and reflexive look at their day-to-day experiences as leaders at UH with a view to making sense of what might be happening in the political machinations of day-to-day organisational life.

At the time of writing, LEGs have just celebrated their second anniversary. During this period, one of the original five groups all but stopped meeting, but the other four have met regularly, albeit with variable individual attendance. My group have met regularly, and attendance has been good. This is partly due to the fact that we meet outside of 'normal office hours' – between 5.00pm and 8.00pm. Professor Mowles and I met with a group of SBU Heads in October, and it was agreed to continue much along the lines of *Responding to the Challenges of Leading*, see below.

More recently I have started a *Research Leadership Experience Group* (RLEG) at the University, and I am also working with a group of senior managers from the School of Nursing, Midwifery, and Social Work in a similar fashion to LEGs. These groups are working well and I think that is a reflection of i) my growing experience as a convener, and ii) a willingness on behalf of participants to invest in the programme beyond their attendance of the sessions - see *Responding to the Challenges of Leading*, immediately below.

Responding to the Challenges of Leading

The most recent development has been the initiation of a new programme entitled *Responding to the Challenges of Leading*. It comprises quarterly meetings of three hours duration, at which groups of eight participants (plus me convening) come together to make sense of our day-to-day experience as leader-managers. We spend ninety as a large group, and ninety minutes in smaller groups of two to four. The major difference between what was happening in *LEGs* and here is that between quarterly meetings, participants are continuing their enquiries into the paradoxical situations that they face. For some, this means engaging with relevant literature, for others it means pursuing their enquiry in discussion with colleagues, and for the remainder it is a combination of the two. The idea is that colleagues will take it in turns to share their emerging sense making with the group at the quarterly meetings. In addition to these quarterly meetings we have developed a series of workshops that explore subjects such as *Difficult Conversations* (working with the mediator/consultant and professional actors from *Making Sense of Leading*), *Embodied Leadership* (with a Professor from the School of Education), and *Leadership as Improvisation* (with a colleague who used to teach 'improv' at University).

Summary

In summarising the changes to my practice, I would say that over the course of the DMan I have developed a series of courses at UH which are much more personally and professionally challenging for those attending them. There is now a requirement for participants to speak about their experiences at work and to confront head-on the anxiety of acting in conditions of uncertainty, and to explore the politics of everyday life in organisations. Additionally, I no longer present managerial thinking as if it is the only game in town, but rather engage with a wide and diverse range of perspectives in order to

encourage participants to think about how they are thinking. This includes the perspective of complex responsive processes. Indeed, I would argue that one of the contributions that I am making to practice is furthering the accessibility and dissemination of this perspective. The managers with whom I work would not have the time, finances, or inclination to enrol on the DMan programme. Professor Stacey, in his foreword to Professor Mowles (2011) recent book writes:

> [This book] presents a rigorous critique of current conventional management wisdom in a very accessible way so spanning the divide between academic and popular management books (Mowles, 2011: vii).

I contend that I am doing something similar in and on the development programmes that I lead. However, this is not to idealise reflexivity, engagement with critical perspectives or the method. I have to take into account that the leaders with whom I work might consider the models of leading and organising contained in the dominant discourse to be natural, ethical, and useful, or they might question the ethics but continue to manipulate those who work with them for their own selfish ends, or indeed, they might well question the ethics but continue to collude with colleagues in order to avoid exclusion.

THE THEMES EMERGING IN REFLECTION AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF PROJECTS AND PRACTICE

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Introduction

I now want to explore further the themes identified in my earlier reflections on the Projects above. These themes reflect shifts in thinking that have occurred since the completion of Project 4. Taking each of the themes as they emerged above, I intend to explore 1) the development and persistence of *habitus*, 2) what it means to make sense of the context in which one finds oneself, 3) leadership and management, same or different, debate and 4) leadership development as coercive persuasion/corrective training.

1. The development and persistence of habitus

The concept of *habitus* - which Camic (1996) describes as 'the durable and generalized disposition that suffuses a person's action throughout an entire domain of life or, in the extreme instance, throughout all of life' (ibid: 1046) – is central to Elias' thought. However, it is arguably now more readily associated with Pierre Bourdieu. Indeed, Webb et al (2002) proffer a not uncommon view that Bourdieu's 'concepts of habitus, field and capital...constitute what is arguably the most significant and successful attempt to make sense of the relationship between objective social structures (institutions, discourses, fields, ideologies) and everyday practices (what people do, and why they do it)' (ibid: 1). I briefly explored habitus in both Projects 3 and 4 above.

Bourdieu refers to the contexts that we find ourselves in - the 'series of institutions, rules, conventions, categories, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy and which produce and authorise certain discoveries and activities'- as 'cultural fields' (Webb et al, 2002, 21-22). And 'cultural capital' as 'a form of value associated with culturally authorised tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills and awards. Within the field of education, for example, an academic degree constitutes cultural capital' (ibid: x). And finally, *habitus* is understood as 'the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts [fields]...These values and dispositions allow us to respond to cultural rules and contexts in a variety of ways (because they allow

for improvisations), but the responses are always largely determined – regulated – by where (and who) we have been in a culture' (ibid: 36). Bourdieu identifies three forms of capital: i) economic (material wealth in the form of money, stocks and shares, property, etc.), ii) cultural (knowledge, skills, education, qualifications, etc.), and iii) symbolic (status, prestige, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1991: 14). Thus in order to gain and maintain a position of influence within a given field, one must accumulate the relevant (recognised) economic, cultural, and symbolic capital.

Bourdieu's conceptions of capital and field are useful in making sense of the contexts and communities in which we find ourselves, that is, the interdependent mix of values, norms, beliefs, power relations, and ways of thinking that constitute local communicative interaction. Looking back on my early career, as described in Project 1, I immersed myself in the field of management and set about accumulating what I believed to be the required cultural capital through active involvement within the Institute of Management (IM)[17], and study for the first of many professional qualifications – a Certificate in Management Studies (CMS). Then, on becoming a leadership developer, I immersed myself in the sub-field of organisational development and accumulated cultural capital through membership of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)[18], and study for more professional qualifications - a Diploma in Management (DMS), a Masters in Managerial Psychology (MSc), and a professional qualification in Human Resource Management (HRM).

