CHAPTER 5

METHODS OF *'LEARNING LEADERSHIP'*:
TAUGHT AND EXPERIENTIAL

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Introduction

Can leadership be taught? Can leadership be learned? For many years the answer to both questions was presumed to be yes. In countless business school classrooms and executive development seminars, 'experts' delivered lectures and presented examples that were supposed to 'teach' learners about the 1940's trait theories of leadership, the 1950's focus on tasks versus relationships, the 1960's identification of contingencies, the 1970's insights about leader-follower interactions, and the 1980's celebration of transformation and vision (Ferris, 1998). This teaching paradigm is based on an instructor-centred approach, where an expert draws from an existing body of information to select and transmit some predetermined content to passive students, whose 'learning' of this material is conceptualised in terms of memorisation, abstract understanding and behavioural replication. The intellectual roots of this teaching paradigm can be traced back to positivism (an expert transmitting knowledge to a novice) and behaviourism (introduction of new behavioural patterns that are repeated until they become automatic), reflecting a 'banking' model of education, where information is deposited by the teacher into the learner, where it is accumulated (Freire, 1970).

While the teaching paradigm was effective in the socialisation process of a managerial elite (Grey, 2002), providing them with the credentials for occupying positions of leadership and the language to talk about leadership, its emphasis on cognitive learning, tools and techniques often succeeded only in turning out 'highly skilled barbarians.' (Bisoux, 2002: 28).

There is a growing awareness of the limitations of these traditional approaches to teaching leadership (Kouzes & Pozner, 1995; Doyle & Smith, 1999). While they might be useful in transmitting knowledge *about* leadership, they stop short at developing leadership per se.

When the study of leadership evolved, in the 1990's, to an understanding of the importance of credibility, soul, reflexivity, emotions, openness to experience, and values (Ferris, 1998; Bolman and Deal, 1995), exploring what McDermott (1994) calls 'leadership from within,' there was a progressive shift from the traditional instructor-centred teaching paradigm to a learner-centred paradigm of personal transformation. The transformation paradigm, with intellectual roots in constructivism, social constructivism and interactionism, emphasises co-creation, interpretation, discovery, experimentation and a critical perspective. Rather than learning 'leadership' as it is known by others, learners make sense of their own experiences, discover and nurture leadership in themselves and in each other, not in isolation but in community.

The premise of this chapter is that leadership is not taught, and leadership is not learned. Leadership *is* learning (Vaill, 1996: 126). Whatever else leaders do, their primary role is to keep learning, and to facilitate the learning of those around them. Immersed as they are in what Vail calls an environment of permanent white water, constant change requires something beyond managing to stay on a pre-determined course. It requires leading, i.e., learning whether changing conditions are altering the landscape of needs and opportunities and requiring a change in existing plans or goals; learning which alternative courses might be possible or desirable; learning which direction to go, learning what it takes to get there, learning, learning, learning. In this sense, the crucial question in leadership development is not just *what* to learn, but how to *learn how to learn*.

This chapter departs from the dominant paradigm in leadership development research and explores the notion of 'learning leadership' as one which centers on the person discovering and experiencing leadership from within, as a continual learning process, rather than as something that can be simply granted by others. 'Learning leadership,' therefore, is not the 'learning about leadership' that characterized the teaching paradigm. Rather, it is an approach to leadership that is rooted in the transformational paradigm, where leadership is a process of becoming, and learning is a way of being (Vail, 1996: 126).

Whereas the teaching paradigm prizes and perpetuates the dominant conception of the leader as a fully competent, confident, knowledgeable, clear-sighted visionary[1], the transformational paradigm sees the leader as being fundamentally a learner. In organizations immersed in continuous change, what matters most is not what a leader knows, but what he or she is capable of learning. This ability to learn, however, requires a leader who is willing to feel the vulnerability implicit in not knowing, an openess to experience that approaches each new situation as a circus artist who flies from one trapeze to the next, rather than clinging to the comforting security of the platform. Ironically enough, these are not qualities that are valued in the teaching paradigm, where not knowing is perceived as a weakness, and 'incompetence' is a dreaded state. By contrast, the experiential assumptions of the transformational paradigm foster the kind of leadership where one is perpetually a reflective beginner (Vail, 1996), and 'incompetence' is just the exhilarating flight between competently holding the trapeze of the past and tentatively grasping for the trapeze of the future.

The analysis presented here is, therefore, a direct response to the need to explore ways in which management training and development activities can provide the space for leadership to emerge and be discovered. This can usefully be done both in the way individuals engage with their practice (self-learning), and in terms of the innovative ways in which individual learning can be supported.

The discussion is organised in three main sections. We begin with an overview of the main perspectives that have informed our assumptions and approaches to developing leadership so far. We make the case for 'learning leadership' as an alternative way to understanding leadership and explore leadership as learning practice. We analyse the relationship between learning (strategic learning) and leadership in highlighting two main principles which we argue underpin 'learning leadership'; namely *leadership as a window to inner learning* and *leadership as a relational process*.

The second section extends the illustrations of 'learning leadership' by considering approaches for developing 'learning leadership'. Examples from Improvisational and Image Theatre are reviewed, as are approaches using Arts and Music. Both sets of examples help us distill more clearly the learning structures which can support leadership as learning practice.

The main learning structures and principles which underpin 'learning leadership' are reviewed in the last section of the chapter, in order to draw attention to the implications of this new perspective on leadership, both in terms of future leadership research and leadership development practices.

