

**Taking Experience Seriously: A Critical Inquiry into
Consultant-led Leadership Development Programmes
in Global Corporations**

Sharon Moshayof

June 2017

Thesis submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the degree of Doctorate in Management

Acknowledgements

They say it takes a village to raise a family. I would say the same about writing a doctoral thesis. First and foremost, I thank my brilliant supervisor, Karen Norman, for holding my hand (sometimes literally) on this challenging journey. Thanks also to my second supervisor, Programme Director, Chris Mowles, whose encouragement and advice were invaluable, and to faculty members, Ralph Stacey, Emma Crewe and Nick Sarra, for their wisdom and generous support.

Thanks to my learning set colleagues, Christian Gonner and Leif Iversen, for challenging me relentlessly to inquire critically into my experience. Thanks also to Shelly Gordon and Tali Avigdor, the 'Israeli learning set'. Without Shelly I would not have known about the programme; without Tali I would not have made it through.

On the home front, the biggest thank you goes to my husband, Mike, who, unlike me, never doubted that I could do this and who supported me in every way possible. Thanks to my mother, Naomi Phillips, and my children, Keren and Gil, for their love, support, and interest in my work and my research.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge two very special men who have inspired me throughout my life. Norbert Elias says that when a beloved person dies, it is not an event 'out there' in the world: a part of us is forever changed as that person's death 'means that the survivor has lost a part of himself' (Elias, 1970: 136). This is how I feel about my father, Bill Phillips, who died too young, in 2004, and whom I miss every day. He taught me to work hard and play hard, in that order. My uncle, Trevor Phillips, shared with me his love of John Dewey and encouraged me to undertake this doctorate. He challenged me to look critically at my unquestioned, rule-following ways, and to doubt more.

I dedicate this thesis to the Phillips brothers, in loving memory.

Abstract

Key words: leadership development (LD), human resources (HR), critical, complex responsive processes of relating, power, reflexivity, practical judgment, experience, ritual, communication, habitus

Key authors: M. Alvesson, S. Brinkmann, J. Dewey, N. Elias, B. Flyvbjerg, R. Jackall, G.H. Mead, C. Mowles, R. Stacey, B. Townley, T. Watson

Corporate Leadership Development (LD) is a multi-billion dollar industry. It is estimated that in the US alone corporations spend between US\$14-20 billion annually on LD (Pfeffer, 2015: 10), yet academics and practitioners continue to wrestle with the question of whether their approach achieves its goals. These are typically framed in managerialist terms related to organizational and performance outcomes where leaders have a privileged role and are assumed to be able to design a set of outcomes for an organization, thought of in systemic terms (Alvesson et al., 2017; Beer et al., 2016; Hayward & Voller, 2010; Pfeffer, 2015; Rowland, 2016).

This thesis presents a critical inquiry into my work over several decades, firstly as an internal Human Resources (HR) leader in a global, US-headquartered corporation, and more recently as an independent LD consultant. By sharing a series of reflexive narratives, I offer a complex, non-linear understanding of organizational life, considering leadership as a social practice which emerges in the interactions of interdependent individuals. I contrast this with the idealized picture of a visionary and transformational leader proposed by much mainstream literature and on which many LD programmes are based (e.g. Heifetz et al., 2009; Johansen, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

I draw on the pragmatists to argue that corporate LD programmes could more usefully focus on practical judgement, which would mean exploring lived experience and practice both critically and reflexively. I argue that the abstractions and universal,

decontextualized models featured in many programmes are unhelpful in preparing leaders to handle their everyday challenges.

In my research I draw extensively on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating to support my arguments. This theory posits that organizations are not systems at all, but rather processes of human relating emerging in every day conversation, where people are joined in ever-expanding webs of interdependence. This has major implications for understanding power, communication and ritual in the workplace. I argue that it is important for the consultant to consider these in their leadership practice. In particular I point to the need for him/her to become more critical and reflexive, and to pay attention to micro-interactions between people.

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1 Introduction

This thesis traces the evolution of my thinking and practice as I transitioned out of a corporate leadership role in Human Resources (HR) and Leadership Development (LD) at MIDCO¹, a company where I worked for sixteen years, into a new chapter in my professional life as an independent leadership consultant working with large, global, private-sector corporations. Concurrent with this change, I began my studies on the Doctor of Management (DMan) at the University of Hertfordshire (UH), a professional doctorate programme where experienced practitioners develop their critical thinking by ‘taking experience seriously’ (Stacey & Griffin, 2005).

During my last years at MIDCO I had begun to experience a sense of unease with the work I was doing and with the corporate environment of which I had been a part for so long. Through my research I have come to understand that this was related to questions about the largely unexplored premises of the ‘dominant discourse’ of management. By this term I refer to the pervasive view in mainstream management literature of the organization as a system, with leaders who can objectively observe and analyse it, then set a direction for its future, using tools and techniques to implement the defined strategy (Stacey, 2011a: 17). After decades working in major global corporations I was grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of this approach to management, and in particular of HR Management (HRM), defined as:

...a specific set of practices, policies, procedures and programmes *that manage people and organizations* (Ulrich et al., 2008: 4, my emphasis).

I had not previously questioned the assumptions implicit in this definition, specifically that people and organizations can be ‘managed’, and that an organization is an entity

¹ All of the companies and characters mentioned in this thesis have been anonymized. MIDCO is a global pharmaceutical company with approximately 80,000 employees world-wide.

above and beyond the people who work in it. This is a ‘managerialist’ approach to work and organizations (Mowles, 2011a: 8), a term that represents a body of thought and beliefs in which managers have a unique and privileged role to direct the work of others, where predictability and control are assumed, and where measurement is key (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Flinn & Mowles, 2014; Mowles, 2011a).

Working in the pharmaceutical industry, ‘evidence-based medicine’ was the standard for clinical trials, which led to the approval and launch of our products. It follows that we adopted the tools and techniques of ‘evidence-based management’ (Morrell & Learmonth, 2015) in our HR practices, including a strong focus on measurement. Critical scholar Barbara Townley, Professor of Management at the University of St. Andrews, captures this idea, stating that HR translates individuals into ‘numerical equivalents’ (Townley, 1995: 566), turning HR into a ‘calculative practice’ (ibid: 567) which serves to ‘calculate things, people, events and processes from a distance’ (ibid: 568). The managerialist perspective is reflected in most academic publications which ‘support the dominant discourse in HRM (i.e. prescriptive, positivist, managerial, functionalist and strategic)’ (Keegan & Boselie, 2006: 1505-1506). This was the only kind of literature I used to read before joining the doctoral programme, with the *Harvard Business Review* as its main prolocutor.

As part of my research I discovered critical writers (e.g. Alvesson, 2009a; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Legge, 1979; Townley, 1993; Watson, 2010), who also question and take issue with the predominantly managerialist beliefs of HRM: its unitary framing of issues, the often claimed rhetoric that ‘people are our most important asset’, and the belief that ‘effective’ HRM practices will unquestionably lead to enhanced performance outcomes. These are ideas which support what critical HRM scholar, Paul Thompson, from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, calls the ‘naïve optimism’ of the HRM discourse (Thompson, 2011: 359).

My experience of daily life as an HR Director was indeed very different from the rhetoric of HRM. I often failed to see the linear connection between HR practices and the

expected outcomes promised by the traditional HR protagonists (e.g. Huselid, 1995; Ulrich, 2008), yet this only provoked me to try harder. I assumed that there must be something wrong with how I was 'doing' HR, rather than questioning the assumptions underlying my practice. This is how 'thought-collectives' (Fleck, 1979, explored in Project 4, p.120), act as a social constraint on our thinking: as a member of the HR thought-collective I was unable to see what was outside of the socially formed views of my group. My increasing concern about the practices of 'evidence-based HR', including how LD programmes were run, was one of my reasons for joining the UH Doctorate of Management. I knew that it adopted a critical approach to management and would encourage me to re-evaluate many ideas in an academic framework together with fellow researchers who were pursuing similar lines of inquiry.

In order to provide the reader with context for this thesis, I first introduce my method and explain the structure of my thesis. I then present three major theoretical perspectives which have greatly influenced my thinking since commencing my studies. These provide the underpinning for many of the arguments I will be making. The ideas to which I am referring are (1) a critical approach to management, (2) the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, and (3) pragmatist philosophy. Each of these will be briefly introduced below, and then drawn upon throughout the thesis.

1.1 Method of Research and Structure of Thesis

The UH Doctor of Management (DMan) is a professional doctorate programme, which means that it differs in fundamental ways from a traditional PhD. I introduce these distinctions in relation to method and structure, in order to provide important context for the reader of this thesis.

In many traditional doctoral research programmes, a student (typically younger and with less work experience than the average professional doctorate researcher) begins his/her doctoral studies with a clear idea of the research topic, often reached by carrying out an extensive literature review and revealing a gap into which they aim to make a

contribution. The DMan, in contrast, is a part-time programme where students work as managers or consultants, and their research themes emerge through reflection on their practice in a way that involves ‘treating the workplace as a laboratory’ (Banerjee & Morley, 2013: 177). The programme takes a complexity perspective on management and organizational behaviour and the method adopted is a reflection of this. My themes and the eventual research focus emerged through a process of social iterative inquiry in a way that I could not have fully predicted. In this way the emergence of the research theme is itself a complex responsive process: the focus of my own study emerged in the local and social interactions both on the programme and during my consulting work. The programme thus provides a framework which is paradoxically both predictable and unpredictable, another way in which the method reflects the perspective that it professes. I will explain these ideas when I return to the subject of method in detail in the synopsis (p.185).

As introduced above, my method involves ‘taking experience seriously’, a term coined by Stacey & Griffin (2005) which has strongly informed my work. I am pointing not only to a key element of method, but also to one of my central arguments about leadership development: that it should focus on lived experience and support leaders in developing reflexivity. The idea of starting with and focusing on experience draws on the pragmatist tradition, introduced below.

My research consists of four projects written and analysed over a period of three years. In these projects I explore my practice as an HR/LD professional, questioning and uncovering assumptions, focusing on puzzling situations and, through inquiry, illuminating these situations in a way that may be of interest to my community of practice. In the following sections each project is presented in the form in which it was originally written. This is a deliberate element of method: presenting a portfolio of work put together over the duration of a three-year programme is precisely in order to highlight the progression of thought and the emergent nature of the themes and arguments. In the

synopsis that follows my projects (p.158) I will re-visit each of them, pointing out the shifts in my thinking and the arguments I am making.

1.2 A Critical Approach to Management

As outlined above, prior to my research I did not question the managerialist paradigm. This way of thinking had a fundamental influence on what I was doing as an HR leader, considering the unitary framing of HR practices (Ulrich, 2008), as well as the systemic approach to leading change advocated by Kotter (1996). Through my research I have encountered for the first time *critical* approaches to management such as the work of the CMS (Critical Management Studies) tradition (Alvesson & Spicer, 2013; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, 2003; Jackall, 2010; Spicer, 2013). These challenge the largely unquestioned assumptions of a predominantly managerialist approach to organizations with its focus on performance outcomes, arguing that:

...management is simply too important an activity and field of inquiry to be left to the mainstream thinking of management departments and business schools [and that it is] vital to subject it to critical examination (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992: 3).

CMS, explored in P4 (p.130), argues for the consideration of perspectives other than the predominantly managerialist focus of most mainstream management thinking. It uncovers the necessarily political elements of what is typically presented as a neutral discourse of management, where powerful leaders are privileged and others largely marginalized. A critical approach thus includes subjecting to inquiry that which is generally taken as a given. In CMS terms this process is called ‘de-naturalization’ (ibid: 13) and forms part of my research. I have begun to subject my practice to the kind of critical examination suggested above, exploring and questioning the myriad of assumptions on which it was built.

1.3 Complex Responsive Processes of Relating

The theory of complex responsive processes of relating (Mowles, 2011a, 2015; Stacey, 2011a, 2012; Stacey & Griffin, 2005) offers a radical alternative to the dominant discourse in organizational studies, arguing that organizations are not systems, but rather processes of human relating, ‘understood as acts of communication, relations of power, and the interplay between people’s choices arising in acts of evaluation’ (Stacey & Griffin, 2005: 3). My newfound familiarity with this theory has influenced my thinking significantly and I draw on it repeatedly throughout this thesis. I outline a summary of the key differences between a mainstream or managerialist approach and this perspective, in the table in Project 4 (p.139). The overarching differences highlighted are between the dominant organizational paradigm with its rational, linear, systems approach, and an alternative perspective which emphasises non-linearity, emergence and interdependence, leading to the essential unpredictability of human interaction.

An appreciation of this alternative perspective has surfaced many of the taken-for-granted assumptions which underpinned my practice, particularly the assumption that anyone can stand outside of a system and impose programmes of change (with pre-determined outcomes) on that system. Indeed the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating suggests that the organization is not a system to be analysed and ‘fixed’, but rather ‘ongoing, iterated processes of cooperation and competitive relating between people’ (Stacey & Griffin, 2005: 1). This leads to a focus on what happens when people engage in conversation, when they come together and participate in local interaction, with less emphasis on strategic plans and what ‘should’ happen.

Through these ideas I have come to appreciate how we are all constrained and enabled by each other at the same time, always acting into a web of everyone else’s intentions. As

the process sociologist Norbert Elias² explains, there is a ‘web of chains of action into which each individual act within this differentiated society is woven’ (Elias, 2000: 368). As a facilitator of corporate leadership development programmes, this has caused me to re-think my practice in highly significant ways, as I will explore throughout the thesis.

1.4 Pragmatism

The dominant discourse of management, introduced above, assumes a world ‘out there’ which is independent of thought, and while acknowledging complexity, seeks to manage it through knowledge that is absolute and certain. Questioning these ideas, I draw on the late 19th and early 20th century American pragmatists, particularly George Herbert Mead and John Dewey. The concept of an objective world waiting to be discovered lies in stark contrast to the ideas of a pragmatist such as Dewey, who rejects what is known as the ‘spectator theory of knowledge’ (Dewey, 1929) and argues that what is ‘known’ is always related to the ‘knower’. Rather than knowledge as certainty, pragmatists view all knowledge as fallible, believing we can only claim that something is a ‘warranted assertion’ (Dewey, 1938, referenced in Martela, 2015: 537), a useful theory to inform our action until something more helpful comes along.

The early pragmatists’ focus was on the development of a philosophical approach that takes human experience and practice as its starting point, and aims to inform that practice in a way that is useful. Pragmatism has had something of a renaissance since the 1970s, and has been taken up extensively by contemporary scholars writing in a critical and pragmatist tradition such as Martela (2015), Simpson (2009), Thomas (2010, 2012) and Watson (2010, 2011), all of whose thinking has influenced me in the writing of this

² Elias is one of the main thinkers on whose ideas the theory of complex responsive processes of relating draws. Mowles (2011a, 2015) has built extensively on Elias’ process sociology.

thesis. It is from these ideas that I have come to formulate my key research theme as ‘taking experience seriously’. Tony Watson, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Work and Organization at the University of Nottingham, whose work is particularly relevant for my interest in HRM, claims succinctly that:

The pragmatist evaluates knowledge about the world in terms of its power to inform action (Watson, 2010: 916).

I will, later in my thesis, join others in challenging the ‘supremacy of knowledge as the goal of management higher education’ (Ramsey, 2013: 7), focusing rather on the primacy of practice and exploring how to make sense of experience.

In this introduction I have drawn the reader’s attention to the context for my work and to the areas on which I intend to focus in the thesis. I have provided initial background on the key theoretical approaches which influenced my practice before beginning my research, and given a brief indication of those which are now becoming more central to my thinking. In summarising this introduction, the key point that I am making is that I am shifting from a largely unthinking acceptance of the ideas of the dominant approach to HRM and LD, to a more *critical* way of thinking, questioning assumptions and taken-for-granted elements of corporate life. In doing so I am drawing on the ideas of critical management studies, pragmatism, and the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating. Each of these challenges the dominant discourse of management, posing alternative ways of making sense of my experience which have emerged throughout my research.

2 Project 1: ‘An Intellectual Autobiography’

2.1 Introduction

This project is a reflective narrative of my life history, and an attempt to describe and reflect on its different experiences. I will explore the influences and ways of thinking that have informed my work in organizations, as well as my own thinking on the subject. I will discuss the questions that are beginning to shape my inquiry and how these have emerged in my life, work, education and reading. I will also show how I am beginning to think about these in the light of my early experience of the University of Hertfordshire Doctor of Management (DMan) programme, and the ideas which form the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, to which I am being exposed for the first time.

I am beginning the DMan during Passover, April 2014. The symbolism strikes me. Passover is when we reflect on the Jewish people’s journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, a journey that took forty years. At the traditional eve of Passover meal we ask the question, ‘Why is this night different from all other nights?’ As I embark on my research, I have a strong sense of things being different, and wonder when I last took the time to reflect deeply on who I am, where I have come from, and how I got here. In an attempt to make sense of it all I return first to the very beginning.

2.2 The Early Days

I was born in London towards the end of the fifties, and grew up with two younger brothers. We lived a traditional Jewish life, following a rigid set of social and cultural norms. Life was all about rules: there was a right and a wrong way, with little room for questions. This was the environment in which I grew up, my ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977), meaning the taken-for-granted ways in which our culture and its norms determine the acceptable beliefs, values and behaviours of its members. My early childhood was

formed by the habitus into which I was born, and being rather insular and isolated, it restricted and discouraged questioning or challenging of the rules.

I remember a particular activity that I enjoyed as a child: 'Painting by Numbers'. I can recall the sight and smell of the boxed kit, containing pre-drawn images, with tiny numbers assigned to each element of the picture. There was a key, linking each number to a colour, and paint was provided in numbered pots. The activity was to paint the picture according to these numbers. How I loved to open those little pots and carefully paint in the designated spaces. By strictly following the rules, picking the right colour and painting within the lines, I was guaranteed a beautiful final picture. As I reflect back on the significance of this activity, I see how it symbolises my lifelong following of rules, limiting myself to playing a game that was carefully controlled to lead to a particular outcome. This is, of course, a rather recent realization, and not one that I had really considered until the past few years. I will be exploring the reasons for, and the impact of this in the coming pages.

2.3 A 'Born Leader'

I am five years old and having attended a Jewish kindergarten, am now at the local primary school in our London neighbourhood, where for the first time I meet a heterogeneous group of children. My out-of-school friendships remain, however, only with those from within our social group: mostly the children of my parents' friends. It is only much later that I will begin to mix, in a limited fashion, with friends from outside of my social environment.

A couple of things stand out in my memory. First of all, 'Jewish Assembly'. We meet in another room, say a few prayers and then march in at the back of the large hall to join the wider school community for some general administrative announcements. I remember the feeling of being different as we marched in, and how all the other children as well as the staff turned their glance backwards to look at us. This was my first experience of

being different, of being a minority in a larger community, something that was to become a key theme of my life.

Another memory is of school meals, in particular the glass bottle of warm milk that pupils in the sixties had to drink. I hated it, and even today my stomach heaves at the thought of drinking milk. The food was disgusting and I can clearly remember the sight, smell and taste of lumpy lukewarm mashed potato served in scoops, gristly dark brown stew and, worst of all, rice pudding. My memory, however, is less about the food itself and more about what I did. My parents recount the story of how I requested a meeting with the headmistress and proceeded to tell her all the reasons why the food was inedible and that something needed to be done about it. I do not remember the outcome of this, or whether the menu was changed or the quality or choice of school lunches improved as a result of my intervention, but what I do remember is being labelled a 'born leader' at home and at school. It seems that at the age of five I had the confidence, assertiveness, and ability to challenge senior leaders, an ability that I only really developed much later as I moved up the managerial ladder in different corporations. But that is still a long way off.

2.4 Moving Away

I was a well-behaved and diligent child, and always did extremely well at school, bringing home top marks. I continued to meet the expectations of my family and social environment until, with no teenage rebellion worth mentioning, I made the decision at eighteen to move to Israel. My love affair with the country and its people had begun two years earlier, when I first visited Israel with my family. The airplane doors opened at Tel-Aviv airport to the intoxicating perfume of orange blossoms in the air. The airport is situated in an area full of citrus groves, and in April they were in full bloom. That smell changed my life. I fell in love.

I wonder now to what extent this was my love for Israel, the 'pull' to a new place, or rather an escape from the constraints of my childhood with the endless rules, and the life

full of ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’, as well as that underlying feeling of being different. In Israel I felt at home, and my new life was one of unconditional acceptance, with fewer rules and restrictions. It should not, however, be interpreted that I was breaking the rules entirely with this move. In fact, moving to Israel was an acceptable option for a young person growing up in my environment. So while there was a certain breaking away, it was still within the confines of the ever-present rules of my social group.

2.5 To England and Back: Entering the Corporate World

After 10 years in Israel, having qualified as a teacher, married and become a mother, we were on the move: first back to the UK, where we spent five years living and working, and then back again to Israel. The move to the UK enabled me to re-assess my career choices, and, realizing that high school teaching was not my future, I re-trained in computer programming and began working in one of the major UK banks on international banking projects. The opportunity soon became available for me to move into Organizational Development (OD), and I became a facilitator for the design of new banking projects and systems. I loved working in this area, and felt more comfortable working with people than with computer code.

Back in Israel in the early nineties I joined a large global IT corporation, IMITECH, facilitating workshops for top clients. I learned about process facilitation, drawing on literature such as Schwarz (1994) ‘The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups’. This was also when I studied for an MSc in Organizational Behaviour (at the University of London, on a distance-learning programme). I learned ways to develop organizational effectiveness, particularly in the area of organizational change, grounded in a systems approach to organizations. The systems paradigm considers the organization as an entity, above and beyond the individuals who form it, and advocates that interventions can be planned and implemented by leaders for the organization by analysing and breaking down the organization into its composite parts (e.g. Senge, 1990). This was how I saw my role as a

facilitator; indeed leaders, Human Resources (HR) and OD professionals are assumed to stand outside, and indeed above the organization, and their leadership role is to increase its overall effectiveness through a series of interventions.

An example of the kind of tool we used is the Congruence Model (Nadler & Tushman, 1988), where ‘fit’ among different organizational components is considered critical for implementing strategy. We applied models of change based on linear processes, for example John Kotter (1996), from whom I learned that 70% of change initiatives fail, and that by following certain steps we can avoid failure and become adept at leading change. Implicit in this approach, and unchallenged by my colleagues and me at this time, is the belief that leaders and HR/OD possess the power and influence to apply approaches like this. Indeed our change processes identified the following different roles: ‘Sponsors’ (the leaders, who somehow stand outside the change), ‘Targets’ (those who need to change), and ‘Agents’ (HR/OD and others who support and facilitate the change).

Perhaps even more fundamental than the systems approach to organizations were our underlying beliefs and assumptions grounded in behaviourism (Skinner, B.F. 1953; Watson, J.B. 1913). Both in my personal life, especially as a parent, and in my work in organizations, I am starting to see how I was accepting the dominant thinking around observable cause-and-effect ways of understanding behaviour, a focus on reward and punishment, and a belief in the controllability of behaviour and outcomes.

This was all highly appealing to me, giving me a sense that I could not only control the change, but bring a guaranteed methodology to my clients. As I reflect on this now, I am struck by the connection to the ‘painting by numbers’ sets that I loved as a child. Here again I was attracted to the promise of a set of rules leading to a guaranteed outcome. I believed in the idea that every change effort needs to include a systems-based assessment of the different organizational elements to ensure congruence, and should begin with ‘Establishing a Sense of Urgency’ (Kotter, 1996: 35) followed in sequence by each of the other seven steps.

Upon completion of my degree, I became interested in the area of leadership and moved into HR. After becoming head of Leadership and Organizational Development at IMITECH, one of my areas of responsibility was running a People Management Skills programme. The content included elements of Kouzes & Posner's 'Leadership Challenge' model (1987), which lays out five practices and ten commitments to help leaders 'get extraordinary things done in organizations'. An example of these is 'Envision the Future: Imagine Ideal Scenarios'. We built course modules around each of the elements and gave examples of ways that leaders could incorporate them into their daily lives. I remember the class participants taking copious notes on the material, but I do not remember any serious discussion about the extent to which this material actually reflected their reality, or indeed whether they saw any application back in the workplace. As I look back on this period in my professional life, I question the wisdom of having such a young and inexperienced person leading these programmes. I was well versed in the course materials, but did not have any personal experience as a people manager with which to bring depth to my teaching and facilitating. I did not question the relevance of the material, believing that the realities of managing people were aligned with the programme I was delivering. I cringe as I look back and remember how I operated at this time, and with the passing years my thinking about developing leaders has significantly shifted.

One day I was teaching the class in the R&D area. I had been talking about challenging situations in handling people management issues. One of the engineers suddenly stood up, came to the flip-chart at the front of the room, took the marker from me and proceeded to draw a 2 x 2 matrix on the flip chart. I do not remember what the axes represented, but I do remember his desire to reduce the human challenges we were discussing to a 'scientific' method whereby he could classify the issue and the recommended course of action. I could appreciate and indeed shared his need for some rules and processes to simplify the world of leadership. I also remember feeling that trying to reduce the complexity of people management to a grid of 'do's' and 'don'ts'

was somehow missing the point, but I did not do anything about it. The organization's approach to leadership was very much rule-based, and as I have explained, following the rules came naturally to me. I did not question it, and continued to focus on the grids and techniques as set down in the course content.

In Aristotle's terminology (The Nicomachean Ethics, 2009), there are three types of knowledge: *episteme* (theoretical knowledge), *techné* (processes, skills and rule-based knowledge) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom and judgment). I was not aware of these concepts at the time, nor, as I have already commented, did I reflect deeply on what was missing. Looking back, however, I would describe the focus of the course as explaining leadership in terms of *episteme* and *techné*. It occurs to me now that introducing *phronesis* into the programme in a more deliberate way, encouraging a discussion of cases and reflection on decisions and actions might have enhanced its value.

As I embark on the DMan programme, I am learning new concepts that help me to look back and consider things in a new light. For example, I see that we were approaching leadership development in a way that Flinn & Mowles describe as focused on:

the idealized conceptions of leadership in the dominant discourse..... [based on the assumption that]... the act of leading can be reduced to a set of identifiable skills and competences that can be learned....[and relying on]... theories, frameworks, tools and techniques that privilege a form of instrumental rationality (Flinn & Mowles, 2014: 11-12).

Before I had the chance to question what I was doing, I moved out of this company and joined another global corporation, MIDCO. This was a pharmaceutical business, a very new area for me, and I became HR Director of their newly-established subsidiary in Israel.

2.6 A Steep Learning Curve

That first year at the pharmaceutical company was the toughest professional year of my life. I felt out of my depth: the role was a major step up in my career, and the first time I sat on a senior leadership team. I was challenged and stretched to a new level, implementing new processes and handling previously unfamiliar areas of HR. A group of leaders had come from the headquarters to set up the new company, and together with a few local leaders, we began work establishing the Israeli subsidiary.

Part of our mission was to ‘change the culture’ from family-owned local Israeli business, to part of a global corporation. I did not think that there was anything amiss in the assumption that organizational culture was an object, and that a strong coalition of leaders had the power to change it, relying heavily on the frameworks from my MSc, particularly Edgar Schein (1984). Our approach was that people either need to ‘buy into the new culture’ that we, senior management, advocated, or they would need to leave.

Schein defines culture as:

the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has...that has worked well enough to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel (Schein, 1984: 3).

He claims that leaders have a key role to play in changing organizational culture, through a process he calls ‘coercive persuasion’. Schein’s ideas remain largely unchallenged by CEOs. In a Harvard Business Review blog, Francois Nader (CEO of NPS Pharmaceuticals) posted the following about Changing Culture:

I came up with six rules that could also help others change their cultures... anyone can write down words, call them values, and incur no change. Something has to be done to turn them into an actual culture. I believe that these rules...which I applied at NPS – can work at other companies, too.

[\(http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/05/how-we-built-a-new-company-culture/](http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/05/how-we-built-a-new-company-culture/) accessed 11.6.14).

I did not see the models and approaches (Kotter, Schein) playing out in what was happening around me. The models' simplified and idealized view of reality was very different to the one that I encountered every day. People did not behave in a rational way, daily life was 'messy' and irrational, things happened in a seemingly random fashion, and I felt frustrated and helpless at times. Rather than being convinced by our top-down efforts to change the culture and engage employees in the company's mission, people's concerns were much more mundane and personal. I remember one day a sales representative came into my office to complain about the smell in her company car which distracted her from her work. This was the kind of minutiae of daily issues that was on people's minds, and they were not covered in any theoretical model. I remember feeling frustrated and thinking to myself, 'Seriously? We are busy building a new company and you are worried about the smell in your car?'

I look back and realize, however, that I did not question the underlying assumptions, fully believing that the idea that leaders can in fact lead change was sound. Looking back, I see that I was not reflecting deeply and questioning my practice, as we are encouraged to do on the DMan programme. I was accepting the rules, following the process, and when things did not work in the linear fashion that the models suggested, I simply assumed that we were not following the model closely enough, or that there was something wrong with the employees.

I remained in this role for five years, working with two very different leaders, seeing the impact their leadership style had on the employees. The first, Sonia, demanded and often achieved incredible professional results, but often in a very harsh way that was painful for her team. The learning for me, which I have taken with me to subsequent assignments, was to confront leadership issues when I see them, to speak up and challenge when something is wrong. Another learning was of the critical importance of developing leaders, helping them to develop the necessary maturity, experience, skills and judgment to lead.

The second leader was promoted from within, and as a former colleague I worked with him in a collaborative relationship, helping him to establish himself as leader within the management team. This required me to ‘hold up a mirror’, share insights, encourage reflection and support him with the changes that he needed to make. From this I learned the challenges of assuming leadership from within a peer group, and some ways to facilitate this kind of transition. We both learned and grew in confidence and our relationship developed into one of strong mutual support, which remains until today.

2.7 The Promotion that Changed Everything

Five years after joining MIDCO I was offered a major promotion: Regional HR Leader, responsible for seven countries. The decision to accept it was hugely challenging, both personally and professionally, and provided me with incredible work experiences. Three years later, however, it had demanded a personal price that I was no longer willing to pay. While I led the HR organization in this diverse region, the pace of professional change was matched by that in my personal life.

Accepting the role meant that I took on a nomadic lifestyle, living alone in Brussels while spending most of my time on the road across the region, and coming home only occasionally. In many ways accepting the assignment in Brussels, moving away from home and living alone without my family was very counter-cultural for me. I took it on assuming that it would be challenging at a personal level, but also thinking that it would provide me with such significant growth and professional development that it would be worth the price. I do indeed remember this as a rewarding time professionally, but painful from a personal perspective. Following several family crises which had a devastating impact on me, I felt a strong need to get back home, and informed my manager of my decision to move back to Israel. I had enjoyed an excellent professional relationship with him, but this all changed when I told him that I was no longer willing to carry out the role from Brussels, and requested his approval to work from my home base. He was angry, absolutely refused, took my decision as a personal affront, and told me

that I should either stay in Brussels or leave the company. I remember experiencing this as an out-of-character ‘breaking of the rules’, which was difficult and painful, but felt like the right thing to do.

I returned home to Israel in 2006, thinking I would have to leave the company. This was something I did not want to do then; the time had not yet come. In fact I stayed for another seven years, taking on two global roles, on a commuting or ‘virtual assignment’ basis – firstly leading the Manufacturing Division’s global Change Management practice through a major merger, and then leading the Global Talent and Leadership Development group.

Throughout my 16 years at MIDCO, I both led and attended many leadership development programmes. One stands out because it made me stop and reflect deeply on who I am, something which I did not take the time to do very often. The following narrative describes this event and its impact upon me.

2.8 Not Seeing the Gorilla

It is 2005 and I am attending a corporate training programme in New Jersey, feeling proud to be included in this group of senior executives. There are about a hundred of us in a large room, sitting at round tables with people we do not know. We have been brought together to aid the building of new relationships across functional and geographical boundaries, and to help ‘break down the silos’. A group of consultants from one of the US business schools are running the programme. They ask us to watch a short video on the screen at the front of the room and give clear and specific instructions: ‘Count how many times the players in the white clothes pass the basketball’. The clip runs for 1.21 minutes, there are five players wearing white and five wearing black, and I carefully count the number of passes. At the end of the clip the trainer asks us how many passes there were. People call out different numbers, ranging from 14 to 18. I had counted 16. ‘How do you explain the fact that there are so many different answers?’ asks

the consultant. A lively discussion ensues with people offering different ideas as to why we had not all counted the same number of passes.

After a few minutes, a hesitant voice from the back of the room suggests: ‘Maybe because of the gorilla?’ The gorilla? What gorilla? I had no idea what he was talking about. Other people started saying something about the gorilla, only adding to my utter confusion, and a few said, ‘Well yes, that could explain it’. The trainer asked if we would like to see the clip again. The clip runs again, and this time, about halfway through, a person dressed from head to toe in a black gorilla outfit slowly moves to the centre of the screen, beats their chest at the camera, and casually strolls away. My reaction is to say: ‘it’s not the same clip’. But it was, and according to Simons and Chabris who devised this ‘Selective Attention Test’ in 1999, about half of all people who are shown the clip do not see the gorilla.

My reaction was extreme. I could not believe I had missed the gorilla. Part of my distress was from having ‘failed the test’ (not something I am comfortable with), but there was something much more: as a senior HR professional with wide-ranging responsibility for noticing what is going on in the organization, how could I miss the gorilla? What else is going on right under my nose that I am missing? In my focus on the assignment, or the ‘rules’, I only paid attention to the players in white, and totally missed the black-clad gorilla. While being ‘focused’ can be a good thing, I had taken it to the extreme. I expect that if the instruction had been to watch for the gorilla, that is what I would have done, to the exclusion of other elements of the scene, and I wondered why I had accepted the power of the facilitator without question.

In their book, ‘The Invisible Gorilla and Other Ways our Intuition Deceives us’, psychologists Chabris and Simons (2010) point out the limits of our cognitive ability to pay attention and at the same time notice the unexpected. They further discuss the implications of this when witnesses to a crime, for example, are sure they saw something, which is later proved incorrect. I interpreted the experience differently, questioning my

focus on rules, on a task, to the exclusion of everything else going on around me, and extrapolating from this to my way of being in the world at large.

March, Schulz and Zhou (2000: 6) make an interesting distinction about how our identity determines the way in which we act (or not) according to the rules, posing the question, ‘What do my identities tell me to do in the situation as I have defined it?’ Reflecting on the gorilla episode, I ask myself this question about my following of rules. I also wonder how I could pay more attention to things, and be less task-oriented. In a way this event was a watershed moment for me, and apart from being upset, it was also a catalyst for change.

2.9 ‘Behavioural Coaching and Consequence Management’ and Inclusion

Not long after the gorilla episode, and as part of my Change Management role, I was responsible for introducing a company-wide coaching programme for managers. The company had hired a consulting firm who trained the lead coaches and supported us until we were certified to take the programme forward on our own, coaching leaders from across the world, as well as training new coaches. The coaching approach that the company adopted was called Behavioural Coaching and Consequence Management (BCCM), an approach focused on behaviour through the lens of antecedents and consequences which, according to the company we worked with, ‘unleashes discretionary performance through the systematic use of Behavioural Science’ (Wilk Braksick, 2007). Without reflecting on what we were doing or what assumptions were underlying our practice, the dominant approach was clearly a behaviourist one.

A couple of years after implementing this programme, the company asked another consulting firm to bring in a large-scale programme to increase the level of inclusion in the organization. We defined this as ‘a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued and seen for who we are as individuals’, and an inclusive culture as ‘a place where people can bring their thinking and contribute their best work’. The aim was to increase employee engagement levels in order to bring about higher performance. We combined the

coaching and inclusion practices, and members of my team from around the world worked with leaders to try to increase engagement in their business areas.

As I had experienced years earlier when attempting to change the culture, there was a major disconnect between the promise of this programme and what ensued: we saw no major changes in behaviour and I had a sense that we were placing too much faith in this top-down programme, demanding compliance but never achieving much change. However, once again we did not question the underlying assumptions of the approach, although I did wonder why we were not being successful.

Because the top managers in the company had mandated the programme, I saw people playing a game, pretending to have adopted the new tools. This was becoming a pattern and I was troubled, but could not see another way of operating in the environment in which I worked. I was steeped in the concepts and paradigm of ‘managerialism’ (Mowles, 2011a), the approach of the dominant discourse where leaders are believed to determine the course of an organization, and had not yet even considered an alternative world-view.

I have recently read Stacey (2012), who questions the:

implicitly assumed theory of efficient causality which holds out the promise that if a manager uses the tool properly, then an improved outcome will be realized, (Stacey, 2012: 40).

Stacey offers other ways of understanding what was going on. I will now share another example that illustrates this.

2.10 More on Diversity and Inclusion

While diversity and inclusion were buzzwords in the company, and as described above were part of company-wide initiatives, on the ground things looked different. The following narrative describes such an example. It causes me to reflect on the

assumptions of control implicit in the way in which we approached organizational change:

It is September, and I am sitting in a business review in Brussels. The room is full of serious-looking businessmen and we are reviewing operating plans for the year ahead. When the dates for this meeting were set, I had noticed that they included one of the most important holidays for us in Israel: the Jewish New Year. The Israeli MD and I indicated that this would be a problem for us, but the meeting remained on the planned dates. We were not happy, and informed our management that we would leave a day early.

The day has arrived and I am feeling stressed about the fact that we have to leave in the middle of an important discussion, but committed to our decision to be at home with our families for this major holiday. It feels like everyone around us is oblivious to our discomfort, which just makes me feel different and not included. We have a taxi for the airport booked for 10:45, which is cutting it very fine. Before we start the meeting I ask my boss if we could break for mid-morning coffee around 10:30, so that my colleague and I could leave in an unobtrusive way. 'No,' he says, 'we will not take a break to suit you; if you must leave, just get up and leave'. So at 10:40 we gather up our belongings and walk out of the meeting room, feeling embarrassed, awkward and angry. We talked at length on the way home about how the company talks about creating an environment of inclusion where people feel valued and respected for who they are, yet on the ground, in one small interaction, we are left feeling anything but valued and respected. How easy it would have been for that leader, we grumbled to each other, to take a break at the time we needed to leave, and to wish us a happy holiday as we left the room.

Fast forward to my first DMan residential, where a similar yet very different situation occurs. The last day of the residential is the eve of Passover, and the four participants from Israel need to leave early. I have a sense of *déjà vu* and wonder how this will play out. We are in Learning Sets and my supervisor suggests that we break at 17:30 so that I can say my goodbyes and leave on time for my taxi to the airport. The same circumstances, but a very different experience. Again I reflect on how little effect a

central inclusion programme had on behaviour, and how, indeed, effect comes about only through local interaction. I also reflect now on the significance of habitus and how missing a key family holiday was ‘not an option’ for us, and wonder about the reaction of those outside of our group. How did they feel about our need to leave early? Could we possibly understand their reactions, or was this perhaps another gorilla that I was not able to see?

2.11 Personal Assessments at MIDCO

Over the years at MIDCO we went through several assessments which were designed to help employees gain insights into their style and impact on others. One in particular had a significant influence on me: ‘Self-star’, one of many personality assessment tools used in organizations based on Jungian psychology.³ These typically focus on preferences: for example for introversion or extraversion, and for thinking or feeling. Self-star creates different ‘types’, and each is given a label and associated with a particular colour to reflect its dominant traits. My assessment revealed that I was strongly extrovert and I was classified a ‘Directing/Controlling’ type, which in Self-star is associated with the colour red. I clearly recognized myself in my Self-star report which analysed me as ‘Direct, Assertive, Demanding, Determined, Strong-willed, and Purposeful’, but cautioned that my type can be experienced by others as ‘Aggressive, Controlling, Driving, Overbearing and Intolerant’.

Self-star was typical of the assessments used throughout my corporate life. There was a desire (which I shared) to simplify the world into a manageable approach, with the 2 x 2 grid being one of the preferred ways of doing this. The idea is that by recognizing our

³ ‘Self-star’ is not the actual name of the assessment process; I have anonymized it for contractual reasons.

dominant style, we can learn to communicate more effectively with others. In fact, apart from creating a common language, it did not really increase the effectiveness of our communications at all. Once again the understanding I took from this was that we were typically not carrying out the approach well enough, not that the approach itself might need challenging.

I wonder about the link between this and the gorilla episode, as well other times in my life where I have ‘missed the gorilla’: in my focus and my haste, what am I missing? I reflect now on my strong preference for completing tasks rather than taking the time for reflection and for considering different options. I also reflect on the corporate setting and how the ‘task list’ mentality, which I so readily accepted, may in fact actively discourage reflection. Alvesson & Spicer (2012) discuss this phenomenon in their article, ‘A Stupidity-Based Theory of Organizations’. Their argument, which I will come back to and critique in my next project, presents a concept which they call ‘Functional Stupidity’, defined as ‘*organizationally-supported lack of reflexivity, substantive reasoning, and justification*’, and I note a connection between my experience and the ideas they present in the article, which resonate strongly for me.

2.12 People Management training – this time with experience

Throughout my years in the company, I took on people management responsibilities, managing large teams of people across global regions. I gained experience handling a wide range of situations. The common thread among these challenges was the need to have honest and often tough conversations with people.

I am in Istanbul at our Turkish subsidiary, delivering a basic people management class, working with a less experienced trainer as co-facilitator. It is 14 years since my days at IMITECH where I delivered people management training ‘by the book’, and this time it is very different, mainly because I feel that I now have experience in managing. My colleague has prepared extensively: she has covered her facilitation guide with sticky notes and highlighter annotations, and she knows the script by heart. On the other hand, I

have *general* knowledge of the course, and rely mostly on my experience in managing people, and believe that I can handle the questions and challenges I receive from the group ‘on the fly’.

Following my recent reading, I look to the Dreyfus’ Model of Expert Performance, (1986) as a way to explain what was happening. In the model, five levels of performance are described: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competence, Proficiency, and Expertise. In an extensive review of the model, Flyvbjerg (2001: 9-24) explains how the first three levels focus on rule-based thinking, whereas the highest two levels feature judgment based on experience and are applied in a context-dependent way. I find the Dreyfus model helpful as I look back and see that my junior colleague was operating at the Competence level; having completed a ‘train-the-trainer’ programme, she relied solely on rules and processes, lacking personal experience to draw on in her teaching. I was operating closer to the Proficiency or Expertise level, focused more on context-dependent practical experience and judgment, built up over years of managing people.

