

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP:  
LEARNING WHAT CANNOT BE TAUGHT

MICHAEL THOMAS SHIEL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the University of Hertfordshire  
for the degree of Doctor of Management

The programme of research was carried out in the Department of  
Human Resources Strategy, Marketing and Tourism

University of Hertfordshire

in collaboration with  
The Institute of Group Analysis

January 2003

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores leadership in a business setting and how it is learned, and the role that a teacher may play in the process of learning. The thesis draws on Stacey's theory of complex responsive processes of relating in organisations to present a view of leadership as skilled participation in an ongoing process of interaction rather than as an individualistic act. The theory is also used to take a view on the process of learning the skills of leadership.

At the outset, the ideology of mainstream management, and how it is typically learned, is examined through the study of a narrative account in relation to relevant literature. A number of issues are explored which give rise to the author's dissatisfaction with current approaches. In subsequent sections, a number of typical teaching situations, a leadership workshop and a strategy workshop, are studied in narrative form and explored from the standpoint of Stacey's theory.

The argument in the thesis is that while management is concerned with the coherence of action in an organisation, leadership is to do with willing and informed participation which derives from the shared meaning which is made of the situation in which the participants find themselves. What is different about the argument presented is that shared meaning arises, not from the act of an individual, but from the ongoing interaction of all participants. Not all participants in this interaction are the same; some will be more powerful, while some will be more skilful in discerning, making sense and interacting with other

participants. To the extent that participants see an individual as skilled in this way, that person will be seen in a leadership role.

These skills of leadership, and how they are learned, are explored with particular reference to Foulkes' theory of Group Analysis.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Wil Pennycook-Greaves, my principal supervisor, and to Prof Ralph Stacey, my second supervisor, of the University of Hertfordshire, for their sustained support, advice and great kindness during the demanding journey of this doctorate.

John Tobin and Steve Hagedorn, fellow students in our learning set, have become my teachers, critics and dear friends.

Mary O'Flynn, Trinity College and St Patrick's College, has been a source of great encouragement and insight.

At the Irish Management Institute, Barry Kenny, Chief Executive, has been wonderfully supportive in this learning initiative; Elaine McMahon, librarian, has been totally professional, helpful and cheerful; Rachel Ramirez-Ward has 'kept the show on the road' with her customary élan.

*"O body swayed to music, o brightening glance  
How can we tell the dancer from the dance?"*

*W.B. Yeats, 'Among schoolchildren'*

## CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SYNOPSIS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	8
THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEIR ORIGINS .....	10
THEORETICAL ARGUMENT.....	11
Paper One.....	12
Paper Two.....	13
Paper Three.....	20
Paper Four.....	28
METHODOLOGY.....	52
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS .....	66
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE .....	70
<b>PAPER ONE: A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE, WEAVING TOGETHER THE INFLUENCES AND EXPERIENCES THAT FORM MY CURRENT PRACTICE IN ORGANISATIONS, INCLUDING MY LEARNING FROM THE PROGRAMME. (DECEMBER 2000).....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>PAPER TWO: MANAGEMENT IDEOLOGY AND EXECUTIVE EDUCATION: A JOURNEY OF ARTISTRY OR FUTILE SEARCH FOR POWER AND CONTROL: (MARCH 2001) .....</b>	<b>93</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	93
THE ORIGINS OF MY INTEREST IN THIS TOPIC .....	95
THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT.....	98
THE STORY OF BOB.....	100
ABOUT PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING AND IDEOLOGY.....	106
ON LEARNING.....	108
AN INSIGHT TO THE IDEOLOGY OF THE PARTICIPANTS.....	111
ABOUT IDEOLOGY.....	114
CONCLUSION .....	119
<b>PAPER THREE: A COMPLEXITY VIEW OF A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP (OCTOBER 2001).....</b>	<b>120</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	120
ON ANXIETY .....	124
THE WORKSHOP .....	127
ON THE ROLE OF LEADER .....	129
ON SILENCE .....	133
THE WORKSHOP CONTINUES .....	136
MAKING SENSE OF THIS .....	141
CONCLUSIONS .....	151

<b>PAPER FOUR: LEADERSHIP, LEARNING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT: A COMPLEXITY PERSPECTIVE. (AUGUST 2002)</b> .....	<b>153</b>
<b>THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT</b> .....	<b>153</b>
<b>PART ONE: A COMPARISON OF VIEWS</b> .....	<b>157</b>
Writers on Knowledge and Learning in Organisations.....	162
<b>PART TWO: A COMPLEXITY VIEWPOINT</b> .....	<b>181</b>
A different View of Knowledge .....	183
The Case of SSL.....	187
Leadership and the Move into the Unknown.....	188
Irregularity and New Thought.....	192
Novel Thinking in SSL.....	195
The Capacity to Direct Attention.....	199
Learning about Change.....	205
On Knowledge.....	207
On Language. ....	209
On Power .....	211
On Capacity, Skill and Intelligence.....	212
Skill and the Theory of Complex Responsive Processes.....	213
On Knowing Oneself.....	215
On Reflection and Self. ....	216
On Internal Dialogue and the Role of the Teacher.....	217
<b>SUMMARY: A COMPLEXITY VIEW OF MY INVOLVEMENT</b> .....	<b>220</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>222</b>

## SYNOPSIS

### Introduction

This inquiry is about leadership and how it is learned, and what role a teacher may play in this learning. The basic idea in this portfolio is that leadership requires managers to deal with co-existing known and unknown and this requires skills which cannot be directly taught, but which can be learned in action with the assistance of a teacher. In particular, this inquiry is an exploration of my professional practice as a teacher of management and my attempts to make sense of differing and often conflicting ways of understanding what I do. The journey of participating in this DMan and writing this portfolio of papers has led me to question, in ways that I could not have imagined at the outset, and come to new understandings of my professional identity. I now see myself as a participant in a process of communicative interaction where my skill enables me to exert a measure of influence, but not control, in the emergence of new knowledge. The DMan has enabled me to understand and articulate at an explicit level an aspect of my practice which, while it continued to develop, remained tantalisingly beyond the grasp of description.

Management is to do with coherent action in an organisation.

Leadership concerns willing and informed participation in the actions of an organisation, and this principally arises when participants have a shared meaning for those actions. What is different in this thesis is that I have approached the issue of leadership from a group-centred point



of view, as opposed to the more mainstream individualistic point of view. Rather than seeing meaning as something which arises within an individual which must then be transmitted to a group, I argue that meaning arises in the interactions of the group, that is, the emergence of meaning and its sharing are the *same process*. Leadership is to do with the process of meaning making within a group; a 'leader' is a role of one who is recognised as skilled in the process in which meaning emerges, but does not determine meaning.

These skills do not represent 'technical' knowledge which can be abstracted from their useful contexts, and learned without reference to practice. Rather, they constitute 'practical' knowledge which can only be learnt in the context of practice (Dunne, 1993, 1999)<sup>1</sup>. The role of a teacher in assisting managers to learn these skills does not consist of the 'transmission' of knowledge from teacher to student; rather, it is the skilled participation of the teacher in a process concerned with the exploration of the student's own work setting. In effect, I am asserting the primacy of focus on practice over theory in the development of leadership. I argue that this is important because the student's attention is continually drawn to his ultimate goal, making a difference to the *actions* of himself and others, and to the actual process through which this occurs, conversation.

The research for this thesis consisted of four projects in which I attempted to make sense of the experience of my professional practice, principally from the standpoint of the theory of complex responsive

---

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between 'technical' and 'practical' knowledge is explored in this Synopsis in the section dealing with Paper Two

processes as developed by Stacey (2000, 2001)<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the object of my study was my subjective experience of my practice, and of the experience of making sense of it. This reflexivity is continued in this synopsis in my reflections on my earlier sense-making attempts. In this paper, and in the four projects, I reflect on the ways in which various theories assist my attempts to make meaning from my experience. The actual process of writing was, therefore, an integral part of the research process. It is fundamental to the principal theory being explored here that meaning arises in the process of interaction and, so, considerable emphasis is placed on the role interaction both in the exploration of my practice, and my experience of this programme. This is explored further in the section on methodology in this synopsis.

The principal arguments and themes of each of the four projects, as well as my current reflections on them, are outlined in the section on theoretical argument in this synopsis. The substance of each of the four projects is presented in this portfolio, and indicates the development of my thinking throughout the course of the DMan programme.

At the end of this synopsis, I present a recapitulation of the central argument of this thesis, and I describe my contribution to practice.

### **The research questions and their origins**

The questions which form the basis of my research for this thesis arise from my work as a teacher and consultant with practising managers.

The pre-occupation of the managers with whom I work, whether as

---

<sup>2</sup> Stacey's theory of complex responsive processes in organizations is explored in this Synopsis in the section dealing with Paper Four, in the introduction to Paper Two, and in Part Two of Paper Four.

students or members of an organisation, is increasingly with their need to adapt to situations of uncertainty and turbulence. This requires the continuous development of novel understanding and approaches to business, to organisation and to managers' own skills in this process.

Schön comments on the difficulty of developing such skills: 'what aspiring practitioners need most to learn, professional schools seem least able to teach' (1967, p8). My personal experience as a teacher has been that while the technical knowledge of management is relatively straightforward to teach, the skills of practice are an entirely different matter, particularly when it comes to adaptation and change. The mainstream literature acknowledges the need to develop skills of leadership to deal with changing and uncertain environments, but does little to explain what they might be, and how they can be learned.

It is a matter of common observation and experience that organisations *do* adapt and innovate. This, however, poses a theoretical challenge: how do we explain how this comes about? How do we understand what adaptive and innovative managers and organisations *actually* do? As far as my role as teacher and consultant is concerned, what can I do to help them to learn skills to help them to do this? The inquiry in this paper is concerned with these questions and, in particular, with the latter question.

### **Theoretical Argument**

In this section I identify the themes and arguments from each of the research papers which have contributed to the development of the overall argument presented in this synopsis. I finish this section with

an exploration of two issues which have presented a particular theoretical challenge.

### Paper One

In this paper I explored the influences and experiences that formed my practice. For reasons of length, the paper, as presented in this portfolio, has been heavily abridged, principally through the exclusion of a large portion of narrative autobiographical material.

I explored the origins and effects of two strands of thinking in my practice. One derives from my education and practice as an engineer, and subsequent education in business; I term this the 'rational' strand. The other derives from my experience of work, especially business and teaching, and life in general, as well as formal training in Group Analysis and at the Tavistock Institute. I dichotomised these, placed them as opposites, as I had been unable to find a scheme of meaning in which each would find a complementary role. I expressed a view, probably more a hope, that I would find such a scheme in complexity theory. To a degree, I believe that I have done that.

Based on autobiographical experience, I also explored the question of personal identity and its effects on the capacity to work with levels of complexity and ambiguity. I commented on experiences of personal development learning which differed from my traditional education and had an impact on how I began to understand learning differently. Included in this experience of learning was the experience of Group

Analysis and a period of study at the Tavistock Institute<sup>3</sup>. Leadership is a theme which features in Paper One, largely in my experiences in difficult working circumstances, but also in finding a possible alternative model for leadership in Group Analysis.

Learning, relatedness and leadership are the three principal themes which emerge in Paper One and which form a constant thread throughout the rest of this portfolio.

## Paper Two

The body of theory from which I have drawn most heavily is the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations developed by Stacey and colleagues at the Centre for Management and Complexity at the University of Hertfordshire (Stacey *et al.*, 2000; Stacey, 2001). In this thesis I am asserting that the view of leadership and learning afforded by this theory better accounts for how managers learn to deal with change. In making the case for this I examine my dissatisfaction with other views, and I start this process in Paper Two.

In criticising current approaches to the development of business leadership there are three areas of concern to my argument: the type of situation faced by managers, the type of approach taken to dealing with those situations, and the consequent implications for the skills

---

<sup>3</sup>The theories of the Tavistock Institute are explained and critiqued in Paper Four, and in the section of this Synopsis dealing with Paper Four; Group Analysis is explained in this Synopsis in the section dealing with Paper Four and is also dealt with in Paper Three.

necessary to undertake a given approach.

Firstly, the situation facing managers. Schön (1983, 1987) describes two broad types of situation which professionals face; on one hand there are situations which may be familiar, are well understood and have established approaches for dealing with them. Schön refers to this as 'firm ground'. Philosophically, this is a kind of realism. Leadership in this type of situation is a matter of implementing routinised solutions. Although this task may be technically demanding, the issues are well understood, the 'problem-setting' (Weick, 1995) is done, the (accepted) reality of the situation is established and unchanging.

#### *Technical knowledge and practical knowledge*

Turning to the approaches and skills necessary for dealing with this type of situation, the essential point I have made in Paper Two is that the approaches and skills necessary for dealing with situations of certainty and controllability are often mis-applied to situations of uncertainty or uncontrollability. This is because these approaches are embedded in the ways managers learn to approach all situations facing them, that is to say the kind of knowledge which they bring to bear on a situation facing them. Oakeshott (1962) argues that two kinds of knowledge are needed for successful practice of any kind: "technical" and "practical". Technical knowledge can be "precisely formulated... into rules which may be deliberately learned", while practical knowledge cannot be easily described. This reflects Aristotle's distinctions between two forms of rationality, technical rationality (*techne*) and practical rationality (*phronesis*). Dunne (1993, 1999) argues that technical rationality is a particular way of knowing which has

established a predominance in western thought, to a point where it is not only privileged, but has become definitive of reliable thinking. It is characterised by objectivity and detachment. Knowledge creation procedures are standardised and emphasise third-person observation, measurement, replicability and agreed tests of validity. Context and the personal idiosyncracies of those involved are de-emphasised, and prediction becomes the basis of control. Knowledge or skill is disembodied from the particular context in which it has arisen and decomposed into discrete tasks, which can then be reconstituted to provide control over other situations. It is supposed that what is essential to the performance of a task has been encapsulated in the extracted knowledge.

Technical rationality derived from observation of the work of craftsmen shaping physical matter and became the basis of scientific thought in western society, where it yielded considerable advances in the control of matters affecting life. Part of the theory on which this inquiry rests includes an assertion (for example by Elias, 1978) that this type of thinking is unquestioningly and inappropriately applied outside of its proper sphere of influence, to the exclusion of thinking which may be more helpful to practice. Schön (1983) observed that 'professional knowledge is mismatched to the changing character of the situations of practice...the complexity, uncertainty, instability uniqueness, and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of practice'(p22). That is, the application of a type of thinking deriving from the study of the natural sciences to the study of a social science, for example management (including leadership) is likely to overlook the very issues which are crucial to effective practice. These issues include capacities for discernment and insight into

particular situations; an ability to apply flexibly and appropriately generalised knowledge for the furtherance of the setting in question. (Elias' theory (Goudsblom and Mennell, 1998a, 1998b) develops views on society, knowledge and the nature of consciousness which go much further than an appeal to practical knowledge; this is developed later in this synopsis).

In Paper Two I argued that it is the outlook of the executive that determines what type of problem the situation is rendered into, often to suit the manager's range of skills. Mainstream management literature views management as a form of control; the task of theorists is to provide ways of understanding organisational and business phenomena, and thereby affording some predictability. To use the Aristotelian distinction from above, knowledge about management is seen as technical knowledge, and the knowledge pertaining to practice is absent. Management is the application of theories of control, and to be in control is to be competent.

Streatfield (2002) argues that management in organisations is, in effect, a paradox: it is in control and not in control at the same time. In the mainstream view of management, the 'not in control' aspect of the job, if it is acknowledged at all, is a transient aberration which will submit to an appropriate theory, just as natural phenomena are amenable to the application of the natural sciences. To be, or certainly to remain, out of control in this view is to be incompetent, thus providing a strong stimulus to the manager to search for greater levels of control, or at least to develop the appearance of control.



But managers *do* manage effectively. My argument is that mainstream theory does not adequately account for how managers deal with the uncertainty and continually emerging reality of their daily round. I argue that effective managers know at an intuitive level that they contain the paradox of being in control and not in control at the same time; managers clearly appreciate at the level of their lived experience that much of what is valuable in dealing with the demands of change emerges in 'real-time' interaction with colleagues, customers etc.