Perspectives on Leadership Development: The role of 'learning leadership'

The evolution of our thinking on how to develop leadership has paralleled the movement in theories of leadership. From trait theories of leadership, came development efforts targeted at identifying and nurturing certain qualities and attributes associated with 'good leaders.' (Gardner, 1989; Wright, 1996). The behavioral theories of leadership inspired development efforts directed at identifying and developing those behaviors that were most appropriate to each combination of leader, follower and situational characteristics. (Hersey, 1984; Sadler, 1997) The more recent attention to the 'whole-person' aspects of leadership has promoted a variety of efforts towards the development of the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of inner awareness (Ferris and Fanelli, 1996).

In an extensive review of the development of thinking in leadership research, Boal and Hooijberg (2000) argue that the study of leadership has undergone fundamental changes in the last 20 years. Among other things, these changes reflect a shift in focus from 'supervisory' towards 'strategic' leadership, and from trait theories to a wider socio-cognitive analysis of the complexity of leaders and leadership, as a process of meaning creation and construction of reality, which they and their followers jointly negotiate (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; House and Aditya, 1997). The social constructivist view of leadership emphasises both meaning construction and interaction. The interactionist view, in turn, emphasises interpersonal relationships as a vital aspect of leadership. Some of the more recent theories of leadership have emerged from this perspective, emphasising charisma, vision and inspiration (House and Aditya, 1997; Hunt and Conger, 1999). Although there is still little agreement as to the usefulness, or indeed appropriateness, of such value-laden terms to describe leadership (see Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1990), the so called 'emerging

theories' of leadership, according to Boal and Hooijberg (2000: 25-26), hold great promise in furthering our understanding of what they see as the three cornerstones of strategic leadership, namely: "the capacity to learn, the capacity to change and managerial wisdom". By drawing on Quinn's (1988) competing values framework and integrating themes such as behavioural complexity (e.g., Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992), cognitive capacity (e.g., Jacques, 1989), and social intelligence (e.g., Zaccaro, et al., 1991) they put forward an integrative framework for exploring strategic leadership based on knowledge and cognitive structures, which are seen to have a bearing on the actions taken in line with one's ability to 'read' others' behaviours, perspectives and feelings. The ability to integrate and adapt the social conditions with the risks of environmental uncertainties and to make them interact with each other is seen to underpin strategic leadership. Therefore, the qualities of strategic leadership by necessity require strategic learning. As this chapter will argue, leadership research is more likely to move beyond the current paradigm if we explore leadership as learning practice.

Much current thinking propounds the view that leadership is central to organisational development and learning (Senge, 1990; DeGeus, 1997; DiBella & Nevis, 1998). Yet, the intricate relationship between learning and leadership has not been fully explored. We begin such an analysis by first unpacking the potential aspects of leadership if viewed as a *learning-supported process*. We focus, in particular, on recent debates which explore learning as a key capability.

The emphasis on learning capability as a key strategic resource has been increasing in recent years, as we come to appreciate learning as a key competitive resource for organisations. Learning is as much a cause as a consequence and a context where effective practices which

improve performance, enhance productivity and sustain innovation are embedded. In the strategic management literature much effort has been placed to identify the 'distinctive' (Selznick, 1957) or 'core' (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990) characteristics referred to as 'competence(s)', that would be a differentiating factor for the organisation in light of competitive pressures (Bogner et al., 1999). Terms such as 'organizational routines' (Nelson and Winter, 1982), 'absorptive capacity' (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990), 'organizational capability' (Grant 1996), 'transformative capacity' (Garud and Nayyar 1994), and 'dynamic capabilities' (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997) are among the many conceptualisations to be found in our ongoing efforts to locate the key competitive differentiator. Recently, Zollo and Winter (2002) have taken the debate further in exploring the evolution of *dynamic capabilities*, suggesting that such capabilities can be learned.

This introduces a very promising perspective, as it opens the possibility of exploring *learning as a dynamic capability*, an ability to respond to the unknown in ways that widen the scope of action to produce new solutions beyond what is currently known (Antonacopoulou, 2003a). Learning is central to understanding how creative working conditions can be formed, which allow managers the flexibility to respond to issues in ways that support sustained and sustainable innovation. Moreover, learning is central to adaptation and a necessary condition itself for implementing the changes needed to support innovation. Knowing (not just knowledge) therefore, becomes a central learning dimension within communities of practitioners (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991) in their particular cultural and political context, which would affect whether and how managers choose and learn from other's experiences and practices (Antonacopoulou, 1998; Salaman & Butler, 1990). Therefore, learning itself can be seen as a dynamic capability because it is purposeful adaptation and reconfiguration of attributes (including knowledge and skills) and

a capacity to renew previous competence to maintain congruence with changing requirements (Antonacopoulou, 2003a).