This made all the difference and made me wonder about the process of certifying inexperienced HR professionals to deliver leadership training. I am not professing an either/or approach here. There are some useful generalizations that the course material provided, and the learners gave us feedback that these were of value (for example, the idea of adapting your coaching approach to the relative ability and motivation of each employee). However, they also told us that the most valuable part of the class was the discussions where we ‘went off script’ and shared experiences and our reflections on them.

To implement this programme, the company had engaged a company to provide us with the structure, materials, and train-the-trainer process. I joined the train-the-trainer session, and remember sitting through the 4-day programme and wondering what on earth we were doing, as described below.

We have been taught the basic model of people management: a variation on Situational Leadership (Hersey, 1985), where the role of the leader is to identify the ‘Level of

Readiness' of each direct report (a function of 'Ability' and 'Willingness'), and then select a coaching approach accordingly. The trainers ask us to watch a series of video clips showing a group of fictitious direct reports, following which each participant has to plot the person on a 4x4 grid, indicating their Ability and Willingness levels, from low to high. Participants are divided into teams, and each team has to watch the clip, discuss the case, and make a decision about the 'right' answer. Once this is complete, the facilitator reviews each case, awarding points for a correct answer: 100 points if the answer provided matches the textbook answer, and 50 points if the answer is close. The teams compete against each other and the winner is the one with the highest number of points.

I look around the room and wonder if it is just me, or if anyone else sees how ridiculous and meaningless this exercise is. I speak up and question the value of it, but it seems that everyone likes it. How simple we make it sound, and how far removed my own experience. I agree with this critique of the approach:

informed by a deceptive certainty that does not reflect what we are claiming are the non-linear, uncertain day-to-day realities faced by the managers with whom we work (Flinn & Mowles, 2014: 12).

I believe that the reason why these approaches are so prevalent in leadership programmes is because the reality of leadership is 'messy' and not conducive to being developed, so we simplify things, create and teach rules, masking the reality with a veneer of control, along the lines of: 'if you face situation X, just pull approach Y out of your toolkit and things will work out'.

I also wonder about the subject of 'learning transfer', a topic frequently debated among Leadership Development professionals. We struggle with what we perceive to be the lack of transfer of the lessons learned on our programmes back into the workplace, assuming that knowledge gained needs to be transferred as in a sender/receiver model (Shannon and Weaver, 1949), and applied as taught. I am now starting to consider if this is really an issue with the learners themselves, or the lack of support from their managers (as we always thought), and increasingly wonder if the real issue is that the reality back at

work may be so far removed from the situations we present on programmes that people discard much of the learning as irrelevant and disconnected. As I will explore in later projects, the model itself, seeing communication as the sending and receiving of an objective 'it', is in itself one that I would now challenge.

2.13 Leaving the Corporate World

My sense of unease was increasing and I was starting to question my continued role in the organization. As the leader of a large team, reporting into the headquarters of the corporation in the US, I found myself participating in endless teleconferences - listening to the conversation and at the same time feeling that a lot of what was being said was meaningless. Upon reading an article by Andre Spicer titled 'Shooting the shit: the role of bullshit in organizations', I was surprised that someone dared to publish what I was thinking, and to call much of the conversation 'bullshit', or hot air:

a good portion of talk and text in organizations seems to be fundamentally 'empty', bearing little relationship with the reality of what goes on in the organization (Spicer, 2013: 657).

While sometimes wondering if I was like the child in 'The Emperor's New Clothes', who recognized the BS for what it was, I, like others, failed to speak up and challenge it. Was this because I was ultimately still comfortable following the rules? Or maybe because I was too invested in the lifestyle associated with it to leave? Nevertheless, over a period of a year or so, I gradually came to realize that I had had enough. It was a reaction against many of the practices that I no longer agreed with, as well as a desire for a different kind of work and lifestyle, that finally caused me to announce that I had decided to take early retirement and would leave in early 2014.

2.14 Encounter with a New Way of Thinking about Organizations – Complexity

While planning my transition from internal leader to external consultant, I learned about the Doctorate of Management programme at the University of Hertfordshire, and was attracted to its focus on taking experience seriously through reflecting deeply on the experience of working in organizations, applying academic rigor to intuitive reflections. I came across the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating for the first time while reading some books (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2011a, 2012) before committing to join the programme. Something that struck me as intriguing and resonated strongly with my experience was:

...instead of being determined by a prior plan, organizational change will be emerging in the local interactions of many, many people. If this is the case, it is not at all surprising that there is no scientific evidence that planned culture change produced changed culture (Stacey, 2012: 15).

As described above, I had seen us hiring consultants over the years to implement top-down programmes at MIDCO to ‘change the culture’ with no real outcome. This was my first encounter with an entirely different approach which I was keen to explore further. Through reading and discussions I am starting to consider new ways of looking at organizations, for example exploring how I might understand organizations as:

the ongoing patterning of power and ideology as they emerge in local conversation (Mowles, 2011a: 8).

As I move into my second project I will describe this way of thinking in more depth, and consider in what ways it might illuminate my practice.

2.15 Conclusion and Key Themes

Several themes have come up in the writing of my first project. I am struck, above all, by the pervasive theme of rules: my own rule-based life from earliest childhood, where

debate and challenge were not allowed, as well as the way I have lived my life since then, mostly accepting rules as such, and being unwilling to question or challenge them. I note the connection to the gorilla episode, where, in following the facilitators' rules, I missed a key element. I wonder today what determines which rules I am willing to challenge, and which I simply accept, and where power raises its head as an issue. Reading Elias (1970), I am becoming aware of a way of understanding power not as a binary construct, where people (typically leaders) are either powerful or not, but rather seeing that power is present in all interdependent relationships. I will explore and critique this and other approaches to power as I proceed with my research and reflect on its role in my experiences.

I wonder to what extent rules are in fact rules, or if they are continuously interpreted and negotiated, and which conditions facilitate this. To some extent, I escaped my rule-based childhood by moving away, only to take on a different set of 'rules' in the organizational setting, rules which I have grown more concerned about in recent years. As Robert Jackall points out in *Moral Mazes* (Jackall, 2010: 13), managers are constantly reviewing their lives in large organizations according to a virtual compass provided by the implicit set of 'rules-in-use' which have evolved. In my next project I will take up this theme of rules, and will begin by exploring more deeply what exactly I mean by rules and what role they may play.

I reflect on my evolving approach to leadership development over the years, and note the connection to living by rules. Developing leadership has largely focused on emphasizing rules, grids, tools and techniques. Over the years I have become more interested in and focused on developing practical judgment and the ability to apply insights gained from experience in new and unique situations. I am interested in the way in which my natural inclination to follow the rules is evolving. Through my recent reading about complex responsive processes of relating, I have also begun to reflect on how any approach to developing leaders needs to consider leadership in a social and relational context, rather than focusing on any one idealized or context-free approach to 'leadership'.

The second theme, which was particularly exposed through the gorilla narrative, is how I may miss what is going on right under my nose. I have reflected a lot on this, both at the time, when I did not see the gorilla, and more now as I think back on the event as part of my project. It occurs to me that part of the reason for not being aware of things is my rush to complete tasks, to be on time, favouring completion over reflection, questioning and depth. Part of it is also clearly related to following the rules, to the exclusion of everything else. Food for thought for me as I embark on this deeply reflective journey: the need to slow down and reflect more deeply, more carefully, and to notice what is going on around me.

The third theme is that of being different, and of belonging or not, and how that plays out in my life. From the early days growing up in London, through to recent events in my life, I note how uncomfortable I feel out of my habitus, my cultural environment, and how I am drawn to those who share mine. Ultimately, the ‘nomadic’ lifestyle did not suit me, and I note my constant yearning for home and all that it represents.

I have now made the transition from internal leader to external consultant, and am beginning to experience what this change actually means, compared to my somewhat idealized fantasies about it. I am taking my daily experience of this transition seriously, and am becoming aware of several areas that I would like to explore in my research.

The animating question that is beginning to emerge as I complete my first project is related to how I have largely lived my life according to the rules, or by analogy, how I have been ‘painting by numbers’ all along. This matters profoundly to me, as it challenges the basic assumptions underlying my entire life, assumptions to which I have remained largely oblivious, living as I have in a constant rush, and with minimal reflection.

I will explore the role of power in my transition from internal leader to external consultant, considering how the rules and norms of my early life have formed my practice as a leader, and how in turn that practice has formed the rules by which I have continued to live and lead. I will look at the concept of ‘knowing’: an important focus of

my life to-date, and will re-consider what knowing means, as well as how I have valued being recognized for my knowledge as well as for following the rules. From here I will seek a new voice in my consulting practice.

I have a sense of great adventure as I embark on this journey of reflection and exploration. Echoing Foucault, I will be writing ‘in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before’ (Foucault, 1994: 240). Armed with new learning, new colleagues, and an open mind, I look forward to shifting my approach from living by numbers, to allowing life, in all its messiness, to emerge.

3 Project 2: ‘Exploring the Rules-of-the-Game’

3.1 Introduction

In Project 1 I described the major personal and professional milestones in my life, and outlined some of the key themes emerging from reflecting thereon. I will now move on to begin a more detailed and critical exploration as I attempt to address what is emerging as my key question: *‘How is the connection between rules, power and recognition shifting, as I move from an internal leadership position to one of an external consultant?’*

I present a two-part narrative from a recent consulting engagement, and link it to some of the major modes of thought influencing my life and work, firstly by referencing classic literature on leadership and organizations, and later drawing on complex responsive processes of relating as another way of trying to make sense of what is going on in the situations in which I find myself. In doing so I am adopting the idea of ‘taking experience seriously’ (Stacey & Griffin, 2005), a key element of method on the Doctor of Management programme at the University of Hertfordshire. This includes writing and reflecting on narratives, as well as sharing insights and feedback with the members of my learning set and my supervisors.

3.2 Moving from an Internal to an External Role

I recently left my executive role at MIDCO where I was in charge of Leadership Development (LD) in the emerging markets (for example, Brazil, Russia, India and China). Responsible for designing, developing and delivering programmes to increase leaders’ effectiveness, my position required strong business acumen, close relations with the business and HR leaders, and a good understanding of leadership and leadership development in particular. I used the ‘ADDIE’ process, an acronym used to describe the process adopted by training and development professionals, indicating the five phases of the process: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation

<http://www.learning-theories.com/addie-model.html>). Following rule-based tools such as ADDIE has been a key element in my life and professional practice. As described in Project 1, growing up in a strongly rule-based culture I learned to fit in and conform. I see how much of the recognition I earned came from adhering to the norms of my culture. By norms I mean the typical, generally acceptable behaviour of a social group. I have tended to interpret these norms as rules, a pattern which has continued throughout my life. I associated this recognition with being compliant and obedient, and feared the loss of recognition encountered by those who dared to challenge the rules: I clearly remember certain family members who were less willing to conform than me becoming the object of much scathing criticism and was determined that this would not happen to me.

Entering the workplace, I continued this pattern, becoming known as someone who both enforced and followed rules: a ‘good corporate soldier’ (a commonly used expression in corporations, and one which I am starting to consider a rather dubious compliment). Here too I link recognition with following the rules of organizational life, or ‘playing the game’, and see how this comes from habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), introduced in Project 1 (p.18). This creates the underlying assumptions by which we live, and explains my embodied sense of how to ‘play the game’. I have followed both the formal rules of organizational life as well as the unwritten but culturally accepted norms people adopt when they come together at work.

In this project I will focus on both the norms as well as the formal rules, particularly in the sense of tools, playbooks and processes. Applying the ‘ADDIE’ process is an example of following the rules in the sense of a systematic process: a technique rooted in what Stacey calls ‘instrumental rationality’ – a prescriptive instrument, a means to an end, which is based on rationality and offers the promise of desired outcomes if followed carefully (Stacey, 2012: 40). I often struggled to reach the kind of outcomes we sought, but did not stop and ask if there was something wrong with our underlying assumptions about this process.

Reflecting on what has led me to begin questioning these assumptions now, a couple of major events have come together as catalysts. Joining the DMan programme has had a significant role in opening up a new way of questioning my practice. Leaving a senior position at a major global corporation and becoming an external consultant has provided me with a different vantage point. Things I took for granted in my last position are starting to look very different. As a leader, I was used to the prestige and recognition that came with the role. I have noted how I barely stopped to reflect on my practice, and how this was perhaps encouraged by the busyness of corporate life, promoting ‘functional stupidity’, the term used by Alvesson & Spicer (2012), proponents of the Critical Management Studies school. They describe the way organizations actually encourage us not to reflect, but rather to remain within the confines of agreed interpretations of our experiences, interpretations that are wholly congruent with the managerialist approach, briefly introduced earlier. This in turn enables us to hold on to the illusion of control.

In this project I share narratives of events experienced while making this transition to external consultant, working with companies to support their leaders as they engage in development programmes. As I describe and explore my experiences, I shall attempt to take a ‘detour via detachment’ (Elias, 1956: 229), and to de-centre myself as I take a step away from total immersion in the experience and, by forming abstractions in a more detached way, pay deeper attention to what is happening.

As part of this reflection I shall be attempting to understand these situations by exploring the key tenets of managerialism. I will then move on to look at them considering the ideas of the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, in the hope that this might open up new ways of understanding and shed some light on why following the rule-based processes has not led to the planned outcomes. The narratives pose puzzling questions, illustrating many of the issues with which I have been wrestling as I undertake this internal-to-external transition. These involve strong emotions related to rules, power and recognition, as I will demonstrate below.

3.3 Narrative: A Tale of Two Try-outs

The lakeshore setting has the quality of a glossy postcard: a deluxe hotel, five-star luxury with gourmet food and beautiful accommodation. I am here to ‘try out’ as lead facilitator, representing a top leadership development organization (‘LDO’) in a programme they have developed for a major global company (‘GLOCO’). The stakes are high: if it goes well, this could become an ongoing contract, a real boost for my new consulting business.

I am excited about this opportunity, which has arisen due to a personal contact at LDO. In my previous role, I had engaged LDO to design, develop and deliver programmes and had been Marcus’ client; now he is engaging me to work for him and LDO. I am acutely aware of the changed dynamic in our relationship and the shifting power balance. It feels a little uncomfortable to me, as I seek to prove myself in this new role. It feels like a role reversal. I had hired him, now he is hiring me, and I am on the other side of the table: the consultant / facilitator rather than the client.

I received the course content a few weeks ago. I have spent hours reviewing, studying and rehearsing the slides, learning how to deliver the content that has been agreed between LDO and GLOCO. This feels very familiar. I have been given a ‘rule-book’ and am working on following it to the letter. I wonder about this familiar feeling and remember the ‘painting-by-numbers’ activity from my childhood, mentioned in my last project. I still believe that if I learn the script and follow the rules, the outcome is guaranteed, the assumptions instilled in me from childhood guiding my practice.

I had received the deck of slides from Marcus with very clear instructions to deliver the slides as designed, and to follow the key messages embedded in the notes section of each. The topics to be explored with the group include culture, and how our culture frames everything, including how we interpret company rules and the ‘right’ way to behave.

It is the first morning and we gather in a large training room. A huge chandelier hangs from the ceiling, and massive glass doors open out onto grassy slopes down to the lake. The room is set up with well spaced-out round tables and chairs, with the soon-to-arrive

participants' names at their allocated seats. With the exception of Marcus, the lead facilitator, I know no-one. I think back to the many programmes I have delivered or supported while in my previous role, and how different this feels. How confident I felt back then, and how insecure I feel now. I ask myself why I have put myself under this pressure, so soon after leaving MIDCO. I wonder why I am taking on such a heavy workload, and consider a connection to my desire to be recognized as a successful professional. As I begin to reflect on my practice, needing this kind of recognition is a theme to be explored further.

Marcus introduces me to two members of GLOCO's HR team, telling me that they will be evaluating my performance and will make a decision about whether they feel I can take on the role of lead facilitator for this programme. I feel tremendous pressure to deliver, and to 'pass the test'. This feels unnerving and uncomfortable. It shames me to remember how little I considered the feelings of the consultants I used to evaluate when I sat on the other side.

I deliver the material as designed and as rehearsed. Feeling tense and stiff, I follow the script closely, aware that this causes my delivery to be less animated than usual. I think about my earlier experiences of delivering leadership programmes where I felt very free to go 'off script', and how that enabled me to engage in a conversation rather than deliver slides. I wonder about the difference and consider that the knowledge that this is a test, and that the assignment is 'to deliver the material as designed', is leading me to behave in a way which feels familiar yet stressful: to follow the designated approach in an unquestioning way, to do as I am told, in the hope of being recognized for doing so. I do not even consider doing something that might be considered off-script, focused as I am on the test, viewing it as an objective pass-or-fail event, in the same way I would have done when evaluating consultants.

As I continue to deliver the material, I talk about organizational culture, and leading change, and attempt to draw the leaders into a discussion about their challenges at GLOCO. Only a couple respond to my questions and I ask myself why. I feel that I am

coming over in a somewhat flat and non-engaging way, and I take responsibility for the group's passivity. Why, I wonder, was I so focused on my role in the unfolding events? It was as if I was the centre of the story, and it was all about me. Hard as it is to admit, I had granted myself almost supernatural powers at this point in events. I try to recall the sensations in the room at the time and the picture I recollect is one where I am standing in the middle of the room, in hyper-focus, and the rest of the room, including the people, are somehow dimmed out, slightly blurred.

My session ends. The participants clap politely, and I am concerned. I have not felt a real connection with them; something just does not seem to have worked. Clapping at the end of a workshop is not unusual - it is a sign of positive recognition which makes me happy. This time, however, it feels less enthusiastic than usual, and I am disappointed and worried. I think about how the workshop is like a performance where I am the performer and the participants are the audience; their clapping (enthusiastic or perfunctory) is the earliest indication of their satisfaction with the performance.

Before leaving for the airport, Marcus, the HR team and I gather for a quick review. Each provides comments on my performance, and I listen intently, making notes on their feedback, which is mostly positive. They tell me that they will wait for the programme evaluations, and will then get back to me regarding their decision. I thank them, and as we part they 'high-five' me, which I interpret as a positive sign that they have liked my work and see me as part of the team, but I am not sure.

The whole way home, in the taxi and then on the plane, I feel increasingly stressed and concerned that I have not been successful. My stomach aches with spasms of nervous pain. The negative feelings increase over the coming days as I await the 'verdict', in the form of the participant evaluations, with the all-important average score for my session, a number between 1 (low) and 5 (high). After many years working in LD programmes I know the rule: anything less than a 4.0 will mean that I have indeed failed the test and will not be asked back. This is explicitly stated:

Consultant will note that continuation in the work is contingent upon performance and is based upon the consultant meeting or exceeding an evaluation score of 4 out of 5 (or equivalent if Client uses a different scoring system), (LDO Work Contract).

A couple of days later the anticipated e-mail from Marcus arrives. My score is 3.6, lower than the 4.0 required, and, according to the contract, that should mean that I have not passed the test. However, something different happens, which surprises me greatly. Marcus tells me that he and the clients at GLOCO believe that I am right for the role, and have decided that the score does not reflect my performance. They have identified explanations for the lower than desired score, for example, the fact that I was a silent observer until my own session on the second afternoon, and the fact that I had to leave straight afterwards, just half way through the programme. So despite the 3.6 score they invite me back to co-facilitate the entire programme a few weeks later. I am surprised by this unexpected turn of events. While I admit to myself that I am relieved about their decision, excited to be returning to the programme, I find it hard to make sense of what happened, particularly because of something I am not proud to admit: I do not recall ever doing this when I was in the decision-making position. In my strict rule-following way, I cannot remember making a single exception to the rule of the 4.0, and I now wonder about the price that consultants may have paid for my rigid application of the rule.

3.3.1 Some Interim Reflections

Before resuming the narrative, I pause to expand on the practice of evaluating training on a 5-point scale. Asking programme participants to complete an evaluation form is ubiquitous in the world of LD. Often referred to as ‘smile sheets’, such forms capture participants’ immediate assessment of the programme. In most cases, facilitators ask participants to remain in the room until they complete the forms, as experience shows that a request to do so later is often ignored. Participants are usually keen to get away, and generally complete the forms in a hurried manner, marking the relevant numerical scores and often leaving the spaces for written comments blank.

Evaluating training in this way was first described by Donald L. Kirkpatrick of the University of Wisconsin, in 1959. His four-level model (Kirkpatrick, 1994) is still the standard across HR and training communities. It was widely adopted to complement the concurrent expansion of training departments across companies, as the field of Personnel (subsequently Human Resources) Management matured in the sixties and seventies (Ruona & Gibson, 2004). In order to assess the effectiveness of training, this model applies four levels, aimed at measuring:

1. Student Reactions - what they thought and felt about the content and the trainer(s)
2. Learning - the resulting increase in knowledge or capability
3. Behaviour – the extent of behaviour and capability improvement and implementation as well as application
4. Results - the effects on the business or environment resulting from changes in the participants' performance.

Despite its 4-level structure, most training programmes are evaluated at level 1 only: a subjective measure defined as participants' liking of a training programme (Alliger & Janak, 1989). This is a simple way to receive immediate feedback on a programme. I believe that this simplicity is the reason that Kirkpatrick's 4-level evaluation process is used in this way: the rule is adapted to suit the practitioners' needs, and not used in the strict way it was designed.

Literature searches reveal a dearth of critique into this kind of evaluation process, with Kirkpatrick remaining the 'gold standard' until today. An article, 'The Flawed Four-Level Evaluation Model' (Holton, 1996), is one of the few that attempt to critique it, noting that the model has received 'alarmingly little research' (Holton, 1996: 5). As head of Leadership Development at MIDCO, I attached great importance to these scores myself, using the 4.0 threshold as a quick way of seeing whether a programme or a trainer was 'good enough'. I attributed a 'scientific' or rational validity to what were really highly subjective assessments made by participants. Underlying the contractual rule that I must achieve a score of 4.0 in order to continue is a belief that objective reality

exists, and a pre-determined performance standard can and must be achieved.

Underpinning the expectation of a score of 4.0 or above lies a rational, systems approach to experience, one which locates the score in the presenter alone. Following the second part of the narrative I will come back to this point.

In my new position as a consultant, I wonder about the great significance I attributed to my score, and how important it is for me to be recognized as someone who excels, who is at the top of her profession. Again I recall how I took this recognition largely for granted in my former internal roles.

3.3.2 Back to the Narrative: the Second Try-Out

I am back again, five weeks later, and it feels quite different. Whereas the first time I had believed that the rule-of-the-game regarding the necessity of receiving a 4.0 was absolute, experiencing what happened when the rule was modified has caused a shift in my beliefs. I observe how norms become re-created as we live them: in my unquestioning approach I had granted the practice the status of a hard-and-fast rule, and when Marcus overturned the rule, he had changed not just the decision, but me as well. This awareness was not immediate, and only came to me in a gradual fashion after much reflection.

I go for a walk and take in the surroundings: the blue, cloudless sky, the glittering sun reflecting off the lake, the snow-capped mountains in the distance. I feel calmer than last time on entering the training room, ready to meet the executives as they arrive. I make a point of greeting each one, shaking hands, sharing brief introductions with each of the participants. Last time I remember holding back somewhat, not sure of my role exactly, perhaps waiting for Marcus to introduce me? I reflect on these micro-interactions and see how each one changes something in the overall experience, for all participants in it.

Marcus and I had agreed to share the facilitation more equally this time. It is, however, clear to me, and I imagine to the others, who is in charge. While I am presenting and facilitating the discussion Marcus often interjects with a comment or an example, adding to my words. Although we had agreed in advance that he would do this, and most, if not

all of his comments do add value, I gradually find myself getting irritated as the number of interjections exceeds what feels comfortable. I feel undermined and consider saying something to him, but do not. My interpretation of the rules at this point is that he is in charge, therefore he can interject whenever he likes. Each time he does this, I experience it as him establishing his superiority. I imagine that the group sees it the same way. Looking back, I am aware of how my interpretations became my reality and that there are other ways of understanding what was going on that I did not see at the time.

I am sitting at the back of the room watching Marcus facilitating. The session is on 'Leading in Complexity'. I want to make a point, but sit quietly, following the rule I have internalized (but which was never articulated), that I am simply an observer, and should remain silent. I am careful not to annoy Marcus, which is what I imagine will happen if I interject inappropriately, possibly because that is how I felt when he did it to me. I sit quietly, having a conversation with myself about what I would like to say, wondering if I should speak up, but remaining silent.

This continues for a while, until suddenly, without really planning it, I do just what Marcus did: I raise my hand, catch Marcus' attention, and speak up. Following his lead I say something about my experience of leadership in one of the emerging markets, relating this to a participant's previous comment about complexity, sharing a short story about one young leader's struggles and how she appeared to grow and mature through the experience. Heads turn as participants look at me, listening to my comments. I feel like an equal again; I smile and relax. I expand on my thoughts, participants smile back, reacting to my points. I wonder if I have in fact broken a rule at all, and feel strangely happy that I did it, behaving now in a way that feels more natural and spontaneous, less like following a script.

I observe Marcus and wonder what he is thinking. It does not appear that my speaking up is a problem. I feel as if I have violated a rule, but also sense that something has changed for the better. Something new is emerging in this moment, the norms are shifting as it occurs to me that I am part of the process of sustaining or changing them. When I follow

them, as well as when I do not, I am always part of the process of forming the rules. This is a different way of thinking about the process of rules to which I will return later.

The programme ends, and Marcus hands out the evaluation forms. As explained earlier, this evaluation focuses on participants' impressions of the programme they have just completed. Statements include: 'As a result of this programme, I have developed useful skills to inspire and engage my people to deliver on our strategy' and 'I would rate the facilitator as highly competent'. There is room on the form for comments, as well as for numeric scores on various elements of the programme, and on each of the facilitation team. I watch as the leaders hurriedly complete the forms, marking with an 'X' the box corresponding to the score they are assigning to each element of the programme.

My stress levels rise, and I wonder how to sneak a look at the completed forms before I leave, feeling that I cannot wait any longer to find out how I have been rated. I have made the assumption that I need to wait to be told my score, rather than just looking at the forms for myself, assuming that the power relations in this situation determine this as the rule. It occurs to me that this is similar to my thinking regarding my interjection while Marcus was speaking. I have assumed that the rules-of-the-game are constraining me, rather than seeing myself as someone who forms, and not just follows them.

We say our goodbyes, the participants leave the room, and the pile of completed evaluations remains on a desk at the back of the room. I cannot bear it any longer and casually say to Marcus, 'I'd like to take a quick look at the forms, just to get a sense of what the participants thought of the programme'. I do not specifically say that I want to see *my* scores, but I think he knows. He nods, going off to get some lunch and leaving me alone with the forms. I flick through the 29 forms, scanning for only one thing: how had the participants rated my competence as a facilitator? How many had given me a 4 (noted on the form as signifying 'Good')? Had any given me a 5 ('Excellent')? And hoping there would not be many 3s, meaning 'Average', or 2s: an unacceptable score.

I scan the scores, noting where the mark appears in the box by my name, and, feeling delight and disbelief, realize that the majority of participants have given me the top score,

a five. Without doing the math, I know that I have achieved the threshold of a ‘good’ score, a 4.0. I am relieved beyond words, thrilled to have ‘passed the test’, happy that my sense that it has gone well this time has been confirmed by the participants’ scores. This should be enough to ensure that I am invited to join the ongoing faculty of this prestigious programme.

Marcus comes back in to the room. ‘Did you take a look at the forms?’ he asks me. ‘Yes’, I smile. ‘And, how did you do?’ he asks me. I am not surprised that he knows that I was focused on my scores. ‘I did OK, above 4...’ I tell him. He appears happy to hear that. LDO’s administrator proceeds to input the scores into a pre-prepared spreadsheet, and soon looks up, smiling: ‘Fantastic overall results,’ she says. ‘And you,’ she says, nodding at me, ‘you got a 4.6!’

As I reflect on the way the score made me feel, I sense that it is different because this time I am on the winning side of the game. Last time my score was low, so my sense was one of failure, of not being recognized as successful and competent. This time I feel recognized: I have ‘passed the test’. I wonder how often this happens, that we criticize a process when we are on the losing side, yet accept it blindly when on the winning side. Indeed, as an internal leader assessing others, I rarely considered the problematic nature of this evaluation process, and now that I had ‘won’, I was relieved and once again focused on myself, feeling good about this ‘success’.

I now move on to explore further some of the themes that have emerged in my narrative, related to the shift in my relationship with Marcus and how I experienced the events surrounding the two leadership programmes. As I consider how these may be related to power, recognition and following rules, I will draw on theories from different approaches to organizations in an attempt to shift this analysis away from my own personal experience and seek a more generalizable understanding of what might have been happening.

3.4 Following Rules: a Rational Approach to Meeting Organizational Expectations

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary <http://www.merriam-webster.com> defines a rule as ‘a prescribed guide for conduct or action / an accepted procedure, custom, or habit / a regulating principle’. I am particularly interested in rules in the form of ‘how to’ tools and techniques, like the ‘ADDIE’ process described above, and similar to the ‘painting by numbers’ of my childhood.

Looking back at my gorilla narrative from Project 1, I remember how I carefully followed the rules (instructions) to count the number of passes, and in doing so missed the gorilla. I remember this experience as a catalyst for questioning my practice of following rules to the exclusion of real reflection and consideration of what is needed in a situation. I see how following rules and adhering to norms is part of my deeply-held approach to life, and also how it is linked to the theme of recognition, which I will come back to later and in my next project.

The subject of rules in organizations was explored by Max Weber, a political economist and economic historian and one of the first scholars of organizations, writing in Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Weber’s views on rules and organization remain the basis for much of the understanding of the theme until today. Weber (1947) was the first to describe the organization as a bureaucratic structure. He explored the way in which people in organizations follow rules, either as a function of power, which he defined as the ability to force people to comply, or via authority, meaning the way in which charismatic leaders in a hierarchical structure gain the willing compliance of their subordinates as they establish control through structure and rules.

Weber described the bureaucratic organizational form as the most efficient way of organizing, with its focus on a rational-legal authority system based on charismatic leaders, a system of rules and principles, and a machine-like efficiency. The cornerstone of Weber’s way of describing organizations is rationality, with irrationality considered a deviation from the normal and standard. Writing over a century ago, Weber’s thought

continues to influence much organizational practice today. The term ‘bureaucracy’ now has a rather negative connotation, associated with an organization that has a strong focus on rules, often to the exclusion of flexibility and innovation. His approach, based on causality and rationality in organizations, remains prevalent until today, as seen in the way major corporations are structured and managed.

The anthropologist David Graeber argues in ‘The Utopia of Rules’ (2015) that bureaucracies are breeding grounds for a proliferation of rules, which members need to follow as part of playing the game. He describes this following of organization rules as acting in a ‘complicit’ way (Graeber, 2015: 27), echoing the way in which Jackall writes about corporate life in ‘Moral Mazes’ (2010), referenced in Project 1 (p.39).

Having worked in this kind of organization for so long, my assumption was that there were rules in place governing the way in which I could speak up during the programme, that achieving a score of 4.0 was a strict rule, and that I was not supposed to look at the evaluation forms myself. Following the implicit hierarchy and power structure meant that I should defer to Marcus and take on what I viewed to be the accepted norms of the situation such as not speaking up when he was facilitating, and not assuming that I could glance at the evaluation forms without specifically seeking permission to do so. In this way, and drawing on Weber’s theory of the rational-legal system with a powerful, charismatic leader, I too was adopting a rational approach to understanding our relationship.

Adopting a Weberian understanding of organizations as rational systems provides an illusion that rules, systems and the hierarchy enable control of what is happening. A century after Weber, classic approaches to organizations continue to describe behaviour in organizations in this way. The need for control exists along two dimensions: firstly, the idea that using rule-based tools will lead to specific outcomes, thereby providing control over the result, and secondly as a way to control people, with the leader seeking to control teams. Both of these are features of managerialism (Mowles, 2011a).

This dominant managerialist paradigm rests on a set of assumptions related to organizations as systems, in which managers have a privileged role granted to them as a function of their position. They are assumed to be responsible for everything that happens in the organizations. As leaders, their role is to observe and analyse, and then set direction and implement strategy using the commonly adopted tools and techniques of leadership. This is based on a scientific, analytical and rational approach to management which assumes that the leader has the ability to determine an outcome and drive a group of people towards its accomplishment. These tools include the 'ADDIE' process referenced earlier, as well as, for example, the setting of performance goals for teams and employees. At the corporation level this can include wide-scale strategy or culture change programmes. The underlying beliefs of the managerialist approach relate to predictability, linearity, and causality, meaning that there is an implicit 'if...then' connection: if we, as leaders (or consultants) use the tools correctly, a certain outcome can be reached; if we plan correctly, goals and targets will be met.

Another example of a tool or technique rooted in this approach is John Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor and management consultant, whose '8 Steps to Leading Change' (1996) call for the same coalition of powerful leaders influencing followers described by Weber. In a step-by-step approach to change, Kotter provides a compelling roadmap, which practitioners such as myself have adopted for its promise of a controlled process and a way to mitigate the well-known risk of change programmes failing to achieve their goals.

Systems thinking underlies classic approaches to managing organizations. It considers the organization as a whole made up of composite parts, or sub-systems, with autonomous people who come together as individuals, and work in a rational way. Systems thinking can be traced back to Kant (Stacey, 2011a: 50-53). He describes the formative causality in nature, where parts of an organism develop into the whole in a way that is embedded in them – their only option is to develop into the pre-determined end-state of the organism. Systems approaches to organizations, for example Senge (1990),

consider an organization as made up of component parts to which interventions by leaders/consultants are applied. Talking of the 'learning organization', Senge considers that individuals hold an objective view of the whole, standing outside of and observing it, and that they can rationally select and pursue goals according to rationalist causality, observing how things work, forming hypotheses, testing and reaching conclusions about them. The timeframe is linear with a focus on 'if... then' thinking, or 'efficient' causality (Stacey, 2011a: 57).

Despite Stacey's reminder of Kant's caution that we should not think of human behaviour in systemic terms because this misses a key point about humans which is that we have free will and cannot therefore be subject to this kind of 'if-then' causality, most classic organizational theorists continue to do so (ibid: 50-55). They miss the dualism of Kant's thought, which proposed a different view of causality for natural organisms and for human individuals. The pervasive view of leadership remains based on rational causality and choice, for example, Child's theory of Strategic Choice (Child, 1972). Kotter's approach to managing change shares many of these assumptions with Child and other proponents of the commonly-used techniques of leadership. These approaches attribute rational causality and free will to managers only, assuming that others in the organization will follow leaders in the processes and rules that they set.

A particular element of a systemic approach to organizations that has emerged in my narrative is the element that seeks to predict, measure and control the performance of the system. In this way there is a cybernetic element whereby the goal is regulating performance, seeking to meet a pre-determined goal, as in a central heating system, for example, where the thermostat regulates the temperature, checking it relative to the target and adjusting accordingly. In the contract for my work in the GLOCO programme, 4.0 is the performance standard set, and when data was received showing a negative gap versus this standard (the 3.6 score), this presented an issue to be resolved. As described in the narrative, rather than being told that I had not met the standard, and therefore was being

rejected as a facilitator, (as I expected and as I would have done if I had been the evaluator), something very different happened which was surprising to me.

As I explore my underlying beliefs and assumptions about this, I note that they are rooted in behaviourism (Skinner, B.F., 1953; Watson, J.B., 1913) which focuses on observable behaviours, and emphasizes antecedents and consequences as causing or eliminating desired or unacceptable behaviours, and is less concerned with internal states such as beliefs and thoughts. As a leader I see how I have accepted such thinking around observable cause-and-effect and linearity as a way of understanding behaviour, accepting, for example, the rule of the 4.0 and using it for the basis of reward or punishment, and as a way to control quality outcomes in training programmes.

The implicit 'if-then' mind-set has been very much part of how I have operated, together with a focus on rules, and right or wrong, as presented in my first project. The reasons for this seem highly related to a desire for recognition, as well as the fear of exclusion and rejection, along with a need for control, in an attempt to 'manage' the uncontrollable through tools, rules and playbooks. As I begin to critique this approach, which has dominated my thinking for so long, I am beginning to notice how these abstractions were part of this way of looking at organizational processes: we applied simple and rational tools and techniques, but the reality was always infinitely more complex and 'messier', although we often applied the same rational tools to explain away the variance.

I would, however, now like to draw attention to what happened in my narrative by thinking about it in a different way altogether, rather than doing what I might previously have done, which is to explain away the variance from within the same way of thinking. Marcus did not apply the rule, and this leads me to wonder about other ways of making sense of what happened, focusing on rules in their social context. I explore this as an alternative to the rational and cause-and-effect perspectives proposed by Weber, as well as systems and behaviourist approaches, in an attempt to shed light on these puzzles. In doing so my aim is not to come down on one side or another, nor to determine a right or

wrong way of viewing the events, but as part of an exploration of what is occurring when people come together at work.

3.5 A Social View of Rules

Charles Taylor explores this subject in 'To Follow a Rule' (in 'Philosophical Arguments', Taylor 1995a). Taylor, a Canadian philosopher writing about political and social science, follows in the tradition of the 18th-19th century German philosopher Hegel who believed that in order to understand a person, one needs to understand their society and their history (Stacey, 2011a: 298). Whereas Kant's focus is on the individual mind and its ability to comprehend a reality 'out there', Hegel's view is that what humans know comes about in their social context, and therefore human behaviour can only be understood as part of the social process (ibid). This poses a radical challenge to the managerialist view of the powerful leader being able to stand outside the situation he/she is trying to influence.

Taylor draws on Wittgenstein, a twentieth century Austrian philosopher, whose interests include how rules of language are socially determined. Like Hegel and Wittgenstein, Taylor holds a critical position towards positivism (the belief that knowledge is absolute and based on logic and science), and of behaviourism, discussed above. He argues that the way in which we interpret our reality, including how we understand rules, is a function of our background and how we make sense of things. It cannot be absolute because each person will interpret things differently.

In 'To Follow a Rule', Taylor (1995a: 165) begins by taking up Wittgenstein's argument that understanding a rule is rooted in one's social setting, citing an example of following a road-sign in the form of an arrow pointing to a destination. Our ability to follow such a rule, he claims, pre-supposes knowledge of which way the arrows point, in other words, is the tip the direction of the arrow, or are the feathers? Without this knowledge, there can be no following of the rule, and so it is not a stand-alone rule based on objective

reality, but part of the way in which people make sense of conventions as they come together in society.

The philosophical tradition adopted and developed by Taylor is related to hermeneutics, involving interpretation, meaning that we know the world through our way of acting in it, not as detached observers forming pictures in our minds. This approach is concerned with understanding and making sense of things: how do we understand our lives, our actions, other people? Interpretation, according to this tradition, always occurs against a backdrop of our personal histories, our beliefs, our habits. For example, in my narrative, when I interpreted the rules-of-the-game with Marcus to mean that he had power over me, I was bringing my entire life-history to bear, a lifetime of being rewarded and recognized for following rules. He too was following his own interpretation of the rules, interpretations to which I was oblivious. The key insight I have taken from Taylor, referencing Wittgenstein, is that ‘following rules is a social practice’ (Taylor, 1995a: 168) and that understanding rules ‘is always against a background of what is taken for granted, just relied on’ (ibid: 167).

In the narrative in my Project 1, where I described two cases of needing to leave a meeting early due to a religious holiday, the ‘need’ here was an example of my being so immersed in my social group that I was not able to see any alternative mode of action. To those in the meeting with me, who did not share my background, my behaviour may have appeared irrational or even rude, and to me their lack of understanding and support appeared the same way.

Taylor (1995a: 177) makes an important distinction between the rule-as-represented, and the practice of following the rule. As a group of people determine the rules of behaviour, these are codified as representations, and in this sense are reified, becoming an ‘it’; practice is about the following (or not) of the rule-as-represented. Here Taylor highlights the reciprocal relationship between the rule and its practice: while the rules form our practice, they are simultaneously being formed by our actions. When Marcus and the HR team at GLOCO overturned the rule-as-represented (the 4.0), I was surprised, and

struggled to comprehend the reasons, focused as I was on my central role and my performance. What they did changed me, not just as the object of their action, but as the subject of my own actions going forward.

3.6 Complex Responsive Processes of Relating

The theory of complex responsive processes of relating offers a different way of looking at what is happening when people come together at work (Griffin, 2002; Griffin & Stacey, 2005; Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2011a), suggesting that an organization can be considered as:

the iterated patterning of communicative interaction between large numbers of interdependent persons and groupings of them (Stacey, 2011a: 358).

Drawing on complexity thinking from the natural sciences as a source domain for insight into human interaction, the focus is on:

- Complexity: interaction among diverse humans is always complex and uncertain.
- Non-linear processes: we cannot attribute one cause to one effect, nor can we anticipate outcomes in an ‘if...then’ manner.
- Self-organization and emergence: ongoing processes of local interaction, which individuals both form and are formed by. These both enable and constrain. Patterns emerge from this local interaction without a blueprint or pre-designed pattern for the whole. The future continually evolves through interactions between people in a way that cannot be known in advance.

Unlike the classic organizational approaches which I have described in this project, this approach suggests that behaviour is not directed by a leader (or consultant) standing outside an organization; indeed, its advocates would argue that there is no ‘outside’, as this would imply artificial boundaries. It follows that there can be no objective observer and there is nothing prescriptive about what managers should do; the focus is rather on what *is* happening when people respond to each other. The emphasis is on groups of

interdependent people, interacting locally, without an overarching blueprint or plan for their interactions. Mowles further suggests that organizations are places where:

... complex games are being played as people co-operate and compete together to get things done (Mowles, 2011a: 44).

This way of describing organizations argues that change occurs because of many local interactions between people, rather than any top-down programme. Drawing on Stacey (2012: 15) as referenced in Project 1 (p.31), this insight is key to my shifting understanding. Following Hegelian philosophy, and focusing on social, rather than systemic processes (Stacey, 2011a: 298) these ideas are influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead, the American pragmatist and sociologist (1934), and the Process Sociologist, Norbert Elias, (1970, 1991). Their way of thinking about relating offers a very different perspective from that of Weber and others who consider organizations to be rational ‘machines’, represented by hierarchical organizational charts, lines of control, powerful leaders and compliant followers of rules. It also provides insight into why rational, pseudo-scientific processes such as forecasting often lead to unexpected outcomes.

As I look at the events described in my narrative, I see new possibilities emerging in light of these ideas, as I shall now move on to explore by considering Mead’s views on the process of generalizing, social acts and communication.