### *On management ideology*

I have described this view of management as an ideology, meaning 'a shared, relatively coherently interrelated set of emotionally charged beliefs, values, and norms that bind people together and help them to make sense of their worlds' (Trice and Beyer, 1993, p33). What accounts for the durability of this ideology? Elias (1978) points to the ways in which western language and thought predispose us to believing that we can gain control of those forces of nature which threaten us or cause us anxiety, and, by extension, to social forces too. We are habituated to a type of instrumental thinking in our dealings with each other as much as in our dealings with nature. I also argue that we are affected by the anxiety of the experience of feeling out of control, and so distance ourselves from this experience through the development of a kind of fantasy of control. Viewed from the standpoint of Stacey's theory, this ideology represents a relatively stable meaning scheme which continually reproduces itself and provides themes organising the experience of our interaction. I have argued in Paper Two that part of what accounts for the durability of this ideology is executive education. Firstly, it repeats mainstream thinking as its content, i.e., it

propounds and reinforces its own ideology of management as a form of control. Secondly, it acts out its own ideology in the teaching process by implicitly viewing the process of teaching about management as itself a type of controllable management process.

Rose, Leowontin and Kamin (1984, quoted in Dalal, 1998) point to the relationship between generalised power in society and control over education, while Bendix (1956, pxiii, quoted in Czander, 1993, p226) narrows his focus to the field of management: 'Ideologies of management are attempts by leaders of enterprises to justify the privilege of voluntary action and association for themselves, while imposing upon all subordinates the duty of obedience and the obligation to serve their employers to the best of their ability'. This echoes the criticism by Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (2000) that systemic theories of management view managers as standing outside and designing that which they manage (terming this viewpoint 'rationalist causality') and the members of the organisation as working inside the system where their range of action is limited to that which has been enfolded in the system (which they term 'formative causality'). Dalal points out that ideology keeps people in their place by making it appear that the places that people inhabit are the natural ones (Dalal, 1998, p118,) and suggests that the particular power of ideology is its invisibility to the conscious mind. I argue that at the heart of the issue is power, control over what may threaten us. Representing management as a practice of intention, regularity and control (Stacey *et al*, 2000) has an obvious appeal to the manager both in his 'self-talk' and in his relations with others. Feeling powerful, and being perceived to be powerful are important issues for any manager; Dalal interprets Elias on this issue: 'charisma is attributed to the more powerful 'us'

and stigma to the less powerful 'them' (Dalal, 1998, p119). It is no surprise, therefore, that managers are drawn to that which holds out the promise of greater control of their complex environment, even if it means denying the paradoxical in-control/not-in-control (Streatfield, 2002) aspect of their work. Schön (1987) says we prefer to be in control than effective.

My argument in this thesis is that managers will be more effective, and display true leadership if they acknowledge both sides of Streatfield's paradox and learn to work with it, without collapsing the paradox into one side only, as Schön and Heifetz propose. Executive education has a role to play in this, not only in the theory which is taught, but, at least equally importantly, in the experience of learning itself. Knowles (1984) distinguishes between *pedagogy* (child learning) and what he terms *andragogy*, adult learning. The essential differences between these two ideas about learning concern the teacher-learner power relation and the role of experience. In pedagogy, it is the teacher who decides what, how and when something should be learned and even *if* it has been learned; the experience of the learner has little, if any, importance in the learning process. Andragogy, on the other hand, assumes that the learner is self-directing, and that his motivation to learn derives from a need to solve a problem or exploit an opportunity, rather than simply learn a subject. Learners' own experiences are seen as a fundamental resource for learning. This view of adult learning underlies my approach to assisting managers to learn the very different skills required to deal with the out-of-control aspects of their jobs.

However, developing novel approaches to teaching management can place one in conflict with current ideology:

The management learning arena lives, arguably, in continual tension between being the place in which organisational revolutions of thought and practice can be formulated between people and the space in which incipient revolution can be spotted and suppressed by dominant coalitions supporting current unitarist agendas.

(Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997, p62)

In writing Paper Two, I experienced much of that conflict within myself. I now feel that I had been containing both sides of that conflict within myself. Criticising the industry that feeds me felt at once liberating and disloyal. I found it highly instructive to notice repeatedly after I had written Paper Two how much the ideology I had criticised was present in my thinking and writing. Writing Paper Two was a painful exercise in coming to awareness of my own assumptions and thinking, and the process had a strongly 'therapeutic' feel with all that that implies.

### Paper Three

In Paper Three, I began to explore an alternative view of leadership and how it might be learnt. The ultimate concern of leadership is the development of a kind of coherence among a group of people, and how this comes about. The focus of many mainstream theories attributes this coherence to the traits or behaviour of an individual, who is referred to as a leader. In this paper, I concern myself not with the traits or isolated activities of an individual, but with the emergence of coherence through the ongoing process of interaction within a group. By coherence I mean a pattern of meaning which is sufficiently widely shared in the group to enable it to take concerted action in pursuit of its

goals. This pattern emerges from the communicative interaction of the members of the group, principally through conversation, and has the capacity to sustain itself as well as to change. I argue that this is a more useful view of leadership because it more closely corresponds with what actually happens in a group, how coherence actually arises (or not).

### *A leadership workshop*

This was demonstrated in the account of a workshop on leadership where a colleague, Terri, a professor of leadership studies at a US university, and I worked with a group of executives for three days. What gave rise to learning in the workshop was the working through of the conflict experienced by the group between what they expected, and what they actually experienced. In short, the group expected the kind of workshop which might be congruent with the type of ideology described above: principles would be enunciated, examples given, and some reassurance provided. The content and the approach to learning would be congruent with each other, although not, as it emerged, with participants' own experiences.

Instead, my colleague and I continually drew attention to the emergence of a coherent view of our topic, arising from the discussion. We offered concepts to make sense of what the group (including us) was experiencing. Gradually, members of the group began to pay more attention to their own experiences of interaction, and to work with theoretical concepts as ways of making sense of what they were experiencing. One striking aspect of what they were experiencing was how similar was the situation in the room to what they were

experiencing in their own jobs. As workshop leaders, we were part of the group and our leadership consisted of staying in the 'here and now' and trying to make sense of what was happening. The experience of this style of leadership encouraged other group members to do likewise. Our leadership encouraged the development, not of 'followership', but of more leadership within the group. The members of the group were learning their practice of leadership through the experience of participation in the ongoing conversation in the group, assisted, but not controlled, by my colleague and me. The struggle for all of us to stay with our lived experience and make sense of it was an intrinsic part of the learning process.

What is different about the view of leadership I am arguing is that it more accurately takes account of the paradoxical in-control/not-in-control aspect of the manager's job; it pays attention to the entire context in which meaning arises, that is, in the interaction among the members of a group, rather than focussing solely on one person in this web of interaction. It sees all members of a group as active participants in the continual process of creating meaning rather than as passive recipients of the 'leadership' of an individual. I argue that what is critical in dealing with situations of uncertain threat or opportunity is the capacity to develop continually renewed ways of making sense of what is happening. This view of leadership better accounts for how such new ways of making sense emerge, that is from the interaction of the members of the group in question. What is different about this way of learning is that it is a kind of 'learning-in-practice' which addresses the practical knowledge needed for leadership, and does not 'technicise' the knowledge, as Schön warns against.

### *What other writers say*

In this paper, I offer a critique of Bennis (1989, 1994) who asserts the type of individual-centred leadership which I argue against. Bennis locates the essential act of leadership, the provision of meaning, as occurring in a unique individual person and this is then 'handed over', effectively as a process of salesmanship. For him, the task of a leader is to *provide* meaning (although he does not say where the leader gets this meaning, or why it is better than any other meaning). I argue that meaning can only emerge through the interaction of individuals – no one can provide meaning for another; they can only be more or less influential in the continual emergence of meaning. Bennis wishes to protect the organisation from 'organisational vertigo' or 'myopia' which arise from complexity and uncertainty if the organisation is not to be 'shattered' by having the leader provide a coherent view (his own) of the future. I argue that it is only by not distancing oneself from the experience of uncertainty and complexity that one finds a way of dealing with it in a particular situation, and learns skills of dealing with it in general.

Miller (1993) points out that consideration of leadership as an aspect of relatedness was considered at least as early as World War Two, but does not comment on issues of relatedness within an organisation, that is, culture. Schein (1995) asserts that the defining distinction of leaders is their capacity to create and change organisational cultures. Although he is paying more attention to the organisational context of leadership than Bennis, he does so on the basis of an understanding of culture as a 'thing' in itself, separate from the people whose interactions it describes. The problem with this view is that this theory of leadership

(changing culture) proceeds from the premise that culture is an artefact which can be worked on like a material object, and ignores the pattern of participation of the members of the organisation, which is what culture is really a description of. To recall the quote from page 5 of this portfolio, it is as if a dance-master were to attempt to change a dance without recognising that the dance is nothing more than a description of characteristic stylised movements of the dancers; it is not a thing in itself. Schein's theory further implies that the skill of changing culture can be learned like the technical knowledge described in the synopsis of Paper Two, above.

Drath and Palus (1999) disentangle leadership from notions of power and authority (Heifetz, 1994) and describe leadership in terms of participation in a process of meaning making, but do so on a different theoretical basis to that of complex responsive processes. They take a constructivist view of reality being constructed by an individual who then negotiates this view with others in her community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger and Snyder, 2000). The individual/societal distinction is preserved. Stacey's criticism of systems then applies: new thoughts arise within the individual mind without accounting for how this occurs; what is the source of new meaning.

Following Elias, I argue that the term 'culture' describes a 'regularity', a pattern in the interactions within an organisation; it is a characteristic way in which the members of an organisation make sense of their experience of interacting with each other and with the rest of the world. If one wishes to influence those interactions, one must participate. To the extent that one is perceived as having unique skills



of perception or interaction, one may be perceived in a leadership role (Griffin, 2002).

*A different view of leadership*

My understanding of the role of a teacher in this type of process is influenced by my training in Group Analysis. Menzies-Lyth (1990) describes the responsibility of a consultant who is psychoanalytically oriented as lying in 'helping insights to develop, freeing thinking about problems, helping the client to get away from unhelpful methods of thinking and behaving, facilitating the evolution of ideas for change, and then helping him to bear the anxiety and uncertainty of the change process'(p34). Note the tentative language of helping, assisting, rather than doing. Group Analysis emphasises that it is the interaction of members of the group which brings about the possibility of change within the group, and so within the members. Indeed, Foulkes, the founder of Group Analysis, emphasises that it is the task of the group conductor (not 'therapist') to 'default' on the expected role of providing directive leadership; this is a different kind of leadership which aims at the development of a similar leadership capacity in all members of the group.

This is a difficult task for a number of reasons. Knowles (1984) remarks on the passivity in a formal learning setting of otherwise active managers. Miller warns on the seduction by a dependent group of a leader into taking a position of authority, thus undermining the very task of assisting others to find their freedom of action. Menzies-Lyth (1990) also warns that a group disappointed by its authority figures in a situation such as this may turn to attack, believing them to be 'delinquently withholding goodies to which the client is entitled – or

failing that, the client clutches at straws and magical unrealistic answers'(p35). In addition to these psychologically-oriented views, I also asserted that the members of the group often acted from an inherent philosophical conditioning, explicated by Stacey *et al.* (2000) and Griffin (2002), in which the members viewed themselves as members of a 'system' which could only unfold a form already 'designed into' it by the authority figures who stood outside it. This view helped me to understand the issue of individuals who fail to assert their freedom to act in circumstances like this workshop. The philosophical outlook brought a stable scheme of meaning to this situation.

### *On anxiety*

Two particular issues, anxiety and silence, were explored in Paper Three which relate to this process. Miller (1993) and Menzies-Lyth (1990) warn that change inevitably threatens 'social defences' against feelings of anxiety and point to the need to be aware of it as an issue to be taken into account for a consultant. Indeed, anxiety is a central issue in the Tavistock Institute approach to the understanding of organisations. Hirschorn (1998) also counsels that anxiety can serve as a signal calling attention to particular issues. Stacey (2000, 2001, --- *et al* 2000) clearly and frequently acknowledges the role of anxiety in affecting the dynamics of human relating, as does Griffin (2000) occasionally; however, beyond acknowledgement he does little to explore the issue in relation to his theory of complex responsive processes in organisations. Since my interest in this inquiry is in human agency arising in interaction, I am also concerned with the ways in which anxiety may cause an individual to be less influential in

their interactions with others. Both Miller and Stacey point to the ways in which the pseudo-certainties of formal planning routines in organisations can act as an anxiety defence. I also argue that on the ordinary interpersonal level, anxiety may have the effect on an individual of rendering them less perceptive, less reflective, and less skilful in their interactions with others. These are the personal capacities, which I have argued in Paper Four, are essential to skilful participation in a group, that is leadership. Therefore, one of the explicit learning points in this workshop was the issue of anxiety and its effects on leadership capacity.

### *On silence*

The first point I make about silence in Paper Three is that silence is itself a gesture within the process of communicative interaction in a group. Stacey (2001) points out that it is not possible to stand outside this process; simply by being there one is part of the process. The fact that silence can have such an effect on anxiety levels attests to this, as well as to the expectations of many group members of being 'rescued' from it. Mead (1934), on whom Stacey draws in the development of his theory of complex responsive processes, argues that individual mind emerges in social relationships and is the 'internalisation' of those relationships. So, silence is not a separate phenomenon or a withdrawal from relatedness, but is a different aspect of the same thing; this time attention is drawn to the inner conversation. This issue of reflection is further explored in Paper Four.

The mainstream emphasis on choosing courses of action which will result in desired outcomes is very deep-rooted and is closely associated

with notions of competence. In this workshop, we attempted to help the other participants (we were participants, too) through their experience to come to a somewhat different notion of leadership competence; one that is concerned with skilful participation in a process. The participants were learning to pay attention differently, particularly to their own experience, and to make sense differently of that experience.

#### Paper Four

The argument, so far, is that management is concerned with the creation of coherence of action in an organisation. Leadership is concerned with the voluntary and willing participation of the members of an organisation in coherent action. The authors on leadership reviewed so far assert, and I agree, that at the root of voluntary action is the creation of meaning for such actions; that is, a way of making sense of what is happening which is congruent with an individual's way of looking at the world. Coherent shared action will come from coherent shared meaning. The question is: where does meaning come from and how does it get to be shared? Arguing against a view which attributes the emergence of meaning to an individual, I argue here that meaning arises in the interaction of the group, that is the emergence of meaning, and its sharing, are the *same process*. I argue that a leader is one who is skilled in the process of interaction which gives rise to meaning. Therefore, the development of the skills of a leader must emphasise interaction with others; something which can be learnt, but not directly taught.

Most of the mainstream authors reviewed so far, and those reviewed in Paper Four, assert that meaning is derived by an individual, often a person in authority, and is shared with others by communication. In other words, the coherent meaning which gives rise to coherent action is attributed to a person called a leader. This is consistent with the ideology described in Paper Two: an organisational outcome is ascribed directly to the actions of such a person.

I argue that in conditions of relative stability, the origin of the meaning scheme is not a significant issue because a 'leader' (in effect, a person in authority in this scheme) essentially works within a stable meaning scheme which may be good enough to serve the organisation without change. The 'leader' is assumed to have his capable hands on the controls of the organisation. That the 'leader' did not directly give rise to that meaning scheme, is not important as long as change is not required in that scheme. The critical issue in this argument arises when change in the organisation's situation requires a new meaning scheme, a new way of making sense of what is happening. According to the mainstream literature reviewed here, our leader will skilfully produce new meaning and persuade his 'followers' to accept and act in accordance with it. This is the 'dual causality' (Rational and Formative) criticised by Stacey for failing to account for how novelty arises.

#### *A different view of leadership*

Griffin (2002) argues for a different view of leadership. Shared meaning in a group or organisation emerges from the communicative interaction of its members, and not as the result of the control or intention of any individual. Stacey *et al.* (2000) refer to this process as

Transformative Causality, and say that this better accounts for how novelty arises in organisations. Novelty is defined as that which is not simply determined by the past. It is not possible for a 'leader' to have his hands "on the controls" of meaning as such controls do not exist; they are a social construct of an ideology which views management as a search for control and simply attributes organisational outcomes to the individual intent of its managers. Not all participants in an interaction are the same; some are more powerful than others; some are more skilled than others, and so have the capacity to influence the responses of others, and thereby influence indirectly the emergent meaning more than others. Insofar as any member of a group is perceived by other members as having unique skills of perception of the continually emerging meaning in the group, or a capacity to articulate her views and engage with the group in the process of producing meaning, that person will be perceived by the group as displaying leadership. That is to say, leadership is an aspect of the relatedness of the group; it emerges continually from the interaction of the group, and is not the province of any individual.