The amalgamation of ideologies

In Project 3, I described the mix of ideologies that contributed to my own agency (practice) as an ideology 'cocktail'. In Project 4, building on Elias (1956) and Green (2001) I proffered *amalgamation* as a more apt description. I posited that my own 'motive forces of action' (Elias, 1956) were born of an *amalgamation of ideologies.* That is, an amalgamation developed over the course of my lifetime and incorporating ideologies that one might associate with collegiality, managerialism, systems thinking, HRM, complex responsive processes, CMS, etc. The concept of the amalgamation of ideologies was *my* less successful attempt at abstracting from my experience with a view to understanding the relationship

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[17] The IM, now the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), is t*he* professional body for managers in the UK. I started out as my local branch's Representative for Young Managers, before becoming Branch Secretary, and ultimately Branch Chairman. I also held a seat on the Institute's National Council in the late 1990s.

[18] The CIPD is the professional body for Human Resource Professionals in the UK.

between 'everyday practices' and the 'social structures' that we are caught up in. For example, the politically adroit participation that I exhibited throughout *Ralphgate* was made possible by i) my (largely unreflected) understanding of the fields in which I was involved, and ii) my standing in those fields, that is, the influence afforded by recognition of the cultural capital that I had accumulated. Put succinctly, my knowledge and understanding of the rules and workings of the various games in which I was involved, and my skills as a player.

For my purposes here, field is a more useful conception than ideology, particularly as one could argue that the ideology underpinning HRM is managerialism, and managerialism is underpinned by systems thinking. My pursuit of the concept of the amalgamation of ideologies was my attempt to make sense of my experience and find a short-hand that would describe the relationship of interdependent communities in which I live and work. However, the processes that I am trying to describe are so complex that any single descriptor would always fall short and/or require so much explanation that it would defeat the object. There is more work for me to do in this regard beyond this thesis, but for now I am content that I have an understanding that is helpful to me and the managers with whom I work, something I explore in the next section.

2. Making sense of the context in which one finds oneself

If organisations are understood to be patterns of local and global interaction across populations of people coming together for the purpose of organising, then making sense of the context in which one finds oneself is a matter of understanding the patterns that we are co-creating as we go about our daily work. That is, making sense of the communities in which one finds oneself as complex responsive processes of communicative interaction (processes of gesture and response), power relations (politics) and evaluative choice (ethics). As alluded to above, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital are useful here. Michel de Certeau (1984) carried out an analysis of Bourdieu's own political adroitness, what Certeau describes as Bourdieu's 'strategic moves' in the 'scholarly game' of academia. From this he generalised 'three aspects of strategic thinking' that contribute to a player's 'cultural literacy':

1. a self-reflexive understanding of the person's own position and resources within the field(s) or institution(s) in which they are operating

2. an awareness of the rules, regulations, values and cultural capital (both official and unofficial) which characterise the field of activity

3. an ability to manoeuvre as best as possible, given the handicaps associated with, for instance, a lack of cultural capital (ibid: 57).

By making sense of the context in which one finds oneself, I mean that managers need to develop the cultural literacy that will enable them to play the political game more skilfully. To become more detached in their involvement and maintain an awareness of the paradoxically stable and unstable, co-operative and competitive, creative and destructive processes that they are caught up in. Building on my earlier ideas, I argue that in navigating my way through the political machinations of *Ralphgate,* I exhibited an enhanced degree of cultural literacy, and a more detached involvement that enabled me to improvise with colleagues across diverse fields, mitigating against exclusion, and negotiating a mutually acceptable way of going on together.

As outlined above in the *Changes to my practice* section, I have come to appreciate that the participants who attend the programmes that I lead have to be able to operate in environments where managerialist conceptions of leadership and organisation have become naturalised. Indeed, managerialist ideology has become part of the organisational *habitus*. Thus the abandonment of mainstream conceptions of management and organisation in the programmes that I lead would risk leaving participants culturally illiterate and exposed. Whether we accept it or not, the majority of us still have to work in environments where managerialism is the dominant (naturalised) ideology. Challenging this way of thinking carries with it the risk of some form of exclusion. Making sense of the context in which one finds oneself involves understanding the field(s) in which one operates, including an appreciation of the cultural capital required to gain influence. In fields where managerialism dominates, fluency in the language and symbolism of the dominant discourse is part of the cultural capital requirement. This is not to say that the game goes uncontested, but participants have to be supported to develop the awareness and political adroitness required to evaluate the risks, and the practical judgement needed to navigate skilfully should they choose to take the gamble.

3. Leadership and management: are they (really) different?

When I first commenced the DMan, I considered the terms leader and manager to be interchangeable, viewing the apparent replacement in mainstream literature of the term *management* with *leadership*, and *management development* with *leadership development*, as little more than a linguistic turn. However, this change was more than semantic. As noted in Project 2, Khurana (2007) argues that early business schools in the USA set out to build credibility and legitimacy for the new fledgling class of managers through the establishment of management as a profession and the development of a science of management. Khurana argues that in those pioneering days, managers viewed themselves as stewards with responsibilities to not only business owners but also employees and the wider community.

Stacey (2011b), drawing on Khurana, argues that this all changed during the post-Second World War period, when the 'conception of management moved away from the ideas and the ideals of the pre-war human relations approach and focused much more narrowly on the scientific manager who was supposed to design and manipulate systems, involving the use of models and analytical techniques to make decisions '(ibid: 2). Similarly Shenhav (1995) argues that the 'evolution of the systems paradigm was...a product of at least three forces...(1) the efforts of mechanical engineers who sought industrial legitimation and whose professional paradigm spilled over into the organizational field, (2) the Progressive period [in the United States] (1900-1917) and its rhetoric on professionalism, equality, order, and progress, and (3) labor unrest, which was perceived as a threat to stable economic and social order' (ibid: 557). Stacey contends that:

> Since the 1970s, then, managers came to be regarded as mere technicians, taking rational decisions using clearly defined routines and implementing strategies. To compensate for this downgrading of managers, consultancies and business schools elevated the notion of leader as one who chose the direction while managers implemented the choice. It was now the leaders rather than the managers, who were the professionals (Stacey, 2011b: 3).

Also in this decade, Jensen and Meckling (1976) published an article calling for management rewards to be more closely linked to profit, Zaleznik (1977) published an

article arguing that leadership and management are different, distinct activities, where managers are portrayed as bureaucratic problem solvers, and leaders are portrayed as creative shapers of organisational values and culture, and Tom Peters (1980) wrote in *Business Week*:

> Just as tribal cultures have totems and taboos that dictate how each member will act toward fellow members and outsiders, so does the corporation's culture influence employees' actions towards customers, suppliers and one another (ibid).