The latter point is one that has not yet been fully explored in the existing leadership literature. We would argue therefore, that if we are to explore the relationship between learning and leadership we can begin to explore both ways in which leadership capability can be supported and ways in which leadership may be learned. More importantly, in light of the emphasis placed on leadership as central to the development of 'Learning Organisations' (Senge, 1990, Garratt, 1990; Schein, 1992), it is imperative to explore further the relationship between individual and organisational learning (Friedlander, 1983; Kim, 1993), a currently unresolved issue in organisational learning debates. In particular, what would appear to be critical in such analysis would be an integrative analysis of the *what*, *how* and *why* of individual learning in organisations, if we are to address the challenges in the relationship between learning and educational interventions in organisations (see Antonacopoulou, 2000b; 2002a) to support leadership development. Recent research exploring individuals' learning within organisations, using the manager as a unit of analysis (Antonacopoulou 1998; 1999a; 2001), highlights the contextual specificity of learning in the way the very processes intended to support learning are also frequently the ones restricting learning. In light of ongoing organisational changes, leadership development at minimum would need to consider ways in which leadership capability can be learnt. It can also be argued that this very approach of understanding leadership development – as learning practice – can be a useful point of departure, away from dominant assumptions about leadership and its meanings. This chapter, in particular, makes the case about 'Learning Leadership' not only as a prerequisite of developing 'Learning Organisations', in the same way as 'Learning Managers' would be a key ingredient

(see Antonacopoulou, 1998). More fundamentally 'Learning Leadership' could be an avenue for rethinking and redefining leadership.

Rethinking Leadership: Defining 'Learning Leadership'

Leadership is a very fluid concept, as is the role of being a leader. The meanings vary with the multitude of conditions which shape the interrelationships between the diverse dynamic forces that define leadership in different contexts. Such forces could be factors like the persons, their beliefs, values, skills, resources, circumstances, power, organizational structure etc. This very fluidity, therefore, calls for a paradigmatic shift, one that extends beyond a mode of thought restricted in a mentality of 'either/or' to one that embraces the possibilities embedded in the multiplicities of connections permitted even by seemingly oppositional forces (a both/and mentality). If one, therefore, were to rethink leadership as a process in search of questions rather than answers, then it would be possible to equally argue that leaders are defined by the questions they ask rather than the answers they seek to provide. It is possible to adopt a similar definition in relation to learning, consistent with recent definitions which propose learning as "the liberation of knowledge through self-reflection and questioning" (Antonacopoulou, 2001: 328). Learning, therefore, could be an avenue for rethinking leadership from a task, person or situation-specific process, to one that is defined by the lessons one creates as one discovers the inner meanings of leadership, in the way leadership provides and requires personal insight and acts as a window to inner learning (leadership from within). Moreover, learning could be another lens for exploring leadership as a relational and not simply transactional process. Particular attention here would be placed on the leader/follower relationship, a distinction of roles, which from a learning point of

view, in the context of a community of practice, may well prove to be unnecessary. Both sets of issues are discussed in more detail next.

Leadership as a window to inner learning – leadership from within

Lieutenant-General, J.F. Deverell (1999: 120) argues that: "Leading is more than just doing; it is also about being. It's about who you are and what values you represent". This assertion suggests that leadership is integral to the leader as a person, leadership *is* the leader in the way it allows that person to demonstrate insight not only about the issues at hand, but also about oneself and one's values. Leadership is, therefore, as much external in the actions one takes as it is internal in the way one *is* (in one's being and becoming). From this it follows that leadership has both explicit and tacit dimentions, which sensitises us to the fact that leadership research and development have predominantly been focusing on the external, observable, explicit dimensions of leadership, captured in categories such as tasks and behaviours, at the expense of also exploring the tacit aspects of leadership, in such categories as one's identity, character and temperament. Pozner (2002: 1) supports this view and argues that the challenge of finding the leader within is about "the exploration of the inner territory and the search to know more about the meaning of life and one's purpose in some grander scheme as the basis for developing leadership". He emphasises the importance for leaders to know what they believe in, what their principles are and to have unwavering commitment towards them. He also explains that taking a journey into one's inner territory is about finding one's voice as deep down as one's soul.

Ferris and Fanelli (1996: 66) take on board the debate about the role of leaders in 'learning organisations' and focus in particular on the role of these leaders who they refer to as 'Learning Managers' in managing "their own development, improvement and growth as well as that of their

members" (p. 66), as part of their leadership strategy, which would serve to establish a 'learning organisation'. Their analysis explores the inextricable link between individual (leader and follower) and organisational development and stresses the importance of being in touch with one's inner self as a condition for personal growth. They see the inner self as constituted by one's mental, spriritual and intuitive faculties, which at their most basic involve the "reflective discipline of careful planning with a view of maximising available resources" (p.69). They also explain that accessing one's inner self could be best captured by such states as being "in the zone", "in flow", "becoming one with the universe", "infused with the excitement of being alive" (p. 70). One could reach such a state through "learned optimism" and "ego energy" (p. 71). Simply put, in practice this would mean "seeing things with beginners' eyes", taking a fresh look as a "naïve observer" would, "cultivating a responsive awareness of the environment", and recognizing the "dangers of ingrained mindless habits" and other factors which may inhibit learning to take place (p. 72). Learning leadership, therefore, depends not only on critical self-reflection, so that one is able to be reflexive, but more fundamentally it is about allowing our voice of consciousness to speak to us. In short, it is about recognising individuality[2] as a condition of collectivity and connectivity.