What is different about this view of leadership is that the basis of the argument, interaction within a group, is congruent with the ultimate concern of leadership, shared meaning within a group. There is no question of an individual arriving at a meaning and then having to get a group to share it. Leadership emerges from the process of the group – it does not have an existence *a priori*. I argue that this is a more useful way of looking at leadership because it better accounts for change. It does this because it takes better account of *what* is changing when meaning changes. The shared meaning within a group is not a fixed 'thing' susceptible to being 'worked on' like a physical artefact,

but is a pattern in the ongoing process of relating within the group. Since it is an aspect of relating, the only thing an individual can have any control over is how she relates. Therefore, if an individual wishes to exercise influence, and possibly be perceived by a group as a leader, she must pay attention to how she relates, and attempt to become more skilled. This pattern is continually being re-produced, with the potential for change. It can only change as a result of some change in the communicative interactions which produce it; but any person who is part of that interaction can attempt to influence it.

I argue in Paper Four that skill in relating, in participation in a process of emerging meaning, is a type of practical knowledge which cannot be rendered into a technical or abstracted form to be transmitted. Because of its nature it can only be learned in practice, by participation in a process of communicative interaction with other skilled people, who are seen as leaders in the group. Like riding a bicycle, it can only be learned by doing it; unlike riding a bicycle, it can only be learned with others. The job of a teacher in this process is to assist the would-be leader to learn through engagement, by drawing her attention to her engagement in the process of interaction, by maintaining an awareness of the interaction itself.

#### *Other views from the literature*

In Paper Four, I reviewed the literature which has assisted me in my work to make sense of my practice. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) build on the work of Polanyi (1969) in distinguishing between tacit and explicit knowledge, and this was one of the models of 'knowledge management' whose simple appeal enabled me to begin to understand

my practice. The process of learning to be a leader, as I have proposed it in the above paragraphs, could be regarded as a tacit to tacit move of knowledge; from the teacher to the learner, on a kind of apprenticeship model. Knowledge is reified, and the source of new knowledge is only identified as being deep within the 'mine' of individual tacit knowledge.

The Organisation Development (OD) school effectively begun by Lewin (Lewin, 1963) deals with movement into the future by choosing a future, and learning to achieve it along the way (Kolb and Frohman, 1970). It is a Rational Choice model which appealed to the engineer in me. Its basis of thinking is subject to Stacey's criticism of dual causality. I argue that its enduring appeal lies in its congruence with the mainstream ideology explored in Paper Two, while its (partial) success I attribute to the intense interaction and negotiation it sometimes engenders. As a theory to help a group make sense of their experience it becomes less plausible as, over time, it becomes visibly less congruent with their actual experience.

Schein, already mentioned in Paper Three, advocates Process Consultation (Schein, 1988) in which a consultant, or a leader with a consultative style, pays attention to the ways in which a web of overt and covert communication gives rise to norms in an organisation. Again, the organisation tries to choose its future, regards irregularities as a hindrance, and the consultant or leader is effectively external to the process. Theoretically, this is open to a similar criticism to the OD school above, but the concepts of covert communication and organisational norms appealed to my experience.



Argyris' concepts of double-loop learning as a way of understanding the process of coming to awareness, defensive routines against embarrassment or loss, and theories-in-use versus espoused theories brought me a long way in my practice of working with groups on change (Argyris and Schön, 1974). It engendered an awareness of an inner world. Both Schein's and Argyris's theories point to a more complex world requiring sophisticated skills on the part of the manager. Both adopt a detached, cognitivist viewpoint which ultimately tries to describe a more complex world and find ways to control it.

Schön's (1983, 1987) concept of the 'reflective practitioner', who surfaces tacit knowledge through reflection and chooses a future, affected my practice considerably. His focus on practical knowledge (discussed in Paper Two) and recognition of the unstructured nature of many of the problems facing managers was very congruent with my experience. However, Schön ultimately does not go much further than describing these issues. Likewise, his prescription for developing the reflective practitioner, the practicum, effectively says 'learn by doing', without exploring what is actually happening. Theoretically, insofar as he reveals himself, Schön is based in a systemic school while continually hinting at a different way of understanding without exploring it.

Senge's eponymous *Fifth Discipline* (Senge, 1990) is systems theory, in which he elaborates on a collective basis what has been described for the OD school. His elaborate theory of system archetypes which underlie behaviour, and which must be accessed at a fulcrum point to affect behaviour, is one of the more extravagant examples of the point

made by Elias concerning the construction of conceptual edifices outside of people's interaction, which are then granted a separate existence. If attempts to make this theory useful have any impact, I believe that it is due to the engendered dialogue, which is one of the more useful parts of Senge's theory. My brief attempts to work with this theory generally ended up in a fruitful dialogue, albeit uninformed by Senge's theory.

The physicist David Bohm idealised dialogue in the emergence of a mystical 'implicate order' (Bohm, 1983). The source of novelty is located outside the individuals engaged in the dialogue, and only special people can have the right kind of dialogue. This theory has the appeal of a kind of management Ouija Board.

#### *The contribution of the Tavistock Institute*

My practice in working with groups making sense of their experiences of dealing with change has been strongly informed by the two years' training I gained at the Tavistock Institute. The Tavistock theory (Bion 1961; Miller 1976, 1993; Banet and Hayden, 1977; Lawrence, 1979) is essentially a fusion of open systems theory with a psychoanalytic viewpoint which derived from the Institute's clinical origins. The approach is to attempt to limit the potentially damaging effects of dysfunctional shared unconscious assumptions by strengthening or clarifying aspects of the organisation which will help it to carry out its 'primary task'. This could include clarifying task, role and authority relationships; procedures and structures to 'contain' anxiety.

Leadership is conceived of as the regulation of boundary issues, that is those things which define and clarify a well-functioning organisation.

The inner world of an individual is created with possible distortions of reality created through processes of fantasy and repression.

Though not without its critics (for example, Hoggett, 1991), the Tavistock approach does represent an attempt to encapsulate the inter- and intrapersonal and systemic complexity of organisational life. Its approach to learning is strongly experience-based with the respect for individual experience which one would expect in a discipline with clinical origins. In practice, the training approach encourages the development of sensitivity to interaction, awareness of emerging situations and the intellectual capacity to hypothesise, and, most significantly, the capacity to explore anxiety-related behaviour. These capacities are only peripherally mentioned in the literature.

Conceptually, the theory is openly systems-based, and attends to that which does not (or should not) change, or should be returned to a state of idealised systemic functioning through remedial action. Interaction has an instrumental purpose rather than in any sense constituting the phenomenon under study. Organisations are reified and treated as separate phenomena from individuals. My view of the theory is that it discounts or ignores part of what makes the powerful practical approaches of the Tavistock Institute work, and what is at the heart of its clinical origins, human interaction. The theory of the Institute does not pay sufficient attention to its own practice.

### *Group Analysis*

Group Analysis, as conceived by Foulkes (1975), regards people as essentially social beings whose individuality can only be defined within a group context (Wuhrmann, 1999). Central to Foulkes' theory is

the 'matrix', or what Elias (they communicated) calls a figuration. This network of interdependence is the essence of their relationships, operating through verbal and non-verbal communications interacting on various levels and perceived unconsciously. One of the most significant principles of this theory is that what appears to be an individual phenomenon (e.g. a neurosis) is not regarded as the personal failure of the person in question, but as a breakdown in communication in the whole group. Foulkes also emphasised that Group Analysis 'is not a hunt for unconscious meaning' (1990, p114 quoted in Wurhmann, 1996) but that the unconscious arises in the process of communication in the group. Furthermore, the therapeutic effect of the group derives from the process of the group itself. Unlike the Tavistock approach, the analyst is not there in the role of therapist; that is the job of the group. The task of the *conductor* of the group is to 'maintain the group analytic attitude in the group' (Foulkes and Anthony, 1957, p28, quoted in Nitzgen, 1998). Dalal (1998) criticises Foulkes for his constant reversion to Freudian individual-centred concepts in his application of his theory to clinical practice, and proposes an elaboration of Foulkes' theory based on a more evident commitment to a group-centred approach to therapy.

Notwithstanding that criticism, the practice of Group Analysis is highly congruent with Foulkes' central theory. Here is a clinical theory in which the shifting coherence of a group is attributed to the interactions of the group. The task of the conductor is to draw attention to a group perspective of the experience of being in the group and to offer (considered) views on what may be occurring. Importantly, any other member of the group can do this, and learning to do this is an integral part of the method. Critically for the argument in this thesis,

Nitzgen points out that although Group Analysis is a method to be trained in, it is 'not a technique to be applied. Rather, it is an ethic, an ethic of speech' (p237). It is not a practice which can be learned through theoretical abstraction from its situation. Rather it is learned through participation in a therapeutic group, through supervised reflection on the practice of conducting, and through the study of theory which is used to illuminate practice. This is effectively the model I propose for the development of leadership.

I should not be too superior in criticising the Tavistock Institute for discounting its own experience, because the same happened to me in writing Paper Four. Despite four years' training in Group Analysis, I omitted any mention of its effect on my work. This was drawn to my attention by my supervisor who is herself a Group Analyst, adding that my stance in relation to leadership very closely parallels the stance of the Group Analyst. Why had this gone unnoticed by me? Group Analysis is the least theoretically and most practically based programme of learning I have experienced in my career. I had not appreciated the extent to which, through that experience, I had taken on the outlook of a Group Analyst, and how much it pervaded my practice as well as my writing in this thesis. Through participation in a group with skilled members, I had learned many of the skills which I discuss below in the remainder of Paper Four. It is a lesson, once again, of the way in which I overlook my own experience when attempting to make sense of what is happening. Bearing this in mind, and considering the theoretical use to which I have put this theory in this thesis, I wonder if Stacey failed to mention Group Analysis in his literature for the same reason: despite being a practising Group Analyst, he overlooks its effect on his theory because it is knowledge

gained subtly (but powerfully) through experience. In any case, it is surprising that Stacey makes so little use of a body of theory which asserts the primacy of group interaction in accounting for shifting coherence of meaning.

In reviewing the above theories, I have attempted to pay attention not only to their theoretical bases and differences, but also to the experience of bringing those theories into practice. My conclusion is that many of the theories overlook that which lends them effectiveness; they oblige people to interact and draw on skills which are not easily understood or described, let alone learnt. The case which I make in Paper Four is that my job as a teacher is to help managers to become more skilled in the continual process of making meaning. I do this by participating with them in communicative interaction about issues of concern to them in the exercise of their jobs, and in that process I attempt to influence the creation of new ways of making sense of their situations. Learning arises in the sense we make of experience; so I work with the experience of participants, including the experience of being together. My intention is that, through the experience of interaction with skilled people, their skill will grow, although I cannot control the outcome of the process.

### *Knowledge and knowing*

A key theme in this inquiry is the nature of knowledge and knowing. Stacey's theory of complex responsive processes in organisations elaborates Elias' social theory of knowledge. For Elias, knowledge arises in the interaction of individuals in an interdependent grouping, which he calls a 'figuration'. Knowledge is not seen as having a separate existence; it is an aspect, along with thought and speech, of

the same entity. Dalal describes Elias' view that: 'knowledge is mistakenly broken down into three mutually exclusive functions: there is knowledge (the thing itself), how it is stored (thoughts), and how it is communicated (language)' (Dalal, 1998, p96). Elias held that thoughts are already contained in language, and are structured by it.

Stacey also draws on Mead's theory of symbolic interaction to understand interaction at the intimate interpersonal level. Mead (1934) sees meaning arising from the totality of a social interaction comprising the elements of gesture on the part of one person, and response on the part of another. These responses are paradoxically evoked by the 'sender' and simultaneously selected by the responder, and this response depends on the personal history of the responder. The responses constitute gestures which, in turn, evoke further responses. Thus, the meaning arising from interaction cannot be controlled by any party, even though they will have intentions and will anticipate a meaning which may arise. Mead describes this process in essentially dyadic terms, but I take this to be representative of interaction with a 'generalised other'.

One of Stacey's unique contributions is in applying to these theories of knowledge concepts drawn from the complexity sciences as sources of analogy to explain knowledge as a type of patterning. The key concepts applied include emergence and self-organisation, that is a pattern of interaction which is not determined in advance or by a central control, but which emerges continuously from itself, from its own pattern of interaction. Stacey views knowledge as the thematic patterning organising the experience of being together. 'It is communicative interaction, particularly in the form of conversation' (Stacey, 2001,

p220). In the light of this theory, the questions of this inquiry may be restated in the following terms: What skills does a leader need to work with the process of emerging meaning, and how can a 'teacher' help him to learn those skills?

### *Creating new knowledge*

What is of particular concern to me, then, is how new knowledge, new meaning, is created. If a group of managers begin to make sense differently of the situation facing them, then the patterning of the themes organising their experience is changing. 'Knowledge is created as changes in the thematic patterning of bodies relating to each other...' (ibid.) In making sense differently, new knowledge is being created; learning is arising in the sense that is made from experience. The process of dealing with experience is a continuous process of learning.

Similar to the argument above in the description of Mead's theory, nobody can determine what thematic patterning will arise: '...and that thematic patterning *organises itself*.' (ibid.) However, this is not to argue that participants in the process of knowledge creation are passive recipients of whatever patterning may arise. Participants do influence the process through skills of perception and a capacity to communicate. These are the skills of working 'in the moment' with uncertainty, with a continuously emerging view of what is happening. They are skills of attention, reflection and interaction. In this respect, the skills of leadership are not concerned with the production of regularity and certainty, but with the capacity to work with the reality



of uncertainty, and with the emerging meaning in the process of communicative interaction in the group.

One of the principal issues is how a manager deals with the unknowable emerging future. Elias argues that it is only in the experience of staying with the 'not knowing' that fantasies can be recognised which do not serve learning or work, and that truly new knowledge can arise: 'But without throwing oneself for a time into the sea of uncertainty one cannot escape the contradictions and inadequacies of a deceptive certainty' (1998, p270). Dealing with the anxiety which inevitably arises from uncertainty without recourse to the pseudo-certainties of the management ideology described in Paper Two was discussed in Paper Three. The principal emphasis of the literature reviewed in the early part of Paper Four is of existing knowledge and regularity as a way of dealing with 'not knowing' and 'messiness'. What I am arguing here is that part of the essence of leadership is in acting with intent into the unknown and recognising the uniqueness of the situation, while maintaining the purpose and identity of the organisation.

Stacey emphasises the role of difference, misunderstanding in interaction in the creation of new knowledge. I argue that to notice these differences one must pay attention to aspects of conversation which may ordinarily be overlooked or taken for granted. Shotter refers to this way of participating in a conversation as 'relational-responsive' (Shotter, 1996, p215). It is possible to be more present to the creative potential of a conversation while being part of that conversation; that is it is possible to make a difference to the emergence of meaning with skill and intent.

Part of this skill is in seeing the potential of going in one direction rather than another in the conversation. Shotter says that there is so much going on in daily life that we can only pay attention to part of it, but which part, and why? Quoting Wittgenstein, Shotter argues that the best guide to where to put our attention arises from the experience of our daily lives, rather than from 'certain hypothetical mechanisms within us' (1953, p209, quoted in Shotter, 1999). This is why this kind of learning must take place in the context of making sense of experience.

For Mead, the capacity to direct attention is at the core of teaching and learning:

'Man is distinguished by that power of analysis of the field of stimulation which enables him to pick out one stimulus rather than another and so to hold on to the response that belongs to that stimulus, picking it out from others, and recombining it with others...Man can combine not only the responses already there, which is the thing an animal lower than man can do, but the human individual can get into his activities and break them up, giving *attention* to combining them to build up another act. *That is what we mean by learning or by teaching a person to do something*' (Mead, 1934, p94, italics added)

Mead taught that meaning is jointly constructed in human interaction in the totality of gesture-response. But responses do not arise entirely anew: history, memory and therefore previous learning play a role. The skill of deciding where to direct one's attention and that of another arises from one's previous history and from the sense one has made of it. Also, as one participant in the interaction giving rise to emerging meaning, I cannot simply *choose* what meaning arises from our interaction, although I am free to have intention about it. In the systemic theories of change and knowledge reviewed earlier the implicit theory of learning is that the meaning of interaction can be chosen, in the same way that organisational futures can be chosen (by

the manager). Just as a manager has to let go of the idea of control of the organisation as an ideology of leadership, so a teacher has to let go of the idea of control of meaning as an ideology of learning. The teacher cannot then be a 'manager of meaning', deciding what something means from the outset of an interaction of which he is part. But what the teacher can do is to participate skilfully, in the ways I am describing in this paper, to seek to influence emergent meaning.