The book that followed, *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982), was not the first book on corporate culture to be published (see Ouchi, 1981), but, as Parker argues, it was to become 'probably the most influential management text of recent times' (Parker, 2000: 10) spawning a whole raft of popular (as well as academic) management books of the variety that I was reading in my formative years as a manager, outlined in Project 1. Thus, the dominant discourse begins to portray the leader as someone who 'forms a personal vision and builds it into a shared vision through ongoing dialogue', leading to a distinction between 'leaders as the top people (previously stewards and then statesmen) who articulate visions and provide direction and a hierarchy of managers who implement what is chosen by their leaders, all in the interests of shareholders' (Stacey, 2011b: 5).

This 'rebranding' of leader as uniquely skilled entrepreneur, shaper of corporate values, cultures, and futures, is 'widely taken up by motivational speakers, consultants, and corporate trainers as well as aspiring CEOs' (ibid: 45), and is proffered as justification for the enormous salary differentials that senior managers start to award themselves during this period. However, as Stacey goes on to point out, although 'it is the very highly paid executives at the top of any organisation who are the ones really charged with the vision for the organisation and the ones really supposed to change the culture', they are seldom the ones who attend leadership development programmes and thus lay claim to the title of leader. Instead 'it is usually large numbers of middle managers who go on them' (ibid: 20). This is corroborated by the research carried out by Carroll and Levy (2008) who found 'leader identities' to be 'increasingly desirable' amongst the middle managers that they interviewed and studied. They contend that a 'leadership identity currently confers more esteem, status and significance than a management one' (ibid: 90).

However, they also found, rather like Alvesson et al (2003a) did in an earlier study, outlined in Project 2, that 'when managers are asked to give a rationale for such leadership, the tendency is for much of it to 'disappear'' (Carroll et al, 2008: 90). Furthermore, echoing another of Alvesson et al's studies (Alvesson et al, 2003b), also outlined in Project 2, they found that when managers were pushed to describe what it is that they actually do on a day-to-day basis, they 'defaulted' to talking about the more 'mundane' management activities that they were trying hard to distance themselves from in adopting the identity of a leader (Carroll et al, 2008: 90). Carroll et al conclude that for the managers they studied, leadership is a 'desired' identity that masks the 'default' identity of management. They argue 'that defaulting to a comparatively well known and held identity and set of practices like those pertaining to management is not problematic if it is done with intentionality and consciousness...[but caution that] a default position can be a problem if one gravitates there too readily, automatically and unconsciously' (ibid: 91).

This potential for idealised notions of leadership to obscure what it is that we do as managers in our day-to-day interactions with others, to the point that they become 'unconscious', is the reason why the leadership and management debate is so important. What I take from both Carroll et al, and Stacey, is that conceptions of leadership, as distinct from management, are not only difficult to substantiate, but also potentially damaging if the resulting pursuit of desirable leadership identities/activities blinds managers to the ethical and potentially creativity sapping dimensions of the choices they are making in the management identities/activities they find themselves defaulting to.

Earlier in this thesis, I said that I regarded the terms *leader* and *manager* to be interchangeable. Perhaps, given the *zeitgeist* in the dominant discourse to differentiate between the two, inseparable might be a more apt term. I contend that it is necessary to have rules and regulations, agreed ways of working, and a stated intention for what a group of people might do together. But at the same time one has to give up the 'solidness' of understanding this to mean the same as being 'in charge, in control' of patterns of social interaction that are paradoxically certain and uncertain, stable and unstable, known and unknown (Streatfield, 2001). As a leader-manager in figurations of power with others, one is enabling and constraining, and being enabled and constrained, at the same time. The sense-making of context is being made in the simultaneous functionalising of the previous 'next step', within a history of abstracting and functionalising, sense making and next steps.

Leaders need to ensure that they act ethically. This means not only reflectively and reflexively exploring their role as agents of disciplinary power, but also where appropriate acting on it. From here on in, I will adopt the term leader-manager in order to represent and maintain the paradox and avoid the reductionist potential of singular descriptors.

4. Leadership development as coercive persuasion/corrective training

In Project 4, I explored Schein's conception of leadership development as a form of coercive persuasion (Schein, 1961). Schein coined the phrase to describe development interventions designed to bring about attitudinal change (Schein, 1989: 426). He compared the induction and development of managers, with the induction and development of novice nuns in convent schools, and the 'thought reform' of political prisoners during the Korean War (ibid: 426-427). Schein contends that the management development programmes that come closest to coercive persuasion are those that 'remove the participant for some length of time from his normal routine...thus providing a kind of moratorium during which he can take stock of himself and determine where he is going and where he wants to go' (ibid: 433). He argues that the 'brainwashing' techniques employed during such moratoria include:

1. Prevention from leaving the learning experience.
2. Intense interpersonal and psychological pressure to destabilize sense of self and disconfirm current beliefs and values.
3. Learners are put into teams so that those at more advanced stages of moving to the new culture can mentor those at less advanced stages.
4. The team is rewarded if all its members demonstrate that they have learned the new collective values.
5. The new values… are presented in many different forms (Schein, 1961).

Stacey, argues that most leadership development programmes are forms of 'corrective training' that utilise the technologies of coercive persuasion in order to maintain 'order and discipline' (ibid: 9). In Project 4, I argued that the charge of coercive persuasion could not be levied at the programmes that I was responsible for as we explored critical as well as mainstream perspectives and encouraged a reflective and reflexive critique of the thinking we encountered. However, Stacey's (2011b) provocation prompted me to revisit Schein

and subsequently my own thinking. Re-reading Schein, I was struck by his argument that we can be oblivious to the use of coercive techniques if we believe what we are doing to be in some way 'legitimate':

> [W]e cannot ignore that the same methods of learning, i.e. coercive persuasion or, colloquially, brainwashing, can be and are being used equally for goals that we deplore and goals that we accept. If we deplore the goals we condemn the methods, forgetting or denying that we are using the same methods in our organizations for goals that we consider legitimate (Schein, 1999: 170).

He goes on to argue that '[t]rue ``generative learning'' based on learner freedom becomes, from this point of view, a concept that is itself culturally defined. To be encouraged to make choices and ``live free'' can be experienced as being just as coercive as to be encouraged to ``conform'' and ``fit in'' depending upon what is valued in a given cultural context' (ibid: 171). Indeed, this has some resonance with my early experience of being a student on the DMan programme. Consequently, employing the principles of radical doubt and enquiry that I advocate in this thesis, I will briefly explore my own experience as a student and consider the DMan as a form of coercive persuasion and/or corrective training. I will also explore the implications of this for the programmes that I am responsible for.