3.7 Mead and Communication – Co-Creating Meaning

I have described the 5-point scale evaluation as a practice that has become the norm for assessing training programmes. I now propose considering this as a generalization, whose use has become so widely accepted socially that it can be considered a ‘social object’ (Stacey, 2011a: 358). What Stacey means by this term is a generalised tendency for a large number of people to act in similar ways in similar situations. The social object is, therefore, not a thing, and should rather be understood in terms of social *acts*. So by

talking about the evaluation form as a social object, I am pointing to the way in which leadership development professionals use it and attach the same general significance to it. What happened in my narrative shows how we took the rule of needing to reach a 4.0 score, the generalization of the form, and particularized it in the specific social context. This is a different way of making sense of it, and this awareness changes me.

In discussing the terms generalization and particularization, Stacey draws on Mead, who, in 'Mind, Self and Society' (Mead, 1934), outlines a position that the self (and all meaning) emerge only as part of a social process, arguing that the existence of the social comes before any individual can be considered to exist. Describing the 5-point evaluation as a generalization, the meaning of which only evolves in the way in which a group of people actually use it, helps me see the rule in a new light: it exists as an abstraction, which only becomes concrete when people take it up in their social context. This is a very different way of thinking about rules for someone who has tended to see them as strict directives, being surprised when they are not followed. I find this description particularly helpful as I believe it can illuminate what happened in my narrative as I shall go on to explain.

Mead argues that human interaction is a pattern of gesture and response between people, the meanings and outcomes of which emerge together. When one person says something, he/she uses language as a 'significant symbol' (Mead, 1934: 71), meaning that this evokes a response in the other person which is the same as the way the individual making it would be affected. The meaning of the pattern of communication emerges together in the chain of gestures and responses. This idea means that a planned communication process cannot occur, as suggested by the 'sender-receiver' model of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Their model, which has influenced my practice, states that a message is 'sent' by one and 'received' by another, with the assumption that there is objective meaning embodied in the message, which the receiver understands in the way the sender intended.

In the managerialist approach I have described, meaning is believed to exist outside of people's interactions, and the challenge is to uncover such meaning. My understanding of what Mead says is not that leaders have no influence, but that top-down leader-determined approaches such as those discussed above are questionable. An example of this is Kotter (1996), who describes 'Communicating the Change Vision' as one of the eight steps in the process of leading change. This implies a sender/receiver understanding of an objective message, and gives the leader the status of an objective and powerful leader.

Reading Mead helps me understand that in the situation I described in my narrative, there is no absolute meaning to what happened, other than that which Marcus and I created in the social situation in which we found ourselves. I anticipated Marcus' reactions to my following or not following the rules, imagining that he would either approve or not. In fact, I could not have known how he would respond, and this is where emergence, spontaneity and surprise may occur. The meaning of what happened only emerged when he and others responded to me; there was no 'meaning' situated within my gesture, but only in the pattern of gestures and responses we were making: meaning emerged when we became aware of the responses we had called out in each other, and these in turn were related to the wider social context, for example, Marcus' previous failure to find a suitable facilitator to take over from him, and my culturally-based compliance with rules.

This represents a different way of understanding experience, one that forces me to look at the social context of events, and the nuanced way in which each person is interpreting what happens. It takes me outside of my centred view, seeing myself as 'centre stage', and instead makes the social context in which I was acting the focal point of attention. It also means that the rule related to the 4.0 score cannot exist outside of the way in which it occurred within the social process of this particular training programme.

3.8 Elias and the Rules-of-the-Game – a Social View of Power

I now move on to consider power from a social perspective, as part of my attempt to understand the interactions described in my narrative, not only between Marcus and me, but also in light of the wider social and historical context in which we were operating. The traditional view presented earlier would suggest that people are either powerful or not, as a function of their position and personality. Weber claims that power resides within the organizational structure as well as within a powerful and charismatic leader, implying that the person with power sets the rules which are then followed by those with less power (1947). This can lead to frustration when those in positions of leadership see things playing out differently. Why are they not able to implement strategies and practices that will be followed by those less powerful? I look back at my narrative and consider how the facilitator has a leadership role in the programme, albeit a temporary one. At the simplest level, adopting a classic view of power would suggest that the facilitator's questions and directions are taken up and followed by the participants. So, for example, when I posed a question to the group, I expected relevant and engaging responses to my question, but this is not what happened. The lack of responses should not be seen as connected to me, but to the social nature of our ongoing interaction in the room.

Reflecting on the questions raised by my narrative, I find that traditional approaches cannot explain what was happening, and am beginning to consider a different view, one which argues that power did not reside within either Marcus or myself, but was continually emerging in our relationship as we worked together, both in the past as well as in this most recent encounter. The view that organizations are simply patterns of local interactions points to a view of power where:

Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another: it is a structural characteristic of human relationships – of all human relationships (Elias, 1970: 74).

This resonates strongly as I reflect on how I experienced the shifting relationship with Marcus, as well as interactions with the HR team and with the participants in the programme. If power emerges in relationships, then the changing dynamic between Marcus and me starts to make more sense. This may also provide insight into my own behaviour, as I wonder how it is that I find myself repeatedly accepting rules in a rather unquestioning way.

A refugee from Nazi Germany, Elias came to the UK in 1939 and worked as a professor at the University of Leicester. His focus, on issues of the individual and society, and on how people are included and excluded, has important significance for the study of organizations, and particularly regarding his views on how patterns of power emerge in the relationships between people working together.

Elias focuses on the interdependence of people as they come together in groupings where power relations are continually shifting, calling these ‘figurations’, and explains that:

Balances of power are always present wherever there is functional interdependence between people (Elias, 1970: 74).

He gives as an example the relationship between a parent and their baby, different from the classic view that it is the parent who has the power in the relationship, stating that the baby also has power, to the extent that the parents value their child and are dependent on it, for example, for their well-being, love, or social position. Elias’s key insight that has helped me to understand the dynamic in the situations in which I find myself is this: the power balance shifts according to who needs whom more. This situates power in the balance of the relationships, which are in turn a function of the social situation, not a function of the person or their position in an organization or in society. Interdependence is emphasized: to the extent that I am dependent on you, you have power over me; but that can and does change so that the power relations or figurations are constantly shifting. As Elias states:

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 more to the other's demands? In more general terms, who has the higher power ratio? (ibid: 79).

Elias writes extensively about the 'game', by which he means the figurations of ever-growing numbers of interdependent people working together. Bringing together his views on power and the game illuminates my experience regarding the rules-of-the-game in the narrative to which I now return as I re-visit my interactions with Marcus.

I reflect on the years I have known Marcus, and how our power relations have shifted. The first time we met, I was responsible for LD at MIDCO and about to launch a series of programmes which I had hired LDO to develop and deliver. I travelled with him to different global locations as part of the roll-out. I was usually the one who kicked off the first day, introducing the senior leader from the company who gave the first words of welcome, then introducing Marcus in his role of lead facilitator, and generally being around to engage with the participants and the faculty throughout the five days. I was very clearly the one in charge.

I was not paying attention to the dynamics that I am now acutely aware of, namely the power relations and the following of rules in our relationship. As the corporate leader responsible for hiring his firm, I imagine that Marcus was aware of the potential for me to withhold what he wanted, namely continuing the lucrative contract to run these programmes for the company. At the same time, I was delighted with the work he did, and was feeling my own dependence on him. Throughout this time, whether because the power balance was tilted in my direction, or because I was still focused on my own role in the situation and had not really considered the social aspect, I was simply not paying attention to this dynamic.

Having left the corporation and begun working as an independent consultant, I reached out to Marcus and asked if he would like to meet. This time he was the potential employer, and I was seeking something that he could offer or withhold – a contract to work with LDO - so the power balance had shifted. A gesture that I barely noticed at the time, but now recollect, is that after our pleasant conversation in a tea-house, he paid the

bill. In the past, despite the gender stereotype, it would always have been me who would have paid. The figurations are wider than just Marcus and I: they encompass gender and role as well as two individuals.

I was surprised at how quickly the idea of working with LDO on the GLOCO contract came up. Just a few weeks after the initial meeting over tea, Marcus invited me to his office to discuss the GLOCO programme and I was offered the first try-out, the story of which forms the narrative which opened this project.

What I did not see at the time was the following: while the balance of power had shifted, and I now needed LDO more than before, more than they needed me, this was not a binary shift. In the delicate balance of interdependence, I was an important element in LDO's future working with GLOCO. Marcus needed someone to whom he could hand over the programmes, so that he could focus on other clients, and he was not finding it easy to hire someone. Over tea he had shared how another facilitator had been invited to 'try-out' for GLOCO but had not been successful. Later, after the events described in my narrative, he told me that her score was also in the high 3s, but that unlike with me, the team had not wanted to give her a second chance. The practical judgment⁴ they applied in her case was to follow the rule, not to overturn it; but with me, due to the complex interplay of circumstances, the 3.6 score did not deter Marcus and LDO from continuing to explore the possibility of working together.

I see how the rules-of- the-game were being played, but there were many other interdependencies which existed in the situation. I had not noticed these before, and my more recent awareness has come about as a result of inputs both from the literature and from others in my learning set whose ability to provide a different perspective has opened

⁴ I take practical judgment to mean expertise about how to act in particular situations. It is in this way that I will be using the term throughout my thesis. Stacey defines it as 'the experience-based ability to notice more of what is going on and intuit what is most important about a situation' (Stacey, 2012: 108).

up new ways of understanding. Following these I now consider how the rules-of-the-game were put aside in an act of practical judgment on Marcus' part, something I had not seen as an option, acting from my perceived 'powerless' position and my sense that the rules would be followed without question. This raises important questions about the use of the evaluation forms and their significance, questions which I will come back to later in this thesis.

Regarding my excessive concern with my score, I believe it was important to me not only in order to be accepted onto the faculty of the programme, but also in a deeper sense, as a reflection of my worth and recognition as a professional. I am beginning to see how recognition is a fundamental need of mine that has been largely met by following the rules: this behaviour of conforming has served me well in the past. As I take on my new role as a consultant, this behaviour may not be so beneficial to me and perhaps that is why I begin to challenge the rules, as I did by speaking up in the programme and by looking at the forms. This idea of following or not following the rules is related to power and recognition, as I will continue to explore in the next project.

3.9 Conclusion

The narrative and reflections presented in this project have uncovered assumptions related to the 'rules-of-the-game'. In one such example, namely that a facilitator must receive a 4.0 score in order to be deemed good enough to continue, I identify connections to classic theories of organizations related to behaviourism, power and leadership, which, as I have suggested, do not provide adequate explanations for what I am experiencing. I have struggled with the question of why LD professionals continue to evaluate programmes with these 'smile sheets' despite a widely accepted view that their value may be limited.

Part of the answer seems to lie in the 'busyness' of organizational life, a busyness that I both accepted and advocated as a leader. The pressure was to do more, faster, and the 'KISS' acronym (to Keep It Simple, Stupid) permeated our daily life. I look back and see

following the rules as shorthand for this. Setting arbitrary standards like the 4.0 is an example of a rational and linear model, implying that only if the score is 4.0 and above can the programme be determined to have been successful. Like the rule of the 4.0, the playbooks, checklists and roadmaps were all part of an attempt to contain the irrational, to manage anxiety and complexity, and to give a sense of predictability and control. We were all ‘playing the game’ as we surely knew that this was just an illusion, but in a complicit and unspoken agreement, this was the way we did things.

In my corporate roles I attached great importance to evaluation scores, using them as a quick and easy way to select people, never really questioning the value or ethics of the process. Now, as a consultant, especially when I did not meet the standard, I find myself questioning the process for the first time. Anxiously awaiting my own score, unable to wait to see the forms, I view it as an important measure of my worth and the key to being recognized.

Rather than considering the use of these forms and the 4.0 threshold as a rule, I propose that the evaluation forms and scores can be viewed as generalizations, the meaning of which emerges in the way we particularize them (Stacey, 2012). This is another way of understanding what happened in my narrative, when the outcome (the 3.6) did not fit Marcus and GLOCO’s aspirations in this context, they decided not to act on the rule, but to do something different, as described by Taylor:

There is a crucial phronetic gap between the formula and its enactment (Taylor, 1995a: 177).

The term ‘phronetic’ comes from Aristotle’s phronesis (Aristotle, 2009: 105-7), meaning practical wisdom or judgment, introduced in Project 1 (p.24). Taylor indicates how, in the gap between the rule and the way we actually act, practical judgment is applied. This is what I experienced Marcus doing in my narrative when he did not simply follow the rule, but made a different and practical judgment, to proceed with me as a facilitator despite the low score.

Taylor goes on to develop an argument that rules and practice are continually evolving in a reciprocal process: my practice is influenced by my understanding and interpretation of the rule, and the rule is in turn influenced by my practice and how it evolved. Taylor emphasizes the way in which habitus represents the body of our understanding as to how to interpret and follow rules in a social context:

Express rules can only function in our lives along with an inarticulate sense encoded in the body. It is this habitus that ‘activates’ the rules (Taylor, 1995a: 180).

Recalling the events described in my narrative, it felt as if I was indeed following the rules out of an innate sense of the need to do so, as if they were ‘encoded’ in my being. My position, which is slightly different from Taylor’s, is that I do not refer to a specific rule being activated by habitus, but to the very nature of being compliant, or rule-abiding: I have pointed out my tendency to follow the rules in any game, including painting by numbers as a child, and see now how in doing this I am seeking recognition for being a knowledgeable professional, and for one who follows rules.

As part of the process of taking my experience seriously, I have started to question assumptions, which until now were so taken for granted that they were unnoticed. I am learning to take a step back, slow down, and pay closer attention to what is happening around me, seeking to follow Dewey’s position (1997) that being able to think means holding onto doubt while carrying out inquiry.

In this project I have focused on the rules and power elements of my research question, *‘How is the connection between rules, power and recognition shifting, as I move from an internal leadership position to one of an external consultant?’* In my next project I will be exploring the theme of recognition, noticing that moving from a leadership role in a global corporation, with the inherent recognition afforded to me by virtue of my position, I now face situations in which recognition is no longer automatic. I will explore how my strong need for positive recognition, affirmation and confirmation of my value as a professional, has been and remains a key driver in my practice, leading me to act in ways

that I believe will bring me the recognition I seek. I see how I attach critical importance to the feedback I receive from others, as demonstrated by the case of the evaluation forms in my narrative, and am reminded of other circumstances in which this has occurred.

4 Project 3: A Shifting View of Recognition in a Time of Career Transition

4.1 Introduction

In this project I will look at how I am coming to understand recognition, sharing two narratives related to my work transition. I will try to shed light on the emerging issues by situating my thinking about them in various theoretical approaches. It is only recently that I have paid attention to how recognition serves as a ‘vital human need’ (Taylor 1995b: 26). While holding a leadership position in a global company, I experienced what felt like recognition in my daily interactions with others, and took this for granted until, in my perception, it was no longer there. The words of the Joni Mitchell song come to mind: *‘Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone....’*

I am starting to see how my perspective on recognition implies that it is something that is provided to me by others, and how I depend on this in order to feel valued. I will inquire into this idea, as I explore what recognition means to me, noting how I reify the term and grant it such significance. How and why does this ‘vital human need’ take on such a central role in my life and work, particularly at this time of transition?

4.2 Background to Leaving a Corporate Leadership Position

The decision to leave my HR position at MIDCO and become an independent consultant can be viewed as part of the social trend described in the article, ‘The Rise of the SuperTemp’ (Miller & Miller, 2012). The authors use the term ‘supertemp’ to describe someone who has left a senior corporate role to take on work in a similar field on a freelance, or independent consulting basis, often working less than full-time:

Most supertemps are refugees from big corporations and law and consulting firms who value the autonomy and flexibility of temporary or project-based work and find that the compensation is comparable to what they earned in full-time jobs -

sometimes even better. They leave behind the endless internal meetings and corporate politics (Miller & Miller, 2012: 51).

The authors describe the following themes related to an internal to external transition:

1. A shift from the full-time 'total' commitment explicitly expected of a corporate executive, the 'ethic of ceaseless work' (Jackall, 2010: 7) and a move to something that sounds much more attractive: taking on work in a flexible way with the choice of saying 'yes' or 'no' to projects, enabling greater integration with other elements of one's life.
2. An escape from what is often an oppressive corporate environment. Jackall, describing the world of corporate managers, refers to the 'morality of the corporation', where 'what is right... is what the guy above you wants from you' (Jackall, 2010: 4). Andre Spicer describes days filled with endless meetings, featuring what he describes as 'management bullshit', meaning empty and cliché-laden conversation (Spicer, 2013: 657). The use of the term 'refugees' is poignant, comparing the escape from big corporations to fleeing an oppressive political regime. As when a refugee becomes stateless, leaving an organization after so long brings about an associated loss of identity.
3. An ability to earn the same or even more in a consulting or project-based role.

This trend can be considered an employee-led reaction to the movement in the nineties where the implicit 'psychological contract' promising long-term reciprocal loyalty was breached. Whereas previous generations assumed, and often experienced, lifelong employment with one employer (with the end of that employment ritualized in the form of a watch and a handshake on retirement), my generation has experienced the dismantling of any such ties and their evolution into short-term, somewhat precarious commitments.

This phenomenon has been explored by many, including Robinson & Rousseau (1994) in 'Violating the psychological contract: Not the exception but the norm', and by Daniel Pink, who described these independent consultants as 'free agents', explaining that:

Free agency is often the result of downsizing. Others have leaped. (Pink, 1998: 19).

Today's 'supertemps', competent and confident executives, understanding the 'at will' nature of their employment ties, make the decision to leap, pre-empting the next round of downsizing, seeking a more satisfying work-life balance. In doing so they are attracted to the idealized picture painted in articles such as Miller and Miller's, or the book, 'Jumping the Job Track: security, satisfaction and success as an independent consultant', describing 'a large, independent workforce...rising from the ashes of corporate downsizing', (Brown, 1994: xiii).

Many of the reactions to my leaving MIDCO were ones of envy: 'You are so lucky!' was a common reaction, followed by 'You are so brave'. It seems that voluntarily breaking the permanent connection with corporate life is something that is both desired and feared at the same time. My transition heralded feelings of excitement on the one hand, of a new career as a consultant, and at the same time emotions of fear and loss, related to the end of a long period as an employee of a company, a process which can be likened to a grieving of sorts, as articulated by the late Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, an expert on the grieving process (1982).

Despite making the decision myself, and leaving on very positive terms, the transition has not been easy, and has raised issues with which I am wrestling. I am exploring these through my studies, as indicated in the formulation of my research question regarding power and recognition. In the initial period since leaving I sometimes experienced a feeling of being 'invisible'. I will explore this feeling, drawing on Axel Honneth, professor of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt in Germany and at Columbia University in New York. In 'Invisibility: on the Epistemology of "Recognition"' (2001), Honneth describes the feeling of being invisible when one is not recognized, and this strongly resonates for me as I reflect on some of my early experiences as a consultant.

4.3 Experiencing Invisibility on the Cusp of a Major Transition

In the following narratives I share experiences that occurred around the time of leaving: the first on my very last day as a MIDCO employee, and the second shortly afterwards.

4.3.1 Last Day at Work

I wake up with a combination of excitement and dread. I started my career with MIDCO sixteen years ago, and despite moving around the world and holding different global roles, this local office has always felt like ‘home’. I get ready to go in for the last time, to carry out the leaving day formalities, carefully selecting a smarter-than-usual outfit to wear. No-one has said anything, but I am sure that there will be some kind of a leaving party, a small gesture to say goodbye and good luck on behalf of an organization I have supported for so long.

I walk around the office, feeling like a stranger. Many colleagues from the early days have since left the company. I remember with nostalgia the days when I was the local HR Director and knew every employee personally. Walking around the offices back then involved stopping every few seconds to greet and chat to someone. I used to feel so much a part of this organization. Today feels very different: I feel like an outsider already. I realize that I am already mentally moving on, into a new position as a consultant, no longer a member of this place, and yet I want to hang on to that feeling of being a part of it, of belonging, for a little while longer.

I walk along the corridors, office doors open on each side, and I glance into them. People are going about their business, busy as always, and I appear to be unnoticed, ignored. If anyone does glance up and see me, there is no connection other than a polite smile, the kind one grants to a harmless stranger.

Occasionally I see someone with whom I worked in the past. The loyal cleaner, whom I hired so many years ago, still works here, and when she sees me, she smiles happily and hugs me warmly. ‘Today is my last day at MIDCO’, I tell her, after chatting briefly about her health and her family. I go from office to office, meeting people whom I barely

know, who ask me for various pieces of documentation. There is a line item: ‘Company laptop returned?’ The young IT manager checks the item, places a tick in the box, and hands me back the form, sending me on my way to the next official. The car fleet manager escorts me down to the office garage, checks my company car, and confirms that I have returned it in good condition. I feel anonymous, a number on a list. I want to tell the people I meet, ‘You know, I was one of the first managers in this company’, but then I realize that it is completely irrelevant.

I wonder about these company procedures, which I had a part in forming so many years ago, procedures related to the formalities of taking on an employee and then parting from him or her on their last day. On paper these seemed like such basic, routine processes: allocating someone a laptop, taking their photograph and issuing them with a company identity badge, providing them with a company car. And then on the last day, following the list of inventory and ensuring that every last item is returned. It is only now, when I am on the receiving end, that I experience just how cold and dehumanizing these exit procedures feel.

Despite sensing a complete lack of interest in my leaving day from those I meet, I still find myself wondering about the party and when it will start. I peek into the office cafeteria, half-expecting to see tables laid with coffee and cake, and employees gathered to say goodbye. I am conscious of a ‘rule-of-the-game’ in the organization, a norm that has developed over time: when someone leaves, even after a short period, they have a farewell party. I have been on the organizing side so many times, and did wonder who would organize my leaving party. It was not obvious, because my link to this home office was somewhat unusual. While remaining part of the organization, it was only for administrative purposes. Most of my work took place overseas, and I reported to people who were not part of this home office. It occurred to me that my last day at the company might simply not be noticed by people for whom I am largely a visitor, rather than a regular member of staff. Yet, I told myself, surely someone who has been in the company for sixteen years will not leave without a party?

I look back now and realize that the entire conversation about my expectations and hopes regarding the leaving party was a silent, internal one. I did not communicate my desire to say goodbye, and somehow expected others (the current HR Director, the few members of the organization who knew me from the ‘old days’?) to realize what was happening and to plan a farewell event. As I complete the exit procedures, I run into some members of the leadership team on a break from a meeting. Anna, the HR director, sees me and gives me a hug. She knows it is my last day. As we hug I realize, finally, definitely, that there is no farewell event planned. Her hug is warm but there is no sense of occasion about the moment. I feel sad and disappointed as Anna hurries back into her meeting, looking back at me with a somewhat puzzled expression on her face.

I finish all the formalities and look around, wondering if I am really going to leave just like that, without a proper goodbye. The page with my carefully-worded farewell speech weighs heavily in my pocket, and I clench my fist around it, crumpling the piece of paper with a feeling of embarrassment and frustration. I am embarrassed, primarily by my need, which suddenly feels like a childish weakness, to have my leaving acknowledged with a traditional farewell party. I am also frustrated and disappointed by what feels like a lack of consideration from my colleagues, and yet at the same time I chastise myself and wonder why I think they should have been ‘mind-readers’ and known what I wanted to happen. Looking back, I remember that I felt much more embarrassed than angry. I think that even in the moment of disappointment, there was a sense that perhaps my expectations were misplaced. I was no longer really a part of this home organization, and the fact that my leaving had ‘fallen between the cracks’ was probably quite innocent and unintended, yet I am humiliated by the lack of recognition that I was expecting, and so disappointed that I will not now have the chance to make my little farewell speech. The words I wanted to say aloud are stuck inside me, a speech without an audience. I wanted to acknowledge and recognize my colleagues and the organization for the work they do. I wanted to talk of my pride in the company’s mission, and to reflect on the amazing career opportunities I have had. Above all, I wanted to thank my good friends and colleagues for their support over the years. I was not planning to talk about the less

positive parts of my time there, and looking back am aware of how, in leaving, we create the story that we want to be our legacy.

I get into the taxi and leave the office for the last time. I feel invisible, discarded, unrecognized. My eyes fill with tears as we drive away. Later that day Anna sends me a text message. ‘Are you OK?’ she writes. ‘You looked upset at the office before’. She had clearly seen something in my unspoken reaction. I am not ready to share my feeling of loss and humiliation, and so simply reply, ‘All fine. Thanks again for all your support these last few months. Talk soon’. I am not ready to discuss what happened and how I feel about it.

4.3.2 Postscript – Six Months Later

I am feeling stronger, enjoying my new life, enjoying the freedom. Anna and I had agreed to keep in touch, and we have. Today we are out for lunch at a local cafe. I am happy to see her, and we chat for an hour. I am hesitant to bring up the subject of my leaving day; it feels ungrateful and over-critical for me to raise the issue after so long. Suddenly I decide to say something, remembering Anna’s text message to me from that evening. I remind Anna of her question to me, about looking upset on the day I left. I finally feel able to share with her what I was feeling, about the missed opportunity to say goodbye. I tell her briefly what I was feeling then, and how it might explain what she saw on my face. Her eyes open wide, pink colour floods her cheeks, she starts to say something, but stops. She seems surprised and embarrassed. Eventually she tells me that it had not occurred to her that I had any expectation from the local office to mark my leaving in that way. She had expected that any farewells would take place overseas, with the colleagues with whom I had more frequent contact. ‘What?’ she asks, ‘You didn’t have a leaving party in the States?’ ‘No’, I admit. ‘Nothing’.

Talking about what happened over lunch with Anna finally brought my private conversation out into the open. As we discussed the events, I became more aware of my role in creating them, and my assumptions about intentions were challenged. It was a

relief and a somewhat cathartic moment. Looking back, I reflect on how my response to her question about how I was feeling six months earlier (saying nothing was wrong) was perhaps my way of taking the moral high ground and inviting her to feel bad. With the passing of time, I felt less needy and therefore more able to express my feelings.

4.3.3 Interim Reflections – between Narratives 1 and 2

Reflecting on these leaving day events, I experienced emotions of ‘grieving’, related to leaving long-term employment. The descriptions in ‘The Rise of the SuperTemp’ (Miller & Miller, 2012) gloss over any such emotions in a way that I find too simplistic and idealistic, providing a fantasy of a different way of working which has only advantages and no drawbacks. I turn largely to Axel Honneth, introduced briefly above, for his insights into the significance of recognition because I find his explanations both compelling and relevant to my inquiry. For example, in beginning to unravel the events described above from my leaving day, and before attempting to formalize a conceptualization of recognition, I can relate to the way he describes feelings of shame. When the farewell party did not occur, my emotion was primarily one of shame and humiliation. Honneth sheds the following light on this:

The emotional content of shame consists, to begin with, in a kind of lowering of one’s own feeling of self-worth. Ashamed of oneself as a result of having one’s action rejected, one experiences oneself as being of lower social value than one had previously assumed (Honneth, 1995: 137-138)

I find that this fits well with my experience. I had an intention for an action to take place, and when it did not occur, I felt all of the emotions described above. When my leaving was not acknowledged with the expected ritual of a party and a speech, this led to my feeling of misrecognition and disrespect, as I will explore throughout this project, pointing to my centred and individualist view of the events. Before doing so, I will share a second narrative, this time a short ‘vignette’, describing events which occurred a few months after I made the transition to external consultant. There are many links to the

previous narrative, including the centred way in which I interpreted events at the time, and the intentions I assumed in others.

4.3.4 No Reply

As an executive, I was used to having e-mails acknowledged. This made me feel highly visible: my executive status was reinforced on a daily basis by people who responded to me, not necessarily because they wanted to, but because the reality of corporate life dictated that this was what needed to be done. Reflecting on this, I return to Jackall, who describes how corporate reality is like a ‘patrimonial bureaucracy’, similar to courts of old, where:

One survives and flourishes by currying favor with powerful officials up the line who stand close to the ruler (Jackall, 2010: 11).

Once I was no longer a part of this structure I noticed two big changes. Firstly, the volume of e-mails decreased drastically. This was largely a good thing, although I did find myself pressing the ‘refresh’ button on a regular basis, just to check that ‘only’ twenty e-mails a day had really come through. The second change was less welcome: I found myself sending e-mails and not receiving a response. This happened a few times during my first year as an independent consultant. One particular example was with a personal acquaintance who holds a senior position at a global hi-tech company, NEWTECH. Sarah and I had met and discussed some consulting work that she wanted me to undertake. We had agreed to arrange a meeting, but my follow-up e-mails to her did not receive any response.

After several months I received a call from the company, not from Sarah herself, but from a junior member of Sarah’s team, two levels below Sarah, who wanted to discuss the project with me. We have since signed a contract for me to facilitate one of the

company's senior leadership development programmes.⁵ I am pleased about the opportunity to work with the company, yet puzzled by the complete lack of contact from Sarah herself. I find myself looking at the situation from my centred position, and try to pull myself away from that place, to reflect on what has happened. I consider the different perspectives which might explain what Sarah is doing, such as simply delegating to a junior colleague, letting her handle the discussions with an external consultant. As I enter into silent conversations with myself, exploring her intentions and assumptions about our shifting relationship, I feel rejected, ignored.

4.3.5 Some Interim Reflections on Narrative 2

I return to power relations, and to Elias' idea that the balance of power is constantly changing according to who needs whom more (Elias, 1970: 79). As a new consultant, I need this project and am aware of Sarah's power over me: the power to grant the project to me, or not. But another insight is that it is not the project that she is withholding; it is her time and personal involvement. She sends her junior colleague to work with me on the project, and this evokes a response in me, an example of Mead's conversation of gestures: a social responsive process where meaning arises in the responsive interaction between Sarah and me (Mead, 1934: 80). Her gesture and my response cannot be separated, they can only be understood together. Equally, my response (feeling hurt, invisible, disrespected) is part of my silent conversation with myself, not just in response to her gesture of not responding to my e-mail, but to my whole life history, including all of my experiences of interacting with others.

I wonder about the connection to rules and norms, and how, in not responding to my e-mails, I perceive that Sarah is breaking a convention of basic manners. She and I were

⁵ The narrative in Project 4 describes my experience at this programme.

acquaintances and had a personal relationship before the possibility of work at her company arose. I struggle to understand why she does not follow the social norm of acknowledging and responding to my note. Referring back to my first project, I recall how important following the rules and confirming to norms has been to me. I reflect on how I see responding to others' e-mails as a norm to follow.

Reflecting back on this event, I am conscious of how focused I am on myself in the story as I recount it. My tendency to judge Sarah is based on my own assumptions about the 'right' thing to do, the 'rules to follow' in this case, without considering that she may have a different understanding of this. I note how concerned I was with my feeling of being invisible and unrecognized, without really exploring the complex responsive processes of relating which I am beginning to notice.

4.3.6 The Significance of the Narratives – Pointing to a Wider Social Phenomenon

I believe these narratives illustrate the strong emotions which may be experienced at the time of a career transition. This is an example of how I have drawn on the guidance of Svend Brinkmann, professor at the University of Aalborg, Denmark, about inquiring into everyday life:

As you live your life, you stumble upon a problem or a situation that surprises you or makes you worry.....such situations are often very useful..... not just.... to get a clearer view of what surprised or worried you, but which may also throw light on larger social issues.... (Brinkmann, 2012: 3).

The social issue I draw attention to here is the now-common outsourcing of work, discussed through the 'supertemp' phenomenon. I share these narratives with an intention for the reader to invite themselves in, to see if there is value in my experience that others can learn from. Referencing Mowles (2015: 13) on generalizability, the issue is not to prove something scientifically, but to share experiences that 'trigger recognition in the reader'. By situating my own experiences within a wider social phenomenon, I am

following the pragmatic tradition which focuses first and foremost on experience. As described by Martela, drawing on the key pragmatists, Dewey, James and Peirce:

Experience is taken as primary; as human beings we can never escape our embeddedness within the world of experiencing into which we are thrown as actors (Martela, 2015: 539).

4.4 Introduction to the Concept of Recognition

Recognition is a topic of interest in social and political theory, as well as for those concerned with organizational issues (notably Darwall, 1977; Fraser, 1997; Honneth, 1995; Ricoeur, 2005; Taylor, 1995b). In this project I will discuss recognition, reflecting on my narratives and considering it from the perspectives of these and other authors and approaches.

My experience in both narratives above is of feeling ignored and invisible, as I will go on to explain, referencing Honneth (2001). Feeling invisible is a new experience for me, after being so used to being 'seen', and this has implications for how I perceive my identity, particularly in the early stages of transition. I introduced the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating in Project 1, and explored it more deeply in Project 2, to explain how I am beginning to understand recognition as a thoroughly social process. In this project I compare and contrast this perspective with other views, before formulating my argument and explaining how my understanding is shifting through my research. I will also discuss how this helps me make sense of and shed different light on events.

The work of Ricoeur, (2005), Stacey, (2011a) and others follows the Hegelian view that recognition is a social process, emerging in social relations. Another person's recognition of me contributes to my identity by reflecting back to me a certain view of myself, so I may believe that I am a worthy and respected individual and professional.

This self-perception, however, will be maintained only for as long as those around me confirm it; I recognize myself in the recognition of others.

Explaining the social process outlined by Hegel, Stacey describes:

... the interaction of human persons in what I would call responsive processes of struggling for mutual recognition as participants (Stacey, 2010: 298).

The key point here, and one which is starting to cause a shift in my understanding, comes from the word 'mutual'. Whereas, as I indicated in the introduction to this project, I had been thinking about recognition as something that someone grants to me, this way of thinking about it places it at the heart not just of a social, but of a mutual process. By emphasizing the mutuality of recognition, I am pointing to the process whereby I am both recognized and recognizing, all in the same act.

In terms of the social process, what I am paying more attention to is the ordinary, everyday, social interactions of people, thinking about these from within 'interaction in terms of participative self-organization', (Griffin, 2002: 18). This is a key element of the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, drawing attention to the idea that there is not a social 'out there', into which I act, or from which things happen to me, but rather, paraphrasing Elias (1991: 25), the social forms us at the same time as we form it.

This is a shift from mainstream managerialist and realist thinking, which tends to reify the organization and attribute intent to 'it'. The complex responsive processes perspective professes that we both form, and are formed by social life at the same time, in a dynamic, ever-changing manner. As I consider this different way of understanding the complexity of everyday interactions at work, I am focusing my inquiry on the 'living present' (Griffin, 2002: 169, drawing on Husserl, Mead and Stacey). The term 'living present' points to the way in which the present is not a given, or a moment in time between a fixed past and an as-yet unknown future: it is continually being formed by actors, who are in turn formed by it. Our interactions in the living present, as well as our expectations of the future, construct the future and change how we interpret the past, while our past continually forms our experience of the present.

I find this new way of understanding challenges my former attempts to attribute a higher-level plan, or to predict and control events. As an example of this, my sadness when there was no leaving party for me, or my feeling that Sarah was ‘ignoring’ my e-mail, could be viewed as a part of the complex local interactions that occur without one overarching design. Each of us has our own intentions, and as we act into the web of everyone else’s intentions, the outcome is unpredictable.

I have previously focused on myself as the object of others’ positive or negative intent towards me (a centred view), not seeing that I am simply one actor in a myriad of micro-interactions continually occurring. I could not know the background to their actions, yet attributed various intentions which then triggered my emotions of feeling disrespected and ignored. Perhaps a more helpful way to view the events described in my narratives would be as a chain of gestures and responses over time, where I am both the subject and object of the interactions, forming them even as they form me. This necessarily causes me to see how I co-created the events on my leaving day, rather than continuing to believe that someone ‘did’ something to me. My experience of being ignored was co-created in the gestures and responses of the situation, without anyone explicitly intending to ignore me. This is an example of how I am shifting from an individualist to a social understanding as I pay more attention to the complexity of human relating.

Before coming back to my own argument, and how it draws on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, I will now explore some of the key literature on recognition, identifying the dominant modes of thinking they represent and linking these to my narratives, where the lack of recognition that I felt caused me to doubt my value and identity.

4.5 The Struggle for Recognition

Both Honneth (1995) and Taylor (1995b) take up the idea of a ‘struggle’ for recognition, waged by minority groups throughout history, for example, blacks, women, nationalist groups, and others. This is the way that Charles Taylor presents the concept in ‘The

Politics of Recognition’, distinguishing between ‘dignity’, by which he means the right to equal treatment as part of a democracy, and ‘honour’, which is bestowed on those considered worthy of it by society, (Taylor, 1995b: 26-27).

Taylor has a particular interest in the former kind of recognition, describing it as a key driver behind political nationalist struggles, such as those of the French-speaking minority, the ‘Quebecois’, in his native Canada. In the same article, Taylor goes on to describe dignity as respect, and honour as esteem. The political view of recognition, most often discussed in the context of multiculturalism, is also taken up by Nancy Fraser (1997), the American critical theorist who focuses on justice and ‘redistribution’, the economic outcome of recognition.

In researching recognition, and while focusing on Honneth and Laitinen (2002), the work of the 20th century French philosopher, Paul Ricœur cannot be ignored. His book, ‘The Course of Recognition’ (2005), presents a major exposition on this topic. In it Ricœur first takes a lexicographical view of the terms, presenting multiple ways of conceptualizing what is meant by ‘recognition’, eventually focusing on three key areas: recognition as identification, recognizing oneself, and mutual recognition.

Until recently, I have been thinking about recognition solely in the way that Darwall (1977) conceptualizes it, as ‘appraisal respect’, distinguishing it from ‘recognition respect’. The former resembles esteem, in that particular properties of a person are valued, whereas the latter refers to the human dignity of which everyone is deemed worthy. Ricœur, drawing extensively on Honneth, Taylor and Hegel, makes the same connection, namely that recognition is something ‘whose benefit is an increase in self-esteem’ (Ricoeur, 2005: 216). Like Taylor and Darwall, Honneth presents different levels of recognition, with self-esteem as the highest of these, reflecting the way in which a person is recognized for their unique value and achievements. This is the way I have always understood the term recognition, and the way I experienced it in my narratives: linked to self-esteem and one’s personal sense of honour and pride in one’s abilities, achievements and status or worth. Reflecting on my narrative in Project 2, and the way

in which I took the score I received on the leadership programme as an indication of my value or esteem, I clearly saw recognition in this way.

The question is where does this sense come from? To a large extent, my self-esteem is based on the affirmation I receive (or fail to receive) from others, and I agree with Fleming and Finnegan who argue that:

.... in order for humans to achieve a productive relationship with themselves... humans require an intersubjective recognition of their abilities and achievements (Fleming & Finnegan, 2010: 2).

This feels familiar: someone recognizes and affirms me, thus enhancing my sense of self-worth. Reflecting on the discourse of HR practitioners, the ‘thought-collective’ (Fleck, 1979: 60) to which I have belonged for so long, this is the way we have conceptualized recognition and understood its connection to self-esteem and identity. These are formed by the appraisal received from another, in other words in a traditional, individualist and cognitivist manner. So whereas recognition occurs in a social context, I have viewed this as an event in time, occurring between a few (often just two) actors in a giving and receiving mode of recognition, a process echoing the ‘sender-receiver’ model of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), where an objective ‘thing’ is passed from one to another. This accurately describes my initial understanding of the narrative in Project 2, where I viewed the score as reflecting the recognition the participants gave me in a highly simplistic way. It is part of my learning to see how I am moving on from this way of making sense of events and starting to see recognition, or misrecognition, as happening constantly in everyday exchanges between large groups of people.

4.6 Linking Recognition to Early Childhood Experience

In researching the question posed above (what is the origin of my self-esteem?), I turn again to Honneth’s ‘The Struggle for Recognition’, where the argument is made that our earliest childhood experiences play a critical role in establishing the basis for how we

come to experience recognition later in life. Three distinct types of relationship with oneself are explored: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (Honneth, 1995: xii). In Honneth's view it is the first of these, self-confidence, which has a strong link to our earliest experiences in life. Having a secure childhood, where one's identity develops following the successful progression through normative development phases (Erikson, 1980), includes building the basic self-confidence that results from:

The underlying capacity to express needs and desires without fear of being abandoned as a result (Honneth, 1995: xiii).

Exploring these ideas brings into question the position, presented earlier, of the social forming us at the same time as we are forming the social. Does early childhood have a unique role in forming us, or is this phase simply one of a lifelong series of experiences constantly shaping our identity? Early childhood features extensively, not only in theories focusing on developmental psychology, but also in those whose orientation is more towards the social, such as Mead, who discusses this critical phase extensively, noting for example that:

It is important to recognize how entirely social the mechanism of young children's reflective conduct is.... One should not, however, assume that these social attitudes of the child imply the existence in his conduct of the full personalities of those whose attitudes he is taking. On the contrary, the full personality with which he finds himself ultimately endowed and which he finds in others is the combination of the self and others (Mead 1934: 376).

Honneth draws on the work of Donald Winnicott (1965), the British paediatrician and psychoanalyst, who formulated the theory of object relations and of the 'true self', a term referring to an individual's sense of being real, or authentic, as opposed to hiding behind a façade in accordance with society's expectations. Winnicott emphasizes the role of parents, and particularly mothers, in allowing a child to develop healthy self-confidence. A child who learns that it can express its needs and desires and be accepted unconditionally becomes comfortable in revealing its 'true self' rather than needing to

adopt behaviours that will be approved of in order to win favour and acceptance. The American psychologist, Carl Rogers, the founder of the humanistic movement in psychology, describes this as ‘unconditional positive regard’, and argues that it is a critical element in the relationship between therapist and client (Rogers, 1957: 98). The meaning of the term ‘unconditional positive regard’ is that there are no pre-conditions for acceptance; there is no implied message of ‘I accept you *as long as you behave in a certain way*’.

I find Rogers’ term to be highly applicable to Winnicott’s ideas on early childhood and suggest that ‘unconditional positive regard’ is also what Honneth is talking about as part of the development of a healthy basic self-confidence, a pre-requirement for the development of both self-respect and self-esteem. Similar ideas are taken up in Bowlby’s theory of attachment (1969), which explores the way in which a baby develops basic trust in the world through attachment with a primary caregiver.

As outlined above, I am particularly interested in Honneth’s conceptualization of ‘self-esteem’ as, reflecting on my narratives, I see how focused I am on self-esteem, and this leads me, following Honneth’s logic about the necessary pre-conditions for self-esteem, to wonder about basic self-confidence. Could it be something related to early childhood and the normative development, or lack thereof, of basic self-confidence that causes me to attach such significance to recognition in the form of validation from others? In general, if something goes wrong in a child’s basic and primary connection, does that set a pattern of seeking external validation at a later stage in life? To put it another way, could it be that my lifelong need for recognition is related in some way to deficits in the development of early and basic self-confidence in my childhood?