For Elias, knowledge arises in the interaction of a web of interdependent individuals, which he called a 'figuration'. Knowledge does not have a separate existence; with thought and speech, it is part of the same entity, which he called 'symbol'. Our knowledge and way of thinking is contained in our language, and are structured by it. So, to use language differently is to affect knowledge and thought. Elias went further and speculated that identity 'is at the root of possibility to convert speech into thought and thought into speech' (1991, p81). Stacey takes this up describing identity as the characteristic pattern of knowing of an individual. The type of learning which I am advocating involves a change in some aspect of identity.

A large part of my job involves the introduction of new language. I pay attention to how it is used and how it may help the flow meaning making. Mead also sees language as a social process which enables us to 'pick out responses and hold them...so that they are there in relation to that which we indicate' (1934, p97). I take this to mean that meanings can be held, explored and recombined to give rise to new meaning.

The ultimate goal of the type of learning I am advocating is the development of a type of consciousness. Elias says that how far up or down one is on the 'spiral staircase of consciousness' (1998, p278) depends on both the personality and talent of an individual as well as the society to which they belong, but sheds little light on how to develop either. For Mead, intelligence is the ability to solve problems by anticipating the future in the light of the past – so requiring the capacity to delay, organise and select a response or reaction to the stimuli or the given environmental situation. The process is made possible by the mechanism of the central nervous system, which permits the individual's taking of the attitude of the other toward himself, and thus becoming an object to himself' (1934, p100). In other words, he develops a measure of self-consciousness. Mead says that this gives rise to reflective behaviour; I argue that reflection and self-consciousness give rise to each other – they are co-constructive, and this is why I ask participants to reflect both in conversation and in writing.

Shotter (1999) points to how the therapist's dialogue with a client eventually gives rise to the client's own capacity to engage in dialogue within herself, and so 'be responsive to a whole range of situated realities' (p88). Shotter is referring to the development of the capacity for general engagement with the flow of life arising from a process of dialogue with a skilled partner. Similarly, I argue that the capacity of an individual manager to engage with the constant process of meaning-making in dialogue is enhanced by the learning experience of engaging in dialogue with a skilled conversational partner. Shotter emphasises that 'what is especially important about this dialogical

form of practical understanding, is that it is not an individual achievement' (ibid).

In reflecting on how my practice has changed during the course of the DMan, I am able to connect much of my learning with my struggle with two theoretical questions which arose from dilemmas of reconciling the theory of complex responsive processes with my practice. Firstly, what is the role of intention in complex responsive processes in organisations, and how does it manifest itself? Secondly, what is the role of theories of organisation, if any, in complex responsive processes in organisations?

### *The dilemma of intention*

My dilemma arose from my practice as a teacher of management, where I am dedicated to helping managers to realise their intentions, now encountering a theory which asserted a contrary message: managers do not get to choose what happens next. Stacey's elaboration of the theory emphasises the joint, participative and interactive nature of the emergence of organisational reality. In this theory, the manager, or leader, of concern to me cannot stand outside what is happening pulling the levers of control – he is part of the living process of interaction that is the organisation. He forms and is simultaneously and continuously formed by it. One of Stacey's principal claims to validity for this theory is that it better explains an observable phenomenon in organisational life, viz. how novelty arises. I do not see the theory of complex responsive processes in organisation as a consignment to passivity and helplessness in the face of overwhelming

complexity, but a call to recognise the complex, socially constructed nature of reality and find a measure of influence within that. However, Stacey's emphasis in the theory on the impossibility of direct control over an emergent process could leave our manager with a sense of impotence, or at least an unsatisfactory sense of being simply an equal participant in the process. In effect, Stacey argues that human agency arises in interaction *between* individuals. I am particularly concerned with how meaning arises; according to this theory, it arises in the social act in which in which the gesture of one and the response of the other are inseparable phases. This problematises the individual's capacity for unique influence. If this theory is to help me understand my practice better it has to account for another phenomenon as well: leaders in organisations, while they may not necessarily directly control them, *do* often strongly influence them. In other words, it has to account for what other theories (Stacey refers to them as 'mainstream') attempt to explain: how leaders make a difference, how their intentions influence what happens. In other words, the theory of complex responsive processes has to account for how some people are influential within the processes.

I do not wish to imply that Stacey ignores intention altogether; he repeatedly mentions it. It is just that he does not elaborate his theory significantly in this respect. The question of intention is of direct interest to me as my practice is concerned with the issue of how managers can influence their organisations in a desired direction, and how I can help them to learn to do that. The conclusion that I have come to in this inquiry, is that individual skill makes a difference in the gesture-response by noticing and drawing attention to what is emerging in the interaction, and by calling forth responses which have

the potential to give rise to new meaning. Therefore, organisations, understood as complex responsive processes, are (indirectly) influenced by skilled participation. A leader is the role of an individual who is skilled influencing the process.

My practice, therefore, is concerned with the development of these skills. As I have argued elsewhere in this synopsis, these skills represent a type of knowledge which cannot be abstracted from practice, that is, decontextualised, and rendered into formulations which can be in any way usefully applied. Since these are skills of interaction, they must be learnt in interaction with a skilled person, which is the role I propose for the teacher.

My participation is affected by my history of relating, both to others and to myself; that is, my history of making meaning with others and for myself. Through my life, my career, and my professional development (including the DMan) I have developed, and continue to develop, skills and insights which form part of my identity and which are active in the process of participation. As a professional teacher of leadership, I have to hold myself out as having a unique set of skills in this respect.

#### *The role of other management theories*

Secondly, the role of theories, such as strategy and organisational culture. The dilemma I have had to resolve is as follows. In my practice of helping participants to improve their practice of management I will continue to introduce mainstream theories of strategy and

organisation. However, Stacey has argued that such theories are incompatible with his theory of complex responsive processes, since he claims that they proceed from a different philosophical base, generally a combination of Rational and Formative Causality. Many authors have attempted to explore the nature of such theories (for example, in the field of strategy: Bailey and Johnson, 1993; Hart, 1992; Huff and Reger, 1997; Mintzberg, 1994; Mintzberg *et al.*, 1998; Whittington, 1993). How do I theoretically reconcile my continued use of such theories with an understanding of organisations as complex responsive processes? My answer is that I do not see them as being necessarily opposed, I do not dichotomise them in the way that Stacey *et al.* (2000) do. The title of their text<sup>4</sup> appears to establish a binary opposition. Doubtless, this is done to assert its distinctive contribution. However, I would argue that in stridently relegating all previous strategic and organisational theory to the category of reviled 'other', they are defining themselves in antithesis to it (Eagleton, 1983), by what they are not, possibly because they may not be quite so different after all. They are able to create this dichotomy by defining the terms of the debate in a way<sup>5</sup> that separates their theory from all others. They do this by ascribing a philosophical pedigree to these ideas; this suits some of these theories more than others. It seems to me, however, that another way of understanding how such theories might relate to the theory of complex responsive processes is in how they are used, and what patterns they are seen to describe.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Management and complexity: Fad or radical challenge to systems theory*

<sup>5</sup> Essentially in terms of the Kant versus Hegel debate, and the Kantian distinction between *regulative* concepts and *substantive concepts*.



Part of the process of working with uncertain or ambiguous situations involves suggesting meanings or proposing ways of understanding what is happening. It includes the use of concepts, models, theories and other constructs which help the process of making sense of experience. In my case, for example, I use concepts of strategy to attempt to make sense of the business situation facing the firm with which is my client. Equally, I use concepts of organisation to make sense of the relatedness, the interactions among the members of the firm. Theories such as these have arisen from the observation of patterns in phenomena and the articulation of hypotheses concerning causal relationships. Elias refers to observed patterns in phenomena as 'regularities', and cautions against reifying them, ascribing an autonomous existence to them.

Griffin (2002), drawing on Elias, argues that much of management literature attributes agency to such reified concepts, that is, views them as the *causes* of phenomena, rather than as themes patterning interaction. For example, the concept of 'organisational culture', a concept which describes a characteristic patterning of the thinking and interaction of members of an organisation, is described in mainstream literature in a way which suggests that it has an existence outside or independently of the interactions of the people which give rise to it, and that this culture actually *causes* the individual behaviour which is observed. Attention is drawn away from the interaction among individuals, which is what is 'actually' going on.

However, I would argue that there is a distinction to be drawn here between the validity of a theory (e.g. theories of strategy, or organisational culture) and the use that is made of it, or what it is made

into. Griffin argues that concepts of management are reified as external agents which 'cause' things to happen, that is, they are 'made into' autonomous agents. However, just because I observe a pattern of occurrences which seem to have some correlative relationship, it does not follow that I am advocating a necessarily direct causal path which is then open to control, as per Stacey's argument of Rationalist/Formative Causality. I would argue that many of these theories are constructed in this way by Stacey because, when he fills in the philosophical blanks underlying these theories, drawing on traditional western thought with the aid of Elias, he comes up with a systemic Kantian basis. However if theory is ultimately an attempt to explain an observable relationship, Stacey must also pay attention to the use of such concepts in practice. More often than not, in my experience with executives, such concepts are taken purely as guide material, and not as assertions of causality. This must also be explained.

I argue that these concepts still have a role, and are perfectly compatible with Stacey's theory, *provided* their nature is correctly understood. For example, following this DMan I will continue to use the concepts of strategy or organisational culture in my work. What has changed in my thinking is how I understand and employ these theories, and how I understand them in relation to the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations. I view strategy in an organisation as themes patterning the experience of interaction within the firm and with other entities such as customers. Strategy is a pattern in the conversation throughout the firm, but of particular interest at senior management level where there is a concentration of power which can influence this pattern. Strategy-as-pattern is constructive of

reality, and in turn this reality may suggest options for movement into the future.

Stacey elaborates Mead's theory of symbolic interaction to include a category of symbol which he calls 'reified symbols' (Stacey, 2001, p110) These are gestures that point to abstract-systematic frameworks of explanation. Stacey cautions that symbols in this reified form can cut people off from their lived experience, but he also grants that they can also be used to transform the context of human action. The issue for me, given that my practice is concerned with the relationship of theory and practice, is not *whether*, but *how* I use abstract-systematic frameworks, i.e. theories. The formal concepts of strategy are an example of a reified symbol. I do not see these concepts as strategy in themselves; they are tools of strategy. They are ideas which may assist in changing the patterning of the conversation (or not). I introduce these concepts to the conversation as suggested ways of making sense of the conversation as it evolves. The meaning that is made following their introduction to the conversation depends on the interaction of those involved, and cannot be directly controlled by me. My task is not only to be in possession of these concepts, but to offer them when it appears to be helpful to do so. The possession of these concepts is a matter of technical knowledge, putting them to work is a matter of practical knowledge. It is possible, as happened several times in the case of SSL<sup>6</sup>, that following my contribution of an idea, the conversation will shift. However, I cannot control the direction in

---

<sup>6</sup> This is a case, narrated in Paper Four, in which I acted in the role of teacher/consultant.

which it will shift. The resultant shift in conversation is a shift in strategy, that is, a change in pattern. What is important here is that I do not attribute agency, or an autonomous existence to the notion of strategy – rather I see it as a way of understanding the evolution of the conversation among the managers in the organisation, and as a guide to attempting to influence it.

Therefore, the understanding I have of the role of theoretical concepts in complex responsive processes in organisations is that they represent potentially useful shortcuts to understanding and attempting to influence the emergent patterning of conversation within the organisation. The key to their use is in holding them 'lightly', seeing them as tools which aid, but do not supplant, the essential task of participating in the ongoing emergent pattern of conversation within the organisation. Effectively, what I am arguing is that the 'line' between the theory of complex responsive processes and other theories of strategy and organisation is not as clearcut as Stacey implies. These other theories have a role to play in the development of the application of complexity theory to the study of organisations; I do not wish to throw out the transformative baby with the systemic bathwater.

## **Methodology**

The general question under investigation in this portfolio is how people in positions of leadership come to be able to fulfil that role in conditions of uncertainty, and what role a teacher might play in the development of that ability. In particular, the question is explored from the viewpoint of complexity theory, especially the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations, as elucidated by Stacey (2001, ---

*et al.* 2000). The key point of this theory is that the future is essentially unknowable; it is constructed in the present moment through the myriad interactions not only of people, but of the themes that organise experience and help us to make sense of that experience; patterns of meaning emerge through this process of social interaction and form a jointly constructed reality. The usefulness of this theory to managers is that its starting point is their own lived experience, as they are aware of it, or, more importantly, can become increasingly aware of it. The theory is not a guide to specific action, but forms a paradigm within which the experience of interaction and the attempt to achieve (which is the role of leadership) can be more usefully understood. I argue that the development of leadership ability in a manager, particularly to deal with situations of uncertainty, is essentially a process of coming to awareness. The methodology of this inquiry must be congruent with this outlook, while meeting the general needs of the University of Hertfordshire for the award of a Doctoral degree.

The task of this section, therefore, is twofold. Firstly, it must explain the paradigm within which the inquiry is carried out, and how it relates to the topic of the inquiry; it must explain the place of the methodology within the paradigm and why this specific approach was chosen; it must explain how data were collected and analysed; and it must establish its claim to validity. Secondly, given the nature of this inquiry, as will be elucidated in what follows, the writing of this section itself forms part of the inquiry and, therefore, must continue and enrich the work of the inquiry.

The task of this inquiry is the exploration of the meaning of a social phenomenon, and so, it is placed firmly within a general

phenomenological paradigm (Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Tranfield and Starkey, 1998; Tranfield, 2002a, 2002b). Lincoln and Guba (1994, p108) assert that "The basic beliefs that define inquiry paradigms can be summarised by the responses given by proponents of any given paradigm to three fundamental questions, which are interconnected in such a way that the answer given to any, taken in any order, constrains how the others may be answered. The questions refer to ontology: "What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?" (ibid.); epistemology: "What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?" (ibid.); and methodology: "How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?" (ibid.)

I therefore propose to explore my methodology initially from this viewpoint and to show its relationship to my inquiry and to the theoretical framework through which I am working viz. complexity theory. Before I do that, a fundamental question arises, what am I trying to achieve in elucidating my methodology? What must I and the reader be convinced of by the end of the argument? Lincoln and Guba note "that paradigms, as sets of basic beliefs, are not open to proof in any conventional sense; there is no way to elevate one over another on the basis of ultimate, foundational criteria...No construction is or can be incontrovertibly right: advocates of any particular construction must rely on *persuasiveness* and *utility* rather than *proof* in arguing their position" (1994, p108, original italics). That persuasion, particularly in the case of an inquiry of an exploratory kind such as this one, will not come in any stepwise fashion, but rather will be the result of an overall impression of the argument which will come at the end: "We do ask

the reader to suspend his or her disbelief until our argument is complete and can be judged as a whole" (ibid.).

The process of inquiry must, of necessity, in some way reflect the theoretical basis of the inquiry (i.e. the *how* should reflect the *what*). It would be difficult ultimately to claim validity for the use of the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations if it had not, in some way, been demonstrated to provide a useful way of making sense of the issues it examines. Therefore, the methodology I have brought to bear on this inquiry is the application of the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations to inquiry. That is to say, the inquiry is itself an emergent process. The meanings of the phenomena I am examining will arise through my interaction with those phenomena, as well as with other experiences and themes which impinge on me. This report is, therefore, a description of complex responsive processes in organisations, which was experienced by me in exploring a particular social phenomenon. The object of study, therefore, is my experience and how I make meaning of it. It is important to say also that the experience under study is the everyday experience of my professional practice – I have explicitly not engaged in any type of constructed study as this would decontextualise my reflections, and would therefore invalidate the inquiry.