DMan as coercive persuasion

In an earlier iteration of this synopsis I went through each one of the techniques of coercive persuasion outlined above, methodically identifying examples that illustrated my view that during the first twelve to eighteen months of my research, my experience was similar to Schein's descriptions of the experiences of those who had been exposed to processes of "thought reform". I argued that even though the DMan is a voluntary programme this does not mean that students do not experience the same anxieties as those who are coerced against their will. Indeed, as Schein points out, 'it is reasonable to assume that the majority of managers...may be eager to change at a conscious motivation level, yet still be psychologically unprepared to give up certain attitudes and values in favour of untried, threatening new ones (Schein, 1989: 431 – 432). The uncertainty and anxiety that I experienced is testament to this, as outlined in my reflections on Project 1 above.

Implications for the programmes that I lead

Having adopted many of the techniques and methods of the DMan for use in my own programmes, it is important that I continue to explore and acknowledge the potential for participants to experience the programmes that I lead as a form of coercive persuasion/corrective training, irrespective of my intentions. Stacey does not see corrective training as negative *per se*, arguing that 'complex modern organisations cannot function without the techniques of surveillance, hierarchical normalisation and corrective training' (Stacey, 2011b: 18). However, he argues that 'when leadership theories and leadership development programmes focus attention on idealised and, thus, unrealistic theories...the danger...is that the techniques of disciplinary power are utilised in completely taken-for-granted ways which are not open to question or critical reflection. This makes it possible for the techniques to be taken up in increasingly extreme ways which produce counterproductive domination and block creativity and innovation' (ibid: 18). What I take from this is that leaders of leadership development should explore participants' responsibilities as agents of disciplinary power, in order to ensure that leader-managers take these responsibilities seriously and continue to work in a way that leaves open the exploration of ethics.

Of course, even where the techniques of coercive persuasion and corrective training are intentionally employed, it does not guarantee that an actual change in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours will actually occur. Indeed, Stacey, drawing on Ofshe (2000), argues that although 'participants show all the appearance of making the change in public...in private they display well developed skills of resistance...The programmes do not really change the beliefs of many people but they do train them in the public display of willing acceptance' (Stacey, 2011b: 9). Similarly, Schein found that the vast majority of political prisoners who seemed to have been 'converted' reverted to their old beliefs on return to their homeland (Schein, 1961). This re-exploration of the concept of coercive persuasion has been an important iteration in my thinking. Taking my experience as a student seriously meant that I not only compared my experience on the DMan to coercive persuasion, but also to all of the other conceptions that I explored in Project 4 – identity regulation, space for emancipation, etc. – and I recognised my experience in all of them. I conclude that, irrespective of intent, there exists the potential for students/participants to have contradictory experiences of the same programme, and these may well vary over time.

A SUMMARY OF MY THINKING

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As men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves
and on the world, increase the scope of their
perception, they begin to direct their observations
towards previously inconspicuous phenomena
(Freire, 1972: 55)

Introduction

Having set out the main arguments of my projects and engaged with them critically, noticing and building on emerging themes, in this section I will attempt to summarise my current thinking about leadership and leadership development, respectively.

Rethinking leadership

I agree with Alvesson when he argues that as a concept 'leadership...like culture...too easily captures everything and nothing...[it] is typically defined in general terms. The ambition is to say something of relevance across quite diverse settings...a coherent definition with universal aspirations may tell us little in terms of the richness and complexity of the phenomena it supposedly refers to' (Alvesson, 2002: 93). If one accepts, as argued throughout this thesis, that organisations are not reified systems, but rather patterns of co-operative and competitive communicative interaction between people in which identities are forming and at the same time being formed (Stacey, 2005) in figurations (fields) of power where one is enabling and constraining, being enabled and constrained, at the same time (Elias, 1972), then one must accept that leader-managers are recognised and co-created in these same relational processes of social interaction. I am arguing in this thesis that individuals who come to be recognised as leader-managers are those who are able to: live with the paradox of being 'in charge but not in control' (Streatfield, 2001), whilst participating 'skilfully in interaction with others in reflective and imaginative ways' (Stacey, 2010), through being more detached in their involvement (Elias, 1956) in the 'game' (Bourdieu, 1972), living with the uncertainty and anxiety of not knowing that little bit longer, making sense of the contexts in which they find themselves, and articulating and negotiating a next step that assists the groups with whom they interact 'to continue acting ethically, creatively, and courageously into the unknown' (Stacey, 2010).

I am conscious that these capacities, for instance, 'participating skilfully in interaction', have something of the 'everything and nothing' quality that Alvesson talks of. This is because I am pointing to thinking/action that has more to do with practical judgement than it does with recipes and prescriptions. I am not offering the capacities identified above as some form of grand theory or competency framework for effective leadership. This would idealise and reify something that only exists at the time of *doing* in social processes of interaction. These capacities are improvised in the moment, and what might be useful in one moment, with one group of people, may not be useful in, and with, the next. My actions throughout *Ralphgate*, for example, were nuanced by reflexivity, practical judgement, and a heightened sense of cultural literacy, but they were co-created in social interaction in unique circumstances at specific points in time, and as such they can never be repeated in exactly the same way, or modelled for future use. What I *am* offering is a more reality congruent perspective from which leader-managers can make a better sense of what it is that they might usefully do, relationally with others, as they *do leadership.* This is a radically different perspective from that advanced by the dominant discourse.

Rethinking leadership development

As a consequence of revisiting what it means to be a leader-manager, I want to turn my attention to the implications for people like me who are charged with developing leader-managers in institutions. Firstly, I contend that, irrespective of the programme leader's intentions, participant experience of leadership development interventions will differ. Participants might experience any combination of the patterns described above – from coercive persuasion, through identity construction, to a space for reflexivity. The patterns that emerge will be co-created in the social interaction of all involved. Additionally, participants will be influencing whilst at the same time being influenced by the many local and global patterns of interaction (fields) in which they find themselves. Consequently participant experience will not be uniform. However, this does not mean that leaders of leadership development cannot and should not act with intention.