As already suggested, following Honneth, the process of recognition begins in earliest childhood, but even for well-established adults, there is a sense that it is ‘always with the child remaining in the adult too’ (West, Fleming & Finnegan, 2013: 131). For example, remembering the description of my rule-based childhood and the ‘painting by numbers’ activity from my first project, reminds me of growing up in an environment where

acceptance was a function of toeing the line and behaving in a way that conformed to the norms of our culture. I do therefore see a link between this and the need for constant reassurance and recognition, as evidenced by my narratives in both this and my previous projects.

This offers one possible answer to the question that I posed above, drawing on the humanistic school of thought which emphasizes a core true self waiting to be uncovered. It also focuses on the role of emotions, understanding recognition in largely individualist and psychoanalytical terms, focusing on the self and how it is enhanced by others' affirmation. This is in contrast with the view that the self is co-created in a purely social context, as understood by the perspective of complex responsive processes. I do not believe that Honneth's views can fully explain the events that I have been describing in my narrative, but at the same time, I do find that certain elements of his work shed some light on the puzzlement I encountered, as I continue to explore below, turning to the concept of invisibility.

4.7 Recognition and Disrespect - Axel Honneth on Invisibility

The idea of 'invisibility' in the social sense is described by Honneth (2001), linking it to his concept of recognition and disrespect described in an earlier article (Honneth, 1992). I draw on this concept particularly noting how Honneth's work on recognition builds on Hegel and Mead's ideas about the social nature of this process, outlining how recognition is granted and received in an inter-subjective context, and has a critical role in forming one's identity. As he explains:

...human individuation is a process in which the individual can unfold a practical identity to the extent that he is capable of reassuring himself of recognition by a growing circle of partners... (Honneth, 1992: 189).

This dependence on the recognition of others renders us vulnerable, in the sense that we are in constant need of affirmation of our value. It is in this sense that one can interpret

the ‘vital human need’ that recognition meets (Taylor, 1995b). In Mead’s terms, the ‘me’, or the way in which I view myself (taking the ‘me’ as the object and the ‘I’ as the subject), depends on validation and reassurance from others.

The experience of being invisible is one that I have described in this project related to events at the time of leaving MIDCO. This was a new experience and arose strong emotions. Honneth’s article (2001) provides some illuminating insights: he describes the act of rendering someone invisible as an act of disregard or disrespect related to perceived social inferiority. The analogy he draws is of nobility who undress in front of their servants, viewing them as so inferior to their masters that it is as if they are not there. The invisibility we attribute to another is therefore related to the way in which we perceive them as inferior or not worthy of attention, or as Honneth calls them, ‘socially meaningless’, and in this way it forms a kind of humiliation.

This idea resonates for me in the experience where I felt invisible both to my colleagues at the office who did not hold a farewell party for me, and to Sarah who did not respond to my e-mails. At the same time, and considering the views of Mead in particular, I would now argue that by focusing on the feeling of invisibility, I am co-creating meaning in my response to gestures, where other meanings could be made. I am also becoming aware of my role in this process and how it is not ‘the organization’, or Anna, who are recognizing or ‘ignoring’ me. What exists, rather, is a pattern of local interaction where each actor’s intentions are playing out. I remember Anna’s glance back at me, with puzzlement on her face, as well as her text message later that evening, and notice how these were both gestures of recognition. Ignoring her is a powerful gesture in itself, perhaps even a form of passive-aggression

Returning to Honneth, he acknowledges, and I would agree, that the term ‘disrespect’ covers a huge range of potential acts of disrespect: from the complete disregarding of someone’s basic human rights, to much subtler (but still painful) humiliation, as described in my narratives. This form of perceived disrespect can have a significant effect on one’s identity, as Honneth explains:

The differences between these forms [of disrespect] are measured by the degree to which they can upset a person's practical relationship to self by depriving this person of the recognition of certain claims to identity (Honneth, 1992: 190).

Taking this to an extreme, he argues that experiencing disrespect of one's individual social and professional value can potentially take away one's ability to view oneself as a successful professional. This implies that we are wholly dependent on external and inter-subjective recognition from others, or, as Honneth writes:

.... what the person experiences about himself is the constitutive dependence of his person on recognition by others (ibid: 199).

Experiencing what I perceived as a lack of recognition from my colleagues at the office on my last day caused me pain and challenged my sense of identity as someone who was significant to the organization. Being 'ignored' (as I perceived it) by Sarah made me doubt my value as a professional. I felt that she was treating me as someone who was not worthy of her personal attention when she asked a junior colleague to interact with me. Delegating interaction with me to a junior person was a gesture to which I attributed a certain meaning: understanding the shifting power figuration between us, and whereas we had once been peers, and even friends, we were now in a different kind of professional relationship, one where she was able to provide or withhold what I interpreted as respect. This interpretation led me to feel humiliated.

Honneth, referencing Dewey, provides a plausible explanation for my emotional reaction. Dewey suggests that we create an anticipation or an expectation for our actions, and when these are not realized, we are upset. Honneth explains this as follows:

Dewey regards feelings, in principle, as the affective reactions arising from the repelled success or failure of the intentions of our actions (ibid: 198).

An explanation for the strong emotions arising from the failure of our intentions to materialize can be that we feel that basic norms of behaviour have been violated. This is how I perceived my colleagues' behaviour in the narratives. Not holding a farewell party

on my last day was, I felt, a denial of my opportunity to say goodbye in the way that I had intended, as well as a reflection of what I saw as the unimportance of my leaving day to those in the local office. At the same time, and as I wrote in the narrative itself, I also felt angry with myself for my somewhat childish need for a party. Drawing on Dewey (referenced above by Honneth), I agree with the view that when one senses the violation of a norm, it can cause one to experience moral indignation: a feeling of taking the moral high ground, judging others' behaviour from a position of moral superiority where one asks oneself, 'how could they?' Implicit in this position is the view that one would not behave in a similar way oneself. Looking back, that was indeed how I experienced both the lack of a farewell party, as well as Sarah's lack of a personal response to my e-mails to her.

4.8 Critique of Honneth's Ideas on Disrespect

On the one hand, I find these explanations plausible and somewhat reassuring, as they allow me to wallow in the self-justification of my hurt feelings. However, I also find them lacking on two levels. Firstly, they appear to me to assume that everyone will react in the same way to similar expressions of disrespect. Secondly, I understand them to locate the experience in an individualistic understanding of behaviour, seeing events as something that happen to me, rather than focusing on my role in co-creating them. As already indicated, I am starting to see how looking at my experience from a different perspective shifts the way in which I make sense of the events. By understanding the events as part of an unplanned, emerging and complex local interaction, occurring at the intersection of everyone's different intentions, the making of new meanings becomes possible.

The way in which my understanding is shifting, based on my reading and discussions with my learning set, is that there are other possible views than the individualistic view of self and recognition. For example, the way Honneth describes the self is as something to be unfolded from within, something which 'exists'. I note how hard it is to move away

from this thought-collective which has so deeply shaped my ideas and my practice. The insights from my learning set have encouraged me to consider that others might perceive Sarah's lack of a response very differently. Indeed, my fellow researchers have challenged me as to why I take offence at her not responding to my e-mails, and shared the view that they would not interpret her lack of response in the same way. So my expectation of a timely response to my e-mail may not be a universal reaction to this situation, but rather an element of the complex responsive processes of relating which are ongoing between Sarah and me, with a past, a present and a future. By considering the latter, I open up new ways of understanding the situation in which I found myself. I am arguing that it is not helpful to understand my reaction to Sarah's lack of response to me in an individualistic or objective way, or to separate her gesture (not replying to my e-mail) from my response (feeling ignored). I am beginning to see how meaning was only created in the gesture and response taken together, and how these were part of our history of complex social processes and an ongoing conversation of gestures (Mead, 1934).

This insight leads to real movement in my thinking. Looking back now on the events in both of my narratives, I am struck by the centred way in which I interpreted them and the lack of reflexivity about this. I would argue that this is an example of 'functional stupidity' (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012), pervasive in the environments in which I was working. As I develop greater reflexivity, and as my understanding shifts, I become aware of other ways in which I could have both understood the events and indeed acted. In particular, I wonder why I did not arrange my own farewell party where I could deliver my speech, but note how such a thought takes me straight back into an individualistic way of thinking. Even if I had planned this, I could not have known how this gesture would be taken up in the moment. It occurs to me that perhaps being 'recognized' (as I perceived it at the time) was more about someone else arranging the event for me, than about the event itself, and that insight now causes me both embarrassment and regret.

4.9 Recognition and Identity Formation

Arto Laitinen, professor of philosophy at the University of Tampere in Finland, questions the role of recognition: is recognition a response to perceived value in someone, or is it a ‘precondition of personhood’? (Laitinen, 2002). As I have been exploring the function of recognition in the formation of professional identity, particularly related to the career transition described in my narratives, I have seen this as a ‘both/and’ situation, as I am beginning to understand recognition in both senses. In this way I would agree with Laitinen, who quickly clarifies that it is ‘both a response to value *and* a precondition of personhood’ (Laitinen, 2002: 463).

Laitinen takes up the distinctions explored by Honneth and others regarding different conceptualizations of the term recognition. The way in which Laitinen describes the concept is similar to the way in which Honneth has described it, involving a similar three layered approach: recognition of a person as a person (the basic human respect owing to everyone as part of the human condition); recognition of a person as belonging to a certain group of people (the political view related to the ‘struggle for recognition’ particularly discussed by Taylor (1995b)); and recognition of being a particular person with unique abilities and attributes. Laitinen calls this having ‘unequal personal significance’, and he outlines a ‘policy of singularity’ – of recognizing someone for their unique value as an individual.

Concentrating on this third category, Laitinen goes on to explore the role of misrecognition and describes this in a way that I have found helpful, connecting it to norms and their violation, in a similar way to that described above. We feel misrecognized, suggests Laitinen, when we are insulted by another’s failure to follow norms regarding the recognition we expected to receive. He thus draws an important distinction about the process of recognition: that recognition occurs between people in a social context which is formed by and continues to form norms of behaviour. When I felt misrecognized by the lack of a farewell party, or by Sarah’s lack of a personal response,

this was because I felt that a norm of behaviour had been violated, and as a result, I felt disrespected, and outraged that the rules had not been followed.

Explaining the role that recognition in this third form has in creating and maintaining identity, Laitinen agrees with Honneth who states:

The connection between the experience of recognition and one's relation-to-self stems from the intersubjective structure of personal identity. The only way in which individuals are constituted as persons is by learning to refer to themselves, from the perspective of an approving or encouraging other, as beings with certain positive traits and abilities (Honneth, 1995: 173).

Returning to the question of whether recognition is a reaction to something that already exists, or brings something new into being, I turn to the chapter 'The Potential and the Actual' (Markell, in Van den Brink & Owen, (2007)), to explore this further. This collection of chapters is dedicated to Recognition and Power and Axel Honneth's thought. In this particular chapter, Markell further explores this distinction, taking up the terms 'potentiality' and 'actuality' introduced by Laitinen (2002), meaning that a person has features which are worthy of recognition ('potentiality'), but until that recognition is expressed and felt by the person being recognized, it does not cause anything in the person's identity and self-esteem to shift: 'actuality' only occurs at that stage. As Markell writes, referencing Honneth (2002):

.... Evaluative qualities that subjects already have to 'possess', according to this model, would then be conceived of as potentialities that recognitional responses transform into their actual capacities (Brink & Owen, 2007: 105).

Considering my narratives, the connection I see here is that while I may believe that I possess recognition-worthy traits (surely I deserve a leaving party, surely Sarah would want to speak to me herself), these traits only become actualized upon realization of the expectations (the party being arranged for me, the phone call from Sarah taking place), and when these failed to happen, my sense was that I had not been recognized.

4.10 Critique of Laitinen and Markell's Views

Following Markell's exploration of the dual roles of recognition related to potentiality and actuality, I can see how recognition might be viewed as more than a reaction to certain value perceived; it also plays a role in 'bringing about' (Laitinen, 2002: 473), and in this way it supports the formation and maintenance of an identity. Recognition has a constitutive role in creating a person's identity, and it has a role in acknowledging what is already part of a person, what Laitinen calls the 'pre-established view'. In the 'policy of singularity' described above, recognition plays a key role. I cannot consider myself as someone with unique and special talents unless others see me in that way and express their affirmation of me. As Laitinen explains:

The status of being a special person can be acquired only through recognition (ibid: 475).

This is where I see a strong link to my narrative and the way in which I perceived recognition as contributing to my sense of worth, while a lack of recognition of my value was able to disrupt my sense of self-esteem. This leads me to note both the generative as well as the destructive role of recognition. My concern with this view of recognition, and my critique of the views presented by Laitinen and Markel, is that it leads me to a rather weak sense of my own ability: I am only worthy of recognition if someone else deems me to be so, regardless of my own evaluation of my qualities, noting that the person from whom I seek recognition is someone whom I also recognize. The question is one of consistency: how frequently does recognition need to be provided in order for me to be reassured as to my value? Is it sufficient for me to be recognized once, and from then on I 'carry' the voice of my recognizers in my head? Or does recognition need to occur every day or even every hour, because the moment it has been granted, the recognition slips away and I need to be reassured again? Is it more reasonable to consider that the process involves some middle ground between these two extremes, and may differ from person to person?

This concept is explored by Markell, drawing on both Honneth and Mead, under the subject of ‘finality’ (Brink & Owen, 2007: 109). I take finality in this sense to represent the extreme state I outlined above, where having been recognized inter-subjectively, from that point on I am in a state of having been recognized, and can be considered from then onwards as ‘fully developed’.

My main critique, representing significant movement in my thinking, is that the views of recognition I have presented until now (specifically Honneth, Laitinen and Markell) lack consideration of the complexity of human interactions. In particular their individualistic focus implies a view, which I am beginning to move away from, that the self and identity are entities which are ‘created’, rather than being continually co-created within a complex web of social interaction.

4.11 Connection to Mead

Both Markell and Honneth allude to Mead’s ideas, but as I now proceed to discuss, they do not fully embrace Mead’s views on the self and identity as being social through and through: while emphasizing the social context in which recognition occurs, they retain a rather individualist perspective. The way in which both Honneth, and Markell, referencing Honneth, counter the ideas around ‘finality’ includes linking to Mead’s ‘I/Me’ dialectic, a concept which is of interest to me as I explore recognition from the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating. Mead’s position is that the mind is socially created by way of the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ such that:

The existence of the ‘me’ forces one to fight, as in the interest of one’s ‘I’, for new forms of social recognition (Honneth, 1995: 82).

As the conversation of gestures continues, there can be no finality, and recognition will therefore be continuously sought as an ongoing form of inter-subjective reassurance. The key points that I am making here, based on Mead (1934) are:

- Thinking is an internal conversation of gestures (my silent conversation is a social conversation which is influenced by my past).
- We become a ‘self’ by adopting others’ attitudes so that we are able to see ourselves as objects (not purely as subjects).
- The social, in the form of the generalized other, comes before the self; the self is socially constituted, and constantly emerging.
- The mind is made up inter-subjectively; it is made up by us turning experience back to ourselves, being ‘reflexive’ – and our inner conversation affects the way we interact with others.

This creates new understanding for me (as opposed to the automatic way in which I initially understood the events described in my narratives). What I take from Mead is that I cannot separate myself from the events; they did not happen to me, but rather there is a:

mutually constitutive, mutually negating dynamic of individual and social..... we are subjects to other people who are our objects , but we are also objects to ourselves because we can take their perspective on us (Mowles, 2015: 22).

4.12 Recognition: a Complex Mutual Process

Having explored in some depth a rather individualistic approach to the concept of recognition, one which has dominated my thought until now, I am beginning to problematize this view. I am widening my understanding to consider the mutual processes occurring within complex responsive processes of relating, focusing on the social context in all its complexity, as well as on the element of temporality, where recognition occurs continually and not as isolated events.

I have tended to reify the concept of recognition as an expression of my worth, a ‘thing’ to be granted by one person to another. From the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, and following discussions and insights provided by my learning set,

I am re-considering this view. My new understanding links recognition and power as I come to realize how relationships of recognition are always also relationships of power. Returning to my Project 2 and my understanding of the changing relations of power that I experienced with Marcus, I see how these are inevitably tied to the way in which I perceived recognition. When I hesitated to speak up from the back of the room, I was interpreting power in a certain way, following the hierarchy as I interpreted it, and therefore felt weak and dependent on his granting of positive recognition to me by way of valuing my comment. In the same way, from my narrative about Sarah and her lack of response to me, I perceived this at the time as an expression of disrespect and a breaking with the norms of behaviour.

The way in which I now view the events described is, following Elias (1970), as an expression of the constantly fluctuating power figurations related to who needs whom more at a particular point in time. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, also believes that power is not a commodity owned by certain people, but a feature of the relationship. Linking to my work on a feeling of invisibility when not acknowledged, Barbara Townley quotes Foucault, making a connection between being seen and power:

power is exercised by virtue of things being known and people being seen
(Townley, 1993: 520).

Foucault's landmark work, 'Discipline and Punish, the Birth of the Prison' (1995), provides important insights about the role of power in the disciplinary process. I see many parallels to the organizational setting, and the role of HR, and will come back to the role of disciplinary power later in my thesis.

Additionally, if until now I have always equated recognition with something positive and desired, Stacey helps me to see that this may not always be so, noting that:

Process is understood as responsive acts of mutual recognition, where recognition is not simply good since persons may recognize each other and themselves as superior or inferior, as attractive or repugnant' (Stacey, 2011a: 321).

Summarizing the way in which my understanding of recognition has shifted through my research in this project: I had always seen recognition as the affirmation of an individual's specific qualities and abilities in a way that adds to one's self-esteem and contributes to the formation of a professional identity. This view draws particularly on Honneth and Laitinen. It is interesting that Honneth's work on the subject of recognition was carried out in his native German, and only later translated into English. The original term used by Honneth is the German '*Anerkennung*', a term which implies appreciating and granting positive status to someone. I acknowledge how much I crave '*Anerkennung*', particularly as I perceive it as less forthcoming in my new role as a consultant.

I find myself struggling to renounce this view, noting how it resonates as I go through a career transition, seeking to reassure myself of my value to others as I take on a new role as a consultant. I can also see how shifting one's perspective, from a habitual way of seeing the world to adopting a new set of ideas, is a gradual process that happens slowly and over time. Paraphrasing Dewey (1958), we are our habits, including our habitual ways of thinking. I am, however, beginning to see how the process of experiencing recognition is indeed a thoroughly social and mutual process that does not always lead to enhanced self-esteem. The movement in my thinking on this subject since beginning the DMan programme can be expressed as follows: while I sometimes slip back into viewing recognition as an identity-enhancing process granted to me by others, I now largely see it as a process where I am equally the recognizer as well as the recognized, including in the ongoing silent conversation with myself. Reflecting on my leaving day narrative, I begin to see how in my interactions with the office staff, and particularly with Anna, I was part of the complex patterns of recognizing and relating, and not the object of their lack of recognition as I had previously felt. Echoing Elias, I am being recognized at the same time as I am recognizing others, all in a reciprocal and concurrent manner.

4.13 Recognition and Powerlessness – Sartre

I have discussed in depth the role that recognition, in the form of positive affirmation, might play in the development of self-esteem and a positive professional identity. An alternative view is presented by Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist, who argues that recognition can have the opposite outcome from the one that I have understood until now. His argument is that others' positive affirmation can deny individuals the freedom to change, as it effectively freezes us in the present state (Sartre, 1984).

This idea has caused me to reflect deeply, opening up some interesting and different ideas. I wonder about habitus and reflect on how a continual search for recognition can in fact be a stifling habit, one which closes down, rather than opens up routes to development and fulfilment. I have described a habit of following the rules, conforming, and being recognized for doing so, and now wonder if this is one way in which I remain dependent on constant recognition. This idea has the potential to create another major shift in my thinking, one which is particularly relevant in a time of transition. It also draws attention to a paradox which I had not noticed before: recognition is an enabling and a constraining process, both at the same time. This is a new idea for me: having focused only on the positive aspects of recognition, I now see how, echoing Sartre, recognition is also constraining me. It occurs to me that the transition from an internal leader to an external and independent consultant could be a catalyst for change, yet see how I am repeating patterns of behaviour related to the ongoing search for recognition.

As I start to become more reflexive (by which I mean thinking about how I am thinking), I am becoming aware that this transition opens up an opportunity that I have not considered before. The warning about being frozen within patterns of behaviour resonates for me and poses a challenge to pause and consider my assumptions and automatic responses more closely as I note the constraining, as well as the enabling aspects of recognition. I see an opportunity to become less centred and focused on myself as the object of others' affirmation, moving to accept my role as an equal partner in the continually emerging processes of mutual recognition. Drawing on Sartre, I can

see how this holds the potential for liberating me from the automatic tendency to follow the rules in the search of recognition, something which came very naturally and followed from my role as an HR Director where I was often setting and enforcing the rules for others. I realize that recognition is also related to issues of inclusion and exclusion, a theme which has come to the forefront since leaving my internal leadership role. While not the focus of my work here, it would be remiss not to discuss this topic briefly as I approach the conclusion of this project.

4.14 Inclusion and Exclusion

Leaving an organization in the way that I have described in this project raises questions of inclusion and exclusion, as well as of belonging. Talking about being ‘internal’ (an employee) or ‘external’ (a consultant) draws on a spatial analogy and implies physical boundaries around the organization, a concept which Elias, Stacey and Mowles challenge, seeing organizations as ‘the ongoing patterning of power and ideology as they emerge in local conversation’ (Mowles, 2011a: 8).

While agreeing with this way of viewing organizations, I also acknowledge that there is a physical manifestation of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, as described in my leaving day narrative. As well as returning my laptop and company car, I also gave back my employee identity badge, a badge which was electronically programmed to allow access to all floors of the building. Since leaving, and returning as a consultant, I now receive a visitor’s badge, which requires an employee to accompany me as I move around the building. This is symbolic, indicating that I do not belong in the sense that I did before; I am excluded from membership in the in-group comprised of the company’s employees. However, since becoming a consultant, I am frequently invited to enter into conversation with people in both my former company, as well as others.

There is a difference in the way in which I am ‘included’ in my former company, and with new clients. Following Elias and Scotson’s ‘The Established and the Outsiders’ (1994), I feel much more of an ‘insider’ in my former company, with our shared history

and language. In what sense am I therefore ‘excluded’? I would argue that outside of the physical manifestations of the ‘inside/outside’ constructs described above, I am still very much included in the local conversations which are occurring with my clients, noting the different levels of inclusion based on our previous relationships. The conversations we engage in feature patterns of power and recognition on a daily basis. Applying the same thinking that I have adopted about recognition to inclusion and exclusion, I would suggest that I am not included or excluded by others (an individualistic view), but rather that my inclusion and exclusion are mutually created in a social process. I can see how by leaving my full-time corporate role and becoming a consultant I had, to a certain extent, excluded myself. Looking at this in a new way I see that when working as a consultant, this is taken up differently in my interactions with clients – we are continually co-creating the patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

4.15 Kirkpatrick’s Evaluation Process and Recognition

I return briefly to the narrative I presented in Project 2 about the evaluation scores and how I understood them then, in order to reflect further on the events from the perspective of my more recent insights on recognition. At the time, I attributed tremendous significance to scores given to me on a Kirkpatrick Level 1 evaluation form, and viewed the 4.0 score as an absolute threshold, a clear pass/fail grade. I interpreted the scores as a reflection of my value as a facilitator in my early days as an external consultant, describing a highly stressful and puzzling situation which I found difficult to explain using the approaches of managerialism and systems thinking, which had largely dominated my thinking until that point.

An observation drawn in my Project 2 was that the generalization of the scores was being particularized in a certain way due to a range of social interactions that I had largely ignored, as I was solely focused on following the rule about the 4.0 threshold. I also came to understand the situation described with Marcus and LDO overruling the lower score and providing a second try-out due to power relations and the question of ‘who

needs whom more' which I had not considered, coming from a standpoint of power residing within an individual. Looking at this same narrative from the perspective of Laitinen's approach it is possible to see that receiving the low score meant that my value was not actualized, but remained a potentiality. My distress can therefore be understood in this way: I remained with non-actualized potential for recognition. On the one hand, LDO gave me a second chance, but the low scores were a constant reminder to me that the participants had not rated me as highly as I had hoped.

I would argue that this a rather extreme way of understanding the process, not fully considering the complexity of the events: the interdependence of the characters involved and their ongoing interactions, as well as the shifting power relations at play. While finding Laitinen's ideas useful and complementary to others I have explored in this project, and using my Project 2 narrative to further reflect on them, I now argue that his views fail to fully incorporate the complexity of the social context and dynamics.

4.16 Conclusion

As I reach the end of this project, and having explored the concept in some depth, it is clear how recognition is indeed one of many key inter-related themes emerging from and dominating my research. In the sharing of narratives related to a time of transition from a long-term career as an internal leader, to uncharted territory as an external consultant, I have highlighted some of the emotions that this change has brought to the surface; emotions which are linked to my themes of rules and power, and particularly to the theme of recognition.

In Project 1, I noted how a culture of conforming to the norms of my social group largely blinded me to questioning assumptions. In my second project, this theme expanded as I looked at both recognition and power while experiencing new working relationships as an independent consultant. I see now how there are additional related themes emerging in my inquiry, including identity and loss, belonging, inclusion and exclusion.

I notice how I am starting to understand my experiences at work as a social process, in continual flux. This is in contrast with my initial ways of thinking about situations as being fixed, rational, one-dimensional and ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. A major change occurs for me when I start to see the uncertainty of life at work in the way that Mowles explains it:

... uncertainty arises in social life because we act into a web of other peoples’ actions and intentions (Mowles, 2015: 5).

Thinking about human relating as a ‘web’ is helpful to me, evoking a set of complex, unpredictable and intertwined relationships, and inviting a much more nuanced approach to my work as a consultant. I link this to the invitation presented by my work on the DMan to reflect on my experience and to ask questions, explore assumptions, and reflexively consider how the way in which my thinking is shifting is in turn affecting my practice.

I am particularly struck by Dewey’s idea that reflection can lead to emancipation in the sense that it can create openings for a new way not only of understanding, but of acting in the world, and link this to Sartre ideas referenced earlier about being frozen in fixed ways of behaviour. As Dewey writes in ‘Experience and Nature’:

We discover that we believe many things not because the things are so, but because we have become habituated through the weight of authority..... This discovery marks an emancipation; it purifies and remakes the objects of our direct primary experience (Dewey, 1958: 14).

This is in contrast to the way in which I have typically been acting. I have drawn on Alvesson and Spicer’s concept of ‘functional stupidity’ in each of my first three projects, finding that their ideas echo my experience strongly as I reflect on my years in an executive role. As I have described, in the rush to take action, slowing down to think, reflect, surface assumptions and ask questions was not encouraged. I agree with Stacey (2012: 80-85), who believes that discouraging reflection in this way is part of the technique of ‘coercive persuasion’ (Schein, 1985), another way of describing organizationally mandated brainwashing. When I was interacting with consultants, my

unthinking application of the rules meant that I would probably have rejected anyone whose score failed to meet the 4.0 threshold, and this causes me concern as I wonder about the ethics of such judgments.

In my last project, I will describe a leadership development programme undertaken for a client. Drawing a 'red thread' through my four projects, I will focus on my evolving critical thinking related to my previously unquestioned acceptance of the managerialist approach to HR and LD.

5 Project 4: Leadership Development: A Critical View

5.1 Introduction

Since joining the ranks of the ‘supertemps’ (Miller & Miller, 2012), I have been hired by clients to design, develop and deliver various Leadership Development (LD) programmes. By taking my experience seriously, reflecting on what I am doing, as well as how I am thinking about it, I find myself questioning many facets of the kind of work that I have undertaken for more than two decades.

In Project 2, I described the experience of being assessed as a facilitator during one of my first consulting engagements since ‘crossing to the other side of the table’. I had transitioned from being the person who hired consultants to work on programmes, to being the one contracted in to do the work. I introduced Marcus, and described how our roles had been reversed: I had initially hired him to run programmes, now I had been hired by his company, LDO, to run programmes for clients such as GLOCO. In that project I focused on the impact the process of being evaluated had on me, exploring how rules were followed, or over-turned, and how I felt recognized (or not). The theme of recognition was explored further in my third project, from the perspective of recognition as a ‘vital human need’ (Taylor 1995b: 26) at a time of career transition.

In this project, I describe another workshop which was, in many ways, unremarkable and fairly typical of my experience. What sets this workshop apart for me, and compelled me to focus on it as part of my research, is the growing and lingering doubts it raised for me, both about my practice and about the activity itself. This experience is a starting point for a wider exploration into LD programmes in general, as I try to make sense of the way in which leaders are developed, and surface the assumptions which underpin this practice. I find myself increasingly problematizing the dominant paradigm of LD, based on its understanding of the leader as an autonomous individual with specific personal traits that make him/her a ‘leader’, and which conceptualizes leadership as:

successful influence by the leader that results in the attainment of goals by the influenced followers (Bass, 1990: 14).

I will consider a more social approach to leadership (Griffin, 2002; Stacey, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) which will necessarily lead to a different approach to LD; one that takes account of the complexity and ‘messiness’ of the day-to-day work of leaders. I will argue that there might be a more useful way to consider LD, different from the highly simplified and abstracted process often adopted. I first describe my experience at NEWTECH, a global technology corporation, where Sarah (introduced in Project 3) is Head of HR.

5.2 A New Leadership Model for NEWTECH

NEWTECH is a global technology corporation. Bob is the recently appointed CEO, and has been charged by the Board to double sales over the next five years. Sarah has suggested that the company needs a new leadership approach in order to meet the business challenges. She hired a consultant, Samantha, to develop the model and lead the project. Once ready for launch, Samantha invited me to join the team of facilitators for a presentation of the LD programme. Samantha's new model prescribed a set of leadership behaviours that every leader at the company should adopt, presented as a colourful graphic model on a PowerPoint slide. The content of NEWTECH’s model is shown below:⁶

Be bold and take smart risks
Be a disciplined executor
Own your business
Enable empowerment

⁶ This is a high-level view of the content: for confidentiality reasons I have not replicated the exact words, nor the graphic design of the model.

Its theoretical underpinning came from Ronald Heifetz's book, 'The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world', (Heifetz et al., 2009). The leadership behaviours were related to what Heifetz calls 'bold leadership', for example: 'I display boldness and smart risk-taking'. The promise was that by developing 'bold leaders' and 'enabling empowerment', the company would ensure the realization of the desired business outcomes.

5.2.1 Cascading the Model to NEWTECH's Leaders

The programme began with a one-day workshop to present the new model to Bob's leadership team, facilitated by Samantha. It was then to be 'cascaded' to the teams by their team leader and a facilitator. The term 'cascade' refers to a common organizational process whereby a strategy or programme is communicated by leaders at one level of management to the next. The plan was as follows: a one-day workshop, followed by two virtual (teleconference) sessions, and finally, a second one-day session, to take place several months after the first. I was assigned to work with Benny, leader of one of the company's technology divisions, and he asked me to schedule the workshop with Hannah, his HR Director.

Benny sent out an e-mail invitation to the team, making clear that attendance was compulsory. While acknowledging everyone's busy schedules, he stated: 'It is key for each of you to inspirationally lead your people with clarity of vision'. He added that spending a day in the leadership workshop was designed to help 'define our role as senior leaders in translating the NEWTECH strategy into execution, forming a shared understanding of our direction and building the necessary skills to lead changes in your teams'. He went on to instruct his team to 'delegate critical work items before you attend so that you can be "device-free" and give the discussions your full attention.'

5.2.2 Workshop 1

The day of the first workshop finally arrived: a hot mid-summer morning. As each of the leaders arrived, they exchanged friendly, informal greetings, with smiles and the occasional hug. I introduced myself and exchanged brief, polite words of welcome with the leaders. There was a frenetic sense of activity: ‘We are under huge business pressure’, ‘We have incredible business challenges to handle’, ‘Bob and Benny work 24/7 and expect the same from us’, ‘I’ve been up most of the night on a teleconference with my team in Asia’ were comments I heard as laptops were hastily opened to make use of the remaining few minutes.

At 9 am, the designated start time, the last few people had just arrived, and, with a final flurry of keyboard activity, the leaders turned off their laptops and took their seats in the simple, air-conditioned conference room. Chairs had been arranged in a semi-circle and a desk was set up for the facilitator at the front. Several flipcharts had been placed in three corners of the room, with paper and pens as specified in the detailed set-up instructions. The instructions left nothing to chance: Samantha's ‘TTT’ (train-the-trainer) programme included familiarizing us with 65 slides and a 39-page ‘facilitator’s guide’, a document which listed, in meticulous detail, everything from how the room should be set up, to what should be served for breakfast (‘protein-rich please’), to how many markers should be on each flipchart stand, and, most importantly, how the agenda should be structured, with detailed activities and timings for each.

Benny opened the programme by presenting the division’s key business goals and challenges. Additionally, and as instructed in the ‘Leader Briefing’ document sent out by Samantha (which I had discussed with him in a brief phone call), he emphasized the importance of the new leadership model for achieving the company’s business goals. He frequently mentioned Bob’s name, and occasionally Sarah’s. At one point someone started to challenge the concept of ‘empowerment’ featured in the model, saying something about Bob’s ‘micro-management’ leadership style being the opposite of ‘empowering’, yet calling for that very approach. After a couple of similarly energetic

comments were made by the team, Benny said, ‘Guys, leaving Bob’s leadership style aside, let’s focus on what we *can* do to increase the level of empowerment at NEWTECH and in our division in particular. How can we all become bold leaders who are willing and able to take smart risks?’ There were looks of frustration, and a couple of leaders raised their eyebrows and exchanged glances.

His presentation over, and with no further questions from the group, Benny handed over to me to begin the first activity of the day. Each member of the group was to take a pad of coloured Post-Its and rate each element of the new leadership model presented by Benny. The exact instructions were as follows: ‘We’re going to get some data in the room on assessing where we stand as individuals and as a leadership team on the leadership model. We’re going to do this in a public way that’s completely anonymous. So please be frank in your answers. Please stick to whole numbers’.

As I called out the name of the elements, each leader wrote two numbers from 1 (low) to 10 (high) on the Post-It, representing their assessment of the extent to which they personally, and the team overall, currently demonstrated the specified behaviour. We would then repeat this activity in the second workshop to see if the scores had increased. Heads down, they wrote quickly on Post-Its, glancing up occasionally at the screen to remind themselves of the exact wording of the leadership behaviour as it appeared in the model, and then returning to writing their numbers.

A short break followed, during which I collated the scores. As the team members left to get coffee from the nearby kitchenette, Benny asked Hannah and John to join him for a moment to discuss an urgent HR issue. I watched as the others left the room in twos and threes, in spirited conversation unrelated to the leadership model that we had just been discussing.

After the break I invited them to review the various scores and average for each element, which were displayed on a completed grid. According to the facilitator’s guide, the activity was to discuss the various numbers, drawing attention to the differences in scores. After what felt to me like a long silence, Rod, a quiet, middle-aged man with a

friendly smile, pointed to one of the lines on my carefully-drawn grid and said, 'On average we've rated ourselves individually 6.5 on the leadership behaviour of "boldness and risk-taking", but rated "others on this leadership team" a 5.8 on the same element'. I nodded and asked Rod what he made of this distinction. 'Not sure, really,' he said. 'Perhaps that's just human nature, that we rate ourselves more favourably than we rate others?' With a nod and a smile, I tried to encourage the others to join the conversation. 'Any other thoughts on this?' I asked, turning to the rest of the group who were standing around the flipchart in a semi-circle. I pointed out various scores and asked what they made of them, but no-one else offered any ideas. There was another awkward silence as people moved back towards their chairs. I desperately tried to think of a way to get the group talking.

Suddenly, I saw that one of the leaders, John, had picked up his smartphone and was typing something on it. I wondered if he was checking his e-mails. He abruptly called out, 'Hey, Sharon, you've made a mistake on the third line of your grid: the average is wrong'. He had clearly been using the calculator on his phone, not checking his e-mails. I looked at the flipchart and quickly checked the numbers. He was right; I had miscalculated the average. I felt my face redden with embarrassment. I was mortified at having made a simple arithmetic mistake in front of a group of technology experts. I apologized and corrected the average score, changing it from 8.3 to 8.5. Trying to explore other observations they may have made, I asked one more time: 'Is there anything else you notice here?' There were no further comments. We were running behind the planned schedule and so I quickly moved us on to the next item on the agenda. The level of energy in the room had briefly increased with John's correction of the average I had miscalculated, but by now the leaders appeared largely disinterested. Most of the talking was done by Benny and Hannah. I saw Xavier and Rod surreptitiously glancing at their phones a couple of times.

Towards the end of the afternoon we conducted an activity where the leaders were asked to split into smaller groups and discuss a business topic, linking it to the elements of the

leadership model we had been talking about all day. As they arranged themselves into sub-groups, Benny came up to me and said quietly, 'I am going to step out for this activity. I have something urgent to prepare for Bob. I'll be in the other conference room if you need me'. Although surprised that he was leaving the session, I did not challenge his decision to step out.

I sat for a few minutes with each group listening to their conversations. One group's voices became increasingly excited as Hannah, the HR manager, talked openly about some of the issues the team were facing with another leader, one of Benny's peers. This topic had not been raised in the larger group. The group members were supporting Hannah's claim that this other leader's behaviour was completely different from the new behaviours being promoted, and a clear impediment to effective working across their divisions.

5.2.3 A Very Good Day?

Benny returned for the final session of the day. I felt a sense of relief that it was over and was anxious to hear his summary and evaluation of the day. Unlike the leadership programme at GLOCO, this programme did not use 'level 1' evaluation forms (Kirkpatrick, 1994) to evaluate the programme and the faculty, although clearly facilitators were still evaluated. Lena, one of the others, had run a programme for another division, which according to Mary, the LD Manager and my contact at NEWTECH, had been 'a mess' and she had since been removed from the programme.

Benny closed the programme, and then turned to me and thanked me 'for a very good day'. I smiled at him, feeling pleased about his warm words, but also thinking to myself, 'Seriously? A very good day?' I was feeling frustrated and had a sense that the day had been rather a waste of time. What I said, however, was that I appreciated the chance to work with the team, and looked forward to the virtual sessions and to the second workshop, which we agreed to schedule as soon as possible.

5.2.4 Postscript

Due to business issues, we struggled to schedule the virtual sessions, although eventually one was arranged. After only fifteen minutes, Xavier, one of the leaders, interrupted the conversation, saying, ‘Sorry, everyone, I have to leave the call for an hour now, I’ve just received an e-mail from Bob saying that he needs me to join another meeting right now. Sorry, I’ll try and get back before you finish’. The others questioned whether it was worth continuing the call. They were upset that while they were discussing Bob’s new leadership model, it was Bob himself who had pulled Xavier out of the call to work on something urgent. ‘We all have our own things to get on with’, they complained. We continued the call for a short while, but finished early.

Nothing further has happened with the programme, despite my e-mails to Benny, Hannah and Mary suggesting we schedule the second virtual session and second workshop. I recently asked Samantha if she knew what was going on. ‘I haven’t heard a peep despite multiple emails’, she replied. I asked Mary if there was any news about the leadership programme. ‘Oh, we don’t really know what’s happening with it these days’. She sounded quite despondent. ‘There doesn’t seem to be much energy to continue with it. Half of Bob’s leadership team never even did the first workshop’. I understand that NEWTECH is doing well from a business perspective, with sales on a modest upward trend, but can this be attributed to the new leadership model?

5.2.5 Initial Thoughts

I have been struggling to make sense of what happened and how I feel about it. Nine senior leaders spent a full day in a workshop, with the objective of ‘helping infuse the organization with this leadership model’ (NEWTECH internal company document). As described in the narrative, I facilitated a series of activities focused on leadership, but these felt abstract, simplified, and detached from their everyday life. We had followed the programme, more or less, and while I thought that my frustrations must surely be shared by them, no-one had expressed such thoughts (beyond a couple of glances and

raised eyebrows that I had noticed, but not questioned). In terms of the impact of the workshop, Mary's comment led me to believe that nothing significant had changed in terms of the leadership behaviours at the company, and that the focus on the new model had dwindled, if not stopped completely.

The NEWTECH workshop took place almost a year ago, and I consider it a watershed moment in my career. In trying to make sense of this particular experience, I will begin by identifying and exploring the common (yet in my experience rarely surfaced) assumptions implicit in this way of thinking about leadership development in general, and cascading a new model in particular. I will do this by drawing on literature, as well as my own experience, both from my in-house leadership role, and my more recent work as a consultant. I will contrast these with critical views based on ideas from writers in the CMS (Critical Management Studies) tradition (Alvesson & Spicer, 2013, Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, 2003; Jackall, 2010; Spicer, 2013), as well as those of the perspective of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating, (Elias, 1970; Griffin, 2002; Mead, 1934; Mowles, 2011a, 2013, 2015; Stacey, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) building on ideas from my earlier projects.

Most significantly for my practice, I will then inquire into my role, thinking about what I do as a facilitator when I feel 'stuck' in a process that I have started to question. How does this change my practice as a consultant, and how is this linked to the themes of following rules, power and recognition that I have been exploring throughout my thesis? What effect will it have on my work as a consultant if I challenge the way of doing LD in corporations on whose contracts my livelihood depends?

5.3 From ‘Guru’ to Doubter

For much of my career I was comfortable with what I was doing and, considered by my clients to be a ‘guru’ on HR and LD,⁷ moved confidently from workshop to workshop. This was important while I was an internal leader, charged with running the LD activities at MIDCO, because doubting my practice might have compromised my ability to continue to lead this area in the way expected. As an HR leader, my inclusion in the HR professional body was dependent on my acceptance of its ideas; indeed I saw those who voiced major criticisms of corporate HR removed from the company. Questioning what I was doing would have felt risky, as someone who enjoyed ‘painting by numbers’ in childhood (Project 1, p.19) and had grown up to be a conformist, reluctant to break rules and recognized for being a ‘good corporate soldier’. In adulthood I seemed to ‘marginalize doubt’ (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012: 1194), by which I mean purposely ignoring my questions and doubts in favour of adopting the corporate narrative. It is, therefore, not surprising that I colluded in what I now see as a game, even after early signs of doubt had emerged. Bourdieu refers to our ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 80) and it is to this I am referring as I describe how I continued to play my corporate leadership role, often pretending to agree with something that I had actually begun to question.