Now, to address Lincoln and Guba's three questions on paradigm. The theory of complex responsive processes in organisations proposes that reality is an emergent construct, perpetually under construction in the 'moment' through the constant interaction of all involved. Similarly, knowledge is created in the 'moment' through the same process of interaction. 'The investigator and the object of investigation are

assumed to be interactively linked so that the “findings” are *literally created* as the investigation proceeds. The conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears’ (ibid., p111). Knowledge is gained through engagement and interaction through the medium of conversation with others, and through reflection and insight, which can be considered a kind of “internal conversation” (see Paper Three on this topic). The theory of complex responsive processes in organisations holds that the future is constructed in the present moment through the communicative interactions of people; patterns of meaning emerge through this process of social interaction and form a jointly constructed reality. The ontological/epistemological question is thus settled; reality is socially constructed, and the knower is part of the process of knowledge creation. In Lincoln and Guba’s ordering of Basic Beliefs of Alternative Inquiry Paradigms, this would place this approach to inquiry under the heading of Constructivism, although they quickly add that this paradigm is still in a formative stage (ibid., p109).

Thomas Schwandt (1994, p125) comments that “Constructivists are deeply committed to the...view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind”. Schwandt hints at a resonance with the complex responsive process view that phenomena emerge from the interactions (discourse) of those involved: “Constructivists are antiessentialists. They assume that what we take to be self-evident kinds (e.g. man, woman, truth, self) are actually the product of complicated *discursive* practices.” (ibid., p125, italics added). In discussing the contribution of the philosopher Nelson Goodman to the field of constructivism, notions of truth and certainty are questioned



and found to be “excessively restricted concepts beset with trouble” (p126). Instead, Schwandt tells us that Goodman proposes the notion of

“rightness”, a term with “greater reach” than truth. *Rightness* is defined as an act of fitting and working but ‘not fitting *onto* – a correspondence or matching or mirroring of independent Reality – but a fitting *into* a context or discourse or standing complex of other symbols” (ibid. p126, original italics).

Again, the term discourse arises and suggests that attention must be paid to interaction.

In considering the generation of knowledge, this theme of process is taken up by Schwandt in discussing the contribution of von Glaserfeld to radical constructivism: ‘In von Glaserfeld’s view, knowledge is not a particular kind of product (i.e., a representation) that exists independent of the knower, but an activity or process...To know is “to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen” (ibid., p127). The notion of knowledge arising in and from action rather than pre-existing as an artefact is critical to the methodology which I have adopted. In order to know in this inquiry I have acted as a participant in social contexts.

I part company with radical constructivism at this point, given its emphasis on the individual, and am drawn more to social constructionism as developed by Kenneth Gergen (Gergen, 2001): ‘Contrary to the emphasis in radical constructivism, the focus here is not on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind but on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes’ (Schwandt (1994, p127) This concept more

closely approaches the concept proposed in the theory of Complex responsive processes in organisations where a phenomenon (a reality) emerges from the unending interaction of its constituents, where it constantly forms and reforms itself recursively. Kenneth Gergen (2001) labels his approach "social constructionism" because it more adequately reflects the notion that 'the world that people create in the process of social exchange is a reality *sui generis*.' (Schwandt, 1994, p127, original italics). This more closely approaches the phenomenon I am inquiring into, if strategy and leadership can be considered as constructions arising from social discourse.

I recognise that this inquiry is itself a socially constructed view of the area of interest and that I am part of this social process. Guba and Lincoln assume that the observer cannot (should not) be neatly disentangled from the observed in the activity of inquiring into constructions. Hence the findings or outcomes of an inquiry are themselves a 'literal creation of the inquiry process' (ibid., p 128) Reason (1994) takes up this theme in examination of differing approaches to what he terms "participative inquiry", describing a worldview which "sees human beings as cocreating their reality through participation: through their experience, their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action" (p324). Although part of the general debate on approaches to qualitative research in academic settings, Reason cautions that "These approaches to inquiry through participation need to be seen as living processes of coming to know rather than as formal academic method." (p325). The clear implication here is that the validity of such an approach rests on, among other factors, the authenticity and quality of engagement of the inquirer with

the social context in which the inquiry is carried out. This issue is taken up below.

Reason (1994) explores three specific approaches to participative inquiry: Co-operative Inquiry, Participatory Action Research, and the closely related Action Science and Action Inquiry. Co-operative Inquiry is essentially a formal procedure of establishing an approach to social inquiry in explicit agreement with a subject group. While this is not specifically what I am engaged with, Reason's discussion of the validity of his approach has much to contribute to my claims of validity. He describes the process as an encounter with experience (ibid., p327) viewed from a standpoint of what he refers to as "critical subjectivity" (ibid.)

Critical subjectivity is a state of consciousness different from either the naïve subjectivity of "primary process" awareness and the attempted objectivity of egoic "secondary process" awareness. Critical awareness means that we do not suppress our primary subjective experience, that we accept that our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are *aware of* that perspective and of its bias, and we *articulate* it in our communications. (ibid.)

In his exploration of Participative Action Inquiry, a type of liberationist inquiry traditionally practised with disadvantaged or oppressed groups, he makes an important epistemological/methodological point: "The *rationalist* critique [of traditional monopolistic research] points out that the classical research paradigm has, in the interests of maintaining objectivity, overemphasised thinking as the means of knowing, neglecting feeling and acting" (ibid., p329). This theme is very present in my inquiry; for example, I pay attention to the issue of anxiety (both mine and others') as an indicator of significant issues.

Of the three modes of participative inquiry elucidated by Reason, the one to which I come closest is Action Inquiry, developed by Torbert

(1976). Torbert's emphasis on what I synthesise as reflection-in-action and action-in-reflection is key to my approach to the development of my thinking about how I am gaining useful knowledge and why:

research and action, even though analytically distinguishable, are inextricably intertwined in practice...Knowledge is always gained in action and for action...From this starting point, to question the validity of social science is to question, not how to develop a *reflective science about* action, but how to develop genuinely well-informed action – how to conduct an *action science* (Torbert, 1981 quoted in Reason, 1994, p330)

Argyris and Schön (1974) coined the phrase 'double loop learning' to refer to the capacity of individuals to discern, reflect on and amend the 'governing variables' behind a given strategy of action. The purpose of this is to distinguish what actors think guides their actions ('espoused theories') and what they may discover actually guides their actions ('theories-in-use'). They refer to their practice as Action Science. Torbert's Action Inquiry builds on this but is significantly different. Argyris and Schön focus on the implicit cognitive models underlying actions. "Action *inquiry*, although it addresses these, in addition addresses outcomes (measured empirically) and the quality of one's own attention (monitored by meditative exercises as one acts)" (ibid., p330). The purpose of both action science and action inquiry is "to engage with one's own action and with others in a self-reflective way, so that all become more aware of their behaviour and of its underlying theories" (ibid., p332). This effectively describes the approach I have taken in this inquiry.

Reason states that the nature and role of knowledge is similar in all three approaches to participative inquiry: "Knowledge arises in and for action" and that "The implication of this epistemology of action is that the primary outcome of all these forms of inquiry is a change in the lived experience of those involved in the inquiry" (ibid., p333). To a

degree, one of the tests of validity of this approach will include my personal view of the ways in which my own professional practice will have been changed by my engagement with this inquiry over the course of study for the DMan.

This discussion of methodology has lead increasingly to a reliance on the personal capacities of the inquirer (in this case, me) for reflection, or, as, Torbert calls it, "consciousness in the midst of action" (quoted in Reason, 1994, p331). He pays considerable attention to the possession of these capacities to enable the inquiry to proceed: "One of the key skills in this process is to find ways of sidestepping one's own and others' defensive responses to the painful process of self-reflection" (ibid., p332). This capacity comes into being as a result of a process of development:

Now, as Torbert, (1976, p167) points out, "the discipline and rigor involved in this sort of research is formidable"; he suggests that a person must undergo what appears to be an unimaginable scale of self-development before becoming capable of relationally valid action (Reason, 1994, p331)

and the practice of action inquiry makes its demands clear if it is to yield its benefits:

Action inquiry draws our attention to the particular individual skills required for valid inquiry with others. It confronts us with the need to cultivate a wide-ranging and subtle attention; it suggests that we can develop such an attention only as we move toward the later stages of ego development; and it offers methods for the detailed examination of our purposes, theories, and behaviour, and the consequences of these for our world. (ibid., p335)

Ultimately, if I am to claim validity for my insights and reflections, and therefore for my methodology, I have to be able to provide convincing evidence through the quality of my observations and my written reflections that my state of development is such that they are valuable. Evidence to support this is also supplied in Paper One, where I outlined the course of my personal and professional development.

Having addressed the question of paradigm and method, and their appropriateness to the subject under inquiry, the question remains as to how I can claim that my approach has validity. Schwandt poses the general issue this way:

The issue is deceptively simple: What is an adequate warrant for a subjectively mediated account of intersubjective meaning? In the absence of some set of criteria, such accounts are subject to the charges of solipsism (they are only *my* accounts) and relativism (all accounts are equally good or bad, worthy or unworthy, true or false, and so on. (Schwandt, 1994, p130)

In describing the response of contemporary constructivists to this dilemma, Schwandt outlines three viewpoints. First, procedural: i.e. that the methodology followed is most likely to give rise to valid interpretation. Interpreting Lincoln and Guba on this point: "Truth is a matter of the best-informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus at a given time." (ibid., p128). Second, "subtle realism": this is a view which asserts that the truth, worth or value of a theory or construction is determined by something *beyond* the theory or construction, and that if these are accurate they must correspond in relevant aspects to the phenomena described. This essentially re-asserting the existence of some greater reality accessible only through this work. The third is essentially pragmatic: "Interpretive accounts (efforts to make clear what seems to be confused, unclear) are to be judged on the pragmatic grounds of whether they are useful, fitting, generative of further inquiry, and so forth" (ibid., p130). I base my claim to validity on the first and third issues.

The methodology of this inquiry follows from its ontological/epistemological stance. The theory of complex responsive processes holds that knowledge is a pattern of communicative interaction and is constantly reproduced with the potential for change.

The methodology of the inquiry involved interaction in several settings. I participated in five residential modules which included large group meetings. The experience of the large group was familiar to me from my training in Group Analysis and with the Tavistock Institute. Nonetheless, the challenge of being present to what was happening and reflecting on it remains as great as ever. But this was not a therapeutic or Group Relations exercise; it had a more exploratory and educative function. I often felt ill-equipped for the level of theoretical debate, and although this stimulated my reading, I was wary of any implicit suggestion of a new theoretical orthodoxy to which one must conform.

I was a member of a small learning group with two other students (both based in the US) and our supervisor, based in London. The loss of a fellow Irish person from the group early in the Programme, due to pressure of work, underscored the burden of this course of study and struck a background note of tension which has remained and intensified. All four members of our group have become dear friends. However, in considering the experience of my participation in the matrix (Foulkes) or figuration (Elias) of our group, I am struck by the ambivalence I felt for some time about the members of our group. (It took a little more time before I began to wonder about the others' ambivalence about me). Both my fellow students are from the US healthcare system; one a physician, the other a hospital CEO. Our supervisor is a Group Analyst and practices in the UK healthcare system. I felt that none had sympathy for the world of business with which I interact. I felt that my experiences and my approaches to making sense of them were at best partially understood. I felt myself having to struggle for understanding in what I was attempting to

express. I longed to be part of some group peopled with students whose practices were closer to mine. This feeling felt all the more shameful as our friendship deepened.

The change in my experience of the learning group parallels the general change in my thinking and practice. I noticed the ease with which we began to be able to interact, not only meeting in person, but in our almost daily round of e-mails, which were always shared. We spoke not only of our reading and writing for the programme, but of the challenges in our work and personal lives. The other members of the group became a constant presence even when I was engaged in the solitary task of writing. Mead (1934) speaks of the capacity to take the attitude of the other toward himself. In anticipation of the possible responses of my group to what I was thinking and writing, I enhanced my capacity for reflection. Foulkes speaks of the relationship with the group-as-a-whole as not being with a particular group, but with the whole social constellation of which the immediate group is but a constituent. In this sense, my interaction with this generalised other has served to develop ideas which have relevance not just for me, but for a general audience, including others whose occupation is similar to mine.

Elias and Mead stress the role of conflict in the creation of new knowledge. Stacey emphasises how differences and misunderstanding serve to shift patterns of meaning. I became aware that my group colleagues remained in the fray and continued to interact. I became accustomed to the continual struggle to explain and explore my writing, and participated in the struggles of the exploration of their writing. I noticed the skill and insight of my colleagues, in probing,



sense-making and drawing my attention to what was not apparent to me. Their very difference became apparent to me as a resource.

Misunderstanding was itself a gesture evoking a response. It became clearer that I was a participant in my own message: I had been failing to attend to my own lived experience, and wished to recreate it so that I would not experience the mental struggle and anxiety of the process of learning from experience.

The skill of our 'resident' Group Analyst became subtly more apparent in drawing my attention to how I was thinking, and also in acknowledging feelings. The predominant feeling, after early fears in the programme of inadequacy, was of anxiety. Much of this anxiety derived from the sense of exposure of writing, especially about my reflections on personal experience. 'Public' disclosure such as this leaves one open to shame. Equally, taking a theoretical position, which is what is required of a doctoral candidate, is exposing. The temptation was to censor, but this was the opposite of what is needed. Foulkes says of Group Analysis: 'We want communication under reduced censorship' (Foulkes and Anthony, 1957, p56, quoted in Nitzgen).

In the section on conclusions, I have commented on the role of theory in complex responsive processes. Essentially, I argue that its role is to illuminate but not supplant the role of reflection and interaction in the process of knowledge creation. The process of knowledge creation in this thesis has focussed on a process of reflection on interaction. As argued elsewhere, reflection is a kind of interaction, a silent conversation within an individual. Given this focus on knowledge arising from and intended for practice, I have referred intensively to a somewhat restricted range of theorists to illuminate my arguments,

rather than the extensive review of literature that would be required if the focus of this inquiry were on the development of theory to be added to the existing corpus.

Shotter, in a description of his role of learning coach with medical students, drew a lesson from the world of therapy. He says that a client's experience of dialogue with the therapist eventually gives rise to the client's own capacity to engage in a variation of this kind of dialogue within herself, and from there move among and be responsive to a whole range of situated realities. The intense process of interaction within the DMan has emerged in changes in my practice, largely without my centrally intending them. These changes are described in another section in this synopsis. The experience of the process of the DMan substantiates the argument which I put forward; interaction with skilled participants can result in the development of an awareness and a skill which can be learned, but not taught.

### **Research Findings and conclusions**

In examining the development of leadership, I am not concerned with the exercise of formal authority, or the management of routine situations. Rather, I am concerning myself with situations facing senior managers in business where, as a matter of course, they confront situations which are characterised by high levels of uncertainty or ambiguity, and there are no routine approaches to dealing with them. This is the situation I work with most commonly with participants, where my task is to help them to learn from their own work situations. The basic argument in this portfolio is as follows:

- Managers and organisations facing new and uncertain environments must constantly find new ways of making sense of what is happening and of acting into those situations in the interests of their organisations.
- The approach of many managers to this task is affected by ways of thinking about management which locate the source of ideas, and the agency to put them into effect, in a single person. This way of thinking represents an ideology of management which deals with the complexity of organisational life by simplifying it into basic cause-effect relationships, which may bear little relationship to the reality in effect. It encourages managers to discount their own experience and to deal with the 'messiness' of their situations by seeking regularity, rather than understanding the particular messiness in which they find themselves. This regularity is expressed in the form of theories of management, and managers are implicitly encouraged to make their practice more like the theories.

Managers learn to think like this because their thinking is formed by the ideology of their workplaces, which they simultaneously also form, thus perpetuating the ideology. They also learn to think like this because of their formal education in management; they are encouraged to deal with the experience of uncertainty, of not knowing, by seeking certainty, rather than learning the skills of dealing with uncertainty as it occurs. The role of a teacher in this approach is to provide explanatory theories to enable a manager to

gain control over the messiness of his situation. This ideology is explored in Paper Two.