Secondly, I agree with Stacey when he argues that the potential exists for some leadership development interventions to be experienced as coercive persuasion/corrective training, where rather than contesting what is presented, participants subsequently 'strike a strategic pose and practice the arts of resistance', or else carry out their duties

unreflexively (Stacey, 2011b). This leaves the political and ethical dimensions of what it is that we are all doing together unexamined. Consequently, an important function of leadership development is the exploration of the role of the leader-manager as an 'agent of disciplinary power' (ibid: 1). Thirdly, when I invite senior leader-managers to comment on their experience of attending external leadership development programmes, they invariably report that they "got little, if anything, from the content", but the "opportunity to network made it worthwhile". They find little practical benefit in being shown the latest (and in some cases not so recent) models, theories, or two-by-two grids that are lacking in reality congruence. The utility stems from the opportunity to converse with colleagues, and to share their experience and experiences, in an attempt to make sense of the paradoxical, political, emotionally-charged situations in which they find themselves. Over the last three years I have been developing programmes that support managers at UH to do just this.

However, I contend that managerialism has become part of the organisational habitus. This means that conversations are often repetitive and seemingly stuck. The naturalisation of the dominant discourse means that leader-managers have come to view managerialist conceptions of organisation as the *only game in town,* hence they find in difficult to imagine difference. I contend that introducing alternative and critical perspectives on leadership and organisation is critical, as it is through dialectic engagement with the other/otherness that we come to know ourselves. Consequently, it is through reflexive engagement with other perspectives, literature and one's own and/or others' experience that we come to recognise and understand our own ways of thinking.

Fourthly, I argue that it is insufficient to snipe critically at managerialism from the sidelines, problematising one perspective and simply replacing it with another (Ford et al, 2007). While the dominant discourse on leadership and organisation is flawed, to avoid exclusion managers must still become fluent in the language and practice of managerialism. Similarly, some tools and techniques are useful in supporting inexperienced managers to move from 'novice to competence' (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2009). We should explore mainstream models for what's generalisable rather than dismissing them out of hand. In sum, it is important for managers and leaders of leadership development to engage with a polyphony of perspectives, including mainstream, to develop a reflective and reflexive capacity that mitigates getting stuck in 'modes of thinking' that leave them trapped in modes of acting that may no longer be serving [them] all that well' (Stacey, 2011a: xviii).

RESEARCH METHOD: A REFLEXIVE PROCESS

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In this synopsis I have reprised my four projects, have reflected upon how taking my experience seriously has impacted upon my practice in what I do at work, and have developed further themes by critically appraising my research to date. In this section I want to draw the reader's attention to how this process exemplifies and validates the method which I have been using throughout my research.

Starting with experience

To restate, from the perspective of complex responsive processes, organisations are understood to be 'widespread patterns of interaction between people' with global patterns emerging from local interaction in which 'global tendencies to act are taken up' (Stacey, 2005). 'This means that the insights/findings of the research must arise in the researcher's reflection on the micro detail of his or her own experience of interaction with others' (ibid: 9). The starting point for a research project is a reflective narrative from current experience that is illustrative of the struggle and/or question that is sustaining the student's research. As students we are then encouraged to make sense of this incident 'in the light of traditions of thought' (Stacey, 2007: 17), that is, to locate the thinking that shaped/is shaping one's interpretation in the relevant literature, before comparing and contrasting this with the interpretation one might make from other perspectives, including the perspective of complex responsive processes.

This use of such personal narrative accounts of experience differs greatly from the qualitative research methods employed on most traditional PhD programmes, where one might embark on some form of research into the 'experience of others', often carried out via surveys, interviews, or some form of action research, in order to reach some 'objective' conclusion. I want to consider what it means to take one's experience seriously.

Taking experience seriously

I will compare and contrast the methodology that I have used in my research here with the established (recognised) qualitative research methodology that comes closest to the

research method of the DMan - organisational ethnography. More specifically with the particular genre of organisational ethnographic research that has been variously described as the 'confessional' or 'autobiography' (Van Maanen, 1979), 'autoethnography' (Cunliffe, 2010), and 'at-home ethnography' (Alvesson, 2009), as since not only do these forms of ethnographic research, share many attributes with the DMan method, based as they are on personal narrative, but they also attract many of the same criticisms. Firstly, I will establish a working definition for organisational ethnography, tracing its origins in the early twentieth century and subsequent fall from grace as the pre-eminent method of research in organisation studies. Then, secondly, I will briefly outline some of the reasons why at the beginning of the twenty-first century it currently finds itself back in favour, at least in some quarters. Finally, I will address some of the criticisms of narrative forms of research.

The rise and fall of organisational ethnography

Zickar et al (2010) trace the rise of organisational ethnography where 'investigators studied workers by living among them, working alongside the people they were observing, and even spending time with workers in their homes, taverns, and churches' (ibid: 304). They cite the works of Whiting Williams (1920, 1921, 1922), and Rexford Hersey (1932) as '"neglected classics", 'widely cited and highly influential at the time they were published, but in recent years...largely ignored' (Zickar et al, 2010: 306). Zickar et al contend that the popularity and influence of ethnographic studies began to wane at the same time as interest in organizational psychology, with its 'sophisticated statistical analysis techniques and elaborate formal research designs', began to rise (ibid: 304).

They argue that a combination of concerns about researcher bias, and a growing interest in 'new statistical techniques, such as factor analysis, regression analysis, and analysis of variance', seriously undermined the use of ethnographical research methods. Quantitative methods were easier to replicate, 'easier to conduct', 'easier to train', and 'easier to codify' (ibid: 311). However, the authors contend that over recent years there has been a reversal of this trend catalysed by the 'growing awareness that all research suffers from researcher bias' (ibid: 312). In addition, the 'assumptions behind logical positivism, which underlies much of quantitative research has been questioned', along with the 'growing realization that typical quantitative studies suffer from a lack of context and cultural understanding' (ibid: 312).

John Van Maanen, the respected ethnographer, also questions the merits of the typical hypothesis driven, data gathering, academic research studies that populate many a PhD programme. He challenged 'much of organization theory for its technocratic unimaginativeness' arguing that:

> Our generalizations often display a mind-numbing banality and an inexplicable readiness to reduce the field to a set of unexamined, turgid, hypothetical thrusts designed to render organizations systematic and organization theory safe for science (Van Maanen, 1995: 139).