Leadership as a relational process in a community of practice

The love of others is what drives leaders, according to Wakhlu (1999). By being compassionate and loving, leaders act as conduits for growth. This resonates with Ashkanasy's and Tse's (2000) assertion that the power of transformational leaders lies in their ability to exercise control over their emotions, as well as the emotions of their followers. Effective leaders, therefore, care about others. Caring always involves personal risk. Jones (1999: 107) explains that: "When you show

that you really care, you reveal a little bit of your self-identity and you may be rejected…it means putting a bit of yourself on the line". This is in line with Pozner's (2002) observation that caring is also associated with grief - 'the suffering of the mind'. He explains that "deep within ourselves there is something we hold dear, and if it's ever violated we'll weep and wail…Leadership begins with something that grabs hold of you and won't let go" (p. 3). Jones (1999: 107) also points out, drawing on Goleman (1997), that "leaders use their emotions to liberate the *energy* of others" (our emphasis). Leaders have relentless energy and they depend on high energy to keep them going (p. 108). Leaders get people to act in a selfless way (Deverell, 1999: 119).

Like a good gardener who nurtures the growth of his plants, a leader nurtures the growth of the people around him/her. They become a channel of nature's will and through the flow life finds expression in the totality of the collective achievement. Learning leaders, therefore, value learning with and from others and create a conducive learning enviroment, where individual and collective growth can take place (Garratt, 1990). Also referring to learning leaders, Schein (1992: 392) argues that leaders "have to set the example by becoming learners themselves and involving others in the learning process." This would imply that traditional role distinctions between leaders and followers become unnecessary, particularly if one were to adopt the Royal Military Academy motto 'Serve to Lead'. Lieutenant-General, J.F. Deverell (1999: 128) explains that: "those who lead are servants of those whom they lead. In order to lead one has to learn how to serve".

The question central to learning leadership is, therefore, not what it takes to be a good leader, but 'what does it take to be a good follower?' If one takes on board the ideas explored in the preceding paragraphs, it would appear that learning to adopt multiple perspectives (e.g. those of

followers) rather than being self-diluted in one's own perspective and vision, would be an important aspect of learning leadership. Another important aspect would be having the humility to recognise talent and allow it to grow, without setting boundaries or pre-conditions to self-development (see Antonacopoulou, 2000a). What this means in practice is that it is critical to accept that there are people with more talent than oneself, as a reflection of one's commitment to learn from others, so that one can lead others. Learning from others also reflects a commitment to developing others. In other words, learning leadership is what community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is; a way of exploring collectively the meanings of activities from which knowledge and learning derive and contribute to individual and collective development. Along the same principles, Raelin (2002:6) advances the idea of "leaderful practice" in the way leaders who allow a team to thrive leader*less* is in fact leader*ful* in the way it maximises leadership across team members 'concurrently', 'collectively', 'collaboratively' and with 'compassion'. The latter characteristic of leaderful practice emphasises in particular the "unadulterated commitment to preserving the dignity of others".

Learning leadership: Revisited

Fundamentally, from the main principles of inner self and collective individuality, one can appreciate that learning leadership is not simply about facilitating other's learning, or indeed being a skillful learner, as previously argued by proponents of the notion of learning leadership (Garratt, 1990; Schein, 1992). Learning leadership, as revisited in this analysis, is about acknowledging that *leading is learning*. This is not to suggest that the two terms are synonymous, but instead to encourage a stance which suggests that learning leadership begins with an appreciation that because leadership is ambiguous, as is learning, one has to start by exploring as

much the external dimensions (explicit) which constitute leadership, as the internal (tacit) dimensions. This would imply that critically reviewing how one thinks about leadership and learning is a fundamental principle of learning leadership (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Equally fundamental is an appreciation of how one participates as a learner in collective leadership, as well as the way one participates as a leader in collective learning. In other words, by encouraging reflection and reconsideration of what one knows, one develops and is developed by others, one becomes a learning facilitator. In doing so, a leader is also learning about the process of leading; i.e. developing other leaders. Being a great leader, according to Hodgson (1999: 132), is about allowing yourself to be also vulnerable and to have the humility to be willing to learn things that you often don't want to learn. In other words, confronting the dilemmas and challenges (of exploration and exploitation as per March, 1991) that learning presents is central to also addressing the paradoxical nature of what being a leader is about. This means that learning and leadership both require focus, as well as flexibility. They require structure, as well as agency. The flexibility and ability to move freely between apparently contradictory polarities requires an open mind. This is the art of "wholesomeness" according to Wakhlu (1999: 208): "Being wholesome as a leader is vital so that leaders can move freely as they discover and adapt their leadership instead of being fixed on any single idea of what a 'good' leader should be".

Approaches for developing 'learning leadership'

If we are to make the case that learning leadership provides the scope for moving away from the dominant paradigm of leadership research and development, a series of issues arise about ways in which learning leadership can be supported. In this section we explore the question of whether learning leadership can be developed.

Traditional questions around leadership development tend to be concerned with the extent to which leadership can be taught, or indeed whether it should be taught (in the way we understand teaching in the didactic training mode). There has also been concern with several questions: how might we justify investment in leadership development?; what do we get from having effective leaders?; and what is the return on investment in leadership development?

It is not hard to see that the traditional mode of researching and developing leadership is driven by a economic logic which sees learning and development as a means of improving financial performance. We would like to propose a different logic for understanding the importance of learning leadership. Our concern is with questions such as whether the leader is a learner, and whether leaders can and seek to learn from their followers. These questions essentially beg a more fundamental question; how can we develop learning leaders?