The American pragmatist, John Dewey, argues for the ‘productive use of doubt’ (Dewey, 1997: 9) and for reflective thought which begins when a ‘felt difficulty’ (ibid) occurs. At this point it becomes necessary to overcome the automatic way in which one typically operates, practising deep inquiry, questioning assumptions, being less convinced of one’s convictions and thus open to challenging one’s habitual practice. Svend Brinkmann refers to these moments of doubt as ‘breakdowns’, mysteries related to one’s experience,

⁷ One of the leaders I worked with at MIDCO actually called me a ‘guru’.

(Brinkmann, 2012: 44). I am now paying deep attention to my doubts, and no longer brushing them aside. By taking puzzling experiences like NEWTECH as the source for my inquiry, I explore different ways of making sense of my experience, hoping that this might help me become more skilled at dealing with it. In doing so I am building on the pragmatist approach of informing action and keeping ‘ends-in-view’ (Martela, 2015: 537). Joining the DMan and becoming an independent consultant have been the impetus to reflect on, question and examine my practice as I take up new ideas and perspectives and notice how these impact the way I work. Dealing with my doubts since NEWTECH I find that the following idea resonates deeply for me:

Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry: and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful (Dewey, 1997: 13).

It is indeed ‘painful’ to be questioning a way of working which has been highly successful until now. I find it hard to sit with the doubt and uncertainty, resisting the drive to find new answers too quickly. I recognize this in Mowles’ view that:

Reflection is not necessarily inclined towards answers, solutions and conclusions, but rather to doubt, questioning and uncertainty (Mowles, 2011a: 265).

As indicated above, I was previously focused on ‘answers, solutions and conclusions’ and was recognized for this. Questioning what I am doing and the value it brings to clients, is a new experience. My feelings following the NEWTECH workshop have led me to question many assumptions, as I now move on to explore.

5.4 Unpicking Managerialism

Until recently, working within a managerialist paradigm was not something I was aware of, nor could articulate as such. It was, simply, the ‘only game in town’ (Flinn, 2011: 123) and the way I operated, largely unaware of the underlying beliefs this implied. Managerialism forms the dominant and mainstream paradigm of organizational theory, as

it is commonly taught at Business Schools, and practiced in organizations such as MIDCO and others where I have worked as an HR Director and LD consultant.

I have drawn on Ulrich's definition of HR as 'a specific set of practices, policies, procedures and programmes *that manage people and organizations*' (Ulrich et al., 2008: 4, my emphasis) and discussed the implications therein: that people and organizations can be 'managed', and that an organization is an entity at a higher level than the individuals who work in it. As part of the HR 'thought-collective' (Fleck, 1979)⁸ I recognize myself in Fleck's idea that:

The individual within the collective is never, or hardly ever, conscious of the prevailing thought style, which almost always exerts an absolutely compulsive force upon his thinking (Fleck, 1979: 62).

Fleck makes two important points here which I recognize as related to habitus:⁹ 1) that our habitual thought patterns are so taken-for-granted that we do not pay attention to them, and 2) because of this we see, believe and think certain things and not others. While in a corporate HR role, I *could* not see things differently, and it is only after moving out of this role and encountering different theoretical perspectives that I am able to point to and critique these assumptions as key elements of the managerialist approach. Managerialism is defined by Flinn & Mowles as the belief that:

...all aspects of organizational life can and should be managed according to rational structures, procedures, and modes of accountability in the pursuit of goals defined by policymakers and senior management (Flinn & Mowles, 2014: 4).

⁸ Defined as a group of people who share a certain thinking style.

⁹ *Habitus*, defined by Bourdieu (1977) as taken-for-granted ways in which one's culture and its norms determine the acceptable beliefs, values and behaviours of its members, has been discussed in previous projects. For Bourdieu, habitus is a practice.

Stacey (2011a) refers to this approach as the dominant discourse of management:

...based on the assumption that an organization can be thought of as a system for which leaders and managers can more or less choose the strategic direction and/or design, influence or condition the process which will determine that direction (Stacey 2011a: 328).

These elements have implications for my work in LD, as I will now move on to highlight briefly in reference to the NEWTECH programme.

1. Organizations are thought of as systems

The organization is considered a system, which is made up of a 'whole' and 'parts'. It is reified as an entity, above and beyond the people who work in it, as demonstrated in Ulrich's definition above. This way of thinking was explored in Project 2 (p.56) and has been taken up extensively by Heifetz (2009), Senge (1990), and others. In the design of the NEWTECH workshop, the understanding was that Bob, Sarah and the rest of the leaders and consultants could stand outside of the system, observe and analyse it, then set direction and implement change which would affect the various parts of that 'system'.

2. Causality is linear; predictability and control are possible

An expectation of linear cause-and-effect is core to the scientific, analytical and rational approach to management, dating back to Weber's 'rational bureaucracy' (1947) and Taylor's 'Scientific Management' (1964). At NEWTECH it was assumed that by presenting a model and delivering convincing arguments for its adoption, others would accept it. These ideas are at the heart of mainstream HRM. HR leaders support business strategy by designing and implementing programmes and processes in the belief that their adoption will necessarily lead to improved business outcomes (Huselid, 1995: 635). It therefore follows that, knowing that Bob needed to double sales at NEWTECH, Sarah proposed a new leadership model, looking for a tool to 'get individuals to work together

effectively to produce collective outcomes’ (Biech, 2010: 2). This is an example of an idea rooted in predictability and control (we can apply a tool and this will ensure that people work well together, which will lead to positive outcomes).

3. Leadership

The practices of HR and LD are inexorably linked to the idea that leaders can design a new strategy or cascade a change for an organization (a system), and guide a group of people to adopt it. The way that Bob, Sarah, Samantha, Benny and I designed and delivered the NEWTECH programme reflects multiple assumptions about leadership:

- a) Leaders are somehow ‘out of’ the ‘system’ and acting on others who are ‘in’ it.
- b) The idea that leaders can cause their employees to adopt certain behaviours provided that the right set of antecedents and consequences are provided comes from a worldview focused on the individual and behaviourism (Skinner, 1953; Watson, 1913). These ideas are reflected in ‘scientific behaviour modification’ proposed by Wilk Braksick (2007), an approach that I adopted at MIDCO, related to ideas of ‘coercive persuasion’¹⁰ (Schein, 1984) meaning that people can be persuaded to change their behaviours if the right conditions apply.
- c) Leaders are autonomous, ‘heroic’ individuals who can influence others to adopt a new vision. This idea places power within the individual leader. The idea of the autonomous, visionary leader is reinforced in much popular leadership literature, for example the book that I referred to in Project 1, ‘The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations’ (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) suggests that it is leaders who have this ability to make extraordinary things

¹⁰ Schein’s ideas were developed from his work with ‘brainwashed’ prisoners of war from Vietnam. While the context is very different, Schein’s ideas have been influential in organizational thinking and help me think about the cascade process.

happen. Alvesson and Sveningsson have also observed that ‘contemporary writing usually frames leadership in visionary and heroic terms’ (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003: 1435). The book which informed the NEWTECH workshop (Heifetz et al., 2009) promotes the idea that leaders can and indeed do change organizations. In Benny’s e-mail and introduction to his team he explicitly delivered the message about the need to be visionary leaders and to lead change at NEWTECH.

- d) Individual Competencies: a pre-defined set of required skills and behaviours can be developed in the classroom, pre-supposing that knowledge can be transferred from trainer to trainee. This idea is promulgated by consultants working in LD who advocate a finite set of skills which leaders need to master in order to succeed (Goldsmith, 2016; Johansen, 2012: 24). At NEWTECH, the assumption was that attending the workshop could help the leaders learn to be bold, for example, to take smart risks. This assumption also helps explain why my ‘performance’ as a facilitator should be evaluated and scored: if I am responsible for the participants gaining knowledge and skills, then it makes sense to assess how well I did this.

4. Messages can be ‘cascaded’ and understood as planned

Communication in the managerialist paradigm is based on the assumption that if a message is delivered clearly, others will understand and make sense of it in the way intended. The theoretical basis for this understanding is Shannon & Weaver’s 1949 ‘sender/receiver’ model, which has been taken up extensively in mainstream organizational communication approaches (Bridges, 2003; Kotter, 1996). Any exception to this is explained away as an issue either with the way the message was formulated or delivered, or with the ability to understand of those who are receiving it: in other words in the individuals. Believing that it is vital to get the message right, it makes sense for Samantha to have insisted during the TTT that the facilitators were delivering the messages ‘correctly’ and that we stayed on script at all times.

5. Targets and measurement

An example of HR's managerialist focus on targets and measurement is the ubiquitous 'performance management' approach: the annual process of setting goals and measuring progress towards their accomplishment. This approach is an example of what the prestigious Academy of Management promotes as 'evidence-based management', arguing for a scientific basis to managerial practices and promising the 'more consistent attainment of organizational goals' (Rousseau, 2006: 256). Adopting this way of thinking, we created a numerical grid and asked the NEWTECH leaders to rate leadership behaviours on a scale of 1-10. The discussion of the differences between the scores, paying attention to whether I calculated the average correctly, and the expectation that these would increase between workshops one and two, is also part of this focus, as is the discussion of my facilitation scores following the GLOCO workshop (Project 2, p.57).

5.5 Cascading Change

When rolling out an organizational change, for example, a new leadership model similar to the one at NEWTECH, or a manager-as-coach management programme for MIDCO, I used the company's internal change management (CM) approach. One of its core ideas is the leadership cascade: a process by which 'sponsors' enrol 'targets'¹¹ in a change. This is explained as follows:

The backbone of organizational change is the 'sponsor spine'. That spine runs from the individual or group with enough power to first legitimize a significant change (the initiating sponsor) all the way to those who have local control of communications with—and consequences for—first-line employees (local

¹¹ In change management terminology 'sponsors' are defined as the individuals who have the power to lead the change and 'targets' are defined as those who must actually change.

sustaining sponsors). Sponsors throughout the spine must be impeccably aligned to ensure the consistent messages and actions needed to realize the true intent of the change. (Internal CM manual).

CM draws on ideas from John Kotter, former Harvard Business School professor and management consultant, and author of 'Leading Change' (1996), who calls for a coalition of powerful leaders to influence others to adopt change using techniques of coercion and persuasion. The manual specifies the same kind of detailed agenda and strict time-keeping as Samantha developed for NEWTECH, calling for sponsors to:

demonstrate commitment to the change by clearly and unequivocally sponsoring the participation of their direct reports in the enrolment process—publicly and privately (Internal CM manual).

At NEWTECH the cascade followed the 'sponsorship spine' with leaders enrolling targets in a change. Bob had begun the process with his leadership team, and then charged each of them with sponsoring the model at a workshop with their teams. I heard from Samantha that Bob and Sarah had made clear their expectation for Benny and his peers to act as 'good sponsors' of the new model at NEWTECH, following the agreed communication plan as a way of enrolling their teams in the change.

Using the CM process at MIDCO I would measure who had been 'enrolled' via a change cascade, creating spreadsheets to track the completion of 'enrolment sessions', and assessing who had acted as a 'good sponsor'. This is an example of what Barbara Townley describes as a common HR practice of translating individuals into 'numerical equivalents' (Townley, 1993: 566), adopting quantitative methods in order to 'calculate things, people, events and processes from a distance' (Townley, 1995: 568). James C. Scott refers to a similar process in a different context in 'Seeing Like a State' (1998), referring to how the pre-modern state, seeking to control its lands and citizens, created

cadastral maps,¹² ‘designed to make the local situation legible to an outsider’ (Scott, 1998: 45). Such maps necessarily simplify and abstract from the complex social reality they are presumed to represent, and this ‘thinness’ (ibid: 44) is sometimes useful. My concern with these simplifications is when we lose sight of the intended functionality of the abstraction and treat it as if it represented something much more complex. For example, during the NEWTECH workshop, the exercise where participants scored the adoption of various leadership behaviours did not lead to any significant discussion (and indeed only ten minutes had been allocated for it). What was more important in Samantha’s plan was for us to record the scores from the first workshop, repeat the exercise in the second, and presumably see an increase in between sessions. This numerical focus and simplified process reflects many of the ideas I am critiquing in this project, as I will now go on to explore.

5.6 Critique of the Leadership Cascade

While I once unquestioningly accepted the idea that it was possible to create an unbroken sponsorship ‘spine’, I now find myself reflecting critically on these ideas and challenging such highly simplified and abstracted change cascade processes. It strikes me how little attention I paid to the assumptions of managerialism and CM reflected in the idea of a ‘cascade’ such as the one we used at NEWTECH. Looking back, I note in particular my ‘felt difficulties’ (Dewey, 1997: 9) with the process:

- Samantha’s programme to present a new leadership model as part of a one-day workshop did not (could not) change leaders’ behaviour, nor did it lead to a significant increase in the company’s sales. Coercing and persuading ‘targets’ to enrol in change may cause them to go through the motions, and appear to do so

¹² High-level maps designed to show ownership of land for regulatory purposes.

publicly, but cannot bring about a pre-determined outcome, as I will go on to explain later in this project.

- Each element of the model (for example, ‘Be a disciplined executor’) was presented as a ‘thin description’ (Ryle, 1947; Geertz, 1973), without any context or connection to the leaders’ experience. Without discussion on how this could be taken up in everyday life, the simplified and idealized ideas lacked any resonance.
- Asking participants to score how they perceived the adoption of behaviours and reducing this to a single number was highly misleading and a gross over-simplification. As I was facilitating the exercise, I remember feeling that it was rather pointless. When the discussion moved to whether I had calculated a number correctly, in addition to being embarrassed about my mistake, I felt that the whole process with its focus on numbers was bizarre.
- Despite Benny asking his team to be ‘device-free’ and to leave other business issues aside for the duration of the workshop, he could not control this, neither for his team, nor for himself: in fact both he and others repeatedly needed to address urgent matters throughout the day.
- Some months after the session I heard that several of Bob’s direct reports had not run even the first workshop. Benny’s team did not complete the programme. This shows that while the intent was one of full compliance with the programme across NEWTECH, the outcome was different.

I am claiming, together with other critical management writers whose work I will move on to explore in the coming sections, that these are all examples of how outcomes cannot be fully predicted nor controlled, and how measurement as we used it is largely meaningless. Similar to the NEWTECH example, I have often been part of efforts to implement large-scale organizational change programmes which failed to deliver the expected outcomes. My reaction then would have been to blame the process, or the

participants, considering them non-supporters of the change, or ‘black holes’.¹³ I would also blame myself for not doing a good enough job as leader or facilitator of the change, but would rarely, if ever, question the underlying assumptions.

I have discussed and reflected upon the events discussed in the narrative with my learning set. During one discussion, the comment was made that my initial draft felt ‘bloodless’. This description has stuck with me as I continue to reflect on the day, thinking about the low levels of energy in the room (the leaders’ as well as my own) and the lack of engagement with the leadership model and the various activities I tried to lead. I wonder about the highly abstracted ideas that were presented and their lack of resonance with the leaders. Rod, John and the others appeared unengaged in the content of the session, and their attempts to challenge the claims of the model were rebutted by Benny. I now think that this might have been because they experienced a disconnect between the daily challenges they faced and the ideas in the model. Robin Holt, professor at Copenhagen Business School, captures what I am referring to:

Those being managed regard managers as purveyors of fiction that bears little resemblance to lived experience (Holt, 2006: 1667).

Similarly Watson & Harris, writing about the experience of managers, describe ‘the gap between how things are portrayed and how they really are’ (Watson & Harris, 1999: 5). This now seems to me to be a possible reason for the ‘bloodlessness’ of the session: with the exception of the small group discussions after Benny left the room, it felt like people’s lived experience had disappeared in our decontextualized and theoretical debate. With its strict agenda and technical focus, it was lacking the human vibrancy of unencumbered interaction. Tony Watson uses the very same term when he critiques ‘the

¹³ In CM terms, a ‘black hole’ is a leader who has not fully committed to the planned change and cannot therefore effectively sponsor it. This was seen as divisive behaviour and would often lead to the person being removed from their position. The analogy is to black holes in astronomy.

bloodless “technician-style” outpourings of mainstream HRM researchers’ (Watson, 2010: 925). I now move on to explore this idea of the wide gap between idealized models and lived experience, as I find it key to shifts in my thinking.

5.7 A Shift in my Thinking

In the process of my inquiry, through paying close attention to my experience, writing about it, discussing it with other researchers, and questioning previously accepted assumptions, I am becoming increasingly aware of a lack of congruence between the dominant discourse on leadership, and the day-to-day experience of leaders. I suggest that while appealing, the view of the heroic and omnipotent leader as portrayed in much popular and academic literature is actually misleading and does not represent the lived experience of leaders. Despite talk of developing a vision, and inspiring others to follow it, the work of the leader is, in my experience, far less about vision and much more about the mundane navigation of conflicting desires, opinions and priorities. This distinction is explored by Alvesson & Sveningsson (2003), who problematize thinking about leaders as special people who deal in visions and such grandiose activities. Similarly, organizational scholar Ann Cunliffe (2011) argues that leaders spend the vast majority of their time not in heroic actions, but dealing with the mundane and micro-details of daily life, in conversation with others. This is what I saw at NEWTECH with the contrast between the attempts to ‘inspirationally lead people’ which Benny had invited the team to do, and the myriad of urgent tasks with which they were actually occupied throughout the day. This leads me to agree with the distinction that the idea of a heroic, visionary leader reflects ‘magico-mythical thinking’ (Mowles, 2011a: 41), more fantasy-based than rooted in leaders’ actual experience.

The NEWTECH programme is a good example of this incongruence: the leaders were unable to make sense of nor link the leadership model and its behaviours (be bold, or more disciplined, enable empowerment) to their experience at work. Benny presented the model and suggested that the leaders needed to adopt the behaviours listed on it, arguing

that this would bring about a new and more empowered approach at the company, but they were sceptical, based on how they saw Bob actually behaving. This is an example of the difference between ideas and people's lived experience of them, and is often pointed to in more critical approaches to management. Alvesson refers to this as the 'gap between rhetoric and reality' (Alvesson, 2009a: 57). I now turn to such critical management voices in order to shed different light on the events at NEWTECH.

5.8 Critical Voices in Management and HRM

Paul Thompson argues that mainstream HRM's 'naïve optimism' (Thompson, 2011: 359) includes the common HR rhetoric that 'people are our most important asset', and the claim that 'effective' HRM practices and a strong corporate culture will unquestionably lead to enhanced performance outcomes (Huselid, 1995; Ulrich, 2008). Together with others who take a critical view of HRM (Alvesson, 2009a; Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Legge, 1979; Townley, 1993; Watson, 2010) Thompson argues against managerialism with its taken-for-granted unitary framing of issues¹⁴ that is pervasive within strategic HRM. Keegan & Boselie characterize HRM as 'prescriptive, positivist, managerial, functionalist and strategic' (Keegan & Boselie, 2006: 1505-1506) supporting views expressed earlier in this project and resonating with my experience at NEWTECH. Critical management scholar Hugh Willmott argues that a focus on managing corporate culture, often led by HR, is an insidious form of Orwellian 'doublethink' (Willmott, 1993: 518). Attempting to coerce people into believing in a certain conceptualization of leadership as we did via the leadership cascade at NEWTECH could be understood this way. Willmott points to how some HRM programmes can:

¹⁴ The idea that what is good for the company is also good for the employee.

promote or strengthen a corporate ethos that demands loyalty from employees as it excludes, silences or punishes those who question its creed (ibid: 519).

Looking back, I see how labelling someone a ‘black hole’ was doing exactly this. As an HR leader, focused on driving programmes linked to business goals, and believing in the feasibility of aligning everyone’s needs, I was highly committed to what I was doing and did not question it. Critical HRM, draws on Critical Management Studies (CMS), a tradition of which Alvesson & Willmott (1992, 2003) are leading exponents, and which surfaces and critiques the assumptions of mainstream organization and management theory and practice. According to Fournier & Grey (2000), CMS has three main characteristics: non-performativity, denaturalization, and reflexivity:

1. Non-performativity means that the approach of management or HRM should *not* (or perhaps not *only*) be about increasing organizational and business effectiveness, but should consider other issues such as people’s welfare and needs. This idea is anathema in a managerialist approach to HR. I have explained in this project about how the HRBP’s role¹⁵ is to support enhanced organizational outcomes expressed in terms of business performance. When Sarah proposed a new leadership model for NEWTECH it was in order to increase business performance, creating an organization where doubling sales would be possible.
2. Denaturalization refers to the idea that what is considered natural in organizational life, is not ‘natural’ at all, but is reflective of *one* way of understanding, typically held by a dominant group of theorists and practitioners in mainstream management. CMS questions whether managerialism is actually ‘natural’ by pointing to its taken-for-granted ideas, thus calling into question

¹⁵ HRBP stands for HR Business Partner, the re-branding of the HR manager, indicating the role’s strong business focus and alignment (Ulrich, 2008).

whether it is, or should be, the only game in town. As explained by Fleck, thought-collectives act as a ‘social constraint upon thought’ (Fleck, 1979: 85). I am suggesting that my inclusion in the corporate HR world was dependent on accepting as natural, and not challenging, the various ideas of managerialism and HRM.

3. Reflexivity: I have written about how both reflection and reflexivity were lacking in my past practice (Project 3, p.95). I have drawn on Alvesson & Spicer’s concept of ‘functional stupidity’ (2012, 2016), and their claim that leaders are encouraged not to reflect, but rather to remain within the confines of agreed interpretations of experience, interpretations that are wholly congruent with the managerialist approach. The NEWTECH workshop was designed to roll out a model without providing the time or encouragement for people to explore what they were thinking about it. CMS, in contrast, advocates reflexivity as a way to pay attention to practice and question what we are doing.

Following in a critical tradition, Robert Jackall’s study of corporations, ‘Moral Mazes’ (2010), and Andre Spicer’s provocative 2013 article, ‘Shooting the shit: the role of bullshit in organizations’, both describe life in corporations in ways that resonate with my experience. Jackall describes the language of managers in corporations as ‘euphemistic’ (Jackall, 2010: 142), which he explains in terms of the need to be safe, taking care not to annoy or upset the boss. This leads to sanitized, neutral conversations and the use of ‘an elaborate linguistic code marked by emotional neutrality’ (ibid: 143). Benny’s introduction and unwillingness to engage in serious challenges reflect this kind of safe talk. Spicer takes this further and exposes an entire code based on the term ‘bullshit’ by which he means ‘organizational speech and text that is produced with scant regard for the truth’ (Spicer, 2013: 653) and ‘fundamentally “empty”, bearing little relationship with the reality of what goes on in the organization’ (ibid: 657). This also echoes Holt’s view, expressed earlier, about managers as purveyors of fiction.

In my work both at NEWTECH and at MIDCO I recognize this way of speaking and writing in corporations that is largely detached from, and non-reflective of people's experience. When the NEWTECH team appeared detached from the leadership model and the ensuing conversation, I do not think this was because they were so overwhelmed with other business priorities that they were unable to engage in the conversation. I believe they were reacting to Benny's unwillingness to enter into a debate about the lack of congruence between the model ('empowerment') and what they experienced (Bob's leadership style, and to a lesser extent, Benny's too). I realize that I was part of the game we were all playing, doing what Spicer indicates:

Concepts that should be subjected to further interrogation are skirted over without any further inquiry (ibid: 661).

I wonder why I did not encourage inquiry into what people were thinking and feeling, but rather colluded in the way that we *did* indeed skirt over the issue of empowerment that was at the centre of the new model. Looking around the NEWTECH conference room I noted the shift in behaviour when the leaders in Benny's team realized that the discussion was limited to the topics on the agenda. John and Xavier had tried to discuss the lack of empowerment at NEWTECH, but Benny made it clear that he did not want to open this up with his 'Guys, let's leave Bob's style out of this' comment, and from that point on there were no further tough questions asked. The only time the leaders became active and animated was in their small group discussions, when Benny was out of the room. For the rest of the day, they were quiet and hardly participated. When I saw a couple of them glancing at their phones or watches, I sensed a desire for the day to be over so that they could get back to their endless tasks. This reminds me of what Scott (1990) describes as 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts. Drawing on his work in South-East Asia observing the behaviour of those under domination, Scott describes what happens when the person perceived by a group to be the most powerful member is absent. I saw this in the team's very different behaviour when Benny was present (tacit compliance) compared to when he left the room (animated challenge and debate of previously undiscussed topics).

I do not know if Benny fully agreed with the model, and whether his public voice reflected his hidden and private views, but he fulfilled his obligation of presenting it to his team in what CM calls a sponsorship cascade. I believe that the emotionally neutral language and Benny's unwillingness to enter into debate on the issues are key to understanding why the session felt 'bloodless'. Jackall describes a workshop where the senior manager behaved in a way that was highly unusual and certainly not 'bloodless', speaking out in a way that departed from typical corporate behaviour, and challenging the team:

Fellows, why aren't any of you asking about the total lack of correspondence between what we're preaching here and the way we run our company?' (Jackall, 2010: 152).

Looking back at the NEWTECH session, there were no such provocative questions asked by Benny, and although I was thinking along these lines, I did not ask either. I was playing my role – following not just the agenda that Samantha had created, but also the 'rules-of-the-game' as Jackall (ibid) describes them, in the same way I had done a year earlier in the GLOCO programme (Project 2), where I did not change the slides or the words. I see how this relates to seeking both recognition and follow-on contracts with the clients. Looking at the question above, it feels to me like this would have been calling the game into question, and perhaps until now this has been too much of a risk for me to take. I am not sure if it would have been helpful for the group if I had asked it: it will only be in future programmes that I will see if there has been a shift in my actions and what has followed.

Both Jackall and Spicer's views are extremely critical of the corporate world, and while many of their views resonate with my experience, I also find them one-sided and dismissive, seeming to find nothing positive about the corporate world. Rejecting everything about corporate life as 'bullshit' seems overly pejorative and provocative. Alvesson himself critiques critical HRM, suggesting that it might be helpful to 'also include "positive" work' (Alvesson, 2009a: 59) and to provide 'some ideas on how to

work with HRM issues in a more productive way' (ibid). He suggests that critical writers (himself included) should also be concerned with ideas that:

... go beyond fault-finding and focusing on what is wrong with dominant ideas, models, claims and perspectives (ibid).

I agree with this critique of CMS: that it tends to focus on what is wrong, without offering a more positive and potentially helpful agenda. In pragmatist terms I would argue that it does not keep the ends-in-view, and does not enable action.

5.9 Thinking Critically about Leadership Development

To reiterate, an assumption of mainstream leadership development is that leadership can be broken down into distinct areas of competence which can then be taught in a programme. Reflecting on my experience since joining the DMan and reading the work of Ralph Stacey in particular, I am beginning to question this. Stacey writes:

Ostensibly the leadership programmes are about developing the competences or skills that the autonomous leader requires in order to bring about change (Stacey, 2012: 75).

With the word 'ostensibly', Stacey points to and challenges the idea that a set of leadership behaviours can be taught. He goes on to argue that leadership programmes tend to focus on idealized models of leadership, implying an unconstrained environment into which leaders act and lead. This was the case at NEWTECH with its promise that if the various leadership elements are adopted, then empowerment will occur and this 'will allow leadership to emerge' (NEWTECH internal document). Mainstream LD makes many similar claims as to the efficacy of its programmes. A report by Ashridge Business School in 2010 concludes: 'there is substantial evidence that leadership development makes a positive impact' (Hayward & Voller, 2010). This claim was based on several

meta-analyses of LD programmes¹⁶ together with Ashridge's own assessments of the programmes they have run. I do, however, question this 'evidence', and am sceptical about objectivity on the part of an organization whose business (like mine) depends on this kind of claim. In this project I have discussed and critiqued leadership models and programmes such as NEWTECH's, and concluded that there is something very appealing about them as a way to provide what I now claim is an illusion of control: a roadmap and an 'if/then' structure to navigate the way towards the accomplishment of goals. Stacey claims that such models are 'abstract, idealized and edifying' (Stacey, 2012: 64), but as a reflection of the linear causality inherent in mainstream management theory and practice, I argue that their adoption is not surprising.

A very different understanding of leadership from the individualist definition offered in the introduction (Bass, 1990: 14) is of a *social* practice which evolves in interactions between interdependent individuals. When Samantha worked with Bob and Sarah to design the model, and I was charged with supporting Benny in presenting it to his team, such an understanding might have helped us see that there could be no certainty as to the outcome, and this might have changed the way we ran the workshop. Considering the interdependence inherent in a social understanding of leadership posits an entirely different way of thinking about what a leader does. As Stacey writes, arguing for a social rather than a systemic understanding of the practice of leadership:

This presents radical challenges to the dominant discourse in all its forms, because it questions the ability of leaders and others to change the 'whole' in any direct manner (Stacey, 2011a: 293).

Drawing on this point, the NEWTECH leadership model could not meet its claim of changing the leadership behaviours of the company, and I would argue, against Heifetz,

¹⁶ For example, Burke & Day, 1986; Collins & Holton, 2004.

that the various tools and tactics he proposes, and on which the model was based, cannot bring about change (Heifetz et al., 2009). Linking this social understanding to what it might mean for LD, Flinn and Mowles dispute the fact that ‘the act of leading can be reduced to a set of identifiable skills and competences that can be learned’ (Flinn & Mowles, 2014: 11). With this argument they are effectively calling into question the way LD is commonly practiced within the dominant discourse of HRM, for example, in the NEWTECH programme and as advocated by mainstream LD consultants.

This is what has led me to question what I have been doing for so long: I no longer think that the role of LD is to cascade and develop a set of individual skills and competencies, focusing on what Aristotle (2004) calls *techne* (processes, skills and rule-based knowledge). *Techne*, according to Aristotle, is, as presented in my earlier projects, one of three ways of knowing (the others are *episteme*: universal and context-independent scientific knowledge and *phronesis*: context-dependent practical judgment). The NEWTECH workshop focused almost exclusively on *techne*, with a series of technical exercises and no deep reflection on what these meant. I am arguing that focusing on *phronesis* might be a more useful way to help leaders develop. I will come back to this idea when I discuss how my practice is changing.

5.10 Complex Responsive Processes of Relating and Leadership Development

Summing up my argument so far, I have begun to question the mainstream, managerialist approach to HRM and LD with its focus on a rational, linear and individualist approach to organizational life. This approach largely ignores the complex social interactions between interdependent people which I now believe are fundamental to understanding what people are doing when they come together at work. The perspective of complex responsive processes of relating (Mowles, 2011a, 2015; Stacey, 2011a, 2012; Stacey & Griffin, 2005) shares a critical stance towards managerialism with the tradition of CMS introduced earlier, and draws on complexity thinking from the natural sciences as a source domain to provide insight, by analogy, to human interaction. This perspective

argues that rather than focusing on abstractions, simplifications and idealizations of organizational life, as we did during the NEWTECH workshop, it may be more helpful to think about the everyday micro-interactions and experiences of people at work. So, for example, inquiring into what Xavier and Rod were feeling when they seemed to be to be disinterested in the workshop and were looking at their phones, asking people what they meant by the raised eyebrows that they exchanged – these might have led to more helpful and relevant discussions for the team than those we struggled to have about the model.

A significant movement in my thinking has caused me to begin to understand human behaviour and organizational life as essentially unpredictable and non-linear: we cannot attribute one cause to one effect, nor can we anticipate outcomes in an ‘if...then’ manner. I dispute the idea that rolling out a leadership model and mandating a series of workshops at NEWTECH could cause a pre-determined shift in behaviour which would lead to an increase in the company’s sales. In fact, many of the leaders on Bob’s team resisted holding even the first workshop, much less completing the series, and as far as I know, no shift in leadership behaviours has occurred. This exemplifies one of the key ideas of the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating: that change cannot be implemented in a top-down manner, but rather occurs ‘in many, many local interactions’ (Stacey, 2012: 15). This idea is both reassuring and frightening. It is reassuring because it enables me to look back at my struggles and conclude that it was not my fault. It is not that I was failing in my attempts to implement change, but that the idea that change could be implemented in a top-down fashion was in itself misguided. It is frightening because if change only occurs as a result of many local interactions, what then is my role as a facilitator supporting leadership and change programmes?

Challenging the dominant discourse and its views of leadership, Griffin (2002) argues that leadership emerges in social processes of mutual recognition between interdependent people, a view that is radically different from the mainstream views reflected in the NEWTECH model and workshop and in the ‘sponsor’ and ‘target’ approach of CM. I presented the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating in some detail in

Project 2 (p.61). I will not re-introduce these ideas here, but rather provide a summary of the key differences between mainstream organizational thinking (managerialism) as presented earlier in this project, and the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, focusing on those elements which are most relevant for a discussion of LD. I do this by way of the following table, acknowledging that in aiming to present a succinct comparative summary, I am necessarily (over)simplifying by distilling all of mainstream organizational thinking into one column.

	From the perspective of mainstream organizational thinking:	From the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating
Organization	A reified entity, thought of as a system; a whole with constituent parts, for example sub-functions, different departments and people.	‘the ongoing patterning of power and ideology as they emerge in local conversation’ (Mowles, 2011a: 8).
Causality	Causality is linear: efficient, formative and rationalist– movement is towards a future that has been pre-designed, or is already embedded in the current state.	Causality is transformative: movement and change emerge out of ‘responsive processes of local interaction between entities in the present’ (Stacey, 2011a: 301).
Leadership	A focus on the individual characteristics of a leader and the instrumentality of their actions, e.g. ‘leadership is a means for generating ...shared direction, alignment, and commitment’ (Biech, 2010: 2).	Emerges and is continually negotiated in processes of mutual social recognition. A leader may have the opportunity to wield influence more than others if he/she is better able to take on the attitude of the generalized other (Mead, 1934: 154).
Power	An attribute of people. Leaders have the power to drive strategy, set an agenda, and direct the work of followers.	An element of relationships between interdependent people; power shifts according to who needs whom more (Elias, 1970: 79).
Communication	A ‘sender/receiver’ model, whereby a message is delivered ‘as is’ from one to another (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). The focus is on getting a message across effectively, e.g. Kotter (1996).	Meaning is co-created, and emerges in the ongoing social act, a conversation of gestures and responses, where one cannot be separated from the other (Mead, 1934: 78).
Strategy and Change	The top-down process of determining a desired direction for an organization and then implementing a plan to achieve it, e.g. Child, 1972.	Patterns emerge from many local interactions; cannot be pre-selected or implemented as is, by anyone (Stacey, 2011a: 330).

What are the key implications of a shift in understanding, away from the perspective of mainstream organizational thinking or managerialism, and towards the perspective of complex responsive processes and other more critical and relational ways of understanding leadership? I will discuss this by drawing on two writers whose ideas have had a major influence on my research: the American pragmatist, George H. Mead (1934) and the process sociologist, Norbert Elias (1970, 1991, 2000). Mead and Elias' ideas have contributed significantly to the formulation of the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, and contemporary scholars have also found them useful: Barbara Simpson has drawn on Mead, and Chris Mowles has written extensively about Elias. I am drawing on these two writers, rather than others I could have selected, because of their focus on *social* aspects of relating. I will explore two main areas which I believe encompass the main differences between the perspectives compared in my table, using these to further explore my experience at NEWTECH:

1. Interdependence and Emergence
2. Communication and Meaning-making

5.10.1 Interdependence and Emergence

One of the ideas shared by a complex responsive process perspective and other critical and relational approaches to management is the view that behaviour cannot be directed towards a pre-determined future state by someone who is assumed to be standing outside of an organization. Indeed, by arguing against the idea of an organization as a system, and instead seeing *organizing* as an ongoing responsive process, no-one can be considered to be 'outside' looking at and analysing 'it' from an objective, observer standpoint. Furthermore, the future is uncertain, and inherently unpredictable, emerging in many local interactions which form wider patterns. Elias posits that because individuals are interdependent, they are continually enabling and constraining each other. This immediately problematizes the approach in the NEWTECH workshop, where certain leadership behaviours were pre-selected by Bob, Sarah and Samantha, assuming that they could mandate their adoption. It also casts doubt on the idea of setting a strict

time-bound agenda, as we did at NEWTECH, believing that we could control what topics will be discussed and for precisely how long.

The perspective of complex responsive processes focuses on what is happening when people respond to each other, with an emphasis on ever-growing chains of interdependent people, linked together in figurations of power.¹⁷ Rather than reifying the organization as an entity, this perspective focuses on the *process* of organizing as ongoing patterns of conversation. Elias' ideas are highly relevant for a critical discussion of LD, particularly regarding interdependence, and how power relations emerge in the workplace. Elias claims that the outcomes of our intentions can never be controlled, which undermines the basic assumption of managerialism related to control, linearity and predictability. He focuses on the unpredictability of social life due to fluctuating power relations between interdependent people. As a facilitator I have my intentions for an LD programme, but I can never control the outcome because I am always acting into a web of everyone else's intentions. As Elias explains, there is a:

web of chains of action into which each individual act within this differentiated society is woven (Elias, 2000: 368).

We form figurations, and the form these take cannot be determined or predicted by any individual's intentions alone (Elias, 1970: 164). Our interdependence stems from our need for each other: this was explored in Project 2 when I had a sense of being 'powerless' while on trial for the lucrative contract, yet came to understand, through Elias' ideas about the balance of power between interdependent people, that just as I needed the contract, so too did LDO need someone to take over the lead facilitator role at GLOCO. The power figuration shifts according to who needs whom more at any one time. At NEWTECH I was hoping to be evaluated positively and invited back to

¹⁷ Elias (1970: 13) uses the term 'figuration' to describe groupings of interdependent human beings.

continue the programme; it was important for Benny to be seen by Bob and Sarah as a ‘good sponsor’ of the new model. We are all invested in what we are doing together, and for this reason we remain engaged in ‘playing the game’, as I have explained throughout this thesis.

Mainstream organizational theory focuses on the individual as separate from the social environment, implying two distinct and separate areas. Mead, however, sees the individual and the social as one and the same, two sides of the same coin. The idea of the inseparability of the self and the social is at the heart of Mead’s work, where he insists: ‘selves exist only in relation to other selves’ (Mead, 1925: 262). Thinking further about how we were all constraining each other in the NEWTECH workshop, I draw on Mead’s concept of social control (ibid: 273). I believe this concept provides an important distinction that resonates strongly with my experience and provides a useful way of explaining many of the things with which I have been struggling in this thesis, especially related to following rules and power. I react strongly, viscerally, to his image of a ‘censor that stands at the door of our imagery and inner conversations’ (ibid: 272), recalling how my silent conversations often contain imagined admonishments coming from my expectation of others’ expectations. I find Mead’s idea that different people have different levels of social control, dependent on their life histories, helpful in explaining how I think about my experience differently from others in my research community. In Mead’s words:

Each individual has a world that differs in some degree from that of any other member of the same community... he slices the events of the community life that are common to all from a different angle from that of any other individual (ibid: 259-260).

I remember my strict childhood with its clear and non-negotiable rules (Project 1, p.18) and realize that the ‘specious’ (Mead, 1925: 273) or ‘living’ present (Griffin, 2002: 169) is not a moment in time, but part of a process which contains both my story of my past, as well as my expectation of the future. These both influence how I experience the present.

I see a strong connection between social control and habitus and how we are formed by the social groupings to which we belong. My sense of unease with the NEWTECH workshop comes, I believe, from my shifting membership in significant social groups: moving out of mainstream HRM and into the critical discourse of the DMan means that whereas once I would probably have been happy with my role during the workshop, I am not now, imagining my expectation of my fellow researchers' thoughts and wondering, 'what would they say if they saw me facilitating this workshop in this way?'

5.10.2 Communication and Meaning-making

Thinking about communication from the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating poses a radical challenge to the way that Shannon & Weaver (1949) conceptualize it, as the transmission of a message containing meaning, from one to another in a 'sender-receiver' model. This model is the foundation of the dominant approach to organizational communications, including the leadership cascade at NEWTECH. I believe that a more useful way of thinking about communication is to consider how meaning is co-created, and emerges in a social context, in the ongoing conversation of gestures and responses which together form meaning. Mead explains this as follows:

The response of one organism to the gesture of another in any given social act is the meaning of that gesture (Mead, 1934: 78).

The cornerstone of Mead's thinking is that 'the 'social act', in the form of a conversation of gestures, is 'the basis of all human meaning-making' (Simpson, 2009: 1334).

The idea of meaning emerging in a social responsive process is, I suggest, foreign to mainstream HRM, which considers organizations as rational systems represented by organization charts, lines of control, powerful leaders and compliant followers of rules. Samantha spent hours in 'TTT' sessions, where she trained us to deliver the new leadership model in precise detail. The focus was on the content and how to deliver it, including rehearsing the exact words to use. We did not think about, nor discuss, the idea

that Mead proposes, that the meaning of the model could not be determined independently from the response of the team.

Considering that meaning is co-created, and cannot be known in advance, problematizes the belief that the meaning of the new leadership model at NEWTECH could be pre-determined and communicated via a cascade. Stacey explains this, drawing on Mead's theory of gesture and response in a way that I now believe sheds useful light on what happens when leaders 'cascade' information:

These are necessarily generalized, simplified, abstract statements which constitute powerful gestures to large numbers of people. However, what then happens depends on how these abstractions are taken up in the responses of people in many, many local interactions (Stacey, 2011b: 14).

In our gesturing and responding we are bringing our social worlds along with us: our life histories, our relationships, as well as our sense of the 'generalized other' (Mead, 1934): our ability to take the attitude, meaning the tendency to act, of the groups to which we belong. This means that we are always thinking about what others expect of us in a given setting, and it is to this that Mead refers when he talks about 'playing the game'. I have referred to this in relation to the NEWTECH workshop where I talked about my expectation of Sarah's expectations: this exemplifies how, in a paradoxical way, we are at once formed by, and forming the game. This idea rejects the concept of the individual as independent or autonomous, and echoes Elias' views on being enabled and constrained by the groups to which we belong.

For Mead, leadership is not something that an individual 'has' or 'does', rather it emerges in interactions. We cannot claim that a leader has unique abilities to drive change or any specific action, because in a complex social situation we can never know how the gestures of a leader will be taken up by others. While gestures made by leaders may be 'powerful gestures', such as Bob and Sarah rolling out a new leadership model for NEWTECH, they cannot know what this means in advance. Benny's gesture (presenting

the model) will be taken up in multiple ways by the different members of his team, each with their unique life history and habitual patterns of acting.

Mead's social understanding of leadership presents a strong contrast to the idealized picture of a visionary and autonomous leader which is part of the managerialist approach that I have presented in this project. Claiming that successful leaders are those who take on attributes such as being 'bold' or 'disciplined' as the model advocated, is an example of such an idealizing mechanism. To paraphrase Scott, the actual is replaced by the abstract (Scott, 1998: 12). These abstractions are generalisations which have to be particularized in the different contexts in which the leaders find themselves acting. What does it mean for Xavier or Rod to be 'bold' or 'disciplined'? I would argue that these are largely meaningless terms when left in the abstract as we did in the NEWTECH workshop.