Van Maanen promotes ethnography as an approach that allows a researcher working in the field 'to use the culture of the setting (the socially acquired and shared knowledge available to the participants or members of that setting) to account for the observed patterns of human activity' (Van Maanen, 1979: 559). The aim is 'to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation' (ibid: 540). I do not necessarily share Van Maanen's dismissive description of the quantitative research methodologies employed on PhD programmes, but I contend that such methods of study would not have enticed, suited, or indeed afforded me the opportunity, to undertake the type of personal, collaborative, emergent, and open-ended research described in this thesis.

Organisational ethnography today

Cunliffe defines organisational ethnography as an attempt to understand 'human experience – how a particular community lives – by studying events, language, rituals, institutions, behaviours, artefacts, and interactions' (Cunliffe, 2010: 227). An 'ethnography is...a way of engaging with the world around us, an epistemological stance informed by a particular set of assumptions about the way the world works and how it should be studied' (Cunliffe, 2010: 233). If one replaced the phrase 'set of assumptions' with 'perspective', and the word 'should' with 'might usefully', then this would be as good a definition of the DMan method as any – *a way of engaging with the world around us, an epistemological stance informed by a particular perspective about the way the world works and how it might usefully be studied.* Cunliffe identifies four concerns/characteristics of ethnographic research:

i. 'culture' with a little 'c', where 'little c culture is about micro level interactions, patterns of life in segments of society'.

ii. 'context and temporality', where *context* means taking into account 'a view from-within...as opposed to an outside...view using academic categorizations and theorizing', and *temporality* means exploring context over an extended period.

iii. 'sociality and meanings', 'how people live their lives and make meaning together'.

iv. '"thick description" [Geertz, 1973] and imagination', where thick descriptions describe 'micro interactions in the field' (ibid: 228-229).

The research method employed in this thesis and on the DMan

I contend that the method used in my research satisfies all four of the characteristics identified by Cunliffe. As established above, from the perspective of complex responsive processes organisations are understood to be 'widespread patterns of interaction between people' with global patterns emerging from local interaction in which 'global tendencies to act are taken up' (Stacey, 2005). It therefore follows that 'if patterns of human interaction produce nothing but further patterns of human interaction...then there is no detached way of understanding organizations from the position of the objective observer' (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 2). Consequently, students on the DMan research their 'own personal experience of participating with others in the co-creation of patterns that are the organization' (ibid: 2).

This focus on personal experience satisfies a number of the ethnographic research characteristics that Cunliffe identifies - small 'c' culture, context, and 'thick descriptions'. And the 'thick descriptions' of DMan researchers are not merely close observations, but actual embodied experiences. This also means that the DMan 'research method is [openly and unapologetically] subjective, or rather a paradox of *detached involvement'* (ibid: 9) (emphasis in original). The paradoxical nature of this approach arises out of the fact that as 'we can never completely avoid involvement, it follows that it is impossible for any of us to achieve fully detached thinking about the action of engaging with others' (ibid: 9). Stacey has more recently described detached involvement as 'abstracting from our immersion' (Stacey, 2010).

As a DMan student's research is based on his or her 'experience of their organizational practice', all participants on the DMan programme must be working (immersed) 'in an organizational setting' (Stacey, 2010: 222). Thus a typical DMan cohort will be made up of a mixture of participants who are employed in some form of management or consultancy role, often at very senior levels, in private, public or charitable organisations both in the UK and abroad. As illustrated above, the research thesis is made up of four projects built over the three years of the programme. This satisfies Cunliffe's characteristic of temporality. Project 1 is a 'narrative account of the events, influences, literature and traditions of thought that are now shaping' (ibid: 222) one's practice. The remaining three projects are explorations of incidents that occur in day-to-day organisational practice. Although the research experience will be different for everyone, the one constant will be the presentation of a 'narrative account of what the author and others are doing' (ibid: 222) in the incidents under exploration.

However 'the reflective narrative is…only the 'raw material'…as the basis for discussion with others in a deepening reflection on the meaning of the narrative' (ibid: 222). As mentioned above, students on the DMan are encouraged to make sense of their experiences 'in the light of traditions of thought' (Stacey, 2007: 17), that is, to locate the thinking that shaped/is shaping their sense making in the relevant literature, before comparing and contrasting this with the sense one might make from other perspectives, including the perspective of complex responsive processes. This satisfies the remaining characteristic of ethnographic research identified by Cunliffe – sociality and meanings. Students work in small groups - learning sets - where the completion of a project is an iterative process whereby early drafts are shared not only with one's supervisors, but with all members of the learning set.

Criticisms of ethnographic methods

Cunliffe argues that ethnographic methods are not covered on the majority of PhD programmes as ethnographies are seen as subjective, 'leading to findings that are not generalizable, valid, or "true" knowledge' (Cunliffe, 2010: 226). Similar charges are often levelled at the method employed on the DMan programme. Consequently, in the remainder of this section I will deal with the three (overlapping) criticisms that come up most frequently - each of the four areas - subjectivity, validity, and generalisability.

Subjectivity - what's the difference between narrative and fiction?

Narrative accounts as the basis for research are often accused of being indistinguishable from fictional stories. Gregory Currie is a philosopher at the University of Nottingham he describes the elements that go into the making of a credible narrative/story, 'real' or fictional:

> A narrative is an artefact, wherein the maker seeks to make manifest his or her communicative intentions...In communicating these events, the maker may do more, he or she may convey a *framework* which the reader is encouraged to adopt, a way of engaging imaginatively with those events...But some narratives frame their events in ways that do not come naturally to us, and good narratives often challenge us to see events in unfamiliar ways' (Currie, in Hutto (ed.), 2007: 18).

Stacey contends that it is the 'the explicitly reflexive nature of the narrative that distinguishes it as a research method from the literary story:

> The narrative as research method is reflexive in an individual sense insofar as the narrator is making explicit the way of thinking that he or she is reflecting in the construction of the story...The narrator is making explicit, as far as possible, the assumptions being made and the ideology being reflected...The literary story leaves interpretation of meaning largely to the reader while the narrative method in research rigorously sets out the writer's interpretations as assumptions (Stacey, 2010: 221-222).

The concept that Stacey describes as 'assumptions being made and the ideology reflected' echoes what Currie describes as framework – 'a way of engaging imaginatively with…events' (Currie, 2007: 18). He further argues that a framework 'is a pervasive feature of situations of joint attention' (ibid: 23) where the narrator draws the reader's attention to a particular incident or theme within the narrative. Currie later refines the term 'joint attention' to 'guided attention', as joint attention 'involves a condition of mutual openness' something he contends cannot be present 'when one of the two parties – in this case the author – knows nothing of the other, and may not even know whether there is such another party' (ibid: 24). Guided attention, on the other hand, is a refined form of joint

attention where 'one experiences the influence of another's attention on some object on one's own attention to it' (ibid: 25).