These questions require that we move away from an economic logic in justifying leadership development and instead adopt an affective logic, which places the emphasis not on the hard exchange (of give and take) between leaders and followers, but on the psychological contract that connects leaders and followers, based on their mutual respect, trust and commitment to collective learning and development. For instance, this would be the case in the psychological contract that binds a conductor with a group of musicians: other than a shared vision based on their collective experiences and the music which they jointly produce, they also rely on each other's artistic skills to produce good music, which is also the bond that connects and reinforces their interdependence. This is reflective of what Barry (1991) describes as 'distributed leadership' and Bradford and Cohen (1998) describe as 'shared leadership', the collaborative team process in which team

members share key leadership roles. However, Houghton et al (2003) argue that 'self-leadership' is at the heart of shared leadership. They define self-leadership as a "process through which people influence themselves to achieve the self-direction and self-motivation needed to perform" (p. 9). However, the ultimate state is what they call "SuperLeadership". Drawing on the work of Manz and Sims (2001) they define SuperLeadership as "an approach that strives to develop followers who are effective self-leaders…by helping, encouraging, and supporting followers in the development of personal responsibility, individual initiative, self-confidence, self-goal setting, self-problem solving, opportunity thinking, self-leadership, and psychological ownership of their work tasks and duties" (p. 23-24).

Therefore, seeking to develop leadership through definition, a didactic approach which restricts leadership to specific characteristics, would not support learning. On the contrary, it would seem to be more appropriate to create opportunities where leadership can be learned, by exploring ways in which the risks of leading can best be managed. Hodgson (1999: 129) emphatically argues that "people who have learned leadership as a series of rules will have an inherent inflexibility that will eventually be their downfall. Leadership skills are learned by example and encouragement rather than by rote of rule". He goes on to say that "Telling people how to lead is roughly equivalent to painting-by-numbers" (Hodgson, 1999: 129). Along similar lines, Deverell (1999) emphasises that art teachers can teach students to draw, but they cannot make them great artists. Great artists, he asserts, have to be born from within. Pozner (2002: 5-6) also uses the analogy of an artist's development to illustrate the point, suggesting that "leadership development in the early stages is about painting exterior landscapes, copying other leaders' styles and trying to learn by mimicing great leaders". The erroneous assumption, he argues, is that "authentic

leadership can come from the outdide in. It cannot. I can only come from within… You cannot lead through someone elses' words nor someone else's experiences".

Leadership, therefore, can be learned and we would argue that learning leadership in turn can be discovered if one is committed as a learner to explore one's inner landscape. This is what learning leadership is about, the authenticity of leadership in action, interaction and transaction, which are fundamental aspects of the learning process if it were to act as a space in which the multiplicity of possibilities for growth can be identified and developed (Antonacopoulou, 2002a, 2003a).

Therefore the kind of development that can support learning leadership is one that embraces one's practices as an arena of one's learning. Learning as a practice is not simply about using experiences in order to learn, or indeed learning by doing. It is essentially about practicing one's practice, akin to saying *rehearsing* leadership, so that one is given the opportunity to learn by experience, to gain confidence in their ability to lead.

Two examples that illustrate this rehearsing mode of learning leadership can be found in the way improvisational theatre techniques are used, as well as music and other arts. These artistic forms of learning leadership development not only break out of traditional didactic modes of development, they are also at the heart of exploring the art of leadership as personal insight, a mode of learning which, in our view, is consistent with Bateson's 'deutero learning' (1979) – learning how to learn.

Improvisational and Image Theatre

One of the major barriers for organizational learning and shared leadership is the difficulty in uncovering, interpreting and changing power imbalances in organizations. Those power imbalances drain the creative energy of organizations and often result in fear, defensiveness, lack of initiative and significant gaps between 'espoused theories' and 'theories-in-use' (Argyris and Schön, 1974). One of the approaches that is increasingly gaining momentum as a means of identifying and working with power imbalances is theatre (see Ferris, 2002; Moshavi, 2001; Coopey, 1998, Boje, 1995). Whether it is radical, improvisational or image theatre, the common thread is providing a space where practice, experimentation, expression and discovery can take place; a space where creating a shared story and where reflection in action and interaction with others help produce surprising outcomes rather than pre-scripted solutions. Dealing with the unexpected is not a feature of testing situations but of everyday life. Justifiably, therefore, attention in recent years has been placed on dealing with the unexpected through improvisation as a natural part of both theatre and organisational life (Weick, 1998). Researchers who have studied improvisation and its application in a range of contexts (Crossan, 1996; 1998; Hatch, 1998; Moorman & Miner, 1998; Weick, 1998) explain that some of the main principles of improvisation are:

- "Yes anding" – never denying information and building on other's ideas
- Active listening
- Being open to various interpretations - thinking without criteria – going with the gut
- Tolerating mistakes and supporting others by not judging one's own and other's ideas
- Active participation of all involved in the act (spectators and actors)

Moshavi (2001) provides an interesting illustration of how these principles can be introduced in the management classroom through exercises which can enrich traditional teaching methods, such as class discussion and role playing. Among the learning points that the application of the improvisational theater techniques help generate, explains Moshavi (2001), are that "there are not right or wrong answers or responses, but there there are 'better' and 'worse' responses" (p. 440). By shifting the focus from fact to experience and intuition, Moshavi argues that "the fear of being 'wrong' subsides" (p. 444). He also explains that "Putting the "yes and" principle into practice builds teamwork and trust by enhancing student ability to both listen and communicate" (p. 444). Perhaps more fundamentally, improvisational theatre techniques empower students to have control of their learning and the activities in the classroom, through the 'freeze tag'[3] format. Moshavi points out that: "Each and every student has the power to freeze a faltering scene and enjoy the feeling of 'coming to the rescue'. Students who are 'rescued' come to see that trust is given as a gift" (pp. 444-445).