- This thesis explores a different way of understanding leadership, how it is learned, and what role a teacher might play in the process of learning. Leadership is understood as skilful participation in a continuous process of making meaning in an organisation principally through dialogue. Leadership development is understood as helping managers to learn the skills of working with emerging patterns of meaning as they occur in 'real time'. The role of a teacher in this process is as a conversational partner who attempts to draw participants into a different kind of dialogue in the practice of which they can learn these skills.
- The aspect of leadership, which is explored in this inquiry, is concerned with dealing with uncertain, non-routine situations. Leadership is concerned with influencing a group in the joint continuous process of making sense of what is happening and with devising ways of acting in the interests of the organisation of which the participants are members. This type of influencing does not concern any attempt at persuasion, manipulation or coercion towards a pre-determined outcome; rather, it works as part of the continuously emerging pattern of sense-making, perceiving patterns, offering schemes for making sense, articulating perceptions and proposing action. To the extent that an individual in a group is experienced by the other members of the group as having uniquely helpful skills in this regard, he

will be regarded by them as a leader. (Griffin, 2002) In effect, his leadership is created by the group, and simultaneously he contributes to the leadership of others.

- These skills of leadership represent a kind of knowledge which is different from the more technical or structured knowledge also to be found in the field of management. It is different in that it is continuously concerned with participation in particular emerging situations over which nobody has direct control. It is dependent on a capacity to explore, to attend to one's own thoughts and sensations, to reflect, to interact continuously with others, all without a blueprint for proceeding.
- This kind of knowledge cannot be gained by attempting to extract its essence from practice and 'applying' it to another situation. This is because the essence of this kind of knowledge is to do with dealing with specific or particular situations. This kind of knowledge can only be gained by practice; but the process of gaining this knowledge of this kind can be helped by a teacher.
- The role of a teacher in this type of learning is not to 'hand over' knowledge, but to engage with the leader in action, in the practice of this aspect of leadership. The task of a teacher in this situation is to participate in the task of sensemaking with other participants, in the expectation that his skill, his knowledge will affect, albeit unpredictably, those present towards the development of their own skill. This is similar to

the aspect of leadership described above. In this sense, the teacher may be perceived by others in the group as acting as a kind of leader. In this way also, all the participants in the group may experience a change in their capacity to work with the situation facing them, that is, a change in their leadership skill, without it having been 'taught' in any conventional sense.

### **Contribution to Practice**

#### *Teaching as a participant in a process*

One of the principal ways in which my practice has developed has been in how I understand what is happening when I am working with a group. I understand that I am participating in an ongoing process in which meaning is socially constructed through interaction. All members are simultaneously forming and being formed by the communicative process of interaction. I am responding continuously to the shifting patterns of meaning in the group, and doing so with intent. My job as a teacher is to work with the real interactions which are occurring in the moment and with my sense of the meanings which are arising in the conversation of the group. I am opportunistic, taking advantage of arising meanings to point to potentially new ways of making sense. These gestures are in response to other gestures by members of the group, and to the meaning which is jointly arising within the group. In effect, I am 'teaching into the response'.

My view of my role has changed from detached teacher to participant in an ongoing process of sensemaking. Paradoxically, I believe that this change has, in a way, enhanced my influence as a teacher; by

relinquishing the view of myself as one standing outside the process of interaction I am more open to awareness of my own feelings and thoughts, as well as to what I notice within the group. This awareness, which has been evoked by the group, as well as being constrained by my personal history of relating, can then be brought to the service of the group. In this sense, I am not teaching in the traditional sense of 'handing over' knowledge. But neither am I simply another participant, and here the central issue of skill arises, both mine and the participants. In my work I am attempting to bring my skills to the task of developing the skills of others. I argue that these are not the type of skills which can in any sense be learned by another person by attempts at any type of direct teaching or coaching. Why is this? To understand the skills I am concerned with developing, it is necessary to describe the types of leadership situations in which my participants find themselves.

### *Learning to pay attention*

Part of what has brought about this change has been my attention. My attention has been drawn by puzzlement, discomfiture, conflict within myself and with my colleagues (especially my learning set!), anxiety and occasional glimpses of new schemes of sense. New meaning, new patterns of knowing have arisen from these tensions in my interactions within myself and with others.

The question of attention, of noticing and pointing to phenomena, thoughts and ways of making sense form a large part of the argument in this thesis. How one understands the world affects how one directs one's attention to it. I am also arguing the converse: how one pays

attention affects how one understands the world, or, more accurately, how one constructs the world. The process of paying attention and the view one has of reality form, and are formed by, each other. Therefore, the question of where my attention is directed, and where that of the participants is directed is of considerable interest to me. Moreover, how this quality of attention (both mine and the participants') changes is of considerable importance in my practice. And part of where my attention is drawn is to noticing, and, where helpful, pointing to, where *my participants' attention* is drawn.

My own attention is also drawn differently to my intentions. The notion of organisation, and even the mind, as ongoing processes of interaction, has directed my attention differently, and affected my understanding of what I am doing when I am teaching, or consulting. The fixation on goals, which may distract attention from the present interactions, is overshadowed (if not entirely supplanted) by attention to, and presence in, ongoing interactions: 'There is no *result* of process but only a moment *in process*' (Follett, 1924, p60, quoted in Weick, 1995, p33). There is still a role for intentions, but I like to think that I hold them more lightly and do not allow them to draw me out of the present. It is in action in the moment, in participating in and paying attention to the 'living present', (including reflexively paying attention to one's own emerging thoughts), that one discovers one's own intentions.

I now view more clearly the myriad interactions in my professional practice as a setting for learning. The learning which I wish the participant to gain in respect of leadership will occur in a way that is particular to her, potentially influenced by me. I am also part of the



process and I am also learning, gaining new meaning continuously in the same process. As all interaction is potentially a setting for learning, I increasingly value the 'mundane' settings, seeing in them the potential for a rich and complex process rather than simply a 'flat' transaction of thoughts. Where I have the opportunity to design a workshop I am now more likely to make space for interaction.

### *On conflict*

Both Mead and Elias emphasise the importance of conflict in coming to new meaning. Stacey emphasises the role of misunderstanding in communicative interaction in prompting the search for new understanding. It is conflict which gives rise to further attempts to make sense of a situation, both among people and for an individual in his silent conversation, his "mind". In my case, for example, the conflict I experienced between the theory which I was teaching, and the exercise of professional practice has given rise to the inquiry of this thesis. Not all conflict is similar or equally valuable. Phillips speaks of 'vital conflict' (2002, p18) indicating the health of an individual or an organisation in their capacity to deal with the everyday experience of difference and misunderstanding; and of aggression as a kind of conflict which suppresses vital conflict. An ideology of control, or of the primacy of theory, seems to me now like this type of aggression: it attempts to homogenise and distract from that which gives rise to new ideas.

Equally, the vital conflict which my participants experience is at the heart of the process which will potentially give rise to new meaning for them, as well as for me. In my practice I now pay attention to the context in which conflict arises and work with it.

*What is different about what I have produced and why does it matter to practice?*

I have approached leadership from an individual-centred rather than a group-centred point of view: I have moved from viewing the question of leadership as being 'how can the will of an individual become the desire of the group', which I see as a theoretical cul-de-sac, to 'how can the emerging desire of the group be influenced by any member of the group?' I have argued that what is ultimately of concern in leadership is its shared coherence of meaning, a group phenomenon. What is crucial is how that coherence arises; I argue that it arises from the communicative interaction of the members of a group; leadership is the skilled participation in this process. That is, I have explained the approach to a group goal (shared coherence) in terms of a group process, not an individual process, which is the starting point of the mainstream theories against which I contrast my views.

I have argued that the skill of leadership, the capacity to influence an emergent process of meaning making, is a kind of knowing, a type of practical knowledge, which can be described, but not reduced to essential technical principles. Therefore, it can not be gained through any conventional teaching process, which is what is attempted in much management development practice, but can only be learned in the context of practice.

I have argued that the development of this knowledge (i.e. skill of leadership) is itself an emergent process, which can be influenced by another person, a teacher, but not controlled. Thus, one who would be

a teacher of leaders, must possess a version of those self-same skill of influence; the skills of influencing an emergent process of meaning.

I have linked the theory of complex responsive processes to Group Analysis as a way of understanding both the skills of leadership and the role of a teacher in developing leadership. I have explored and described these skills. The value of this is that it answers the question of how one gains influence in complex responsive processes, while maintaining the explanation, afforded by the theory, of how novelty arises. Thus, the theory can be seen to be more relevant to the practice of managers, as well as to teachers of managers.

I have demonstrated a role for mainstream theories of management within the context of complex responsive processes, thus enhancing the potential value of both to managers.

Overall, I have demonstrated an approach to learning which is grounded in participants' own experience, which is thus self-authenticating and more likely to give rise to changed practice than learning based on traditional didactic processes. This is not a technique which can be applied, but is a way of understanding interaction as an opportunity for learning. The principal value of this lies in its very mundaneness; it is a way of understanding all contexts of interaction as potential contexts for learning what cannot be taught.

**PAPER ONE: A reflective narrative, weaving together the influences and experiences that form my current practice in organisations, including my learning from the programme. (December 2000)**

This paper traces my career and life experiences and attempts to identify those events which have affected my current professional practice. I have dwelt on critical phases or incidents and offered insights (sometimes more than one for a given incident) into how these aspects of my “past” may enact themselves in my “present”. In particular, I shall highlight and explore those issues which remain unresolved: ‘...the *feeling* of order, clarity, and rationality is an important goal of sensemaking, which means that once this feeling is achieved, further retrospective processing stops.’ (Weick, 1995, p29)

I am employed as a senior faculty member of the Irish Management Institute in Dublin. The Institute is a national not-for-profit membership organisation whose members include almost all private sector firms in the country and a number of state-owned trading organisations. The principal activity of the IMI is to provide management education, training and development to its members through a range of programmes ranging in duration from three days to three years.

One of my principal tasks is to direct the Executive Development Programme, an 18-day programme directed at mid-level managers. My principal responsibilities are to design, manage and teach on this programme. The principal subject areas in which I teach are strategy and leadership. I also contribute in these subject areas on programmes directed by colleagues at IMI.

The theme that fascinates me, and that I intend to pursue in this paper is that of leadership, especially at strategic level. The attraction of complexity theory is that it potentially offers a fresh perspective on leadership, especially at a time when assumptions about the nature of leadership in a turbulent environment are changing rapidly. What complexity theory appears to offer is not so much a way of “doing leadership”, as of understanding organisations in a different way, especially where and how novelty arises, and, therefore, understanding the role of a leader in a different way.

When I began to think about why I found it so difficult to start writing this paper, I wondered if the reluctance itself might offer some insight into what I needed to write about. Weick says that sensemaking is partially under the control of expectations. What were the (partly unconscious) expectations I had about a paper which sought to explore the streams of experience and learning which have led to my current practice? I felt that if I could begin to understand these expectations I could also begin to understand, if not untangle, this knot.

In trying to conceptualise my career trajectory to date, there seemed to be two strands; one, which I call the Rational, derives from my education and short career as an engineer, MBA studies and general attraction to the world of explicable causality; the other, which I term the Related, derives from an instinct to connect with and explore my own relatedness to others, and has been developed through the formal study of counselling, group analysis and human relations.

I had considered titling this paper “Rationality Vs Relatedness” to express the internal conflict I experienced in trying to determine where my loyalty really lay. I had an image of these two themes as a type of double helix – intertwining, but never meeting. So, immediately, I had set up my thinking as a kind of polarity – “either/or”. I had attempted to make sense of my past by characterising it as a dichotomy. Growing up in the Ireland of the 1950’s and 1960’s had the effect of attuning me to the expectations of a deeply conservative society and, moreover, of teaching me how to “flow” with the received wisdoms while not fully buying into them. Two separate worlds were set up; the one, external, determined and determining; the other, internal, with a growing sense of self-awareness, wonder about my identity and concern about my place in the world. I did not easily find links between the two; I could not easily find my voice, and, so could not easily bridge the worlds. I learned to hold different worlds in mind at the same time without reconciling them (or, ultimately, even wanting to). This echoes the characteristic Irish tolerance of (or, in my view, *need for*) ambiguity. I had created an existence in which the internal and external were irreconcilably different and experienced as opposites.

I have always experienced a strong sense of loss about this, principally due to a sense of missed opportunity to explore, develop and, above all, enjoy my identity. In the light of this, I have the experience, as I write this, that it is no accident that my choice of career has led me to a situation where I attempt to make reparation for this loss, via the experience of others.

It is equally evident to me that this task is not complete; as I write, I am also aware of a misplaced concern that my interpretation of these

events will, in some way, not be validated. The gulf between my worlds is still active. So, I am familiar with dichotomies and gulfs; less so with attempts to allow one world to enter the other, and each to find its place.

What is the attraction of a dichotomy? An incident occurred while writing this paper which gave me some insight. I was conducting a workshop with a large group of engineers of many different European nationalities, all of whom had been recruited to a large organisation with the preceding 18 months. The purpose of the workshop was to reflect on their experience of the job and organisation so far, and to consider the steps necessary for the success of their careers. In order to begin the process of reflection, I posed two questions: what have you appreciated about your experience so far? And what are you still struggling with? The insight came when I considered what almost all of them did with these questions; they wrote down two columns headed "positive points" and "negative points" about the organisation. The subsequent discussion strongly gravitated towards what the management should do about it all, and the powerlessness of their own situation.

The question which I had posed was intended to relate to the subjective experience of a complex environment. It had been translated to evaluate the organisation rather than reflect on experience, to deal with complexity by simplifying it into crude polarities rather than entering the experience. Why did this happen? Certainly the effects of their engineering training (with which I had a lot of sympathy) would provide some predisposition towards this way of dealing with this type of question in this way. In my view, this response dealt with the

anxiety of a complex and potentially overwhelming life experience by translating it into a more manageable and less threatening scheme of interpretation. Similarly, I am aware of a theme in my life of dealing with the anxiety of experience and relationship by creating irreconcilable polarities. I see this as an aspect of unsure identity (I am reminded painfully of the tragedies of Northern Ireland and the Middle East).

My own search for a scheme to contain, if not entirely explain, my way of being is another troubling instinct. I relate this to another group of concerns that what I produce here will be evaluated and found to be "wrong" with respect to an orthodox body of theory, and that my own interpretation of my experiences may, in some sense, be less valid. There is a temptation to make this paper into a kind of "Who am I?", as if that identity were fixed, and so the process becomes a kind of psycho-social treasure hunt. 'Identities are constituted out of the processes of interaction' (Weick, 1995, p20); in this paper I am interacting with myself, first of all, in a process of continual becoming ("Who am I becoming?"). Finally, my dilemma about which aspect is the "true" me, with whom I must validly dialogue, reminds me of an episode of a TV programme in which the hero enters a mirror-maze in search of a villain. While he can see and dialogue with the villain, his dilemma is to discern which, among all the images, is the *real* person. My way out of this dilemma is to see this paper as a dialogue with all aspect of me as they emerge i.e. to place the debate in Mead's "parliament of selves"(Mead, 1934).

How could I explain the influences on my current practice to you, the reader, when I could not explain them to myself? In other words, I



wanted to know clearly and, above all, *in advance* what the outcome of this paper would be before it was written.

At the start of my career, I entered the profession of civil engineering with mixed feelings. My ambivalence about the job may have clouded the value of the experience. Entering an industry and its culture, learning the discipline of production and business and finding my place in it was an overwhelming experience. In addition to the predictable challenges of learning and fitting in, I now try to make sense of that experience by viewing it as an enforced journey of discovery of myself. This process of discovery occurred in attempting to relate to multiple aspects of my new existence; colleagues, clients, and the work itself.

In retrospect, I believe that, in common with many people starting work, I experienced a type of 'reality shock' as I encountered the true nature of the move to starting a career and taking responsibility for it. It was more than a straightforward process of detached technical learning; it was a highly symbolic and significant event. Schein (1978, p68) says that this type of task "may precipitate the person into a novel situation and may require new internal emotional learning, new interpersonal responses, and the building of new relationships". Although I was becoming effective on the job, I was clear that I did not want to get into the "groove" of a predictable career track so early.

I felt strongly drawn to work in a developing country and I struggled to make sense of this desire. The image which suggests itself to make sense of this craving is the idea of the "rite of passage". Bly (1993) proposes that the absence of any form of testing ritual for men to mark

the transition to manhood in Western society results in a sense of loss; an uncertainty about the point at which one takes up the role of potent adult male and relinquishes the role of child; and that this loss of clear transition can result in an unresolved and enduring doubt about the authentic "adult" identity of oneself.