Currie argues that '[W]hile story-content can be characterised in objective, observer independent terms, framework is essentially a matter of response. In presenting a framework, the author suggests a way of responding to content. In matters of response, we do not easily accept the absolute authority of the other. It is reasonable to think that the author is well placed to make suggestions about how to respond to the story, but not reasonable to think him or her in a position absolutely to dictate terms (ibid: 41-42).

I would argue that due to the iterative nature of the DMan method, where iterations are shared and critiqued by supervisors and learning set colleagues, not only do incidents of both joint and guided attention exist, but also frameworks AND content are negotiable. That is, colleagues will not only engage and critique the frameworks that one is employing as a device to explore one's own experience, but they will also question the content of a narrative if it is felt to lack reality congruence given how well they have come to know their colleagues. Consequently, unlike a work of fiction, a reflective/reflexive narrative:

> ...is not an arbitrary account in that it must make sense to others, resonate with the experience of others and be persuasive to them. Furthermore, it must be justifiable in terms of a wider tradition of thought that the community being addressed finds persuasive, or at least plausible (Stacey, et al, 2005: 224).

As outlined earlier in this synopsis, this is particularly apt in my case as a number of the narratives that I shared during the course of my research explore incidents in which both of my supervisors were protagonists – *Meeting with Ralph* in Project 1, the narrative description of *Leadership Experience Groups* in Project 2, and *Ralphgate* from Project 3. Thus any attempts to embellish, let alone fictionalise, the sequence of events involved in each incident would have been immediately challenged.

Validity

The difficulties or otherwise of establishing the validity of personal experience as raw material for doctoral research, are no different from those faced by other qualitative

methods. Mats Alvesson, referred to earlier, has published extensively on the subject of research method, most notably in his collaboration with Kaj Skoldberg (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2008), and he acknowledges the validity issues that popular qualitative research tools face. For instance, Alvesson contends that during an interview the 'script-following, the social dynamics of the interview situation, impression and management (other forms of) politically conscious language' make it difficult from interview transcripts to separate out the valid accounts of social practices one is looking to elicit. He suggests that one way of generating such 'valid accounts' would be to practice something he calls 'at-home ethnography', which entails the researcher drawing attention to their own 'cultural context' by describing what is actually going on 'around oneself'. Alvesson describes the researcher in this instance as an 'observing participant' (Alvesson, 2009: 157-158).

He places at-home ethnography somewhere between traditional ethnography, which he describes as 'involving a prolonged period of fieldwork in which the researcher tries to get close to the organization or group being studied', and 'autoethnography' in which authors tell 'highly personalized…stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural' (ibid: 160). In making the case for at-home ethnography, Alvesson argues that the contribution that traditional ethnographic methods make to the portrayal of everyday life in social research is 'remote, artificial, and clumsy', whilst autoethnography produces outcomes that are so personal that their contribution to 'scientific study is, for many readers, not clear or convincing' (ibid: 160). Alvesson sees the at-home ethnographer having a 'low or moderate degree of personal involvement' with the aim of carrying 'cultural analysis more than introspection', but with a level of involvement that 'may lead to accounts that give a better feeling than what 'conventional' ethnography allows' (ibid: 160). I contend that the reflective narrative, as the basis of DMan research, lies somewhere between autoethnography and Alvesson's at-home ethnography, and as such it has as much credibility as traditional ethnographic methods, for instance interviews, without losing its claim to making a 'clear and convincing' contribution to scientific study by remaining (too) idiosyncratic. For Cunliffe:

> Ethnographic validity is not determined in the same way as scientific validity but is instead based on the credibility of the text: is the text authentic, conveying a sense of the ethnographer being there and grasping the intricacies of life in that setting? Is the text plausible – does it make sense and connect experience with conceptual

elements in appropriate and consistent ways? Does the text cause the reader to think about the issues differently (Cunliffe, 2010: 231)?

Alvesson argues that 'reflexivity is a construction of communities of researchers whose work is informed by particular theoretical influences, who are subject to the demands of particular university systems…who operate within discourses of science, education, management and progress, and who use language to promote particular versions of 'truth' or claims to superior insights' (Alvesson et al, 2008: 498). I contend that the communities of researchers that make up DMan cohorts comply with all of Alvesson's criteria, and are pursuing a method of enquiry that has as much rigour and validity as any other branch of reflexive research. The sharing of writing with one's learning set, in an iterative process of collaborative enquiry, ensures the validity of one's argument within the research community, as anything less would not be accepted. And this brings us to the third challenge, what you doing may be valid and credible, but is it replicable. Does it have generalisability?

Generalisability - why might your story be useful to others?

If by generalisability one is asking *"How might others recognise, and perhaps relate their own experience to what I am saying?"* then this for me would be problematic as human experience is never replicable in quite the same way. However, if by generalisability one is asking *"What would 'make sense to others, [and] resonate with their experience?"* then I would argue that the research (exploration of lived experience) of DMan students is eminently generalisable. Martin Parker, whilst a Head of Department at Leicester University wrote a reflective account of his experience of 'becoming manager' in order to help him make sense of the new role he found himself in. Part of his justification for publishing something so personal and idiosyncratic was the 'hope that some of these thoughts might be interesting (or even useful) for others, whether researching management or doing it' (Parker, 2004: 45). Aspects of my research and practice have been shared with participants on the programmes that I lead, and colleagues in development and OD across the HE sector, and found to be both 'interesting' and 'useful for others'. Indeed, the pedagogy has been adopted and adapted by colleagues in both the Business School and the School of Education for use with students. I will now summarise the generalisable contribution to knowledge and practice that I feel this thesis makes.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

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> *The best moments in reading are when you come across*
> *something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things –*
> *which you had thought special and particular to you.*
> *Now, here it is, set down by someone else, a person*
> *you have never met, someone even who is long dead.*
> *And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours.*
> (Alan Bennett, 2004: 56)

Contributions to knowledge

In this research, I have been writing about is how uncontested conceptions of command and control are taken up in the specific context of leadership and leadership development. I have demonstrated that leading-managing is not the politically neutral, technical enterprise portrayed in the dominant discourse as it calls out strong feelings in people, as illustrated in the *Simon* narrative in Project 1, and the *Ralphgate* narrative in Project 3. Managerialist abstractions and idealisations obscure affect, and mask the visceral and anxiety provoking nature of workplace politics, relations of power, and attendant themes of inclusion and exclusion. This thesis proffers a fresh perspective on leadership and leadership development and makes an original contribution to knowledge in the fields of leadership and organisation development in several ways.