As I explore the ideas of complex responsive processes of relating as well as other critical theories of management, I find that this perspective provides me with a way to think usefully about the everyday interactions and experiences of life at work, including at NEWTECH, and this is causing a change in how I consider my role as a facilitator as I now proceed to explain.

5.11 Re-considering my Role as Facilitator

With insights from considering HR and LD practices from both mainstream and critical perspectives, I now return to the question I posed towards the beginning of this project about why I might have felt 'stuck' and disappointed with my work at NEWTECH. I think this was because I continued to follow a process designed to elicit an outcome that I no longer believed possible. Considering human interaction as essentially non-linear, it no longer made sense for me to think that I could present a model, facilitate some technical exercises, and expect that this would cause behaviour to change. The workshop at NEWTECH, like the CM enrolment workshops, was an example of the kind of thinking where 'we need to design a process to have a process' (Mowles, 2011b), an idea

rooted in the assumptions already explored in this project related to systems thinking, behaviourism and the role of the independent leader. At NEWTECH I was following the rules that Samantha had presented in the 'TTT' session. Looking back, I think that rather than the session being about making sense of the leadership concepts together, the session was in itself the goal to be accomplished, a kind of 'ticking the box' exercise, fully congruent with the managerialist approach I have explored in this project. Mowles goes on to question these kind of workshops, asking whether:

they tend rather to suppress opportunities for learning rather than encourage them, the very opposite of what they intend (Mowles, 2011b).

This strongly resonates for me, recalling the NEWTECH session with its focus on the agenda, the highly engineered activities, and our 'pronounced anxiety about time' (ibid), as well as Benny's refusal to discuss the empowerment issue and my reluctance to open this up. I think that these activities did indeed suppress opportunities for learning and that the objective of the activity was simply for it to take place.

As I think about the value and impact of this kind of workshop, this includes considering my role as facilitator and what might be helpful for my clients. To explore this idea, I return to Mowles:

Discovering what is 'optimal' for a particular group would probably involve quite a lot of negotiation, rather than blindly sticking to the agenda as pre-planned, and would emerge moment by moment (ibid).

At NEWTECH I recognize that I did 'blindly stick to the agenda' rather than allow what might have been more useful for the group to emerge. Providing input to my inquiry into my role as facilitator, Mowles goes on to say that:

There could well be a role for the facilitator, but the fulfilling of it would partly be about encouraging others to take responsibility for the way that the workshop was running, the things we might choose to talk about and how we might talk about

them. One of the things to talk about would be our power relationships and what this constrained and enabled (ibid).

This would be an entirely different approach from the one that Samantha designed, and I followed. What I understand Mowles to be drawing attention to is the fact that the conversation *is* the work: we cannot design a process to have a process, but rather it is in the process of conversing with each other that change may emerge. This would include wrestling with abstractions such as ‘boldness’ and ‘discipline’, negotiating what these might mean, not as generalisations, but as each leader particularizes them in daily life. Today, through discussing and writing about the experience, I have started to explore different ways of working in LD, challenging the ideas of mainstream LD to a greater extent than before, as can be seen from the following vignettes from recent consulting engagements.

5.12 What Am I Doing Differently?

5.12.1 Sandy

The e-mail was from my client, Sandy, a senior HR executive at PRIMECO: ‘Sharon, do you have a few minutes to talk this week?’ I have undertaken several projects for Sandy, including executive coaching for the company’s top leaders, LD programmes, and developing a new talent strategy, and was pleased to hear from her again. The work, as is the case with most of my consulting, is firmly rooted in the mainstream organizational paradigm explored throughout this thesis.

During the ensuing phone conversation, Sandy explained that she wanted me to design and run an organizational survey to measure whether the company’s several thousand employees believed that their culture was shifting to one which prioritized talent development. As I listened to Sandy, I suddenly felt an opening to challenge what she was suggesting. Hardly recognizing myself, I began, gingerly at first, to suggest a different approach to the assignment. I proposed inviting employees, on a voluntary

basis, to come together in groups and talk in an unstructured way, exploring together the meaning they are making of changes at the company. This was a very different idea from sending out a quantitative survey, or instructing employees to show up to agenda-driven workshops.

The inspiration for this approach comes from the work of Patricia Shaw, one of the founders of the DMan programme (Shaw, 1997), who describes a consulting engagement where she challenged the initially proposed structure in a much more significant way than I did.

5.12.2 Alison

I recently ran two LD sessions for a group of young leaders at MIDCO. I designed and delivered these sessions, deliberately creating an agenda with plenty of time for discussion. During the sessions it became clear that we needed more time for the participants to talk to each other about what they were struggling with at work. I received approval to run two further virtual sessions, which we called ‘reflection sessions’. This was a major step: just giving the sessions such a title was very different from anything we had done before. I even received a request from the HR/LD leader, Alison, to send her the slides in advance! I explained that there would be no slides, no pre-determined agenda, and that each call would involve a small group of leaders simply speaking to each other, with minimal intervention from me, trying to make sense of what they were doing on a daily basis. Alison asked me if I was sure about this ‘loose’ structure, and when I replied that I was, she agreed to try it.

During the phone sessions I found myself doing very little. I welcomed the participants and began by asking a simple question, ‘How are you feeling about your work?’ I then waited to see who would speak. My hope was that by simply allowing the leaders to talk openly to each other, they would begin to share what they were finding difficult. I waited anxiously to see if this would work. I thought to myself that if the silence went on for too long I might have to say something myself. Actually, the calls ran over the allocated time

as people enthusiastically participated. One young leader from the Middle East told a story of one of his direct reports, who was refusing to carry out a certain task: ‘We work as a team, and use IM¹⁸ to keep in touch. Sharma refuses to switch on the programme. I’ve told her many times but she refuses. I don’t know what to do’. After describing the situation, he asked the group how they might handle it. Others jumped in and shared similar examples, or made suggestions. There were no prescriptions nor frameworks in the sense of ‘if...then’, just a conversation with examples and offers of support.

5.12.3 Sonia and Tania – GLOCO2

Sonia was my first boss at MIDCO almost twenty years ago and we have kept in touch since then. Today she is a senior executive at GLOCO, the company where I run the LD programme described in Project 2. A few months ago I received an e-mail from Tania, introducing herself as Sonia’s HR Director. She told me that Sonia had suggested she contact me to help her design, develop and run a new leadership programme. I was flattered that Sonia had recommended me for this work.

It became clear to me that this was an opportunity to do something very different from the kind of programme we had run at NEWTECH. This was about six months later and I was becoming convinced that there was a more useful way to develop leaders. Tania and Sonia were open to my suggestion that we base the programme on the day-to-day experience of both the participants and their managers. I had the chance to interview over twenty members of the department as part of the design phase and it became clear that their needs were related to enhancing their expertise and developing practical judgment in leading highly complex business deals.

¹⁸ Instant Messaging – a system used to send short messages across the internet which ‘pop up’ on a user’s screen and attract immediate attention – which is both their benefit and their drawback.

The first cohort has completed the three module programme and the second cohort is underway. The programme has few formal presentations, no new models to adopt, and except for start, end and break times, no strict agenda to follow. The participants work together with their leaders, including Tania and Sonia, and with me, and we are joined by a group of coaches/actors to work in small groups exploring real-life situations. We sit in a circle and discuss various cases in a way that feels much ‘thicker’¹⁹ than the way concepts were discussed at NEWTECH. People try out different ways of acting: presenting to a top executive who does not like the idea they are pitching, trying to encourage a more junior team member to join in and offer suggestions, or thinking in different ways about the meaning a proposal has for others. Discussing situations leads to shifts in understanding about their experience, rather than this being something that they can learn and apply. There are no guarantees: we are not promising participants, ‘If you do as Sonia does, you will be successful’. Having argued against a linear ‘if/then’ approach, I cannot now use it to claim that my approach is sure to achieve better outcomes. Mine is a more nuanced, tentative suggestion, along the lines of ‘here are some approaches that we have found helpful, let’s look at how they might play out...’

Just before module one, Tania sent me an evaluation form that she had put together for participants to complete. I smiled when I opened the document: despite this being a very different kind of programme, the form looked exactly the same as the one I described in Project 2 (p.47), including a request to rate *my* performance as a facilitator on a 1-5 scale. ‘But Tania,’ I replied when she asked for my comments on the form, ‘does it make sense to ask the participants to rate *me*? The group will be working together, discussing issues and practicing how they might act differently...’ Tania agreed, and while we did not give up the idea of an evaluation form entirely, it looked quite different. We simply asked participants to provide comments on the first module and suggest what they might want

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz’ term (1973) refers to rich, contextual narrative-like descriptions of particular situations.

to do in the second and third modules; no scores were used. Significantly the comments indicated that this very different kind of LD approach was appreciated by the participants. Several specifically commented on the value of exploring how to act in difficult situations, without any suggestion that there is ‘one right answer’.

5.13 Summarizing the Change in my Practice

I have shared these three vignettes, not because I am proposing that they represent the adoption of a radically different or better approach to LD, but as a way of drawing attention to how I am altering my response to client requests and how the resulting work has changed in the subtle ways indicated. Working with Sandy, Alison, Sonia and Tania I was able to risk negotiating what we were going to do, and I believe that this is due to my work on the DMan, causing a shift not just in my understanding of the assumptions underpinning LD, but in how I see my role.

The NEWTECH session left me feeling frustrated because of the lack of congruence with some of my new ideas, outlined above. I am beginning to see a more valuable way of working with and developing leaders in LD programmes: helping them develop their capacity to be reflexive, to share struggles at work, to talk about how they are thinking about them, and by exploring this together, potentially to find different ways of making sense of their experience. Inspired by my work at the DMan, I find myself developing leaders’ (and my own) practical judgment (phronesis) through exploring practice, rather than offering simple solutions through models and frameworks. Aristotle’s phronesis has been taken up extensively in recent organizational literature (for example Eikeland, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Grint, 2007; Holt, 2006). I find many such modern interpretations of the Greek philosopher’s ideas to be highly relevant for my current understanding of the role of LD. At MIDCO and at GLOCO this was my approach, encouraging the HR leaders to focus on helping leaders take their experience seriously, rather than presenting the kind of models which participants find hard to connect to their daily work, as I did at NEWTECH. I do this in the belief that seriously engaging with, reflecting on, and

becoming reflexive about daily challenges, rather than focusing on idealized and disconnected models, may help leaders develop greater skill in facing them. I believe that phronesis can only be developed through exploring lived experience and in relation to particular contexts. This is consistent with my adoption of a pragmatist approach with a focus on *praxis*,²⁰ an orientation towards practice and action, based on context-dependent judgment. A pragmatist approach to developing leaders is one that has ‘ends-in-view’ (Martela 2015: 537). I agree with Martela that:

some theories and explanations are better than others in guiding our behaviour within organizational reality..... in practical terms some theories are better maps for navigating the world than others (ibid: 550).

I am advocating working with leaders in a way that, drawing on Martela, provides them with better ‘maps’, arguing that models such as the one presented at NEWTECH are misleading ‘maps’ that increase leaders’ confusion when they try and reconcile their everyday issues with the concepts delivered in a workshop. This was the case in the programme I delivered while still at MIDCO (Project 1, p.36) where the choice of how to coach an employee was reduced to a number on a 4x4 grid, giving new managers a false illusion that if they just choose the right approach, a positive outcome is assured. Watson makes a similar point when he argues for the pragmatic superiority of theories of HRM that favour taking daily experience seriously in the way that I claim in this project. As he argues, this is because:

Anyone acting on the basis of the former knowledge would be less likely to succeed in whatever project they were engaged in than would someone being informed by the latter theorizing (Watson, 2010: 917).

²⁰ Closely related to phronesis, *praxis* is the Greek term for action or practice.

Watson, like Martela, proposes a way of working which enables ‘successful’ action. One could challenge Watson on what ‘succeed’ means. Having read his work, I do not believe he is arguing for success in the managerialist sense: meeting targets and enabling high performance. I think he is claiming, and I would now agree, that the goal of HR and LD programmes is to help leaders deal with the everyday messiness and complexity of their experience at work.

Sandy, Alison and Sonia all knew (or knew of) me as an internal leader at MIDCO, and perhaps this is why they have been open to, and even expected me to challenge them and propose different approaches. They see me as an experienced corporate leader who may be able to offer more value as a facilitator of LD programmes than those who in Stacey’s experience are often:

...young women around thirty years old...with no significant leadership experience of their own but who can present the models and supervise the exercises (Stacey, 2012: 62).

Looking back to the beginning of my career in LD, I was one of them. I recognize how my lack of experience meant that I could not support the development of *phronetic* knowledge. Today I think I am more helpful to my clients by daring to challenge them, and focusing on developing leaders’ practical judgment, drawing on my own corporate experience. I cannot generalize that from now on I will only take on the kind of work where I can shape the assignment, but I do think that even if I were to take on another NEWTECH-type of project today, I would run the session differently, perhaps questioning the planned approach, as I did with Sandy, and not skirting around difficult issues, for example, the incongruent presentation of the idea of ‘empowerment’.

I have written about habitus and how our habitual patterns of acting form and are formed by the groups to which we belong. Joining the DMan and becoming a researcher, someone who is adopting critically reflexive methods, is changing the significant groupings to which I belong. While I held an executive role in a corporation, where I believed that challenging these views would have been poorly regarded, I toed the line

and followed the rules. As I noted in Project 3 (p.103), the way I thought about recognition may have effectively trapped me in my need for positive affirmation, freezing me in a present state and denying me the freedom to change (Sartre, 1984). Sartre's ideas draw my attention to something I had not thought about before: how recognition is an enabling and a constraining process, both at the same time. Now that I have stepped out of my corporate role, become a consultant, and begun working, reading and writing in a critical tradition, my practice is beginning to change.

5.14 Conclusion

As I conclude Project 4, I find the following observation especially apt. It was made by the late Professor Doug Griffin, my former second supervisor:

There is staggering complexity in the interdependency of people in a large organization.... It is astounding that we continue to hold fantasies that single persons or small cliques of persons can steer such complexity to achieve targets that they have set in advance (Griffin, 2002: 218).

I used to believe in this 'fantasy' about leadership as it is commonly conceptualized in the dominant discourse,²¹ believing that leaders can stand outside of a situation and determine how it will unfold, despite experience suggesting the contrary. The NEWTECH workshop is an example of this: the leaders believed it was possible to design a model to change the way leaders behaved at the company, yet the outcome was different, not surprisingly in light of my current understanding. Far from recognizing what Griffin calls the 'staggering complexity', I recall how it was a source of pride at

²¹e.g. Bass, 1990, referenced in the Introduction to this project, and the CM approach also discussed in this project.

MIDCO to promote simplification in all matters. Perhaps this was another way in which I continued to miss the gorillas around me (Project 1, p.28).

Adopting a pragmatist approach to research and practice, I am now arguing against the way that managerialism and evidence-based management treat ‘evidence’ and ‘scientific management’ as if these were neutral, value-free descriptions. Looking back at my long-held and unquestioned views, I believe Thomas Nagel (1986) is right that there can be no ‘view from nowhere’. As I have claimed in this project, our beliefs are a function of the thought-collectives and groups to which we belong. Dewey makes a similar point, rejecting the possibility of a ‘spectator’ view of knowledge, arguing that our thought patterns are a function of our habits (Dewey, 1958: 14), as does Martela, stating that:

inquiry never starts from a neutral *tabula rasa* position, but it takes place through the actions of the inquirer that are shaped by his or her particular world-view. (Martela, 2015: 549).

I return once again to the question regarding what I do as a facilitator when I feel ‘stuck’ in a process that I have started to question. The simple answer is: I allow myself to question things, and I take my feeling of being stuck seriously – in other words I adopt a reflexive stance towards my work, including my struggles with it. I no longer think of myself as a ‘guru’ who knows all the answers, and as my thinking changes, so too does my practice. I am more open to challenge ideas, and am becoming humbler about the impact of my work, and the value it might provide to my clients. I have shared some early examples of this. This is a subtle shift: I am not rejecting managerialism per se, nor am I proposing that from now on I will only take on work that reflects or at least permits a critical approach. I recognize two important points in this regard: firstly, that I need to continue to make a living and that much of my work comes from within the mainstream organizational paradigm. Secondly, as Mowles (2011a) states, corporations will continue to demand a fluency with managerialism on the part of its leaders, and not preparing them for this world would be negligent on behalf of those charged with LD, in the same way as it would be not to teach my MBA students basic change management models such as

Kotter (1996). The difference is that whereas once I might have posed an exam question such as ‘Give examples of how you would use Kotter’s 8-step approach to implement a major organizational change’, I am now asking my students, ‘What assumptions are implicit in Kotter’s 8-steps and what questions does the model raise for you?’ In this way, while recognizing that there is indeed a ‘universal and dominant currency of management language which one must accumulate in order to be recognized’ (Mowles, 2011a: 106), I also encourage students to recognize the assumptions underpinning mainstream approaches and to be critical and reflexive about them.

In conclusion, I am now arguing that an appreciation of the complexity of organizational life, paying attention to the interdependence, the fluctuating power relations and the mutual recognition, will lead to a more helpful and nuanced approach to my work with leaders. Ralph Stacey, whose views on leadership development have had a profound impact on my thinking, writes:

Thinking together about what we are doing and why we are doing it seems to me to be the only way to produce reasonable and lasting changes in what we do (Stacey 2011b: 19).

I believe this offers a significant alternative to the kind of LD programme adopted at NEWTECH. I suggest that cascading a new leadership model via a one-day workshop, or even a series of sessions, cannot change behaviour. I argue for placing reflection on leaders’ day-to-day activity, and developing their practical judgment at the heart of LD programmes (as I am now doing in the new programmes at MIDCO and at GLOCO), suggesting that encouraging reflexivity can provide a counterpoint to the ‘functional stupidity’ identified and critiqued by Alvesson & Spicer (2012, 2016). Being willing to hold on less tightly to the unquestioned beliefs of managerialism is a necessary precursor to this. Cunliffe describes reflexivity as ‘examining critically the assumptions underlying our actions’ (Cunliffe, 2004: 407) and it is to this I am referring when I describe what was formerly lacking in my practice, and what has come to the forefront in recent years. In taking the time to slow down and reflect on my practice, I believe I am honouring the

memory of my former second supervisor, Professor Doug Griffin, who cautioned me, drawing on Alexander Pope, that ‘some people will never learn anything, for this reason, because they understand everything too soon’.²²

²² Alexander Pope. AZQuotes.com, Wind and Fly LTD, 2017. http://www.azquotes.com/author/11775-Alexander_Pope, accessed April 05, 2017.

6 Synopsis and Critical Appraisal

6.1 Introduction

This thesis presents an increasingly critical inquiry into my work in corporate leadership development. Through my four projects it traces the evolution of my thinking and practice, following a transition from an internal corporate role in HR, to becoming an independent consultant. In this synopsis and critical appraisal of my research I re-visit each of my projects. This will not be a simple summary of each project: I will offer a further reflective and reflexive turn²³ as I look back at my work in light of my evolving thought, reflecting on my research as it has progressed. As Dewey notes, thinking in this way means slowing down, suspending judgment and practising deeper inquiry, while questioning and overcoming the assumptions under which I have typically operated. This has been difficult, painful even. As he explains:

Reflective thinking...involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance (Dewey, 1997: 13).

I will review and expand on the themes as they emerged at the time of writing each project, and formulate my central arguments as they have come together through my inquiry. I will show the progression in my thinking over the course of my time on the Doctor of Management programme, and will explain how being involved in this research has impacted my work, building on the examples that I provided towards the end of Project 4 (p.147). I will also describe the research methods I have been using, and explain why they are particularly suited to the area I am researching. Finally, my

²³ Reflexivity, as I have used this term throughout my thesis, and will explore further in the synopsis, can be considered as a second level of reflection. When I reflect, I think about events, but when I am reflexive, I turn back on myself and consider how I think about my thinking of these events.

conclusion will consolidate my contributions to knowledge and practice in the area of facilitating corporate leadership development programmes.

6.2 Review and Critical Appraisal of Projects 1-4

As explained in the introduction, each of the projects has been presented *as it was written at the time*. Despite a temptation to do so, I have not gone back and changed them, with the exception of minor edits and reduction of duplication. On re-reading each project, particularly the earlier ones, I find myself wanting to update them to reflect what I believe is my current greater degree of insight, as well as a more sophisticated and academic style of writing resulting from my work on the programme. This would, however, miss the point, and obviate the rationale for the way this thesis has been compiled. I have therefore not changed them, but rather re-visited each in turn, reflecting on my thinking then and now. I have also considered the recurring themes emerging in my projects, and how these are forming my arguments.

6.2.1 Reflections on Project 1

Project 1 is an ‘intellectual autobiography’, an opportunity to consider past professional and personal experience, focusing on the assumptions and ways of thinking that have informed my work in organizations. This provides an important grounding for the thesis as it helps the reader appreciate the cultures, societal traditions and ways of thinking that have made me who I am.

In this project I shared my traditional Jewish background with its clear rules and deeply engrained behavioural expectations. I described how, as a child, I enjoyed ‘painting by numbers’, an activity which entailed following precise rules; by painting the picture using the designated colours, I was assured of a perfect outcome. I considered how ‘painting by numbers’ might serve as a *leitmotif* for the way I had typically conformed to rules throughout my life.

Reflecting on this first project, I note how convinced I was that my way of thinking about events was the only way to see them. I wrote about leaving the first weekend residential a day early due to a religious holiday, something that was highly unusual: full attendance at all residential is a stated requirement of the programme.²⁴ I linked this event to another similar occasion at MIDCO where I left an overseas business meeting early to return home for a holiday. On both occasions I remember feeling angry and wondering ‘how can they not understand, of course I need to be at home for the Jewish holidays!’ I remember how I turned to those of my own (Jewish/Israeli) sub-group who were similarly affected by the events and how together we gossiped about the ‘others’ who did not share our priorities.

This episode now reminds me of Elias and Scotson’s ‘The Established and the Outsiders’ (1994), a description of relations of power and inclusion/exclusion occurring in two parts of a town, Winston Parva, based on local affiliations and shared history. I observe how, together with my social sub-group, we were co-creating the pattern of exclusion that we ourselves were experiencing. Examining various mechanisms of vilification, gossip and power, as well as how groups form ‘we-identities’, Elias & Scotson describe how these support and reinforce divisions in society and I believe this is a similar pattern to the one that occurred both during the residential and at MIDCO.

Related to this, I wrote for the first time in P1²⁵ about habitus, (Bourdieu, 1977), the taken-for-granted ways in which our culture and social norms determine the acceptable beliefs, values and behaviours of its members. I do not think I fully appreciated the nature of this concept at the time. If I had, I might have understood that the way I thought and behaved would necessarily be different from those of others who did not share my

²⁴ See Mowles (2017: 13) for additional insights into this event from the perspective of the programme faculty.

²⁵ ‘P1’ stands for Project 1. This abbreviation will henceforth be used for each of my projects, thus P2, P3, P4.

background. I would probably not have changed my decision to leave, but appreciating how our thinking is a reflection of our habits, and is formed by our social worlds, I might have understood how leaving the residential early because of the Jewish holiday was obvious to me, but was not so clear to others. I now reflect on how the decision to leave affected the entire group and that the sense we made of it needed to be negotiated as a group. Drawing on Elias (1970) I understand that the research community of students and faculty attending each residential is a 'figuration', a group of interdependent people, and how the action of one has an impact on others in ways that were not obvious to me in my highly individualist way of thinking. I have explored this episode in some depth because I believe it sheds light on some of the issues which I address in my thesis related to thought-collectives and habitus, namely how our ingrained ways of thinking preclude us from an awareness of other perspectives.

In P1 I described my career progression over several decades as I took on roles of increasing seniority in HR and LD. I traced the evolution of my thinking and pointed out key influences such as considering organizations as systems: the idea that an organizational 'whole' is the summary of its constituent 'parts' and that an objective, autonomous and rational leader can set a direction and lead the organization to pre-determined outcomes. I pointed to behaviourism (Skinner, 1953; Watson, 1913) as another major influence on my thinking: this approach implies a 'black box' within the individual which is amenable to manipulation by an external force, with the right set of antecedents and consequences able to reinforce behaviour and elicit certain outcomes.

I explained how, when trying to lead organizational change projects, I would draw on ideas from John Kotter (1996) and Edgar Schein (1985), both reflecting the systems and behaviourist assumptions outlined above. Kotter and Schein's contributions to management practice are based on the idea that an autonomous leader can drive change and determine outcomes in a linear fashion. Kotter, for example, advocates an eight-step model for leading change (1996), a model which has become the ubiquitous change management tool in mainstream HR. In adopting Kotter's model, I expected to achieve

pre-determined outcomes by following a set of steps: ‘change management by numbers’ perhaps? I was, at this point, quite secure in my sense of ‘knowing’, considered by myself and others to be an HR expert, and had not really considered alternative viewpoints. Despite not always achieving the intended outcomes, I was able to explain this away by suggesting that something had ‘gone wrong’, for example one of the leaders had not sufficiently established the ‘sense of urgency’ (Kotter, 1996: 35).

I wrote about my early experiences in LD as a young and inexperienced leader and questioned the wisdom of someone so young trying to teach others about leadership, while unable to draw on experience as a leader and largely following models and advocating universal tools and techniques. I continued for many more years using the same approach, focusing on simplified models such as ‘Situational Leadership’ (Hersey, 1985) which promised a certain outcome. I traced this behaviour back to my strict and rule-based childhood and to the recognition I received for following the rules.

Re-reading P1 is a stark reminder of the highly individualist approach with which I began my research. I note my heavy emphasis on myself as I presented events, for example the ‘gorilla story’: while participating in a leadership program, we were invited to watch a video and count the number of passes made by basketball players wearing white outfits.²⁶ The ensuing discussion was about how people reached different answers to this question. Eventually someone suggested that the appearance of a ‘gorilla’ in the video might have influenced us. I felt shame that I had not noticed this gorilla, leading me to question what else I was missing in my singular focus on the task at hand. This stance of placing myself at the centre was a feature of my early research. Upon reflection, I find my observations highly simplistic and lacking in depth. In later sections I will elaborate on what has shifted in how I now observe social aspects of experience.

²⁶ See Chabris & Simons (2010).

The formation of my research question as I moved from P1 to P2 reflected my preoccupation with my personal experience and the disruptive and stressful nature of leaving a corporate role and becoming an independent consultant. At this point in my studies I had formulated my question as ‘*How is the connection between rules, power and recognition shifting, as I move from an internal leadership position to one of an external consultant?*’ In retrospect, I can see that my thinking had barely started to shift. While leaving MIDCO and beginning my doctoral research reflected a newer openness to challenge these firmly-held beliefs, in my early consulting experiences I continued to follow the rules in a similar way to before, largely because of my desire to be recognized. P2 described such an event, as I now go on to explain.

6.2.2 Reflections on Project 2

In P2 I explored what I viewed as the ‘rules-of-the-game’, reflecting my growing awareness of a lifetime of conforming. Beginning this project, I perceived organizational life as dictating a set of rules which I dutifully followed. This was apparent during one of my first consulting engagements since leaving MIDCO: facilitating a four-day, senior leadership programme for GLOCO.²⁷ I had been hired to run this programme by Marcus, a former colleague and the head of LDO.²⁸

I shared a narrative of my first time facilitating the programme, and how difficult I found being ‘on trial’. It felt like a very uncomfortable role reversal, from being the person hiring and assessing consultants, I was now on the other side of the process. This was something I had not seriously considered when choosing to leave full-time corporate life

²⁷ GLOCO is another global company in the same industry and of a similar size as MIDCO.

²⁸ LDO is a leading leadership development organization which I had hired to support programmes while I was still at MIDCO.

and become a ‘supertemp’.²⁹ I explored the difficulties I experienced, including being required to obtain high scores in the programme evaluations. Corporate LD programmes are typically evaluated using the ubiquitous ‘4-Level Evaluation model’ (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Participants are asked to evaluate the programme, including the performance of the facilitator, with scores presented on a 5-point ‘Likert’ scale,³⁰ typically from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). On the GLOCO programme facilitators are required to achieve an average score of at least 4.0.

In the project I described how I facilitated the programme as instructed by Marcus, presenting each slide and following the ‘talking points’ I had been given. I shared how stressful it was to be observed by Marcus and members of GLOCO’s HR team, watching me and taking notes on my performance from the back of the room. I remembered what I had read in LDO’s Facilitator’s Manual regarding a set of ‘do’s’ and don’ts’ for consultants, warning that not following the guidelines would cause us to ‘get heavily penalized in the evaluations’ (internal document). My narrative went on to describe how my first trial was in fact unsuccessful, as judged by not reaching a 4.0, but how Marcus and GLOCO nevertheless offered me another chance and how the second time my scores were higher.³¹

In the project I reflected on the major importance I attributed to the scores, linking this to a desire for recognition, and fearing exclusion or rejection. Considering how I had used such scores previously, I interpreted this as an attempt to ‘manage’ the uncontrollable

²⁹ Described by Miller & Miller (2012) and in Project 3 (p.73), the ‘supertemp’ is someone who has left a senior corporate role to take on work in a similar field on a freelance, or independent consulting basis, often working less than full-time.

³⁰ Likert scales, named after their inventor, psychologist Rensis Likert, refer to a scale in which responses are elicited along a numerical range, usually 1-5 (but can also be 1-7 or 1-9). These are then averaged to present the overall score.

³¹ My ‘low’ score was a 3.6, below the 4.0 threshold. I have since been running this programme several times a year and my scores are generally in the 4.3-4.8 range, which is considered acceptable.

through the abstraction and simplifications provided by tools, techniques, rules and playbooks. I explored the experience of being assessed, ‘failing’, being offered another chance, and then ‘passing’. In researching this experience, I began to challenge many of the ideas I had held for most of my HR career related to evaluation and performance management, linking these to rational systems thinking, behaviourism, cybernetics and the idea of an autonomous individual. Many of the approaches to evaluating a programme such as this one can be traced back to Max Weber’s (1947) thinking about rational, bureaucratic organizations which follow rule-based systems and which locate power with those at the top of the organizational hierarchy.

This led me to consider different attitudes towards power. I had located power with Marcus, believing that he could grant or deny me this assignment at a crucial time for my fledgling business. It was only on further reflection and discussion with my learning set, and ongoing reading, that I came to consider a more *social* view of power, drawing particularly on Elias’ view that:

Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another: it is a structural characteristic of human relationships – of all human relationships (Elias, 1970: 74).

Elias goes on to describe the interdependence of people as they come together in groupings where power relations are continually shifting, explaining that:

Balances of power are always present wherever there is functional interdependence between people (ibid).

Further exploring the complex social relations exposed in my narrative, I went on to consider a social view of rules, drawing on the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, who in his essay ‘To Follow a Rule’ draws on ideas related to habitus, claiming that:

Understanding is always against a background of what is taken for granted, just relied on (Taylor, 1995a: 167).

French sociologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu, sees these taken-for-granted elements of habitus as ‘structuring structures’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 72), reinforcing the social structures of which we are part. This key idea has helped me challenge many of my previously unquestioned assumptions, for example, that Marcus and GLOCO were the ‘rule-setters’, and my role was simply to comply. Reflecting on the ‘leaving the residential early’ episode described in P1, I now understand it in the way that Taylor points out: habitus precluded me from seeing any alternative *but* to leave early, in a way that others, with their different backgrounds, might have perceived differently.

Reflecting on P2 I see how researching the rules-of-the-game at GLOCO and reading Bourdieu and Taylor has caused a certain re-evaluation of my interpretation of what it means to follow rules. Drawing on Charles Taylor’s position regarding the social nature of rules, I consider something that had not occurred to me before: my background, coming from a traditional Jewish family, determined my embodied sense of the right thing to do in different circumstances, from early childhood through to senior leadership roles. I was perhaps following the ancient biblical adage of ‘na’aseh v’nishma’, loosely translated as ‘do first, question or understand later’ (Jacobs, 2016). This is a key element of Judaism, a commitment to comply, without questioning the laws of the Torah.

Linking this idea to becoming a compliant HR leader I appear to have accepted the idea of following rules without question, particularly in my organizational roles. I now claim that this idea of compliance, of following rules, is a significant element of the HR discourse. It also featured in the instructions I was given at GLOCO when I first ran the programme, where I was handed a set of slides with associated ‘talking points’ to follow. Reflecting on P1 and P2, I see elements of ‘na’aseh v’nishma’ in my approach to HR, to leading change and to running LD programmes, such as diligently following the guidelines, and often acting without reflecting. I link this to critical management scholars, Alvesson & Spicer’s ‘functional stupidity’ (2012) and its associated lack of justification sought before acting. Returning to a reference from Charles Taylor which I made in P2 (p.59), I further understand his point that:

rules can only function in our lives along with an inarticulate sense encoded in the body. It is this habitus that ‘activates’ the rules (Taylor, 1995a: 180).

Perhaps ‘na’aseh v’nishma’ is this ‘inarticulate sense’ and part of the habitus that leads to my rule-following behaviour. This would be consistent with Taylor’s views that our social groupings and our history are what determine how we approach rules, and that these are never absolute nor purely rational ideas. In this way Taylor draws on ideas dating back to Hegel, the 18th-19th century German philosopher, regarding social processes of human interaction, focusing on the indivisibility of the individual and the social. Hegel’s views have been taken up by Mead and Elias, and are key in formulating an alternative to thinking about organizations as systems made up of rational, autonomous individuals.

In P2 I drew on Hegelian thinking, considering the theory of complex responsive processes of relating as an alternative perspective to help me think about the issues underpinning the GLOCO narrative. This helped me to see that meaning was being co-created between Marcus and me, and that our relationship was one of interdependence. I came to see the evaluation form as a ‘social object’ (Mead, 1925: 266; Stacey 2011a: 358), defined as the generalised tendencies for a large number of people to act in similar ways in similar situations. This implies that in order for HR/LD professionals to attach the same general significance to programme evaluation forms, they must have entered into the conduct of each one of us as a social object, becoming part of habitus. On further reading of Stacey, I come to appreciate such social objects ‘can only be experienced in their particularisation in complex social acts’ (Stacey, 2011a: 361). Understanding how Marcus and the GLOCO team particularized the evaluation in that first try-out of the GLOCO programme provided a different understanding, and pointed to the social complexity of the situation in which I found myself, something which could not be explained using the purely rational theories which had hitherto informed my practice.

I now observe how, in my analysis of the GLOCO narrative, I adopted a highly individualist stance, focusing on my ‘performance’ as a facilitator and largely ignoring

the nuances of the social context. In P2 I drew on critical scholars Alvesson & Spicer's 2012 article, 'A Stupidity-Based Theory of Organizations', where they coin the phrase 'functional stupidity': an avoidance of reflection and reflexivity, without need for justification or substantive reasoning. This is 'functional' because it has benefits for the smooth running of workplaces. The idea of actions occurring in an unthinking way resonated for me when considering my corporate experience and the constant rush to action. In P2 I referred to the article, stating that 'organizations actually encourage us not to reflect' (p.44). Re-reading this sentence I see how I continued to reify and anthropomorphize the organization, attributing agency to the 'organization' and not seeing my own role in making sense of this experience.

I also note how P2 is written in a way that continues to echo my former 'good corporate soldier' behaviour, where I associate positive recognition with following the rules. Despite early academic engagement with ideas related to social complexity, I remained tied to the beliefs and theories of my past. At the end of P2 I became strongly aware of the link between my behaviour and my desire for affirmation and recognition, for example, following Marcus' direction at GLOCO and expecting this to lead to a positive evaluation. This led me to focus on the topic of recognition in P3, returning first to a highly upsetting event which occurred on the cusp of my transition out of a corporate leadership role.

6.2.3 Reflections on Project 3

My P3 narrative recounts my very last day as a MIDCO employee. I wrote in detail about the emotions I experienced when my expectation of a leaving party (and a chance to deliver the farewell speech I had prepared) did not materialize. I explored my emotions, drawing on Honneth's ideas related to recognition and invisibility (1995, 2001). Honneth argues that we are all engaged in a struggle for recognition (1995), and that this dates back to earliest childhood and our need for positive approval by our parents or caregivers.

When re-reading my projects as part of my work on this synopsis, I wondered if P3 was a detour, unrelated to P2 and P4 with their focus on the major theme of my thesis: leadership development. However, at the time of writing, this was an important and troubling experience that I wanted to explore. I inquired into my sense of grief at leaving a full-time corporate position, recounting the micro-interactions of my leaving day including the administrative formalities of returning my company laptop and car, and walking around the office for the last time, feeling invisible. I tried to make sense of the experience, thinking about my disappointment when the HR Director, Anna, did not arrange a leaving party for me. I wrote about my feeling of indignation that what was a widely accepted ritual of acknowledging someone's departure from the company was not followed in my case. This is relevant for the growing population of 'supertemps' who are transitioning out of corporate roles into consulting positions. In the project I explored the painful aspects of this transition, aspects which are often glossed over in much of the literature about the phenomenon (Brown, 1994; Miller & Miller, 2012; Pink, 1998), and inquired into the concept of recognition from different perspectives. Re-reading my project I note that I naively thought that becoming a consultant would enable me to escape the politics of corporate life (P3, p.74), whereas I now believe that I am always part of political processes at work.

I also see how I initially continued to hold onto individualist beliefs about recognition, reifying recognition as a 'vital human need' (Taylor, 1995b: 26) in my life and work, provided *to me by* others. I viewed recognition as positive appraisal for work done, provided in a one-way direction. At the GLOCO programme (P2) I placed myself at the centre, appraised by the twenty-five leaders attending the course. I continued to perceive recognition in this way when I wrote about the lack of a leaving party on my last day at MIDCO: I felt that by failing to arrange a leaving party for me, Anna had withheld the recognition I sought. My understanding that recognition was entirely positive and identity-enhancing was supported by my reading of Darwall (1977) who conceptualizes recognition as 'appraisal respect', meaning that particular properties of a person are

valued. I linked this to Honneth's three forms of recognition³² (1995) and in particular to the third: self-esteem.

As part of my inquiry, and with the encouragement of my fellow researchers, I turned to the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating as a different way of making sense of my experiences related to recognition, misrecognition and invisibility. By problematizing certain elements of recognition, particularly how it is reified as an expression of my worth, a 'thing' to be granted by one person to another, I widened my understanding to consider the *mutual* processes occurring, focusing on the idea of recognition as an ongoing part of complex social relating, not an isolated event. This draws on the Hegelian view that recognition is a social process which emerges in social relations. I came to view my interaction with Anna as an expression of our ongoing relationship, where each of us was acting into a complex web of interdependence, based on our entire histories of relating.

An additional insight came from my reading of Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist, who makes the argument that others' positive affirmation can deny individuals the freedom to change, as it effectively freezes them in the present state (Sartre, 1984). This opened up different ideas about how recognition may not always be positive. I wondered how my perception of recognition as a prerequisite for feeling valued as a competent professional (for example feeling embarrassed by the 'low' standard of my early writing on the programme, or seeking the top scores when facilitating LD programmes), may actually be locking me into a current state, leading to a dependence on this kind of positive recognition. This was particularly relevant in a time of transition.

³² Honneth discusses three forms of recognition: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (Honneth, 1995: xii).

I now notice that I described the leaving party as a 'ritual' (p.80) but did not explore this idea. Re-reading P3 I see that the concept of organizational rituals is important for my research and that this theme may provide an important link between the various ideas I have been exploring in my thesis: following the rules of my religion ('na'aseh v'nishma'), completing an evaluation form, being hurt by the lack of a leaving party. Indeed, leadership development programmes themselves could be considered organizational rituals (Brooks et al., 2016; Hirschhorn, 1995; Smith & Stewart, 2011).

Hirschhorn defines an organizational ritual as:

A procedure or practice that takes on a life of its own and is seemingly unconnected to a rational understanding of experience (Hirschhorn, 1995: 67).

Smith & Stewart describe organizational rituals or 'ritual-like activities' (Smith & Stewart, 2011: 113) as possessing several features which are pertinent to my leaving party narrative. In particular, they assert, rituals are 'physically enacted to conform to a specified and invariable sequence' (ibid); their significance hails from their formal and invariable form, and they 'include and exclude others' (ibid). Brooks et al. (2016) further discuss how rituals emerge as a response to highly anxiety-provoking situations. Leaving a place of work is usually stressful, and the ritualized leaving party with its standard elements (speeches, smiling faces and some refreshments) might be a way to cover over and manage the associated anxiety. I also point to the emergence of these rituals as an inherently social process, occurring within groups. Smith & Stewart explicitly point to the retirement party as such a ritual:

Organizational events such as retirement parties ritualized emblems reinforcing cultural statements about corporate loyalty, the value of work and life transitions (Smith & Stewart, 2011: 118).

This echoes back to early research by Malinowski (1954, in Brooks et al., 2016) about Melanesian islanders whose occupation as fishermen featured extensive rituals to deal with stressful situations such as fishing in deep, unknown waters. When fishing in familiar, shallow waters, rituals were not performed. I find this analogy compelling and

am suggesting, drawing on Hirschhorn, that the organizational ritual operates as a defence against anxiety at work (Hirschhorn, 1995: 67), and that the leaving party has clear ritualistic elements. This idea provides me with a new understanding as I link the following of rules and thinking about recognition, to rituals such as the leaving party. This is relevant to my narratives in both P2 and P3, and particularly so to P4, as I will explore below and later in the synopsis.

6.2.4 Reflections on Project 4

In P4 I described the experience of facilitating a leadership programme for NEWTECH, a global, hi-tech company. At the end of the first one-day workshop, despite praise from Benny, the leader, I felt frustrated and disappointed. In the project introduction I asked ‘what do I do as a facilitator when I feel ‘stuck’ in a process that I have started to question, and what effect will it have on my work as a consultant if I challenge the way of doing LD in corporations on whose contracts my livelihood depends?’ (p.117). This was to become a key question for my research as I wondered about how to keep working with clients whose expectations for a certain type of programme was becoming problematic for me, as I will go on to explain.

The NEWTECH programme had been designed to cascade a new leadership model to its leaders. The model had been developed using ideas from the book ‘The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world’, (Heifetz et al., 2009). I located Heifetz’ work within the systemic approach of the dominant discourse of management introduced earlier, particularly the idea that leaders can stand outside of a system and design its future. I was trained by the lead consultant, Samantha, to run a highly structured agenda for the day, including which slides to present, which words to use in my explanations, and what timings to follow. I explained the idea of a leadership ‘cascade’ such as the one adopted at NEWTECH: a commonly-used change management communication approach where leaders deliver specific messages to their direct reports and so-on throughout the organizational hierarchy.