What this approach to leadership development emphatically demonstrates is that one can only explore multiple perspectives (in a 'yes-anding' mode), listen actively, embrace different interpretations and engage with the internal and external aspects, if one *cares*! The issue of caring, as the issue of compassion (see Frost, 1999), reminds us of how critical it is to think and value others.

An equally powerful technique that reinforces the improvisational principles discussed in the previous paragraph is 'Image Theatre' based on Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed'[4]. Ferris (2002, 2001) has successfully adapted the techniques of Image Theater for team and leadership development in a software and business solution company in the paper distribution industry. The

company was having trouble with morale, employee relationships and customer service, and Ferris believed that Image Theater could give organization members the opportunity to recognize and address issues that they might be unable or unwilling to identify in more traditional discussion formats. Ferris started by having the CEO and staff use Image Theater techniques to represent family relationships, in a warm-up exercise to acquaint them with forming tableaus, in a non-threatening context. He then challenged participants to form a tableau that would represent their current work relationships. They arranged themselves around the room, some sitting at different distances from the CEO at the head of the table, some standing up and facing the wall, and one person (who frequently worked offsite) even leaving the room entirely. Ferris asked them to silently assess whether the resulting tableau was an accurate representation of their current relationships, and after some rearrangements they achieved a tableau that they all agreed was accurate, which was captured in Polaroid pictures to represent their "actual image."

The same process was repeated to form a tableau of the "ideal image" of their interpersonal relationships and power balances, and another tableau of the "transitional image" of how they would get there, both captured in Polaroids. The three sets of photos (current, ideal and transitional) then formed the basis for an 18-month organizational change process, during which the tableaus served as a non-threatening, effective language for insight and feedback, reaching deeply into the truth and hopes of the organization, and helping to form and communicate shared meanings. The success of the intervention was measured not only through various standardized assessment surveys of group process, but also in a dramatic 84% improvement in their most important measure of customer service.

Arts and Music

Recent years have seen an increased interest and effort to explore the relationship between arts and management[5]. Beyond the aesthetic view of organising (Strati, 1999; Linstead and Hopfl, 2000; Strati and Guillet de Montoux, 2002) however, there has been a more explicit effort to engage with poetry, painting and music as means of illuminating management and leadership (Vriesendorp, 2002; Lindkvist, 2002; O'Doherty and Richford, 2002, Marcic, 2002).

A useful metaphorical approach to leadership development has been developed by Marcic (2002), using arts and music to help executives tap into their innermost resources and develop the courage and willingness to experiment that are so necessary to becoming learning leaders. Marcic argues that the traditional management paradigm underutilizes the multiple intelligences of organization members, by only addressing rational approaches to leadership development and leaving aside the aesthetic and emotional dimensions that are so critical to self-awareness, motivation, creativity, vision-forming and sharing, power dynamics, communication, conflict, fear and defensiveness, attitudes towards change, and other individual, interpersonal and organizational phenomena.

Marcic proposes an "harmonics of management" model that uses arts and music to encourage executives to let go of the self-presentation routines they use in the workplace, which reward expertise and reliance on what they already know and are good at, and to put themselves in the vulnerable position of trying something outside their area of competence and experience. For example, Marcic might ask workshop participants to write and perform songs that reflect some aspect of organizational life (e.g., current leadership challenges, ideal state, etc.). Participants and

facilitator then explore the content of the songs, achieving insights about individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships and organizational dynamics that might have remained buried or be too threatening to address in more traditional discussion formats. This exercise gives the executives a sense of the creativity and insights that can be unleashed when they deal with a challenge as whole human beings, simultaneously exercising their rational, aesthetic and emotional intelligences. Given that most executives lack skills in song-making and musical performance, this experience also triggers a feeling of "shared incompetency," similar to what happens in the outdoor adventure approaches to leadership development (Schrank, 1994). By allowing themselves to experience such vulnerability in a group context, executives develop and practice the ability to enter the cognitive, emotional and aesthetic state that Peter Vaill (1996) refers to as the 'reflective beginner', so essential to becoming a learning leader.

Marcic suggests several other ways of using the arts to draw from multiple intelligences and generate this experience of "shared incompetency," involving drawing, painting and sculpture. No matter what form of art is chosen, Marcic highlights the crucial role of the facilitator, the need for allowing ample time for debriefing, and the importance of having those experiences planned in a way that makes pedagogical sense, rather than just performing them for the sake of fun and games.

Like Image Theatre, what Arts and Music based approaches to leadership development also comfront is our very comfort zones. By being exposed to images one is not familiar or comfortable with, one is not only exposed to the wide possibilities that exist, but also one is invited to reflect, leverage and reframe one's way of seeing the world. This process invites us to

transcend time and space as we understand it, and explore the timeless qualities of learning leadership in the way learning acts as the space for growth.

The issue of timelessness can best be illustrated in the unique quality that all forms of art share; namely their representations of reality have the capacity to transcend time. Paintings, for example, have an anachronistic quality, which allows our appreciation of the work to mature over time (in the sense of the *aging* Dalí see Antonacopoulou, 2003b). For when we stand before abstract and surreal images (like leadership), and when we delve to explore the reality beyond what is visible within and around it, there are a number of lessons to be learnt. A simple lesson could be the need to critically rethink what we see when we think we see leadership, and to assess how we react to what we see. These issues are critical, because the way we choose to see and react to images (including paintings and other forms of art) tells more about *us,* than it tells about the object.