Was this desire, then, about the need to develop and express my own identity (or identities)? In a tribal society, a rite of passage typically involves a young man, under the supervision of older men, undertaking a challenge and/or enduring certain hardships. In the process of the ritual, the young man's identity is reconstructed in relation to his society and, thereby, to himself. The process of reconstruction is itself, dialogical; that is, it consists of changing internal and external dialogues which are prompted by the *action* of the ritual. The renegotiation of the identity arises from the doing; this renegotiation is iterative and reflexive: the newly created identity creates further action which gives rise to further dialogues and changed senses of identity.

In order to prepare for a new life in a new culture I attended a one-week workshop which provided a totally new experience of learning. Included in the cascade of new experiences was an entirely different experience of authority, exemplified by the workshop conductors; a new and initially puzzling learning style characterised by exploration and the validation of the importance of subjective experience; the (for me) new experience of being able to question openly assumptions around my life. It is clear that the impact of the workshop related not only to its ostensible purpose, the opportunity to think about spending two years in a developing country. The style of the workshop had an

extraordinarily strong sense of being real, challenging and vitalising. I sensed the opportunity to develop new selves. I had been educated at an all-male Roman Catholic school, studied engineering immediately afterwards with little real question about career choice, and grown up in a society which was still dominated by an austere Catholic ethos, perhaps mostly tellingly characterised by what was absent: debate, wonder, drive and a sense of autonomous selfhood.

Finding one's place in a learning community involves finding one's voice, and it is in the risk of finding one's voice that one finds aspects of oneself, and begins to extend one's thinking into the realm of imagination. It involves exploring the nature of difference and separateness. It involves holding one's difference in the face of other difference and doing it in an uncompetitive way. For me wondering involves questioning as well as imagination. To do this requires a liberty which is taken rather than given.

Discovering and shaping those parts of one's drives which apply to the executive function come as a result of action, as well as reflection. For me it was in taking action, in career choices for example, that I found some of my specific drives (which is partly what this paper is about). Similarly, I attempt to create an environment where action is part of a learning experience, and the uncovered drive is experienced as expressive of a developing self.

For me, personal autonomy is strongly linked with a growing (i.e. potentially increasing as well as changing) sense of selfhood. It is in relating to the encounters, dilemmas and choices of a life that sense of self is developed, not in having those events occur. That is, it is in how

we make sense of what happened, what we did, and even how the situation and the self created each other, that we get a look at ourselves. Part of my work asks participants to look at significant events in their lives, mostly in their working lives, and to try to make different kinds of sense of those. One of the principal and recurring themes is the extent to which they feel managed by circumstances. I sometimes conceive of this type of work as a journey "from dependence to autonomy" (Miller, 1993)

I went to live in Bangladesh where I worked as an engineer in housing, road construction and the provision of water supply. After twelve months I moved to Thailand where I took on responsibility for the construction of refugee camps for Cambodian refugees. I begin to make sense of this period, therefore, as an attempt not to discover a single, fixed identity, ("he's gone to find himself") but rather a response to a natural drive to develop and explore multiple changing identities ("he's gone to create his selves"). The experience of working with groups of people, often under circumstances of extreme pressure had a impact on how I viewed leadership, which has found its way into my current work. My working definition of leadership is: the art of working with a constituency to assist them in identifying, understanding and making progress with difficult situations.

In my view, a large part of the journey of the development of a leader involves understanding the self. This includes gaining some insight to how one deals with ambiguous, unstructured situations and begins to define what the critical issues are in a situation. Part of the art of leadership is in not jumping into premature problem definition, but rather, in holding open the space for multiple perspectives to emerge

before proceeding to finding a way forward. This includes being able to tolerate the anxiety that inevitably accompanies this stance. Another potentially anxiety provoking aspect of leadership is the need, at times, to exert authority more directly; this involves the need to claim one's own authority within oneself, first.

Gaining an understanding of oneself as a leader also involves learning about the ways in which one's way of being or thinking can impede the work of leadership. For example, if one has a tendency to deal with the anxiety of an ambiguous situation by reducing its complexity to familiar or manageable dimensions, rather than by understanding its true nature, then the chances of success for that leader may be seriously diminished. Therefore, in developing leaders, I seek to assist them in gaining an understanding of their typical reactions to difficult situations, and thereby gaining an insight into themselves. One of the greatest challenges in this is to "lure" the participants into the process, and away from an understandable reluctance to reflect, to relate differently, and ultimately let go of ideas of fixity and unchanging views of self-identity.

The experience of entering and working in a new culture has been a regular experience in my career, and has had, in my view, an effect which is profound, but difficult to trace. It is profound because, unlike the experience of the tourist, one does not have the choice of dealing with the culture or retiring to one's cultural sanctuary (the Hilton), or of dealing only with those aspects of the culture which are attractive. Therefore, one is obliged to deal with the new culture in its entirety if one is to work effectively. It involves the commitment of a large part of oneself to understanding the new situation, and to controlling one's

own reactions (often adverse). It is difficult to trace because it includes subtle, pervasive influences as well as manifest phenomena. I have often had the experience of a friend or colleague commenting on some aspect of my behaviour or outlook, and realising that it had been influenced by exposure to another culture. If exposure to foreign cultures could have this effect on me, how much more could my own culture have made me who I am?

I believe that a cultural environment with which one grows up offers reference points to know where one is in relation to principal features and cues for making sense of new events. The important feature of this is that this cultural landscape is built up largely outside of awareness, and therein lies the potential power of the loss of part of that landscape. The impact may be temporary confusion, whose extent is dependent on both the degree of loss and the resilience of the subject. Resilience in this case being the history of the subject in relation to previous loss of reference points.

On my return from the developing world, I worked for a government agency in the field of industrial development. I felt somewhat conflicted about this role, given the more philanthropic nature of my earlier career. Initially, true to my earlier form, I dichotomised my internal debate on this issue into a struggle between 'doing good' and 'doing business', and tortured myself by wondering where I belonged. Despite my initial distaste for the businesslike style of private enterprise, I enjoyed the clarity and freshness of its rigour. I began to see that they could serve themselves as well as meet the needs of others.

After completing an MBA, I joined the faculty of the Irish Management Institute. In addition to teaching strategy, my duties included conducting workshops for client organisations. I immediately sensed that I was out of my depth in dealing with the dynamics of the group situation, and knew that if I was to continue at this endeavour, I would have to develop some skill in this area. I enrolled in a training programme in Group Analysis<sup>7</sup>, and this experience provided a profound, but initially disorienting learning experience.

At the outset, I felt that it would be better if someone had *explained* everything first and then given us a chance to learn how to 'do it' before doing the real thing. It was next to impossible for me to see the value of subjective experience *in the moment* as a forum for learning and growth. My engineering mind struggled with the strange notion that what needed to be dealt with would emerge in the matrix of the group; why not plan it? More than anything I struggled with the need to be fully present and available to the rest of the group. It took me a long time really to be able to trust the group, to disclose my feelings, and to really work my issues in that setting. Like most of us there, I suspect, I never got past the strong ambivalence about being there; it was so churning and yet so rewarding.

I find it surprisingly difficult to articulate exactly what I gained from the experience that has relevance to the task of developing leadership. This is not because that influence is not present, but because the experience of Group Analysis was, for me, so subtle and profound that it seems to have influenced some part of me that is beyond my

---

<sup>7</sup> The theory and relevance of Group Analysis are explored principally in the Synopsis and in Papers Three and Four of this portfolio.

immediate awareness. It is almost as if the learning from that period had bypassed my intellect and gone straight to my intuition. I am more aware than ever of the ways in which the actions and presence of the group conductor have affected my own understanding of my rôle in working with groups. On reflection, it is an extraordinarily subtle form of learning to feel the quiet reassuring presence of a special person in the group whose task it is to maintain her own awareness of the group and gently bring this to the attention of the group, often despite the wishes of the group not to hear. Through experiencing the power of this, and through continuous example, I feel that I absorbed something of the professional stance of the group conductor.

The experience of Group Analysis shifted my view on personal and professional development in quite a fundamental way. In summary, I moved from being an “interferer” to being an enabler. That is, I moved from seeing my job as being concerned with “doing things” to people, to helping them to find their own paths through a process of challenge and support. To be sure, I found this new stance at first a little less heroic until I began to trust the process and see the results. These days in my job, I look on in silent horror when I see attempts to “change” people from the outside without any space for them to find their own way.

In 1995, after two years of the Group Analysis programme, a fellow student interested me in a new two-year programme starting at the Tavistock Institute in Advanced Organisational Consultation<sup>8</sup>. The programme was aimed at professional consultants and teachers. It was

---

<sup>8</sup> The theory and practice of the Tavistock Institute approach are explored in the Synopsis and in Paper Four of this Portfolio.



built on the three pillars of consulting competence, organisational study and psychodynamics. Inevitably, the programme had a strong, but not exclusive, leaning towards the Tavistock style of interpretation, and the group of 15 students, plus three core faculty, studied its own dynamics as part of the learning process.

In addition to learning a huge amount from the programme on a professional front, I felt quite changed in my outlook and in my sense of self. A recurring issue for me in the programme, and a great source of learning, was the taking up of my personal authority. This included the authority to wonder, question and simply speak. That this should be an issue at all is a phenomenon I relate to the culture pertaining in my country during my early life (which I have explored earlier) and possibly to my place in my family (fifth of seven).

It was during this programme that I first encountered the theories of Chaos and Complexity on a one-day workshop led by Ralph Stacey. The ideas presented appealed to me very strongly on an intuitive level; they offered a way of understanding organisational phenomena which, for me at least, had lain outside of any acceptable frame of understanding. Moreover, they began to help me to understand that two previously (apparently) unconnected aspects of my professional interests: on the one hand the world of business organisation and its restless and uncompromising need for novelty and innovation, on the other, my intense interest in the field of human relations. I shall explore this further in the next section.

To give a simple example, one of the ideas I try to get across is the inevitability and necessity for chaos in projects. This initially comes as

a surprise to many participants, whose expectations may be that the concepts and techniques of projects will act as some kind of magical "black box" which will structure their work and remove all uncertainty. Instead, I introduce them to a view where the disciplines of project management are a necessary, but not sufficient, part of the role of a project manager. In addition, I propose that projects are always chaotic; by definition they are tasks which are unique, and therefore, in large part, unknowable in advance. The allusion to the concept of chaos is helpful in explaining that many projects tend, on the one hand, towards a state of utter confusion as uncertainties in the operating environment get played out. Actions have unintended consequences and significant players in the project interpret and respond to events in their own unique ways.

My encounter with complexity theory helped me to place in perspective the roles of constraining disciplines and the simultaneous need for responsiveness to unpredictable events. Stacey (1992) describes how, as the sensitivity of a non-linear feedback like a business is increased, it passes from stable equilibrium through a zone of "bounded instability" before it becomes explosively unstable. It is in this zone that a system may display its greatest responsiveness to changing conditions, its greatest capacity for novelty.

I propose that the management of the project must be kept in the zone of 'bounded instability' with enough structure, procedures and systems to contain and direct the work, but not so much that it loses its capacity to adapt to the changing reality of the project. The significant learning for me in working with this approach is that I have personally moved an approach to management which was expressed as a kind of

high-minded belief in flexibility, participation and self-determination (which I now believe was an expression of my typical counter-dependence in authority relations) to being able to sustain the paradox of simultaneous flexibility and control (Stacey, 1992).

Another important element, which I introduce into the management matrix, is an approach to control which is characterised by rapid real-time learning rather than the more familiar sense of oppression. "The activity of learning in a group is itself a form of control" (Stacey, 1992). I encourage participants to see that part of their task in managing the project is to encourage project members to learn, to recognise that they are learning, and that this is an essential activity in the control and management of the project. Without this learning, the project will become subject to increasingly outmoded views of what is relevant and how to proceed.

In effect, what I have described above is an approach to project leadership, a way of finding a unique and powerful role for the manager of projects, and in which learning not only enables the project team to keep pace with the constantly changing chaos of the project, but over time, enhances their overall capacity to deal with ever more complex situations. I have learned to introduce this perspective *in addition* to the traditional structural view of management, not *instead* of it.

My learning at the Institute of Group Analysis and at the Tavistock Institute have found their way into my approach on a number of levels. I have described earlier in this paper the impact on my general outlook and practice of this learning. In summary, my approach to the design of the Executive Development Programme has been to create an

environment or a 'container' where complex learning can take place. My task is to take up a leadership role somewhat similar to that which I described above for Project Leadership.

The particular question which I struggle with and which I intend to explore in the next paper is how the way in which managers learn can help them to take up their roles at work, or may constrain them. My experience has been that capable managers, upon re-entering the classroom after many years' absence, will appear to trigger archaic memories of learning environments and lapse into an almost sullen passivity. They appear to characterise learning and being taught as equivalents; they tend to evaluate the teachers and the learning experience solely as commercial commodities. How can managers learn to engage in complex learning among themselves when they find it so hard to get beyond a model of learning which is detached, consumerist and evaluative?

**PAPER TWO: Management Ideology and Executive Education:  
A Journey of Artistry or Futile Search for Power and Control:  
(March 2001)**

**Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to make sense of my involvement with the Executive Development Programme at the Irish Management Institute, from the standpoint of complexity theory. It attempts to recount the ways in which I have attempted to shape this programme, and have, in turn, been shaped by it; how, in attempting to help managers move to a different level of thought and a different quality of action I have moved also, and am still moving.

Business practice has traditionally been conceived of primarily in terms of instrumental problem solving. Mainstream professional business education has, thus, focussed on imparting technical knowledge based on knowledge grounded in the theories, technologies and techniques developed in the basic and applied sciences (Curry and Wegin, 1993)

This sort of mainstream thinking pervades the institution where I work, as it does most schools of business. It does not adequately prepare my students for the kinds of situations they face in their practice, particularly problems associated with change, because it deals only with one type of knowledge and fails to provide them with the “know-how” embedded in practical reasoning and problem solving. In this paper I will argue that the kind of “know-how” needed for the ‘messy’ situations facing executives is the capacity to engage with these situations and others involved with a readiness to explore and respond to changing understanding of the situation. I will also argue that

'mainstream thinking', as described above, forms a type of ideology which is self-perpetuating, both in business and in business schools.

In what follows I do six things:

- First, I account for my interest in a view of management and management development which is somewhat different from mainstream thinking.
- Second, I provide the context by describing the organisation within which I work, the Irish Management Institute, and I discuss my particular role in the institution.
- Third, I identify the specific challenge facing me and illustrate the point with a vignette.
- Fourth, I discuss the types of learning suited to current management needs.
- Fifth, I discuss the role of programme participants' ideologies.
- Finally, I discuss the role of ideology in IMI.

## The origins of my interest in this topic

When I began this work I had just graduated with my MBA and felt armed and ready to take on the world of business. My tasks included conducting strategy workshops with client organisations where the objective was to help the client to develop strategic approaches, while, at the same time, helping them to learn to do it by themselves the next time. I quickly found that the concepts I brought from this learning were of limited value to the actual experiences of my clients. What all these theories had in common was that they emphasised the same broad, rational approach of analysis, prescription and implementation, implicitly based on the same concepts of reliable data, an unchanging environment and a knowable future. One of the principal difficulties was not in identifying the correct solution for their 'problems', but in dealing with the fact that, in general, the problems they faced could not be classed in any way that made them amenable to a pre-determined 'solution'.

At first, I attributed my lack of success to inexperience with the models and discounted my own experience. Gradually, I began to notice that what made a difference to sessions with clients was a rich interplay in the workshop between the content and conceptual models of the discussion on the one hand, and the process of the group on the other. In particular, I noticed that what appeared most valuable at the end of a session, in terms of bringing the group to progress an issue or even achieve a breakthrough, were ideas and themes which had somehow 'emerged' from the conversation within the group. I noticed that many

of these themes could not have been intended or predicted by me as the facilitator.

Initially, I tended to locate the source of these ideas in one, or perhaps two, individuals and attributed it to what Schön (1983) calls 'artistry', a kind of innate skill. Personally, I began to rely more on my intuition with a group and less on forcing the issues through the 'sausage machine' of some strategy model. In particular, I found myself paying increasing attention to the process of the group interaction, noticing how creative and developmental the group could be with minimal assistance from me. The shorthand I used to describe this type of productive work was to say that the group went 'live'. By this I mean that the members of the group were present in a way that enabled them to work with the themes of discussion *as they developed* in the moment. My concept of my own role changed from a bringer of solutions to someone who would guide a group in an exploration of its own issues, as those issues developed. My curiosity about group processes led me to undertake training in Group Analysis which further developed my thinking, as attested to in the first paper in this portfolio.