Firstly, there is very little distinctive literature on leadership development in Higher Education (HE). In this study, I have been able to point to the contradictory tensions that exist in HE, tensions that cannot be resolved but nonetheless need explaining. In this thesis, I have been exploring the generative tension between collegial and managerialist conceptions of leadership in UH/HE. By questioning how one might induct people into a working environment characterised by competing ideologies, I have drawn attention to the importance of negotiation in these circumstances, and the necessity of taking into account the context and history of the communities in which one works. The generalisability of this to other sectors and organisational settings is immediately apparent. The competing ideologies may differ but the tensions arising therein will manifest themselves similarly.

Secondly, as a study of leading leadership development this research makes a significant contribution in its own right. It advances an understanding of the role of facilitator as leader of leadership development interventions that has not been seen before, and this is

further enhanced by an analysis of the complex personal and role relationships that constitute management consultants/educators day-to-day life in organisational settings.

Thirdly, the sense-making and argument developed in this thesis emerge from a unique synthesis of ways of thinking that are critical of managerialist conceptions of leadership and leadership development. This makes an original contribution to academic scholarship relating to leadership and organisation studies, but it also highlights the potential for CMS thinkers, and those scholars researching from the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, to engage with and build on each others' respective thought. CMS thinkers, for the most part, draw little on the complexity sciences/perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, and this is the first DMan thesis to engage extensively with the thinking contained in the CMS canon, in relation to leadership and leadership development[19].

And this leads me to the fourth contribution to knowledge that I contend this study makes. In this thesis, I have drawn attention to what one might term the *shadow side* of leadership development, and how such interventions contribute to processes of identity regulation by utilising the techniques of coercive persuasion. Organisations would not function without the deployment of such techniques, but they are often not discussed, particularly in the dominant discourse, hence they go uncontested. My exploration of this theme further develops the body of thinking called complex responsive processes of relating, and has already influenced Stacey's (2011b) and Mowles (2011) thought, with both scholars taking-up the potentiality for leadership development to be experienced as a form of coercive persuasion in their own research.

Contributions to practice

As stated above, the artificial separation of knowledge and practice exhibited here is merely a literary device employed for clarity and ease of navigation as I contend that thinking and action (knowledge and practice) are inseparable phases of the same social activity. Consequently, the contributions to knowledge identified above are as much a

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[19] DMan students have drawn on both Alvesson et al, (2009), and Cunliffe (2003), but only in relation to method.

contribution to practice, as the contributions to practice identified below are a contribution to knowledge.

During the course of my research, I have been able to experiment with the leadership development programmes that I am responsible for with minimal constraint (one of the advantages of employers not taking too keen an interest in what it is that I am doing). I have also been in the fortunate position to be able to work directly with both Professor Chris Mowles and Professor Ralph Stacey on both the University's MBA programme and Leadership Experience Groups (LEGs). There are several contributions to practice emerging in this research/experimentation.

Firstly, in my research, I have problematised naturalised conceptions of leadership and organisation, and I have demonstrated how reflexive activity can have immediate practical benefits for day-to-day practice. I have also explored the importance of reflection and reflexivity leading to greater self-knowledge on the part of participants in my programmes, and the centrality of this to the development of political adroitness and practical judgement. This is a much under- represented view in the literature, and is very different from positivist and mainstream conceptualisations of leadership development programmes as neutral sites for the didactic dissemination of tools, techniques, skills and competencies.

Secondly, the programmes that I lead at the University are unique in that they are the only internal leadership development programmes that I am aware of where the perspective of complex responsive processes is central to both the curriculum and the methodology. I have adapted the methods, techniques, and perspectives that I have been exposed to on the DMan and made them accessible to managers across UH. My experience has the potential to both challenge and inspire leaders of leadership development to reflexively explore their own practice and ways of thinking. This means not only reviewing the learning method, but also engaging with critical perspectives on leadership and organisation.

Yet, thirdly, this does not mean dismissing/abandoning mainstream thought. The leader-managers with whom we work still have to be able to operate in environments where managerialism has become the dominant ideology. In order to make sense of the context in which they find themselves (and avoid exclusion) leader-managers need to develop a degree of cultural literacy that exposure to critical perspectives alone would not afford.

Thus this study is as much a challenge to critical practitioners as it is to those management consultants/educators operating from the dominant discourse. Indeed, Visser (2010) chastises his CMS colleagues for dismissing mainstream perspectives, he calls for 'a rapprochement between CMS and "mainstream" organization science' (ibid: 474). In positioning thinking from CMS and the perspective of complex responsive processes at the core of the programmes that I lead, my practice goes some way towards affecting the type of rapprochement that Visser calls for. This involves not only engaging with different perspectives, but also looking for what is useful and generalisable in these potentially contrary ways of thinking, rather than dismissing them out of hand. In Project 4, I quoted Elias' observation that the 'cases which groups make...for themselves...represent, as a rule, an amalgam of realistic observations and collective fantasies' (Elias, 1956: 236). I contend that engagement with different perspectives and the continual development of our capacity for thinking about how we are thinking (reflexivity) guards against the possibility of inadvertently mistaking our own *collective fantasies* for *realistic observations*.

This leads me to the fourth and final contribution to practice that I contend this study makes, and that is, it establishes the need to take seriously the potential for the leadership development programmes that we lead to be experienced by participants as a form of coercive persuasion/corrective training/identity regulation, irrespective of our intentions. This means that as leaders of leadership development, in order to ensure that we continue to practice in an ethical manner, we should continually ask ourselves - '*Who am I and what am I doing? Who are we and what are we doing?*'

In summary, this thesis points to the importance of encouraging radical doubt, enquiry and reflexivity as a way of developing the capacity of leader-managers to manage in circumstances of high uncertainty and ideological and political contestation. However, radical doubt does not mean throwing everything up in the air and/or risking exclusion, it means learning how to navigate between the poles of absolute certainty and absolute doubt, whilst persisting in seeing the world as more complex than it is portrayed in the dominant discourse. This is the way of thinking/acting that I have been endeavouring to encourage on the leadership development programmes that I continue to lead and evolve.

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