Learning Leadership: Implications for future research and practice

The analysis of learning leadership presented here, together with the examples of developing learning leadership by employing improvisation and image theatre techniques, as well as arts and music, help us distill a number of learning structures around the two main principles which we argue underpinn 'learning leadership'; namely *leadership as a window to inner learning* and *leadership as a relational process*. By learning structures (Antonacopoulou, 1999b) we do not mean boundaries or restrictions in the way procedures may act as structures indicating the limits of action. The notion of structure in the context of learning leadership is akin to the notion of routine/rehearsal which we indicated earlier. What this view suggests is that one learns from

experiences of experimenting/improvising leadership behaviour and actions to the extent that one also generates patterns of what works and does not work, so that one is able to bring those lessons to bear in informing and improving one's practice. Learning structures therefore, intended to support inner learning and a relational mode of practice as essential principles of leadership, act as flexible frameworks for providing social meaning and value to acts of leadership, which emerge through social interactions that allow one to reflect, reframe and leverage one's learning capability. It is in other words, what Weick (1993) refers to as the 'grammar' through which actions are interpreted.

Characteristics of the learning structures embedded in improvisation and image theatre as well as arts and music include the following:

1. Awareness, alertness and attentiveness to one's own and other's learning and leadership needs.

2. Shared learning and leadership responsibility, by alternating complementary roles (teacher/learner, leader/follower)

3. Incorporating discontinuity as a necessary feature of building a sense of continuity in the actions taken in relation to learning and leadership – one can learn from situations one does not initially perceive add learning value in the same way leadership emerges out of situations which are unknown as much as familiar. Discontinuity reminds us that surprise is an integral part of learning and leading.

4. Mutual co-operation and agreement to deal with issues being presented in a spontaneous and flexible way which allows adding on what is being offered rather than seeking to judge whether it fits with one's existing framework. By adding to what is happening one lets things

become what they can become, rather than limiting them to be what we perceive they ought to be.

5. Tapping into one's own and others' cognitive processes as a way of *leading out* the thinking processes that define leadership and learning.

These five learning structures are a window to inner learning through critical self-reflection (Merizow, 1991; see also Yukl, 1998) and they are a space in which leadership can be practiced. It it through rehearsing multiple images of one's learning and one's leadership in relation to other's learning and other's leadership that one emerges as a learning leader. Kets de Vries (1989: 9) refers to leaders' "inner theatre" which affects the courses of action they choose to take, which in turn hold the key to success and failure as a leader. Therefore, one of the fundamental issues that this analysis brings to the forefront is that essentially images of leadership can be accessed internally and not learned by rote externally.

This suggests that one of the most fundamental implications for leadership research is the need to recast the focus, from one which represents leadership as a landscape of ideal practice, to one which abstracts leadership as a context of learning practice. In other words, leadership can be conceived of as surreal – a super reality which defies objectivist representations, but which affords multiple interpretations, that is if we learn to see beyond what we expect to see or assume there is to see. Learning leadership, therefore, presents a fluid image beyond attributes and tasks, beyond behaviours and situations. Learning leadership is the coming together of all these features in a complex blend of colour that stimulates our senses to learn to feel the impact of leadership rather than simply insisting on seeing it if we are to testify its existence.

This phenomenological, interpretivist view of learning leadership not only extends the current constuctivist perpective of leadership, but also enriches it by drawing attention to the importance of discourse. Sensitivity to discourse in the way the languages of leadership and learning are being spoken and enacted, reveal the emotional and cognitive structures that provide learning and leadership their social meanings.

Taking this view a step further enables us to acknowledge that one of the main implications of learning leadership for management development practices is the need to re-instate *education*[6] (see Antonacopoulou, 2000b; 2002c) as a fundamental feature of management development programmes. In its most basic sense, leadership development programmes need to encourage greater attention to self-learning as part of discovering the inner meaning of leadership. It could be argued that it is only through self-learning that learning how to learn is possible and it is by 'learning how to unlearn' that learning leadership can be 'developed'.

Conclusions

The analysis in this chapter has sought to promote new ways of understanding leadership by advancing the notion of 'learning leadership' both as an alternative image of leadership, as well as a method of learning to discover leadership. Fundamentally, learning leadership invites us to explore different ways of seeing leadership, learning and their relationship. Therefore, the notion of learning leadership, and the main principles that underpin it, remind us that learning structures which provide freedom to practice leadership are necessary as an avenue of self-learning and learning how to learn. Moreover, the examples of image and improvisational theatre, as well as the use of art and music to support leadership development, also encourage us to critically reflect

on our representations of leadership, which may limit the possibilities to view leadership by learning to engage with the emotional and cognitive comlexity it entails. The beauty of embracing learning leadership as a new paradigm for exploring leadership is that it effectively highlights the vast array of possibilities for learning that leadership entails, in the same way learning is a space for new *leads* in one's being and becoming.

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Notes:

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[1] John Storey – personal communication.

[2] Individuality refers here to one's unique qualities, which need to be identified and utilised. It would be argued that it is in our unique characteristics as individuals – what makes us different – that our leadership may lie, i.e. our difference makes the difference. The meaning of individuality, however, extends here to embrace the other meaning of what being individual means; namely un-divided, an inseparable part of the social whole.