I discussed the lack of interest and engagement that I sensed from the participants, and my feeling that this was because the day was largely detached from their lived experience, focusing on abstract and idealized concepts that the leaders indicated were incongruent with their daily life at NEWTECH. A key example of this was when ‘empowerment’ was presented as the heart of the new model, and several of the leaders challenged Benny, arguing that NEWTECH’s CEO, Bob, was highly controlling, a ‘micro-manager’ in their words, not at all ‘empowering’. Benny refused to engage in this discussion, encouraging the team to accept it as a key element of the required leadership style without discussing the congruence or lack thereof with their experience. Drawing on critical management writers, Robin Holt (2006) and Robert Jackall (2010), I critiqued an approach to LD which focuses on simplifications and abstractions, leading to participants experiencing the sessions as ‘fiction that bears little resemblance to lived experience’ (Holt, 2006: 1667).

I inquired into the assumptions on which the workshop was based, including systems and managerialist approaches to organizational leadership development and to the cascade of a new model. I questioned the fundamental assumption of mainstream LD: that its goal is to develop specific leadership competencies and transfer knowledge, expecting that this will lead to enhanced business outcomes. At NEWTECH the model was designed to develop the leadership competencies of systems thinking, for example: ‘Be bold and take smart risks’ or ‘Be a disciplined executor’. The business outcome sought was doubling sales. None of these goals were achieved and this led me to reflect on different ways of understanding what we were doing in the workshop that might shed light on my experience.

I proceeded to draw on writers whose ideas have contributed significantly to the perspective of complex responsive processes, particularly Elias (1970, 2000) and Mead (1925, 1934). I explored what is a radically different way of understanding organizational life from the dominant discourse, focusing on the complex social relations between interdependent people at work, noting how humans shape their environment at

the same time as they are shaped by it, paying attention to the everyday interactions between them, the paradoxical collaborating and competing, and the emergence of power relations. This perspective argues that change can only occur as a result of many local interactions forming and being formed by wide-spread patterns of change, rather than expecting it to be driven top-down, as in the cascade model.

By exploring the ideas of Elias and Mead I considered how thinking about interdependence and emergence, communication and the co-creation of meaning could illuminate my experience at NEWTECH. This led me to fundamentally question the idea of a cascade: if meaning, as Mead (1934) argues, is co-created in the gestures and responses of those communicating together (explored in P4, p.143), the idea of a pre-determined meaning to be passed from one to another as if it were a ‘parcel of meaning’ has to be challenged.³³ Drawing on Stacey, I proposed that the concepts we used at NEWTECH were ‘generalized, simplified, abstract statements which constitute powerful gestures to large numbers of people’ and that it was not possible to pre-determine how these would be taken up by others (Stacey, 2011b: 14). Similarly, drawing on Elias (1970), I now consider the leadership team at NEWTECH (not only Benny’s team but also Benny’s participation in Bob’s leadership team) as a group of interdependent people forming a figuration. This therefore precludes the idea that any one of them could stand outside of the interactions and determine how they would evolve.

Looking back and reflecting on P4 while writing this synopsis, certain aspects now emerge which I had not noticed at the time of writing the project. Firstly, comparing and contrasting P2 to P4, I note that my frustration and disappointment in the GLOCO session (P2) were related to the low score I received, and not to the programme itself or

³³ This idea, inexorably linked to mainstream organizational communication practices, has its roots in the ‘sender/receiver’ model of communication, Shannon & Weaver (1949), described in earlier sections of this thesis (p.55).

questions it raised for me. The NEWTECH session (P4), in contrast, was considered a success by the client and yet raised fundamental questions for me which have provoked a major inquiry into my work. I believe that this is due to my ongoing research and how it has challenged me to think about my practice.

This leads me to explore different ways of making sense of my role as a facilitator. At NEWTECH I was frustrated by the focus on driving to a pre-determined agenda and outcome that I questioned, yet continued to follow. I explained in the project that I was not seeking to substitute 'one hegemony with another' (Ford & Harding, 2007: 475), to reject the approach that NEWTECH took and adopt a radically different one. I wrote about being reflexive in my struggle: allowing myself to notice what I was thinking about what I was doing. This is a key idea as my practice evolves alongside my research.

Ralph Stacey distinguishes reflexivity from both reflection and introspection and, highlighting its social nature, defines it as the act of:

Thinking about how we and others involved with us are interacting, and this will involve noticing and thinking about our history together (Stacey, 2012: 112).

Ann Cunliffe's explanation of reflexivity builds on the idea of thinking and noticing, and highlights what I chastise myself for *not* doing at NEWTECH:

Questioning what we, and others, might be taking for granted – what is being said and not said – and examining the impact this has or might have (Cunliffe, 2016: 2).

The shift is subtle, but I do find myself now doing this more frequently. It does not mean that I no longer run this kind of workshop, nor that I run it radically differently, but rather that I challenge myself and the participants to think critically about what it is we are doing, as described below.

Lastly, looking back at P4, I see ritual-like elements in the workshop, drawing on ideas introduced earlier in my reflections on P3. In what way could the NEWTECH workshop represent a ritual-like activity? I suggest that the structured agenda, the formalized

activities, the avoidance of substantive engagement with the messiness of what the leaders perceived as their daily struggles, are all hallmarks of organizational rituals as conceptualized by Smith & Stewart (2011) and described earlier (p.171). I also realise that following the ritualized elements enabled us to avoid these ‘messy’ issues, the discussion of which might have provoked anxiety for each of us. I will elaborate on this idea later.

Before moving on to summarize the key themes as they have emerged through reflecting further on my projects, I pause to consider changes in my practice, building on the vignettes I shared towards the end of P4 (p.147). Each showed the beginning of subtle shifts in my practice arising from my research. The third of these, my work with Sonia and Tania on the GLOCO2 programme, continues. A recent experience provides further data in support of the arguments I make below. I therefore pause now to share another narrative, as an addendum to P4.

6.3 Narrative: Being Critical at ACECO

The e-mail from Mandy came as a complete surprise: ‘I see you’ve left MIDCO and are working independently. Would you be interested in working with us at ACECO?’³⁴ I had met Mandy, a fellow HR Director, at a conference many years previously. She was now seeking a consultant with my background to work on an ongoing basis with the leadership team of ACECO’s local subsidiary, and had come across my profile on LinkedIn. After meeting the country Managing Director, Frank, the contract was signed. My first task entailed facilitating a two-day leadership team workshop using ‘Self-star’. Marketed as a ‘personal effectiveness programme’, Self-star is based on Jungian psychoanalytical theory (Jacobi, 1973), assessing people along three dimensions:

³⁴ ACECO, like MIDCO and GLOCO, is a global, research-based pharmaceutical company.

introversion/extroversion, thinking/feeling, sensation/intuition. Participants' personal profiles are characterized by their dominant and less dominant styles, each associated with a colour linked with a set of personality and behavioural traits, for example, those with a red dominance tend to be fast, decisive and results-oriented. In Self-star terms, a blue personality style tends to be an analytical, quiet, formal type; yellow is used to denote those who are more gregarious, enthusiastic and less interested in details; while green signifies people who strive for harmony and prefer to have time to reflect before responding.

The decision to use Self-star at the leadership team workshop had already been made. I now had a choice: to accept the assignment, despite my questions around the use of this tool, or to decline. My questions concerned the underlying individualist assumptions of this tool: does it really make sense, I wondered, to categorize someone as 'red' or 'blue'? How useful could this abstract simplification be? I was familiar with Self-star, having used it at MIDCO (see P1, p.33). I had not questioned its use back then; indeed I had been one of its strongest advocates. Despite my concerns, ACECO seemed an interesting and lucrative client, and I accepted the assignment.

As ACECO used the Self-star tool worldwide, taking the local leaders through this programme would enable them to connect with others across the company who already spoke the Self-star 'language'. Indeed, during a phone conversation with Frank's boss, Brent, he spent most of the call telling me how valuable the tool was and how it helped him identify his dominant 'red' management style, asking, 'I am guessing you are red too, Sharon, right?'³⁵

I had not used Self-star since leaving MIDCO, so in preparation for the workshop I spent hours reviewing my old materials, including the colourful slides, each illuminated in

³⁵ Indeed, when I received my own Self-star profile in 2010, my dominant colour was assessed as red.

shades of red, yellow, blue and green. The programme included hand-outs for the participants: a set of four bricks, and baseball caps, one in each colour. As I reviewed the agenda for the Self-star workshop, with its precise exercises and timings (an echo of the NEWTECH agenda), I realized that I *did* have a choice, albeit not the binary ‘run the programme’ or ‘decline the contract’ dilemma that I had initially thought. I suggested to Frank that we use the Self-star concepts to have a conversation with the team about how they are working together, but with flexibility in what we do, how we do it, and how long we spend on each section. We agreed upon two goals: firstly for the leaders to become familiar with a set of concepts widely used in the company, and secondly for the team to spend time talking about how they work together. I suggested that these goals were not mutually exclusive, and upon this understanding we convened at the beach-side upscale hotel conference room to begin the workshop.

After taking the group through various exercises to ascertain their colour preferences, each leader was asked to stack their bricks in the ‘correct’ order according to their profile. I observed in wonder as the seven senior leaders each formed a coloured stack and placed it on the desk in front of them, smiling, laughing and making jokes about a return to childhood. I noticed them checking the order of each other’s bricks and making comments like, ‘Oh, yes, that makes sense, John, you are definitely blue’. There was also a comment directed by several team members at Vivian, one of the more outgoing and demonstrative members of the team: ‘Well now I understand why we struggle to work together, you are so yellow!’

Frank’s bricks were ordered red, blue, yellow, and then green. I remembered his boss’ comment about the colour red and it occurred to me that the red brick had become a symbol for this group, signifying senior leader status. Mitch, whose bricks were stacked in the same order as Frank’s, was smiling. He appeared to sit up straighter in his seat, a

look of pride on his face. There was a subtle shift in the room as people regarded their own and others' colours under the guise of 'red: good; green: bad'.³⁶

Despite finding the idea of the coloured bricks infantilizing as well as highly simplistic and abstract, I had decided to use them. I knew, from my conversation with Brent (and remembered from my days at MIDCO), that after attending a Self-star workshop, leaders typically placed their stack of bricks on prominent display in their offices, so that anyone entering assumed they knew how to communicate with the person, for example, 'OK, so this is someone with a "red" personality, I'd better be quick and to the point'. I feared that if we did not use them, Mandy or Brent may visit the local offices and ask, 'Where are your bricks? Didn't Sharon take you through the Self-star workshop?' I wanted the team to be included in this process, and for Mandy to feel that I had done my job. I thought that failing to use the bricks might pose a problem. I had, however, drawn the line at the coloured baseball caps, remembering how at MIDCO each person had worn 'their colour' for the rest of the workshop. The visible reminder that each person was reduced to a colour had become highly problematic for me.

For the remainder of the workshop I was both teaching the concepts of Self-star, and encouraging a critical discussion of them. I realized that calling Vivian 'yellow' might be a mask for the real conversation about how she irritated some of the others, and how having such a conversation could provoke real anxiety in a small leadership group where people needed to work closely and collaborate on a daily basis. I decided to stop the group session and do something different. I said, 'Let's use the next few hours for you to go off in pairs and talk to each other about what these Self-star concepts have raised for

³⁶ Alluding to George Orwell's 'Animal Farm', where the animals state 'Four legs, good; two legs, bad' (1945). While Self-star materials emphasize that no colour is better than another, the red colour is often associated with being a strong and successful leader.

you related to how you work together. Think about what assumptions are implicit in the ideas contained in your profiles’.

I sat down and watched them go off, deep in conversation. Without orchestrating the process, people drifted in and out of pair groupings. Some appeared to be highly animated, and occasionally troubled. Some pairs became trios as people came together and continued the conversation. Towards the end of the day the team regrouped, and we talked about what had arisen in their small group conversations. There was less focus on the colours now as the leaders expressed how they felt about working together. John, the Finance Director, said, ‘I realize that Self-star is just a tool, a technique to help us think about our relationships here in the team. We shouldn’t take it too literally’. The workshop ended with a decision to continue the conversation, not with any grand claim that we had created greater team or personal effectiveness, or that they were now a ‘high performing team’.

In a meeting with Frank a few weeks later he was full of praise for the workshop, and told me that people continued to refer to the colours and the preferences, and to reflect on the insights that they had gained from the discussion. He invited me to run a further Self-star session for the rest of the company’s employees in the coming months.

6.3.1 Reflections on the ACECO Workshop and Changes in my Practice

The ACECO narrative is, I contend, an example of how I am beginning to resolve the question posed in P4 about continuing to work in a tradition that I now challenge, without losing my ability to work with corporate clients and make a living. I did use Self-star, a tool reflecting the instrumental rationality that I have critiqued in this thesis, but was able to do so in a way that included being reflexive about what we were doing. This is similar to the example I shared in the conclusion of P4 where I described how I now work with my MBA students in the Change Management programme (p.155). I have neither abandoned Kotter’s eight-step model, nor continued to teach it ‘as is’. What I do there,

and what I did at ACECO, is enable the participants to connect to the language spoken among their peer group, but to think about it critically.

Reflecting on these examples I notice that as my thinking changes, so too does my practice. Stacey draws attention to this:

It is my experience that when people think differently they find themselves doing things differently (Stacey, 2011a: 20).

I propose that ‘doing things differently’ may not be a radical change, but a more subtle shift which includes the following: (1) I am less certain about the outcomes I am able to achieve, and have become humbler about my practice: I did not promise Frank that a one-day workshop could result in his leadership team becoming ‘high performing’; (2) I find myself less compelled to follow the rules, for example, both at ACECO, and at the GLOCO leadership programme which I continue to facilitate, I no longer use all of the slides, nor follow Marcus’ talking points precisely. I am less rigid and more flexible in following agendas: I pay close attention to the group and while not abandoning the structure of the programme, I make different judgments about which topics to emphasise and which to drop; (3) I suggest to clients that we may discard the evaluation forms (we did not use one at ACECO), or could design them differently (as we did on GLOCO2), but when we do continue to use them (GLOCO), I generally become less emotional about the scores participants give me. This does not mean that I am not thrilled if I receive a majority of ‘5s’ or that I no longer care if someone rates me a ‘2’. I am and I do, but I am also able to view the scores as an expression of what I now see as the complex process of evaluation, where everyone is evaluating everyone all of the time.

6.4 Summarizing the Key Themes Emerging in the Projects

Having completed a critical review of my four projects, I see how exploring themes such as power, following the rules and seeking recognition have caused a shift in how I consider my role as a consultant and facilitator of corporate leadership development

programmes. Considering these programmes as activities of interdependent people causes me to challenge LD's predominantly managerialist approach, built on the individualist understanding that leadership is about 'successful influence by the leader that results in the attainment of goals by the influenced followers' (Bass, 1990: 14). It also leads me to problematize the assumptions underpinning a tool such as Self-star, for example, that humans are autonomous individuals who can change their behaviour by rationally selecting a different approach.

Having reviewed the 'vast body of literature' of mainstream approaches to leadership, critical scholars Ford & Harding conclude that it contains 'a strong, uncritical managerialist focus.....an almost total absence of any critical analysis' (Ford & Harding, 2007: 477). Jackall agrees that corporate life features 'an overriding emphasis on technique rather than on critical reasoning' (Jackall, 2010: 80). This unsurprisingly leads to the conceptualization of leadership development as 'the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes' (McCauley et al., 1998). This was also my understanding of the role of LD until recently. It was implicit at NEWTECH, where, even when considered on its own terms, the programme failed to achieve its stated goals (the adoption of new leadership behaviours such as 'empowerment' was to lead to doubling of sales). Considering these programmes from within the HR/LD thought-collective explored earlier, the only option is to continue doing more of the same without questioning assumptions. Beer et al., echoing a common concern among corporate executives, claim that:

...senior executives and their HR teams continue to pour money into training, year after year, in an effort to trigger organizational change. But what they actually need is a new way of thinking about learning and development (Beer et al., 2016: 52).

The 'new way' referred to by the authors maintains a systemic approach to LD, rooted in linear thinking and the feasibility of LD achieving its goals, if we just do it right. Others share this criticism of corporate LD, offering solutions from within the same basic set of

assumptions. Jeffrey Pfeffer of Stanford University, for example, launches a scathing critique of corporate leadership development, calling much of it ‘BS’ (Pfeffer, 2015: x) leading to his conclusion that ‘The leadership industry has failed’ (ibid: 4). His suggestions for how to avoid this failure, however, maintain the managerialist and individualist focus of mainstream LD, emphasizing rational, scientific, evidence-based methods and measurement. Deborah Rowland, an experienced practitioner in my field, draws on the critique by Beer et al. of corporate LD, and offers prescriptions for remedying its failings. These too, however, remain rooted in a systemic understanding of organizations and an individualist understanding of experience, indeed she suggests that what LD requires includes:

influencing participants’ ‘being’, not just their ‘doing’; placing it into its wider, systemic context. (Rowland, 2016: 3).

Alvesson and other’s recently published book on ‘Reflexive Leadership’ also takes issue with traditional approaches and with those:

belonging to the leadership industry who might benefit from pumping out positive and fluffy messages about the importance and goodness of leadership (Alvesson et al., 2017: viii).

This thesis, in contrast, proposes a complex, social and non-linear understanding of leadership, and argues that surfacing dominant assumptions and adopting a different understanding of what we are doing in corporate LD could allow space for a re-evaluation of what might be more useful. By ‘more useful’ I refer to a pragmatist perspective, asserting with Martela, that:

...some frameworks are always better than others; they have been found to be more suitable as guiding frameworks for our actions in bringing forth the kind of results we are aiming at (Martela, 2015: 540).

Thinking specifically about preparing leaders to engage with the complexities of work, Watson's views are helpful. He argues that many management textbooks (including, I would argue, the one on which the NEWTECH workshop was based³⁷) are:

.... utterly unrealistic and likely to hinder rather than help anyone becoming involved with managers, as a manager themselves or as a non-managerial worker (Watson, 2011: 208).

I agree with Watson that a more useful approach is indeed one which helps managers prepare for the realities they are likely to face at work. Jackall contrasts between two alternatives: on the one hand, a 'rational objectivity' which leads to 'a somewhat stultifying reification of abstract concepts' compared to a 'detailed explanation of the intricacies of political networks that might lay bare the actual troubles of an organization' (Jackall, 2010: 153). I will go on to explain how I am arguing for a subtler re-evaluation of LD, not an either/or choice.

The assumptions underpinning mainstream leadership development have been explored in P4 (in particular the table on p.139). Most LD programmes that I have run, both as an internal leader, and more recently as a consultant, feature the tools, techniques and models of instrumental rationality. The NEWTECH workshop was a prime example of a workshop which featured:

... prescriptions that are supposed to make it possible to choose improved organizational outcomes and results well in advance of acting..... developed through rational analysis and measurement (Stacey, 2012: 40).

³⁷ 'The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world', (Heifetz et al., 2009). This approach promulgates the idea of the visionary and powerful leader who can design a future for the organization, explored in Project 4 (p.113).

The Self-star programme at ACECO similarly assumed linear causality: using the tool should lead to a pre-defined (and positive) outcome: enhanced personal and team effectiveness. Adopting Elias' (1970) ideas about interdependence, explored in the reflections on P4, a different way of thinking is called for. Arguing that we cannot pre-determine how people will respond to the gestures of others (Mead, 1934), my claim is that it is impossible to control the outcome of an LD programme. This leads me to suggest a less regimented design of programmes: the minute-by-minute agenda design at NEWTECH did not allow time for an exploration of the issues faced by its participants, driving us instead towards an outcome that had been pre-determined but was never realized. Considering the processes that occur in an LD programme from a complex, social perspective leads me to focus less strictly on models, tools, techniques and rigid timings, and instead to pay more attention to what is happening in the moment, what people appear to want to discuss, how gestures are taken up, how meaning is co-created, and how power pervades all relating, including in LD programmes. This is my interpretation of what happened at ACECO, and represents a shift in my practice.

I now move on to present a detailed exploration of my method. The reason for doing this before stating my arguments is that I am claiming that my method is in itself a contribution to the HR field of research and a key feature of how I am suggesting that LD could more usefully be taken up in corporations. I am drawing attention to the way in which the idea of 'taking experience seriously' (Stacey & Griffin, 2005) is both part of my method, and part of my argument about developing leaders.

6.5 Research Method

As explained in the introduction to the thesis, on the UH Doctor of Management practitioners are encouraged to reflect critically on their practice. The programme adopts the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating as a way of making sense of organizational life, and the method I have used is a reflection of this. Considering the wide range of research methods, from quantitative, experimental methods drawing on a

positivist approach, to qualitative, experience-based methods, drawing on a pragmatist perspective, my method sits firmly at the qualitative and pragmatist end of the spectrum. Indeed, I am arguing that the study of organizational life, part of the social sciences, can most usefully be approached from such a pragmatist viewpoint.

Flyvbjerg (2001: 38-41) draws on Dreyfus and Bourdieu, to argue that epistemic approaches to the natural sciences, developed over centuries since Plato and significantly developed by Descartes, should not be imported to a study of human behaviour. This is because the study of human interaction is always contextual, and any attempts to reach universal explanations and predictability (the aim of the kind of epistemic research practiced in the natural sciences) are doomed to fail. Gary Thomas writes about these ideas in the context of education, with useful parallels for organizational research:

..the knowledge that we educators trade in is different from the knowledge of the physicist or plant scientist. It is discovered at an individual and local level (Thomas, 2012: 30).

The focus of most mainstream organizational research within the positivist paradigm can be seen as an expression of what Flyvbjerg calls 'Physics envy' (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 1) which I take to mean the perceived inferiority of research which does not meet the standards of replicability and predictability imposed by the natural sciences. Flyvbjerg draws on the philosopher, Richard Bernstein's expression 'Cartesian anxiety' (Bernstein, 1983: 16), a fear that by approaching research from a non-rational, non-scientific tradition, one runs the risk of ending in nihilism, a state where nothing can be definitely proven and therefore 'anything goes'. I will explain how this risk is addressed and mitigated in my research.

In this section I will further explore the social, iterative and reflexive nature of my method, describing how my thesis has been built up in an emergent way. I will explain how the residential weekends form a key part of method. I will also address topics related to literature, validity, generalizability, and ethics, and will consider possible challenges to my method, comparing and contrasting it to other methods I could have

chosen. Finally I will explain how my method, arguments and contributions all come together.

6.5.1 DMan Residential weekends: an invitation to be reflexive about experience

During three years of study, students attend a minimum of twelve residential weekends, joining a rolling cohort of students at various stages of the programme. In this way the student body represents a typical organizational setting where people are joining, and leaving. People leave the programme either because they have completed and are going to graduate, or they withdraw without completing for various reasons, sometimes of their own desire and sometimes with a strong push from their supervisor and learning set colleagues. This reflects a typical organizational setting, where sometimes people leave of their own accord, and sometimes they are asked to leave.

I will now explore two of the main elements of the DMan residential weekends, showing how they each form a key part of method.

6.5.1.1 Taking Groups Seriously - the Community Meeting

The first element of the programme which I will discuss is the ‘community meeting’. This session takes place each morning for an hour and a half; sitting in a circle, all of the students and faculty convene at a fixed time, and aside from known start and end times, there is no agenda. Sometimes these meetings involve sitting in silence for a while, and on other occasions someone makes a comment immediately. Usually the topics raised, and the ensuing discussions, are related to the way in which we work together on our research. Drawing on the Institute of Group Analysis (Foulkes, 1984) tradition, community meetings are a chance to engage in complex group dynamics, where the process and outcome of the discussions cannot be predicted. Topics arise and occasionally conflicts occur. One of the recurring themes in community meetings is precisely the ‘comings and goings’ of researchers from the group: this raises anxiety, strong emotions related to performance, being ‘good enough’, being included or excluded, and recognized. By taking these feelings seriously, engaging in and reflecting

on the interactions, as well as how I am thinking about them, I am able to make connections with events that occur in my consulting work.

Chris Mowles, director of the DMan, writes about the community meeting as method in his recent article, 'Group analytic methods beyond the clinical setting – working with researcher-managers'. He points to the way in which the group analytic tradition informs the practice of holding community meetings and demonstrates the perspective being taught:

the perspective of complex responsive processes conceives of organizations as complex games, i.e. domains with multiple players interacting in the living present, co-operating and competing to get things done. So in taking an interest in conversation, and every day interaction the parallels with the group analytic tradition are clear, although the emphasis on power is different. (Mowles, 2017: 10-11).

I find the above an accurate depiction of what takes place in a community meeting. As someone who joined the programme from an environment where meetings featured a tightly planned agenda, where process was highly orchestrated and designing for outcomes was paramount (similar to the NEWTECH workshop), being a part of the community meeting was a new experience. It has been key to my learning to pay attention to the micro-interactions that occur at work, and to become more aware of the patterns that I am involved in, noticing how I am both forming and being formed by them. As an example of this I look back on recurring conversations in the community meeting about feelings of inclusion or exclusion. Whereas at first I held on to my individualist beliefs such as 'how does the group not understand my need to get home for the Jewish holiday?', paying deep attention to what is occurring in group interactions helped me to see how I was both forming and being formed by patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

Community meetings provide an opportunity to articulate our observations, and to speak into an academic discourse. This is often a new and anxiety-provoking experience for

students coming from a practice-based environment, completely unfamiliar with the complex ideas discussed on the programme. The act of speaking, or not, and the resulting recognition (or lack thereof) provoke further discussion and debate in the meetings, helping to draw parallels with organizational life.

Mowles summarizes the work on the DMan succinctly as developing ‘the student’s emerging reflexivity and ability to notice themselves in relation to others’ (ibid: 16) and I would argue that the community meetings are a key element of developing this skill. It is important to emphasize that while students may experience therapeutic effects from attending the meetings, this is not their purpose. Mowles describes the idea of holding an experiential group as ‘a live forum for thinking about group processes in organizations and thus as a method of research’ (ibid: 13). I would go further and argue that where students on the programme have severe emotional issues, these are unlikely to be helped, and may actually be aggravated by the group sessions. The group processes may serve to surface issues and make clear to the student and the wider community that continued participation in the programme is both problematic, and unlikely to lead to the completion of a doctoral thesis, and may demand too much time and effort on the part of all parties.

6.5.1.2 The Learning Set

The second locus of work on the DMan is the learning set. This is a small group of three to four researchers and a supervisor. We focus on the writing of our theses by discussing and critiquing each other’s work, as well as continuing to reflect on issues arising throughout the residential in a more intimate setting. Joining a learning set is another process which provides rich opportunities for reflection and learning. There are four learning sets with students joining and leaving, so that each set may contain students at various stages of the programme. This leads to dynamics related to power and status, with joking remarks about becoming the ‘senior’ member of the set, or being left alone, perhaps reflecting deeper anxieties. New students have to select a set to join and existing members must accept them – this process, known as ‘negotiating into learning sets’ –

occurs on most residential weekends where there are multiple joiners and multiple openings in learning sets, and provides an opportunity for reflection on what happened as we all make sense of it together.

In the learning sets our work is read and further supported by a second supervisor, and where needed, all members of faculty are available for support. Working in small groups, both during the residentials and in-between on Skype calls and with frequent e-mail and phone contact, leads to the forming of deeper personal bonds and is another way in which the programme helps to link our research with our practice. During my time in the learning set I have been part of the painful process of students reaching a decision to leave the programme without completing their doctorate. Coming from an HR practice where such conversations would happen in private, it was unusual to be part of a group discussion resulting in the decision to leave, yet these provided me with valuable insights into the social nature of the decision. I came to appreciate how someone's decision to leave or stay is never individual, but is socially formed and enacted.

Projects evolve through multiple (typically four to five) iterations. Learning set members provide comments and indicate whether they find the narratives and their analysis believable, interesting and compelling, and whether they resonate with their experience. In this way the process of writing projects involves a social, iterative and reflexive process. Tracing the progression of my work over three years, my ability to read academic literature and to write and reference at doctoral level have all evolved through this social process, indeed the coherence of my P4 and the arguments I am now making only emerged through the interactions with my research colleagues. When the learning set and supervisor feel that a project is sufficiently complete, it is deemed 'good enough for now'. Coming from an HR-led performance management paradigm, this was a troubling comment: what does that mean? Is it good? Very good? With my earlier understanding of recognition in the sense of positive appraisals (P3, p.87) it was hard to handle, yet through my research I have come to appreciate this as part of the pragmatic approach to knowledge, accepting it as fallible, and indeed 'good enough for now'.

6.5.2 Reflexive Narrative Inquiry

I have used reflexive narrative inquiry as a key element of my method. The features and advantages of this approach have been explored by Czarniawska (2004); Etherington (2004); Rhodes & Brown (2005) and others and focus on the importance of context in the study of human behaviour. I am arguing for the benefits of this method, particularly that:

It is the ability to engage reflexively with the lived experience of work that is a key methodological advantage of narrative approaches (Rhodes & Brown, 2005: 179-180).

By writing in a way that involves ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’, my narratives present ‘thick’³⁸ descriptions, (Ryle, 1947; Geertz, 1973) which form the data for inquiry and analysis. In exploring our narratives together on the programme, we focus on the micro-interactions which the perspective of complex responsive processes invites us to explore, and we do so from within an embedded setting. This necessarily leads to a discussion of contextual experience, and is starkly opposite to approaches taken by the natural sciences which aim for context-independent, universal theory-making. No such claim is made in my research: I am aiming for resonance with the reader, and for useful insights which are relevant for a community of practice. As Tony Watson suggests:

‘Good research’ gives whoever reads it a ‘good idea’ of the realities of the sphere of life that has been studied (Watson, 2010: 926).

With his pragmatist orientation, Watson clarifies this further in a later article when he argues that the purpose of research is to enable readers to:

...cope more effectively than they otherwise might should they become practically involved in the settings covered in the studies (Watson, 2011: 207).

³⁸ ‘Thick’ as used by Geertz refers to detailed descriptions which include the minutiae of experience.

In the selection of narratives to explore in my projects, I drew on those events which puzzled and troubled me: Brinkmann's 'breakdowns' (2012: 44) or mysteries related to my experience, adopting what Cheryl Misak, University of Toronto scholar of the American pragmatists, calls the 'central insight of pragmatism':

that we must start from where we find ourselves—as human beings, laden with beliefs and practices, trying to make sense of ourselves and our world (Misak, 2013: 370).

In P2, for example, my existing theoretical understanding could not help me make sense of what was going on when I experienced LDO 'breaking the rules'; in P3, exploring the insult and indignation related to what I experienced as being ignored on my last day at work led to a re-appraisal of what it means to be recognised; inquiring into a 'bloodless' leadership workshop in P4 led to a significant change in my practice and to the arguments I am making about leadership development in my thesis.

Rhodes & Brown argue that 'narratives are structures through which events are made sense of' (Rhodes & Brown, 2005: 171). I would argue that it is not the narratives alone, but the reflexive inquiry which goes with them that enables sense-making. By focusing on the minutiae, 'the complexities and contradictions of real life' (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 84), narratives provide the 'data' from which research proceeds. I have found that by exploring my narratives with my learning set, as well as with others on the programme who are also working as consultants and facilitators,³⁹ there has been an element of re-narration, understanding my experience in a new light. In P3, for example, I wrote about a deep sense of feeling ignored when my e-mails are not responded to; interestingly that

³⁹ I have shared my work with current and former students on the DMan programme, including those working in different kinds of organizations, for example local government, higher education, NGOs and national health care providers, who have also claimed that my findings from global corporations resonate strongly with their experience.

feeling is less prominent today. This might be due to my shifting expectations regarding outcomes: if I appreciate that, drawing on Elias (2000: 368), I am always acting into a web of others' intentions, not receiving a response no longer feels like a personal affront.

In the way I have presented the narratives, I have told things as I recall them. With further reflection, and particularly with input from my learning set provided during discussion of the events described, I was able to consider different perspectives and gain new insights. By exploring experience with others, I become aware of how meaning is not something to be uncovered as if it exists independently, but is indeed only created in our gestures and responses (Mead, 1934: 43). This helps me to problematize and challenge my automatic assumptions, understanding and interpretation of the events as I experienced them. I see, for example, how often I ascribed intentions to the actions of others, and how I centred the experiences described on myself, noticing my 'hero or victim' stance in the stories, for example, when I felt hurt and 'invisible' when my colleagues did not arrange a leaving party for me.

This is a key element of the method of my research: learning is a social process which emerges through iterative turns where my colleagues and I explore our experience. Reflection on the narratives occurs from a position of what Stacey & Griffin refer to as 'detached involvement' (Stacey & Griffin, 2005: 9), building on Elias (1956). This is a paradox of being both involved in the experience described in my narratives, and at the same time being able to take a detached view of events. This occurs when I am influenced by the discussions with my colleagues, as well as by my engagement with literature, allowing me to draw insights which are beyond my own views.

6.5.3 Ethics

Writing narratives about my experience whilst working as a consultant raises ethical questions related to method which I will now explore. Although clients are included in my narratives, they cannot really be considered to be involved as subjects in the research. With my focus on reflexivity, one of the things I am interested in is the movement of my

own thinking. I am not trying to capture the ‘truth’ about other people; I am focusing on noticing what happens to my thinking and my practice as a result of becoming reflexive about the different situations I encounter. I do this in a social process together with fellow researchers in a way that means my account needs to be credible to them.

Drawing on Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), I suggest that consideration of the ethics of my research needs to be undertaken in a context-dependent manner, rather than just following universal rules. The basis for my research is my ongoing work, rather than research being undertaken specifically for the purpose of the doctorate. In this way it needs to be negotiated over time with clients, rather than obtained before beginning my research. I do this by sharing the fact that I am undertaking doctoral work with my clients, who know that part of my research involves writing and reflecting on narratives concerning our work together in organizations.

As a consultant, issues of ethics and confidentiality are of prime importance, as any violation of these principles would jeopardize my business and my client relationships. Having reviewed ethical guidelines for my profession as an organizational consultant, as well as for related professions (e.g. social anthropologists⁴⁰), I claim that I am behaving in an ethically compliant as well as professionally responsible way. These issues are frequently discussed and shared among members of the DMan research community, particularly those working in similar fields.

Any people who do appear in my narratives have been completely anonymized, including identifying features of their names, organizations and locations, so that they cannot be identified. As agreed in the ethics approval for my research, if people are identifiable

⁴⁰ I have drawn on guidelines from the Association of Social Anthropologists which recognize that some situations, particularly in ethnographic research, cannot be anticipated. One does not know who key characters will be and it is not possible to get informed written consent from everyone you encounter. Sometimes consent has to be negotiated over time. This ethical guideline was debated over a long period and endorsed by all anthropology departments in the UK.

and are quoted directly, I will need to seek their consent (obtained retrospectively) after explaining the purpose for which they will be used. This has not been necessary as no-one quoted can be identified.

6.5.4 Literature

Where students in a traditional PhD programme begin their research with an extensive literature review, the process on the DMan is different. Proceeding from a practical question, arrived at by looking closely at one's experience and at doubts that it has raised, leads to an exploration of the relevant literature to illuminate the inquiry. This introduces the student to academic literature of the kind that most practitioners do not encounter, reading ancient and modern philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology as well as organizational theory. As I described earlier, the programme encourages students to read critical texts, often for the first time. Key authors are introduced to all students (for example: Aristotle, Dewey, Mead, Elias, Stacey) and these are discussed extensively during the programme. Further exploration of the literature is a function of each person's inquiry and where that takes them.

There is no claim in this thesis to have carried out a full literature review. I say so not only to pre-empt a critique of this nature, but to point to a key feature of a professional doctorate as distinct from a traditional PhD. As the director of the DMan, Chris Mowles, explained in an internal UH document outlining key differences between a PhD and a professional doctorate, 'In academic PhDs theory validity is increasingly privileged over practical relevance'. In the DMan programme it is our interest in practice, drawing on theoretical alliances with pragmatism, which drives our inquiry into relevant literature. This is not to argue against academic rigour in the reading, but rather to point to the aim of finding organizational scholars whose work can enhance our way of making sense of the complexity of management. The rigour is thus one that argues for the development of practical judgment in a particular profession, the 'scholar-practitioner' notion which I have borrowed from Thomas (2012).

I began to engage with a wide variety of critical academic texts only since joining the DMan programme. The accumulated insights from these, in contrast with my professional reading before beginning my research (typically Harvard Business Review articles as well as popular management and HR writers, some of whom are referenced in this thesis⁴¹) have contributed to many of the shifts in my thinking and practice.

6.5.5 Review, comparison and critique of alternative methods

A core element of my method is the adoption of a narrative approach to research; indeed, it would be highly incongruent to consider learning about organizational life from the perspective of complex responsive processes through positivist research methods. There are, however, other methods which I *could* have considered for my research, methods which would have been congruent with the theoretical underpinning of the programme. Several of them share similarities with the reflexive narrative method that I have used, as I will now explain.

Case study (Thomas, 2010), ethnography (Watson, 2011), at-home ethnography (Alvesson, 2009b) and auto-ethnography, or ‘analytic auto-ethnography’ (Anderson, 2006), are methods which have many features in common with my method, yet also differ in significant ways. The case study method describes a situation and provides for reflection, but not necessarily reflexivity. Drawing lessons from the events, the researcher may be describing an event in which he/she was not involved as an active participant. At-home ethnography involves research in a setting where the researcher is also a participant, but the focus is not on his/her experience: he/she reflects on the events but not in a way that is necessarily reflexive. Both of these methods retain an element of viewing the researcher as an objective observer of events.

⁴¹ For example: John Kotter, Dave Ulrich, Ronald Heifetz, Jeffrey Pfeffer, Edgar Schein, Jim Collins.

Analytical auto-ethnography (Anderson, 2006) appears to be the most similar to my method, focusing on the researcher's experience in a setting in which he/she is a natural participant, involving significant reflexivity as well as a reliance on theoretical inputs and a wider social context for applicability of the ideas. My method differs, however, in its focus on engagement with a community of researchers who play an active and ongoing role in challenging and critiquing my work, as I explained earlier. The learning set and large group meetings provide regular opportunities for me to become aware of other perspectives which could illuminate my experience, and help to surface my assumptions.

It is in this way that my method, and the theory of complex responsive processes of relating come together. The method itself *is* a complex responsive process, where meaning emerges through the way in which my fellow-researchers and I engage in conversation. This is very different from research methods where one starts with a clear question and then seeks data to support or refute a hypothesis. During my research, the questions themselves are subject to rigorous challenging from others, who are able to point out the habitual ways of thinking that are influencing the formation of our questions as well as our interpretations. This encourages me to become more reflexive, and over the many iterations of a project, to reach a different and richer understanding of events. This in turn leads me to develop greater reflexivity in my practice at work, as my research influences my practice and I begin questioning previously taken-for-granted assumptions.

6.5.6 Possible Challenges to my Method

A possible challenge to my method might be to suggest that the narratives lack validity or generalizability. The question may well be asked: isn't this highly subjective? Another way of expressing this is by asking the 'so what?' question: are these personal stories, of interest only to me and perhaps to my friends and family? Or do they hold elements that might resonate for others, that might remind the reader of events in their own life? If the latter is true, then these narratives become significant, and more than merely trivial accounts of upsetting events, to which the reader might quite correctly say 'just get over

it!’ If they are generalizable, there is the potential for them to provide useful learning, and thus value for others. This then is the source of the rigour I aim for in my research.

This concern is addressed by reflecting on our experience within a community of researchers and against a backdrop of theory and organizational literature, so that we aim to reach generalizable and useful insights, where we provide the social relevance of our personal experience, and seek to provide a contribution to knowledge that is new and of value to our research community.

This is an important distinction. As argued earlier, I am not claiming that the validity of a narrative method is the same as a method used in the natural sciences, where most claim that we can prove that a theory is absolutely true and generalizable in all cases. I would argue that there can be no claim to objectivity in quantitative research either. It is never fully objective, and always reflects an *a priori* perspective. There is always a point of view about knowledge, echoing Nagel’s view (1986) that there is no ‘view from nowhere’.

What then is my claim in suggesting that narratives are of interest as a research method and can be ‘generalizable’? I agree with Gary Thomas who argues that a case study’s ‘... validation comes through the connections and insights it offers between another’s experience and one’s own’ (Thomas, 2010: 579). I believe that Thomas’ claim can equally be made of narratives, refuting the ‘Einmal ist keinmal’ argument (ibid: 575).⁴² I claim that it is precisely *because* a narrative enables others to connect with a relevant experience that it is an appropriate research method, the aim of which is to contribute to knowledge and offer insight to others. Rhodes & Brown state:

⁴² Meaning literally ‘once is never’, in other words there is no validity in the single case. I refute this argument throughout my method section.

Our argument is that narrative methods have the potential to dissolve the duality between traditional scholarship and subjective experience in a way that is methodologically sophisticated and theoretically justified (Rhodes & Brown, 2005: 180).

In arguing for the methodological sophistication and theoretical justification of a reflexive narrative inquiry, I am supporting this view, and argue that my research is about making sense and meaning of experience, not about uncovering scientific truth. This is a view also taken by Mowles who argues that generalizability is:

not necessarily one that can be proved one way or another, but which triggers recognition in the reader (Mowles, 2015: 13).

I am arguing for a pragmatist view of ‘knowledge’ as a process which takes place within a social context, understanding that knowledge is always related to the ‘knower’ who interprets experience in the light of assumptions, prejudices and beliefs, or habitus. This is aligned with Alvesson and Skoldberg’s assertion that:

how we interpret phenomena is always perspectival and that so-called facts are always theory-laden (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009: 3).

On the DMan programme this approach is further reinforced by the work that we carry out in a ‘community of inquirers’ (Bernstein, 1982: 69; Martela, 2015: 541), each commenting on and validating each other’s work, a concept dating back to Peirce, one of the early pragmatists. This community approach to research is one of the ways in which we mitigate the risk of pure relativism, or ‘anything goes’, where any one opinion has as much value as another. Working together with other practitioners, my research needs to resonate for others in my field, and it is in this way that I aim for generalizability, conceptualized by Mowles as triggering ‘recognition in the reader’ (Mowles, 2015: 13).