[3] Moshavi (2001: 442-443) explains the characteristics of the Freeze Tag format and provides an illustrative example as follows:

"In freeze tag, two actors engage in a scene based on physical positions suggested by the audience (kneeling, hands on hips, etc.). As the actors begin to move about and create a dialogue, another actor can freeze the action. He or she then assumes the physical position of one of the actors on stage and then unfreezes the scene and redirects the action by creating a new scene. In the classroom, variations on freeze tag can be particularly useful for reinforcing and applying different theories relating to a specific organizational behaviour concept, such as leadership, motivation or power and politics (…). Ask the class for a place of business. Accept the first response that reasonably fits the request. Typical responses are banks, stores, restaurants, hospitals, and factories. Next, ask for a type of business relationship between two people that are employed in this setting (rather than for the physical positions requested in the theatre version). Responses are often based on the place of business suggested and include such relationships as: employee/supervisor, bank manager/teller, doctor/nurse, and so forth. After restating the theory, place of business and the type of relationship, tell the class that based on this information, two student volunteers will create a scene. Ask for two volunteers. Explain that when the scene begins to stagnate or the student volunteers begin to falter, someone in the class should stop the action by yelling, "freeze." Let them know that in your experience, this faltering often occurs within 15 to 30 seconds and almost always within 1 minute. The person who yells freeze then makes his/her way to the front of the room, taps one of the two student volunteers on the shoulder, and replaces him/her 'on stage'. The two remaining students then pick up from the point where the previous scene stopped and continue to advance the action until the scene is once again frozen and a student volunteer is replaced. (The instructor should be prepared to call out the first "freeze" and join a scene if students are initially hesitant.) After there have been four or five "freezes," stop the action and ask for a new place of business and a new type of business relationship and repeat the exercise. This allows the class to apply the chosen theory in a different business context".

[4] The 'Theatre of the Oppressed' is a form of theater created by Brazilian director Augusto Boal (1979). In the 1960's, Boal subverted the traditional roles of actors and audience, moving from a model where spectators are expected to behave as passive "reactors," separate from the actors (play as monologue), to one where "spectators" are encouraged to become "spect-actors," equal and active co-creators with the actors (play as dialogue). It all started innocently enough, with audiences being invited to discuss the play at the end of the performance. This soon evolved into a bolder process, where members of the audience could actually interrupt the performance and suggest different courses of action for the actors, who would then act out these suggestions. One day, a woman in the audience became so frustrated by an actor's inability to understand her suggestion for a change in the play that she stormed the stage and demonstrated what she meant. This incident was a watershed moment for Boal, who started doing by design what had just happened by chance (a living example of learning leadership!). He developed a form of theater where members of the audience were expressly invited to go onto the stage to demonstrate their ideas and suggestions for change, thus becoming "empowered not only to imagine change but to actually practice that change, reflect collectively on the suggestion, and thereby become empowered to generate social action." (Paterson 1999). Later on Boal extended this technique to use theater as a form of social activism, where spectators are encouraged to comment on the social situations represented in the play and propose directions for change (Boal, 1979). Boal's "Theater of the Oppressed" encompasses a variety of expressions (Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Rainbow of Desire), all based on the idea that human relationships involve real or perceived power imbalances, resulting in oppressor-opressed dynamics. Improvisational theater, according to Boal, exposes those power imbalances and makes possible a renegotiation of those relationships. The possibly threatening nature of this process requires creative approaches that allow both the "oppressor" and the "oppressed" to step outside of the known boundaries of the relationship and conquer the fear of the suppressed or unspoken truths….In "Image Theatre", for example, a non-verbal,

metaphorical approach is used to portray the participants' views and opinions on a theme, such as the nature of the interpersonal relationships and power balances between and among the members of a group, organization or community. Participants are asked to represent those views and opinions by forming metaphorical tableaus without using any words, just facial expressions and the positioning of bodies, furniture or other props in space. By suspending verbal communication, Image Theater hopes to elicit feelings that may have been suppressed, and to decrease possible one-up-manships and misunderstandings. Once the tableaus are formed, participants are asked to observe the resulting arrangement, and to correct it as necessary to achieve a "true representation" of the theme, i.e., the image that is most acceptable to all. Participants are then asked to reflect on that image (the "actual image," what is), and to repeat the process to form a tableau that portrays the ideal state for the theme being represented (the "ideal image," what should be). Following a reflection on the contrast between actual and ideal images, participants are asked to rearrange the tableau to represent a "transitional image," to show how it would be possible to move from the current situation to the ideal one (Boal, 1979, p. 135).

[5] September 2002 saw the launch of the Art of Management and Organisation Conference in London. It was the first of a proposed series of international conferences the aims of which are to explore the dramatic increase in recent years of the articulation of the humanities and the field of social inquiry into management and organization, as well as the utilization of artistic processes in the activity of managing. The conference was informed by the field of organizational aesthetics and its dramatic growth over the past ten to fifteen years, and focused on those dimensions of management and organization that render them an art, not purely a science. More information about this and future conferences can be found at: http://www.essex.ac.uk/AFM/emc/second_art_of_management_and_org.htm

[6] When one carefully examines the meaning of the word education - from the root *e* from *ex*, out and *duco*, I lead - means leading out, it becomes even more clear that the business ideology of *domesticating* knowledge for organisational ends which is a central characteristic of management development programmes, hardly approves of questioning, experimenting and critical thinking, all of which reflect more aptly the meaning of education (for a more detailed analysis in relation also to the notion of *ekpaideusi* see Antonacopoulou, 2002c)