6.5.7 The Coming Together of Method and Argument

Having explained my method and how it is key to an appreciation of the shifts in my thinking, I will move on to summarize my key arguments and my contributions to knowledge and practice. Before doing so, however, I pause to highlight the way in which my method and my arguments have come together through the process of my research. In particular I draw the reader's attention to the following:

- I am suggesting that LD should focus on 'taking experience seriously' as a way for leaders to engage with their lived experience and develop reflexivity about their practice. This is precisely what I have done in my research: exploring and taking experience seriously in my consulting engagements through writing reflexive narratives and inquiring into them in a community of researchers.
- I am arguing that paying attention to local dynamics and the power relations occurring between people in an LD programme is critical. This ability has been developed through my time on the DMan and particularly through my participation in the community meetings described above.
- I have explored organizational life as complex responsive processes of relating. My research is itself a complex responsive process and I have drawn attention throughout my thesis to elements of social complexity and the emergence of my research themes and arguments.

6.6 Key Arguments

The arguments I present in this section offer a very different understanding to that of mainstream leadership development. I am arguing that these have major implications for practitioners and represent a contribution to HR/LD theory and practice. The common thread linking my arguments is the suggestion that a facilitator of corporate LD programmes needs to pay careful attention to the micro-interactions taking place between participants. I draw on Gary Thomas' term, 'intelligent noticing' (Thomas, 2012: 39) to

advocate inquiry into local practice, an exploration of the puzzling incidents that practitioners face, paying close and careful attention to what *is*, rather than what *should be* happening. This also means focusing less on the delivery of content, as we did in the leadership cascade at NEWTECH, based on a belief that in doing so we were ‘sending’ packages of universal facts to be ‘received’ by the recipients, (the ‘sender-receiver’ model, Shannon & Weaver, 1949) which they then take away and ‘apply’ into practice. This is similar to Stacey’s argument that a shift in theoretical understanding leads to a shift in the focus of one’s attention (Stacey, 2011a: 476) and to his invitation to:

...refocus attention from an exclusive concern with tools and techniques to focus which pays much more attention to the actual processes that people, including OD practitioners, are engaged in (Stacey, 2014).

My attention has indeed shifted away from unthinkingly ‘following the rules’ of a strict agenda aimed at achieving pre-determined outcomes, largely promoting ‘popular recipes about how to act’ (Alvesson et al., 2017: 1). I now find myself thinking more about what to do in the moment based on practical judgment, by which I mean expertise about how to act in particular situations, adopting what Caroline Ramsey of the Open University in the UK calls a ‘scholarship of practice centred on attention’ (Ramsey, 2013: 6). I suggest that viewing corporate LD as activities of interdependent people may be more useful to HR practitioners than considering these programmes as rational arenas of knowledge transfer, as advocated in much of the HR literature on leadership development reviewed for this thesis. This has several implications for the practitioner, as I now describe.

6.6.1 Paying attention to power relations in LD is key to the facilitator’s ability to apply practical judgment in context.

I have explored how my ideas about power have shifted from the individualist view that power resides in a person (Pfeffer, 1992; Weber, 1947), to an understanding that power is an integral part of all human relating, including in LD. Elias’ views on power and interdependence (Elias, 1970: 74) help me appreciate how learning occurs between

interdependent people and have increased my sensitivity to what is going on during workshops. I now pay more attention to participants' responses and interactions and recognise the importance of exploring these. For example, at ACECO I noticed the glances when Mitch's bricks were stacked in the same order as Frank's, and this led me to decide to stop the delivery of content set out in advance on PowerPoint slides and take the risk of shifting to small group conversations.

At NEWTECH the figuration extended beyond the conference room in which the workshop took place: it included Samantha, the lead consultant, Sarah, the HR leader, Bob, Benny's boss and many others, including myself. Thinking about LD programmes in this way, there is no 'objective'⁴³ place for the facilitator to stand, which is outside of a complex web of interdependence. This results in fluctuating power relations, as I explored in P2 (p.55), when I described following the rules while facilitating the GLOCO programme on behalf of LDO, locating power with Marcus. I now suggest that power was an ongoing negotiation playing out in our interactions and that these had begun well before the GLOCO session.

At NEWTECH, noticing Benny's frequent remarks about Bob's views on the leadership model in general, and empowerment in particular, could lead me to consider how these were pervaded by power relations, influencing all of our actions. It clearly affected me as I considered the different levels of interdependence and need between my business and NEWTECH. This relates to my key question in P4 about how challenging the mainstream way of working in LD could pose a risk to my business and income. It helps me analyse and pay careful attention to what I do as a facilitator: when I take action and when I judge that it is better to do nothing. NEWTECH and ACECO are illustrative of

⁴³ Traditional views of LD advocate for the facilitator intervening in a system by adopting an objective and fully neutral position and for participants having 'free and informed choice' (e.g. Schwartz, 1994: 8). It is this individualist and systems approach that I am arguing against.

this argument: at NEWTECH I was not paying attention to the power relations in the moment, and was focused only on driving through the agenda. At ACECO I was very much aware of the power issues, for example, noticing how Mitch appeared pleased that the colours of his stack of bricks matched Frank's, and how Vivian was singled out for 'being yellow', possibly masking issues between her and others on the team. In this latter case I intervened, not by addressing the issue directly but by encouraging the team to split into pairs to discuss what was going on for them.

Additionally, and drawing on Stacey (2011b, 2012), and Townley (1993, 2008), I argue that LD programmes serve a disciplinary purpose, which is important for a facilitator to consider. This idea comes from Michel Foucault, introduced in P3, who describes how disciplinary power acts as a social form of control. This provides useful parallels to what happened at NEWTECH: the programme's goal was to align the leaders of the company around a single model of leadership, and attendance at the workshops was mandated by Benny. As facilitator I was part of these disciplinary processes, ensuring that we covered the pre-selected topics within the agreed times according to Samantha's instructions. Although she was not observing me in the workshop, through a 'Panopticon'⁴⁴ effect I was effectively disciplining myself.

By constantly referring to what Bob, the CEO, thought or said, Benny was bringing Bob into the room, and this was sufficient for all of us to kowtow in an act of deference to the hierarchy. Benny was not only exerting discipline over his team, he was also being disciplined by his manager, Bob, and to an extent by me. I imagine that he knew that I would report back on the workshop, and whether he had been a good 'sponsor' of the

⁴⁴ The Panopticon, cited by Foucault (1995), is a design proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the 19th century. A prison guard would be situated in the centre of a block of cells, theoretically able to observe everyone all the time. While the guard would not be able to do this, prisoners would not know when being observed, and would therefore act as if they were being observed at all times, and would thus control themselves.

new leadership model. Even more obvious to me is that I was being disciplined as part of a social process due to my expectations of NEWTECH's HR Director's expectations of me. I was disciplining myself when I did not challenge Benny, imagining what he would think of me, and worried about the evaluation I would receive, whether this meant reaching a high score on a 5-point scale, or simply being invited back to work with the company again. This is a social process, emerging in the interactions between interdependent people. In this way disciplinary power is being exerted over everyone at all times, and the process is a social one, reflecting the interconnections between people and their intrinsic interdependence. In P4 (p.142) I described this idea, drawing on Mead's concept of social control (Mead, 1925: 273). This is a very different understanding from the dominant discourse of leadership and LD, where power is located in certain individuals.

At NEWTECH, participants' attempts to challenge the model were shut down by Benny, in effect creating the kind of 'docility' among his team that Foucault (1995) refers to as a goal of disciplining. It is important to recognise that Foucault's views on power reflect a *social* understanding, shared with the perspective I am now adopting. If Benny was shutting down his team, this was not something that he was doing in a rational, autonomous fashion; he is part of the complex environment where everyone is disciplining everyone else, and compliance is thus co-created. Drawing on Stacey's (2011b) interpretation of Foucault's ideas on disciplinary power, and of Schein's views of coercion persuasion, the NEWTECH workshop is an example of the pattern that Stacey describes:

The programmes do not really change the beliefs of many people but they do train them in the public display of willing acceptance..... leadership development programmes are far more about order and discipline than they are about change and creativity (Stacey, 2011b: 9).

Reflecting on the NEWTECH programme in the light of my evolving ideas, I believe I would have acted differently, including encouraging Benny to address the challenges his team was raising.

6.6.2 Noticing ritual-like activities helps the facilitator become more sensitive to the social complexities inherent in LD.

A core issue with which I have wrestled throughout my research is: if corporate LD programmes such as NEWTECH's do not reach their stated goals, what *is* their purpose? Why do we continue to run these programmes in such recognizable ways that the LD workshop can be viewed as a social object?⁴⁵ One idea explored above is that LD programmes are a form of disciplinary action. Continuing my inquiry, I turned to Kevin Flinn, a former researcher on the DMan, who has struggled with similar questions. Flinn's suggestion, which resonates for me and links to the idea of the LD programme as an organizational ritual presented earlier, is that:

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 organizations (Flinn, 2011: 128).

Flinn references Larry Hirschhorn (1995), writing in a psychodynamic tradition, who considers rituals as a way of dealing with anxiety. This was explored in my reflections on P3 where I considered the ritualistic element of the leaving party. Hirschhorn suggests that leadership development training can act as a ritual, offering techniques and methods which cover over the messier (and harder to handle) elements of complex social interactions. This leads me to reflect on Benny's reluctance to engage in his team's challenges of the new model at NEWTECH and face the lack of congruence between

⁴⁵ See p.63 for a discussion of my evolving understanding of the social object in the context of the evaluation of the GLOCO LD programme.

empowerment as a value and his boss Bob's controlling behaviours. While I cannot know, I imagine that it would have been anxiety-provoking for Benny to engage in a critical conversation about his boss, fearful that it might get back to Bob, and this might explain why he stuck firmly to the ritualized format of the workshop and did not allow any discussion beyond the presentation of the model.

There is safety in rituals. Smith & Stewart (2011) list four essential characteristics of what they call full organizational rituals (as opposed to ritual-like activities): (1) they follow a fixed and invariable format; (2) they are formal; (3) they have symbolic significance, and (4) they contain performance expectations. I suggest that the leaving party discussed in P3 can be considered a ritual, whereas the LD programme is more helpfully understood as an activity which contains ritual-like elements. I propose an additional element of ritual-like activities: that they are social processes pertaining to a group of people who share a history and are socially tied together; they are forming the rituals at the same time as the rituals are forming them.

This idea particularly resonates as I recollect our use of the Self-star model to explore interpersonal interaction in the workshop at ACECO. Rather than having to face the personality clashes in the team and deal with the anxiety and potential conflict that this could have raised, for example, the team telling Vivian that her behaviour was disruptive and annoying, they were able to point to her 'dominant yellow energy', using a vocabulary of 'emotional neutrality' and the 'oblique, elliptical quality of managerial language' (Jackall, 2010: 143-144). Maybe we find comfort in the reified ideas of the colours, so it is safer to point to a tendency to act 'yellow' that we are born with and makes us do things, rather than take responsibility for our actions.

I suggest that a programme such as Self-star, or the leadership model at NEWTECH, has ritual-like elements: across the whole of ACECO leaders use the artefact of a stack of coloured bricks to represent the complexity of human interactions. This is ritualistic according to Smith & Stewart's four essential characteristics listed above. The need for the local team to learn the language of Self-star and to place each person's stack of bricks

on their office desk points to the function of inclusion/exclusion that this ritual serves. It also points to the clear social nature of the ritual: to anyone outside of the organization and unfamiliar with Self-star, the stack of coloured bricks would have no symbolic or shared meaning, nor could its use be considered a ritual-like activity.

Brooks et al. offer a further definition of organizational ritual that supports the suggestion that elements of an LD programme can be considered in this way: they ‘lack overt instrumental purpose’ (Brooks et al., 2016: 73). The coloured brick stacks at ACECO had no overt instrumental purpose other than conveying a symbolic meaning, shared by those included in the company’s leadership ranks. Jackall calls certain organizational rituals ‘a kind of ceremony of rationality’ (Jackall, 2010: 74). This helps me think about why we continue to use LD processes that do not achieve their stated purpose: they are ritualized activities that cover over anxieties with a mask of rationality, include and exclude, and carry symbolic meaning to a social group.

Regarding the evaluation form, it is possible to consider the completion of a standard ‘smile sheet’ as another ritualized activity or ‘ceremony of rationality’ (ibid). I am not arguing that they lack any instrumental purpose: summarizing the evaluation forms completed at the end of the GLOCO programme does offer the organizers a means to calculate the relative value of facilitators against a standard and to ‘enable decisions to be made far removed from the context which they reflect, but which they are taken to represent’ (Townley, 1995: 562). The reduction of the complexity of the situation to a single metric facilitates its control and also its comparison, and this, I believe, is the key reason for its use. As I argued in P2 (p.63), the evaluation can be seen as an abstraction, or a social object which needs to be taken up or particularized in specific contexts. I suggest it is also helpful to consider that the evaluation process has ritualistic elements, in Brooks’s terms, featuring ‘a fixed sequence of behaviours that are often characterized by formality and repetition’ (Brooks et al., 2016: 73). I am not critiquing the evaluation form per se, only its unthinking use, or rigid application of rules such as the 4.0 threshold at GLOCO. To be clear: it is my *own* former rigid application of the rule that became

apparent through my inquiry; Marcus and GLOCO in contrast ‘bent the rules’ when the context and their practical judgment seemed to suggest this as the more helpful route.

I suggest that an appreciation of the ritualised elements of a corporate LD programme adds to the facilitator’s intelligent observation of and sensitivity to the social complexities inherent in these programmes. I further contend that this appreciation rests on being both fully involved and immersed in the micro-interactions of the people in the room, and at the same time being able to detach from and form observations on what is happening. This is to practise what Elias (1956) calls ‘involved detachment’, explored by Mowles (2015: 52), drawing on the former’s analogy of the ‘airman and the swimmer’, both immersed in events (the swimmer) and viewing them from 30,000 feet (the airman).

6.6.3 Developing the capacity for reflexive inquiry into lived experience is at the heart of the role of facilitator.

In this argument I summarize how I have come to view my role as a consultant leading corporate LD programmes. This has shifted considerably since the GLOCO programme (P2) where I unthinkingly followed the highly structured agenda with its formal slide presentations. At NEWTECH (P4) I continued to do the same, despite concerns about what I was doing, and it was only at ACECO that a new pattern of behaviour emerged. While acknowledging that this is not a radical shift, and that within the managerialist setting of my corporate clients, a completely unstructured agenda is unlikely to be accepted,⁴⁶ I am now less likely to proceed automatically when asked to facilitate a programme. Drawing on Dewey, I am trying to resist the ‘zeal for doing, lust for action’ (Dewey, 1934: 46) which is so pervasive in the corporations in which I work. I am

⁴⁶ For example, Patricia Shaw (1997) describes a situation where she radically re-framed a consulting engagement, proposing a highly unstructured and reflexive approach, as compared to the organizational development project she was bidding for, and won the contract. I am suggesting that this kind of approach might be a ‘step too far’ for my corporate clients.

suggesting that developing the capacity for the kind of reflexivity-in-action (Stacey, 2014) that I found myself practising at ACECO, is key. I shall now move on to develop two elements of this idea: focusing on lived experience, and developing reflexivity.

6.6.3.1 Lived Experience

In my critique of the NEWTECH workshop, I drew on Robin Holt's distinction (2006: 1667) that avoiding engagement with lived experience may cause a lack of congruence for those involved. I explored this idea, relating the leaders' apparent lack of interest with the new model⁴⁷ to my sense that it in no way resonated for them as they could not relate it to their experience.

Today I find it problematic to design and deliver programmes focused on decontextualized abstract models. I argue that these present an idealized view of leadership, highly incongruent with the reality that participants face, and I therefore advocate a pragmatic approach, privileging lived experience over abstractions. Placing lived experience, or practice, at the heart of LD represents what Barbara Simpson, professor of strategy and organization at Strathclyde Business School, calls a 'practice turn' (Simpson, 2009: 1329) in organizational scholarship: an interest in 'what people actually do' (ibid). As a researcher, this includes me taking seriously and inquiring into the use of grids and frameworks. As an LD consultant, this includes designing the GLOCO2 programme (P4, p.149) in a way that reflects the participants' own daily experience of managing complex deals. The workshop involves discussing this experience in a community of peers together with actors/coaches and the leadership team.

At NEWTECH, the lack of resonance between participants' daily experiences, and the abstract, idealised models presented, is an example of the gap between rhetoric and reality that is commented on by critical organizational scholars such as Karen Legge

⁴⁷ See p.110 for a description of the model used at NEWTECH.

(1995). In the GLOCO2 programme, in contrast, by highlighting and focusing on the everyday dilemmas of the participants' work, we are helping them to make sense of what they are doing and, perhaps, helping them work in more useful ways.⁴⁸ The connection between focusing on lived experience and developing reflexivity, the subject of the next section, is succinctly captured below:

Reflection dwells upon lived experience with the intention of intensifying it, and in doing so the reflector can sometimes come to understand themselves and their relationships anew: they become reflexive. (Mowles, 2011a: 264-5).

It is precisely this intensifying of what is going on in the moment that I think is important in developing leaders who work in increasingly complex organizations where they need to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity on a daily basis. This is the 'VUCA'⁴⁹ world where Mowles (2014a) argues that leaders need to accept that they 'may be in charge but they are not always in control'. The intrinsic interdependence of organizational life means that we are all both enabled and constrained by everyone else. Developing reflexivity may then enable leaders to 'notice how they and others are being caught up in the game of organizational life' (ibid).

6.6.3.2 *Reflexive Inquiry*

I am suggesting that encouraging reflexive inquiry into leaders' lived experience may render corporate LD programmes more useful.⁵⁰ In this section I draw on Stacey's ideas

⁴⁸ Feedback on the programme both from participants and from their managers suggests that this is the case.

⁴⁹ VUCA is an acronym which originated in the US military in the nineties: it stands for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. It is used as a descriptor for today's challenging organizational and business environment.

⁵⁰ To re-iterate, I mean 'more useful' in the way that Tony Watson (2011) uses the term: more useful in helping leader prepare for the realities they face at work.

about practical judgment as a ‘technique’,⁵¹ including developing reflexive inquiry, improvisation and political adroitness (Stacey, 2012: 107). In this section I focus on reflexive inquiry, drawing on Stacey’s distinction between ‘mindless action’ and ‘mindful action’ (ibid: 110). By mindful, I refer to the idea of taking experience seriously, practicing intelligent noticing, and thinking not only about what we are doing, but about how we are thinking about it. It is a necessarily *social* process whereby we are ‘noticing and thinking about the nature of our involvement in our participation with each other as we do something together’ (ibid: 112). This is emphasized by Brinkmann in his exposition of Dewey’s thought:

The process of experience is not exclusively individual but is also social and collective, for all knowing and creation of experience takes place in a specific social context (Brinkmann, 2013: 51).

Focusing on lived experience, in the form of participants’ ongoing work, offers the opportunity to develop practical judgment. At the GLOCO2 programme, for example, the presence of more senior leaders and actors/coaches led to inquiry into experience and helped participants become more politically aware as they considered the power relations and interdependence in the situations in which they found themselves. I am claiming that reflexive inquiry is a key capacity for experienced managers. Beyond the early stages of managing, there is little value in universal simplifications and generalizations, provided as prescriptions to adopt in all cases. This is consistent with Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ model of expert performance (1986). In P1, as part of my critique of simplified leadership models, I drew on their ideas about the five levels of performance (p.35). I now argue, in Flyvbjerg’s terms (2001: 9-24), that at the Novice, Advanced Beginner and Competence

⁵¹ The reason for the quotation marks around the word ‘technique’ is to highlight that this is a different use of the word from the techniques of instrumental rationality which are part of the dominant mainstream approach to leadership. Such techniques infer that there is a linear causality between the use of the tool and the outcome it promises. I am offering no such promise.

level, there is some value in presenting universal rules and models. However, as leaders develop expertise and become proficient, I believe that LD programmes which feature simple, decontextualized models are less helpful. This is consistent with my critique of the NEWTECH programme, where the leaders were all highly experienced.

Exploring what it means to perform appropriately in specific, local situations is what I am arguing for as the focus of corporate leadership development: generalizations about 'leadership' need to be particularized in specific local contexts. These ideas have not received much attention in mainstream literature (e.g. McCauley, C. et al., 1998; Beer et al., 2016). In contrast, *critical* approaches to leadership development *have* drawn attention to them, for example, Shotter & Tsoukas (2014: 377) who emphasise taking action based on practical judgment when they write about 'performing phronesis'.⁵² Referring to an academic rather than corporate context, Elana Antonacopoulou argues for incorporating 'reflexive critique' (2010: S8) into the curriculum of MBA programmes for reasons which resonate with my critique, drawing on Watson (2010, 2011), namely that mainstream MBAs:

Frequently leave participants with a set of disconnected knowledge and skills which bear little coherence and resemblance to the complexity of managing they experience (Antonacopoulou, 2010: S8).

I propose that practising reflexive inquiry is equally important for corporate leaders, because it might help leaders develop the ability to act into the unexpected situations in which they find themselves. I am arguing that the reality implied by the highly simplified and abstract leadership model and workshop at NEWTECH might be misleading.

Echoing Watson (2011) I assert that inquiry into lived experience, including an

⁵² Aristotle's term for practical wisdom and judgment, introduced in earlier sections of this thesis, see p.16. Shotter & Tsoukas build on Aristotle's idea of phronesis as an intellectual virtue, towards the idea of a process of phronesis, or acting in a way that entails the exercise of practical wisdom and judgment.

exploration of the ‘messiness of managerial realities’ (Chia & Holt, 2008: 476) may provide a more useful approach to leadership development. I recall my changing approach to teaching the MBA Change Management class (P4, p.156) where, in discussing Kotter’s model for leading change (1996) I asked the students what assumptions they thought underpin the model and how it resonated with their experience.⁵³ This is an example of developing the capacity for reflexive inquiry.

I further suggest that this might be a way to counter the ‘functional stupidity’ which I have argued, drawing on Alvesson and Spicer (2012, 2016), is pervasive in corporations today, as is the rush to take action without reflection against which Dewey cautions. I am not suggesting that this is an easy shift to make: the pervasiveness of a non-reflexive management approach points to the difficulty of breaking out of habitual patterns of behaviour such as those of corporate leaders. Critical thinking is not a ‘tool’ and it cannot be un-problematically applied. I would therefore argue that the suggestion that ‘leadership development can be improved by encouraging leaders to engage in critical reflection’ (Densten & Gray, 2001: 122) and that this ‘may assist in the development of charismatic leaders’ (ibid: 121) makes a false promise. This is echoed by Ford & Harding, describing their work in public sector LD, where they encourage critical thinking while acknowledging that introducing this way of working is difficult, and that being critical about mainstream LD does not give them any moral high ground (Ford & Harding, 2007: 476). My research in corporate settings supports this.

Considering LD as the activity of interdependent people, and thinking about the NEWTECH workshop, I argue that it might have been useful to encourage the leaders to think about how they were thinking about leadership, including the abstract concepts that Benny was ‘cascading’ to his team. My critique of what happened at NEWTECH is that

⁵³ The students are practising managers who have experience in various corporate change processes; they are able to draw on their workplaces to think about the ideas.

we were trying to force a new model on the leaders without any kind of reflection or reflexive inquiry.⁵⁴ An argument for sitting together and examining together what we think is going on, is that in the discussion we recognise patterns that also occur in daily life at work, and we can try and make sense of these together as a means of shifting stuck patterns. This offers the potential, but of course does not guarantee, that something helpful will emerge: we cannot know what the outcome will be and it may not be for the good.

Stacey's observation that practicing reflexive inquiry is 'an activity which occurs very little indeed in most organizations' (Stacey 2011b: 19) is borne out in my corporate experience, where what happened at NEWTECH is quite typical. While arguing that developing reflexivity is an important element of corporate LD, as already explained, I am not suggesting that it is likely to be taken up easily or widely. There is indeed a counter-argument, put forward by Alvesson and Spicer (2012, 2016) which may explain Stacey's observation above about how little it occurs: *avoiding* reflection and reflexivity sustains the corporation precisely in its rule-following, game-playing way. It should not be assumed that every client would find a reflexive approach compelling. As Stacey writes:

In my experience this kind of more fluid, more searching inquiry is rarely undertaken in organizations and suggestions that it should occur are often felt to be dangerous and anxiety provoking. The response I have often found is rejection of the suggestion because 'it would open a can of worms' (Stacey, 2012: 113).

Linking to my earlier argument about paying attention to ritual-like elements of corporate LD programmes, I am suggesting that it is these ritualised activities that support keeping

⁵⁴ Indeed this was expressly avoided, as seen in Benny's refusal to entertain any discussion about the model and its relevance to the team, effectively closing down the opportunity for inquiry.

the ‘can of worms’ tightly closed. Paying attention to when this might be functional for the group, as well as noticing when it could usefully be challenged, is a key part of the facilitator’s practical judgment.

6.6.4 A critical supertemp offers particular value in leading LD programmes

I have argued that human interaction is inherently non-linear, which leads me to realize that what occurs in an LD programme is paradoxically both predictable and unpredictable. I have come to refute the illusion that as facilitator I can control the process and the outcomes (as we assumed at NEWTECH), but at the same time I am not completely unable to control things either: I do have the ability to influence the group. I suggest that reflexivity, intelligent noticing and practical judgment are key skills for the facilitator, as well as for the leaders with whom they work, because these may help in an unpredictable world where we nevertheless have to take action which we hope will be useful, in pragmatist terms. At ACECO I did not know in advance that I would suggest that the leadership team members go off in pairs and talk to each other about what interpersonal issues the discussion about the colours raised for them. It was something that came to me in the moment, when I sensed the unexpressed emotions in the room and felt that continuing with the presentation would not be useful. This does not mean that stopping the group discussion and sending people off for conversations in pairs will always be the answer; this is not a new prescription!

I propose that consultants working in corporate LD need both the ability to function comfortably in a managerialist environment, *and* an awareness of what is taken for granted and unquestioned, including ritual-like activities. As a facilitator, my aim is to highlight what participants may not notice (but of course I may not notice either, or they may draw attention to something which I have not noticed). A key skill for the facilitator thus becomes the:

experience-based ability to notice more of what is going on and intuit what is most important about a situation (Stacey, 2012: 108).

This might mean pointing out the ritual, or it might mean continuing without drawing attention to it, but I am arguing that the heightened sensitivity and deeper understanding of what is going on in the room is important. It also calls for a certain amount of comfort with taking risks, daring to draw attention to uncomfortable topics. This is what I noticed myself not doing at NEWTECH: for example when Benny shut down his team's challenges about empowerment, I remained silent.

Thomas, working in the field of education, argues that 'teachers need to approach their work as scholar-practitioners, sharpening the tools of critical inquiry' (Thomas, 2012: 42).⁵⁵ I am making the same argument for those who lead corporate LD programmes, suggesting, as explained above, that their ability and willingness to challenge unspoken assumptions and explore experience might make LD programmes more useful to participants and help them to develop practical judgment. In order to do this, I suggest that a highly experienced organizational consultant, a 'supertemp', *may* be uniquely qualified. I am contrasting the kind of LD practitioners to whom Stacey refers, who are often young and very inexperienced (Stacey, 2011b: 4-5), with the 'supertemps' whose value lies precisely in their corporate experience and inside/outside view. Having 'been there, done that' as a corporate leader, these senior consultants *may* be better positioned to encourage a reflexive, experience-based approach. I emphasize 'may' and not *will* be, as I will now explain.

I draw firstly on Stacey's idea that in order to guide others, a facilitator should be an expert him/herself (Stacey, 2012: 108). This sounds obvious, but there are many cases where a facilitator of a leadership programme has no personal experience of leading. This was the case with my colleague in the Istanbul programme described in P1 (p.34), as

⁵⁵ Ramsey, working in management development, uses the term 'researcher-consultant' (Ramsey, 2013: 11) to express this idea. In both Thomas' and Ramsey's terminology I find this hybrid of practice and inquiry to be key in what Banerjee & Morley call the ability to be a 'boundary spanner', someone who can 'straggle the worlds of practice and academia' (Banerjee & Morley, 2013: 181).

it was in my early years at the IT company (p.23). In such situations, I suggest that a facilitator is more likely to rely on rules, models and simple frameworks. Continuing to do this at NEWTECH several decades later, following the ‘TTT’ (‘train-the-trainer’) manual and delivering material under tight agenda constraints, was, I now think, a missed opportunity to draw on my experience, and challenge the non-thinking application of a pre-determined agenda and approach.

Why then do I claim that a ‘supertemp’ may, but will not necessarily add value in running leadership programmes? I do so because I think that someone with decades of experience working in global corporations may well *continue* to operate in the largely non-critical way as before. Indeed, the shifts I am beginning to experience from rule-following HR professional to critical consultant have not occurred automatically, nor could they have. They have come from taking my experience seriously, re-visiting my years in corporate HR/LD, and being willing to critically question assumptions and practices. My early work as a consultant (P2, P4) reflects how I continued to follow the same patterns of behaviour of this thought-collective (Fleck, 1979), remaining dependent on the recognition I had come to associate with following the rules.

I am therefore arguing that becoming critical and working in a different way are predicated on two processes which in my case took place in parallel: 1) leaving the corporate environment in which, as suggested repeatedly in this thesis, I was unlikely to have adopted a critical approach, fearing exclusion from my social group and a threat to my professional identity, and 2) becoming a doctoral researcher in a critical management programme. One without the other would have been unlikely to lead to the shifts in practice that I have described.

I am contrasting both the uncritical practitioner, and the critical academic, with a new term that I have coined: the ‘critical supertemp’, suggesting that both of the former lack an important perspective. I have explained why immersion in the thought-collective of corporate HR practitioners might lead to an uncritical adoption of its premises. I would

also argue that an academic approach to critical HRM may lack practice-based insights. Karen Legge, for example, states that she lacks practical experience in HR:

I have never worked in an HRM department or even talked to many personnel managers (Legge, 1999: 261).

As a scholar-practitioner I am claiming that I bring both the rigour of critical academic thinking, *and* the deep understanding gained from decades of practical corporate experience, evolving into what I am now calling a ‘critical supertemp’. I believe that I would now follow Samantha’s script less closely, encouraging the leaders to pay attention to what was happening in the room. I would surface and challenge the assumptions we were making, ask questions and offer my observations. At the time I was beginning to feel uncomfortable with not challenging the process, but not yet ready to do so for reasons explored in P4.

I am not arguing for refusing to use the structured agendas ever:⁵⁶ that would be arrogant and would jeopardize my business and the securing of contracts. My role is to draw attention to what is happening in the moment in the room on these programmes, as I did at ACECO. As my role as facilitator shifts, I notice that it feels much less like a performance: at GLOCO I was at the front of the room, presenting slides, making points, whereas at GLOCO2 and at ACECO I found myself more often quietly paying close attention to what the others were saying and only occasionally offering an observation or probing for clarity. It is important to note that whether I am at the front presenting, or sitting quietly at the side, I cannot be considered objective, nor sitting outside of the dynamics of power and inclusion/exclusion in the room. Adopting a complex responsive

⁵⁶ This was the point of view expressed by a fellow DMan researcher, also an independent consultant and facilitator, who on hearing about my NEWTECH experience responded emphatically, ‘I would NEVER agree to work with such a TTT approach!’

process perspective, I am both forming and being formed by the dynamics in these programmes at all times.

6.7 Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

In this final section I conclude by presenting my contributions and explain why they may be of interest to others doing the work that I do. I am referring to a professional community of consultants and facilitators working in corporate leadership development, including but not exclusively ‘supertemps’ like myself, working as external consultants after many years working internally in senior leadership roles. The reason for singling out this group is that their corporate insights and ‘savvy’⁵⁷ may, if combined with the kind of critical reflexivity that did not characterise my own corporate experience, but has emerged recently, grant them a unique vantage point as well as the maturity and personal experience to work in the way that I am suggesting.

Corporate LD typically adopts a managerialist paradigm in which organizations are considered to be systems, led by a powerful coalition of leaders who can assume an objective position in order to chart a course for its future (Heifetz et al., 2009; McCauley, C. et al., 1998; Pfeffer, 2015). The focus of mainstream LD literature is on the development of the individual competencies leaders require to achieve business and organizational outcomes. My thesis contributes to knowledge in the field of HR/LD by providing an alternative to this predominantly linear, systemic and managerialist focus of mainstream LD literature. By drawing on critical management scholars, as well as on the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, with its radically different view of

⁵⁷ Organizational ‘savvy’ is a commonly used term in corporations: it refers to a person’s innate knowledge of how things ‘are done’ and how to behave. Jackall (2010) refers extensively to this concept (not by name, but by implication) in his commentary on how corporate managers need to behave in order to succeed, for example not contradicting their bosses.

organizational life, I offer a fresh look at this important topic in HR and leadership discussions, suggesting that taking up these critical perspectives together may broaden HR/LD practitioners' understanding and thus inform their practice.

Drawing on Beer et al. (2016) and Pfeffer (2015), whose research suggests that tens of billions are spent on LD⁵⁸ with questionable return on investment, I am claiming that a more useful approach may not be to do more of the same, but fundamentally to question the largely taken-for-granted assumptions of current practice in corporate LD.

My thesis makes an original **contribution to knowledge** in the field of corporate leadership development in several ways. Firstly, by adopting a narrative-based research method, I have been able to show some of the detailed, micro-interactions occurring in multiple corporate leadership development programmes, taking place in several global pharmaceutical and one global hi-tech organization. This is unusual, because most HR/LD practitioners and scholars adopt a prescriptive, macro approach, describing the ways in which these programmes can support business outcomes and how they should be run. They largely cover over or ignore what people are actually doing together, including proposing idealized models and sanitized exercises, such as those used at NEWTECH. I have suggested that these may act as a defence against the anxiety of not knowing what to do. I suggest that by adopting a critically reflexive method in my thesis, and increasingly in my consulting practice, I am making a contribution to the field of research methods in corporate HRM and LD.

Secondly, I contribute to my community of practice, those involved in designing, developing and delivering corporate LD programmes, by exploring my own experience of facilitating these programmes, drawing on the perspective of complex responsive

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Pfeffer suggests that in the US alone, corporations spend between US\$14-20 billion annually on leadership development (2015: 10).

processes as well as more generally critical approaches. This has allowed me to demonstrate that corporate LD programmes are sites of social complexity, where we are unable to predict outcomes or the meaning people make. This includes challenging the unquestioned premise that corporate LD is about developing individual competencies, and that this can be achieved by transferring knowledge. I have suggested that a more helpful way to think about corporate LD is about developing leaders' practical judgment and reflexivity, and that developing the capacity for reflexive inquiry into lived experience is at the heart of the role of facilitator. In my previous corporate experience and within my thought-collective, these topics rarely received attention. However, since becoming a 'scholar-practitioner' I have come to recognize how the critical management literature does acknowledge the importance of these ideas (for example Antonacopoulou, 2010; Cunliffe, 2004, 2016; Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014).

Thirdly, I have focused on my experience amidst a transition from internal leader to independent consultant. This has allowed me to explore and present some of the unique challenges as well as possible benefits that a 'supertemp' (Miller & Miller, 2012) may bring to LD programmes. This has included tracing my own evolving thought patterns as someone who has 'crossed over' from being an unquestioning member of the corporate HR thought-collective (Fleck, 1979), largely un-critical of my practice, to becoming a 'scholar-practitioner' (Thomas, 2012) who surfaces assumptions, reviews them critically, and explores alternative theories. I have suggested that leaving a full-time corporate position affords the 'supertemp' an opportunity to reflect on management differently, but does not guarantee that this opportunity will be taken up.

Lastly, through my research I have drawn attention to under-explored elements of corporate LD, including the role of ritual-like activities, the way power is taken up in LD programmes, and how rules are negotiated. I have also suggested an alternative to thinking about communication as the sending of an objective message to be received by others. This is important because the dominant sender/receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) model is so engrained in organizational communication in corporate HR and LD

that it is rarely noticed, much less questioned, as demonstrated in the ‘cascade’ approach to the leadership model at NEWTECH (P4). I am posing an alternative way of thinking about corporate communications and LD, drawing particularly on Mead’s suggestion that meaning emerges in a conversation of gesture and response (Mead, 1934: 80). The notion that meaning cannot be pre-determined has radical implications for the ubiquitous HR corporate communication process and leadership cascades.

Academic HRM does not appear to have taken up the ideas of complex responsive processes of relating in the context of corporate HR⁵⁹ and I therefore suggest that this thesis provides an important contribution to knowledge by extending the reach of this perspective into the field in which I practise.

In summary, I am arguing that considering this perspective will enable the facilitator of corporate LD programmes to be more sensitive to the complex dynamics occurring between people, and to question critically what they are doing and why. I am arguing, with Alvesson et al., that the trend in corporate LD to reduce the complexity of leading to simplified abstractions, while in many ways appealing, may also prevent the development of reflexivity:

Striving for ‘simplicity’ is often the enemy of reflexivity, as is the case in many bestselling texts produced by the leadership industry (Alvesson et al., 2017: 16).

I suggest that this is the case for the text on which the NEWTECH workshop was based.⁶⁰ In contrast, I claim that the GLOCO2 programme, with its emphasis on lived experience and reflexive inquiry, is a more useful approach to developing leaders. While unlikely to be appreciated by all, the feedback on this programme indicates that the

⁵⁹ Following an extensive online library search for reference to complex responsive processes of relating in the context of corporate Human Resources, this is my conclusion, leading me to suggest that this is an important area for further inquiry and that my thesis provides important initial insights into this area.

⁶⁰ Heifetz et al. (2009).

leaders do value the kind of discussions it involved and welcome the fact that there is no claim to one right answer. One of the participants sent me this note: *'...thanks so much for facilitating this session, your engagement and empathy without being too much of the 'all-knowing teacher' but gently nudging us, was a real unforgettable experience...'* I was pleased to read that I am no longer perceived as an 'all knowing teacher', in contrast to the 'guru' status I held at MIDCO (see P4, p.118).

In order to share my contribution to knowledge with a wider audience than that of this thesis, I plan to publish part of this research as an article. One journal I may target is the International Journal of Training and Development. I believe this is an appropriate place to publish because of the journal's international reach, and with its editorial policy to provide 'a bridge between academic work and professional practice',⁶¹ in line with my focus in this thesis. I am also working on another article about the GLOCO2 programme, which I will be co-authoring with a colleague who works with mainstream management approaches and is less familiar with CMS and with the ideas of complex responsive processes of relating. The challenge will be to develop my ideas in such a way that they are both appealing to a managerialist audience, and able to encourage deep reflection and critical inquiry.

My contribution to practice has emerged together with the shift in my thinking, indeed, I suggest that my contributions to knowledge and practice are inexorably tied to each other. Through my research I have come to suggest that there is a way to continue working with corporate clients while at the same time being more critical of what we are doing, and what we are thinking about it. I am therefore advocating a position which neither unquestioningly accepts the taken-for-granted mainstream approaches to LD (as I

⁶¹ From the journal's website's guidelines for authors:
[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1468-2419/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-2419/homepage/ForAuthors.html)

did before), nor abandons them totally. This may involve using tools such as Self-star, but will certainly entail using them differently, drawing attention to assumptions we are making and paying attention to the complex responsive processes of relating in the group.

In this thesis I have demonstrated ways for the facilitator to work differently with leaders such as advocating for the corporate LD practitioner to be critical about the tools and techniques of instrumental rationality, to practise 'intelligent noticing', to privilege 'practice-as-learning' (Ramsey, 2013: 7) and to carry out reflexive inquiry within mainstream LD programmes. In the pragmatist tradition, I am arguing for the 'productive use of doubt' (Dewey, 1997: 9), which leads to questioning the many taken-for-granted assumptions and practices of corporate LD, raising questions as to their usefulness. It does not mean 'throwing out the baby with the bath water' as I showed in the ACECO narrative. It would be ineffective for a consultant working within the dominant managerialist corporate environment to refuse to use its common approaches. The contribution to practice is thus not to change the 'what' but to adapt the 'how' and the 'why'.

My contribution to practice is demonstrated by the kind of questions I am asking of my MBA students: not simply learning about Kotter's (1996) eight-step model to managing change, but discussing its underlying assumptions and critiquing its promise when considering practice. I have recently been asked to teach a class in HRM to managers attending an executive MBA programme at a leading university. I plan to adopt a similar approach, encouraging awareness of the key elements of HR but also adopting a critically reflexive approach to the ideas. One way of doing this will be to ask the participants to write narratives about their work as leaders which we then inquire into. Building on my own experience on the DMan, I will invite them to describe experiences in their organizations and locate these within a set of assumptions which may be open to different interpretations among their fellow students. I also plan to bring the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating into my consulting practice and work together with other graduates of the UH DMan who share my concerns about the mainstream

approach to organizational consulting and leadership development. My encouragement to others would be to do as I am trying to: develop my skills of critical inquiry, leveraging my 'supertemp' consultant's insider/outsider status to pay attention to the previously unquestioned acceptance of corporate managerialist assumptions and practices, and to use practical judgment to speak up, challenge, and nudge clients towards greater reflexivity.

How this will evolve could be the topic of an interesting P5, were I to write one.

7 Appendix: Glossary of Terms, Corporations and Characters

7.1 General Terms

CM: change management

CMS: critical management studies

HR: Human Resources

HRM: Human Resource Management

HRD: HR Director

HRBP: HR Business Partner (HR manager supporting a particular part of the corporation)

LD: leadership development

OD: organization development

7.2 Corporations

7.2.1 Internal Positions:

MIDCO: a large global pharmaceutical company; I worked here as an HR leader for 16 years and continue to work with the company as a consultant.

IMITECH: a large global hi-tech company; I worked here as head of LD for 6 years

7.2.2 Consulting Clients referenced in the thesis

LDO: a large global LD company

GLOCO: a large global pharmaceutical company

ACECO: a mid-size global pharmaceutical company

PRIMECO: a mid-size global pharmaceutical company

NEWTECH: a mid-size global hi-tech company

7.3 Main Characters

Marcus: Managing Director of LDO

Anna: HR Manager at MIDCO

Alison: HR/LD Manager at MIDCO

Sandy: VP HR at PRIMECO

Sonia: Executive at GLOCO, and my former manager at MIDCO

Tania: Sonia's HRBP

Sarah: VP HR at NEWTECH

Samantha: Consultant hired by NEWTECH to design the leadership model and workshop

Mary: LD Manager at NEWTECH

Hannah: HR Manager at NEWTECH

Benny: Senior Leader at NEWTECH

Bob: CEO of NEWTECH

Frank: Managing Director, ACECO local office

Mandy: Regional HRD, ACECO

Brent: Frank's boss, Regional Business Leader, ACECO

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