I developed a view of management and organisation development in which the process of interaction was at least as important as the content, and where the two often shaped each other. I found it difficult to describe this outlook to colleagues and clients, partly because I lacked a conceptual vocabulary to articulate something I felt intuitively, and partly because the 'mainstream' perspective from which they were listening tended to deconstruct executive education into strategic analysis, process consulting and other categories



unconnected with each other. Colleagues occasionally found it difficult to fit my outlook and work into mainstream categories, although clients more often recognised the value of my approach without necessarily being able to describe it.

My search for a theoretical scheme to make sense of this experience has led me to the study of complexity theory. Stacey *et al.* (2000) propose that Complex Adaptive Systems could provide an analogy for understanding the overall patterning of behaviour in social systems, although the interaction between the 'agents' would not simply follow invariable rules. In the case of social systems, the agents would be the themes of communication or discussion within a group, and the localised interaction between themes could give rise to a discernible patterning of the themes at work in the group as a whole. The patterning may vary little, if at all, over time, or it may result in a significant change in the group. To describe this social analogue, he has coined the phrase 'complex responsive processes in organisations'. In effect, he has pointed to the significance of localised conversation and its role in shaping the outlook and consequent behaviour of a social grouping, such as an organisation. What is important is that the patterning is an 'emergent property' (Stacey *et al.*, 2000) of the group, and is not centrally controlled or intended.

This echoed strongly with my own experience and intuitive sense of what was important in addressing issues of change in organisations. It helped me to see that much of what happens in organisations is not the result of management intentions, nor is it necessarily within the control of the management even when it comes to their attention. Management

in organisations is, in effect, a paradox: it is in control and out of control at the same time (Streatfield, 2002)

### The central argument

The central argument of this paper is that mainstream thinking about management has not helped my students to deal with change in their organisations because it deals with one side of a paradox: it deals only with what is controllable, both in terms of problem definition and the prescription of solutions, and does not recognise that *at the same time*, a large part of their jobs are outside their control. In seeking to prepare managers to deal with change, executive education compounds the problem in two ways. Firstly, it repeats mainstream thinking as its content, i.e. it propounds and reinforces its own ideology of management as a form of control. Secondly, it acts out its own ideology in the teaching process by implicitly viewing the process of teaching about management as itself a type of controllable management process.

In this paper I have applied the term 'ideology' to mainstream thinking about management. I use the term to mean a 'shared, relatively coherently interrelated set of emotionally charged beliefs, values, and norms that bind people together and help them to make sense of their worlds' (Trice and Beyer, 1993, p33). It is a standpoint from which managers make sense of their complex situations, and one to which, in my experience, they cling to quite tightly. I use the term 'ideology' to denote the level of psychological 'investment' which adherents of mainstream thinking have in particular, and to explain the strength of their resistance to alternative views which may involve a loss of control.

The ethos of the IMI has always been the *practice* of management. Teaching faculty are predominantly recruited from practising business managers. The predominant professions represented in the teaching faculty of the IMI have been engineers (including me) and psychologists. This is reflected not only in the origins of the organisation and its faculty, but also its governance. The members of the IMI, corporate and individual, elect a 46-member Council which meets four times per year to receive reports and make their needs known. The Council selects an Executive Committee which functions as a Board of Directors.

One of the paradoxes of the governance of the Institute is this: the proven talent and capability of the Board is not necessarily translated into a similar level of success for the Institute. Why is this? My belief is that, in common with most successful executives, these people work in their daily management challenges on both sides of the management paradox described above, but do so largely unconsciously; when asked, they consciously attribute their success to explicit acts of control-based management as described above as mainstream thinking, occasionally mixed with general aspects of character. When asked to contribute to the governance of a management institute, it is no surprise that they conceptualise the task of the organisation in terms of mainstream management.

I currently direct the Executive Development Programme, an 18-day programme spread over six months which is directed at mid-career executives. The subjects covered include strategy, marketing, finance,

leadership, communication and quality management. The guiding idea was that it was intended for people who needed, but did not have the time to attend, an MBA programme. The task of the Programme is to assist managers in preparing themselves to take up senior roles in their organisations, and, as I put it, to be able to take part in the “strategic debate” in the organisation. Participants have been drawn from a wide variety of industries. The programme originally consisted of five one-week sessions. It now consists of six three-day sessions.

When I got the job of directing this programme in 1994, I examined its title – Executive Development Programme – and tried to understand the task by deconstructing its title. What are executives and how do they add value? What is development as distinct from training or education? What is a programme: how do managers learn, and especially learn anything useful?

### **The story of Bob**

The purpose of this section is to illustrate how my encounters with managers have led me to my current state of thinking about management ideology. The story related is similar to experiences I have had with the majority of managers I have worked with or interviewed. After narrating the story, I reflect on the nature of managerial thinking, particularly from the standpoint of complexity theories.

Part of my approach to the EDP is to try to understand the issues currently facing managers by meeting them in their environments, listening to them and learning from them so that I can design the

programme for the greatest possible relevance to practising managers. It was this that led me to talk with Bob. He is in his late 50's and has been with the same global-name IT manufacturer for his entire career. He is the CEO of the local operation, with approximately 5,000 staff. At the time of this story, Bob had been serving on the board of the IMI for two years.

When I took over the direction of the EDP I knew that I would need to talk to executives like Bob to gain an insight into the management challenges facing his firm, and what he would expect from a programme such as the EDP, were he to send one of his managers. By any standards, Bob was clearly a successful business executive and leader of his firm. Business results were very healthy, his parent company had favoured the Irish site over their other European sites with significant investment, and regular climate surveys indicated a high level of staff satisfaction with his leadership. He seemed like an ideal advisor and possible contributor to the Programme.

I felt that the best use of Bob's valuable time might be to lay out my ideas about the renewal of the EDP, the issues to be dealt with in the Programme, the learning methods to be used and the overall expected outcomes for a participant in the Programme. When the meeting started (punctually) Bob agreed with my proposed approach and indicated that he would listen to my ideas and then comment, in a kind of 'stream of consciousness' unstructured response. I delivered my impromptu talk, occasionally writing the principal points on a flipchart. Apart from occasional questions of clarification, he listened quietly. After I had spoken, he responded with some astute comments and further questions about my thinking. He gave me a clear insight

-into the requirements of his firm from the management development process.

In reviewing the meeting afterwards in my own mind, and with the help of my notes, I found myself able to re-enter the flow of the meeting and even to be able to continue to build on the ideas we had discussed. I was struck by the quantity and quality of the ideas which had come out of the meeting. Certainly, many of the ideas were not new. However, many of the ideas were subtly nuanced by Bob, and connected to other ideas in a way that gave me a rich picture of his working context, and the contribution that executive education might make to it.

Some months later, I asked Bob to contribute to the Programme as a guest speaker, and he willingly agreed. I was very pleased to be able to list him on the Programme brochure as a contributor as this would clearly add to the status and attractiveness of the programme; in fact, he was the weightiest contributor, my 'star turn'. In advance of his contribution, I explained what I wanted him to do. I asked him simply to tell a story and not to try to teach, just have a conversation with the participants. Bob described his own situation and his outlook as an executive, illustrated with a number of stories. The participants rated his contribution very highly, and found it relevant to their own situations.

Not long after this first contribution, disaster struck Bob's company. It reported huge losses on its worldwide operations. The company had to cut costs, lay off staff and radically re-orient its operations. The Irish site was to bear its fair share of cuts and changes. From others in the

-company I learned that the company had been placed on a 'war footing' with Bob at its centre. The following two years saw tough decisions being made with painful changes in the company. I learned that Bob was personally engaged in an intense programme of communicating the changes in face-to-face sessions with groups of staff. The intense effort paid off and the firm began to come around to profitability and increased responsiveness to customers. Bob's leadership role began to be recognised in the change effort.

When the Executive Development Programme came around again after Bob's first contribution, he offered to do the session again, and I accepted. I was surprised at his offer, since the firm was in the midst of an intense change process, and mentioned this to him. He said it was helpful to his own thinking to get away from the situation for a while and talk out his story to a disinterested group. He arrived for the session just in time and simply told the story of what was going on in the company, and what it was like as a manager in the middle of it all. This new group of participants rated his contribution very highly.

The following year, the change in the firm was well on course and Bob said he felt he had learned so much that a 90-minute session would not do justice to what he wanted to say. He asked for a half-day with the participants, which I agreed to. This time, he arrived well in advance of his allotted time, equipped with impressive slides prepared by his firm's PR department. In addition to telling the story of the change, this time from a distance and with less passion, he theorised about the change, and how the learning might be applied to other situations. The storytelling had none of the freshness and compelling quality of the previous sessions; it felt stylised and rehearsed. The theoretical part of

his presentation was simplistic and did not plausibly make sense of the successful change in the company. Bob was teaching. He explicitly attributed the success of the change effort to the pre-planned efforts of a small number of managers, with him at the top.

The story of Bob exemplifies a phenomenon which I have encountered with many managers, both in their business context and as students. When explaining the reasons for the success of their actions, or otherwise making sense of their working environment, their descriptions commonly emerge in the language of the rational, the predictable, the controllable. Yet, when actually carrying out their work, I notice the role of the 'non-rational' at work too; intuition, ability to relate, and an innate appreciation of the uncontrollable aspects of work. This is an example of what Schön refers to as 'artistry'. It is as if the manager knows at an intuitive level that her job is to contain the paradox of being in control and at the same time being out of control; managers clearly appreciate at the level of their lived experience that much of what is valuable in dealing with the demands of change emerges in 'real-time' interaction with colleagues, customers, suppliers, etc.

When Bob spoke to the class the first couple of times, he was in the middle of the change effort in his company. He told his story with his whole body; the words described not only the rationale of the story, they conveyed the commitment and the passion with which he engaged with the task. In describing the countless meetings he was having with all his staff on the change, it was clear that he was engaging with them in the same way. Moreover, he engaged with the class on questions he had not considered up to that point; his responses



were spontaneous and provoked further responses from the students. We were engaging with an executive in the exercise of all his faculties.

When the 'storm' abated in the firm Bob admitted he had learned a lot and would like to share it with us, hence the offer of a half-day. What was of note in his half-day was the ideology he used to make sense of his recent experiences, when obliged to do it formally. It emerged in 'management speak' – predict, design, control. The uncertainty about the possible success of many of the change initiatives where, in Bob's own earlier words, they had simply 'muddled through', was downplayed and the required outcome presented as an almost inevitable outcome of the pre-determined change process. Even the style of presentation was congruent with the message: measured, rational and, overall, less engaging.

The point of this story for the argument I am advancing in this paper is that, in my experience, successful executives often understand the reasons for their success from the standpoint of an ideology which rationalises, post hoc, their experience in terms of clear cause-and-effect relationships, and does not allow for the recognition of phenomena which emerge during the experience as a result of the interaction of individuals in real time at a local level. That is to say, the way in which experience is interpreted further strengthens this ideology. When a manager of the authority, experience and standing of Bob speaks it is inevitable that this ideology is re-created, and thus perpetuated. The ideology is to a great extent the outcome of rationalised success rather than explored failure. It is a tenet of this ideology that success is to be attended to more than failure.

## About practical knowledge, learning and ideology

In this section, I firstly consider the type of knowledge required for managerial practice and its relation to the real situations facing managers. Secondly, I consider how the process of learning may (or may not) be congruent with the ideology of the learners and their sponsors.

Oakeshott (1962) argues that two types of knowledge are needed for successful practice of any kind: "technical" and "practical". According to his definition, technical knowledge can be "precisely formulated" while practical knowledge cannot be easily described. Technical knowledge, he maintains, can be "formulated into rules which are, or may be deliberately learned", while practical knowledge is not susceptible of formulation of this kind (pp 7-8). Thus, only a part of the knowledge required for effective professional practice can be precisely formulated. Nevertheless, it is the kind of knowledge that tends to be valued, and programmes have focussed on imparting *only* this kind of knowledge.

Schön (1983, p20) observed that this type of 'professional knowledge is mismatched to the changing character of the situations of practice...the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of practice'. Schön describes the problems faced by managers as being of broadly two types. There are problems which are clear and which are amenable to pre-determined solutions. The other type of problem, or more accurately, situation, he describes as 'messy and indeterminate',

and as more commonly the one faced by executives. It is the outlook of the executive that determines what type of problem the situation is rendered into, often a type which will appeal to the executive's current range of skills. He uses the term 'artistry' to describe the range of tacit skills and intuition which enable the practitioner to deal with a messy situation, 'knowing more than we can say'. Schön remarks ironically: 'what aspiring practitioners need most to learn, professional schools seem least able to teach' (1987,p8).

Heifetz (1994) takes up Schön's distinction of problem types, referring to the former as 'technical' and the latter as 'adaptive', saying that the majority of problems faced by executives are adaptive. He views the essential skills of leadership in this situation as the capacity to recognise a problem as adaptive with no routine 'solution' and to assist the owners of the problem to explore it without escaping into technical pseudo-solutions. Essentially, he recognises the leader as having responsibilities in the task of dealing with the situation, but having the answer is not one of these responsibilities. A large part of his work points to the pitfalls of mainstream thinking in dealing with messy situations.

Viewed from a complexity standpoint, the above writers point to the paradoxical nature of the role of managers: having ownership of a situation while recognising that a useful approach to dealing with it can only arise from the interaction of those involved. I interpret Oakeshott's 'practical knowledge', Schön's 'artistry' and Heifetz's 'leadership' as involving the capacity to engage responsively with others in the living present while recognising that they cannot be in control of the outcome of this interaction.

Streatfield (2002) introduces the notion of paradox, stating that the manager's job is in control and out of control *at the same time*. Thus, he implicitly refutes Schön's separation of problem types, saying that all management situations simultaneously contain both. Therefore, the skill of a manager is not in the 'discernment' of different problem types (actually, in my view, a construction of problems, not an act of discernment of a pre-existing problem), but in the capacity to hold the paradox and work with it. This comes closest to describing my own ideology. When this is viewed from the standpoint of mainstream ideology it is understandable that it could be seen as vague, evasive and ineffective. Clegg *et al* (2002) explore the capacity for dealing with paradox without collapsing them into one pole or another, as an essential skill of leadership.

### **On learning**

Knowles (1984) is one of a number of writers who addressed the issue of adult learning. The essence of his contribution is to draw a distinction between the assumptions attending child learning (*pedagogy*) and adult learning (referred to as *andragogy*), and to suggest the implications for the design of learning events. Knowles commented on the assumptions underlying both approaches to learning, including the concept of the learner, the role of the learner's experience, readiness to learn and motivation to learn. Knowles' comment on the role of the learner in the traditional model is quite revealing:

Regarding the concept of the learner (and therefore, through conditioning in prior school experience, the learner's self-concept): The learner is by definition, a dependent personality, for the pedagogical model assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all the decisions about what should be

learned, how and when it should be learned, and whether it has been learned. (Knowles, 1984, p7)

Essentially, Knowles shifted the view of adult learning to see formal courses and the like as the more visible elements of a “learning iceberg”. Learning was viewed as occurring in all aspects of life. The task of a formal course could include making sense of experience so far, directly absorbing the knowledge of others and potentially creating new knowledge in conversation with others. Most notably, the experience of the learner, his/her current perception of learning needs and the overall power relationships in the learning situation were open to examination and renegotiation. In addition, little value is accorded to the learner’s experience, so the backbone of the pedagogical technique is transmission techniques – lectures, reading etc. Learners enter the process with a subject-centred orientation; learning is a process of acquiring prescribed subject matter content, in the logical order of the subject. Learners learn what they are told they have to learn to progress to the next level of learning. This model of learning is the one most of us experienced in our childhood and adolescent learning, and may have been appropriate to that phase. Knowles points out also that it may be appropriate for learning certain types of skills or information in adult life.

Contrast the view of adult learning, andragogy, whose underlying assumptions on the same topics are strikingly different:

The learner is self-directing. In fact, the psychological definition of adult is “One who has arrived at a self-concept of being responsible for one’s own life, of being self-directing.” When we have arrived at that point, we develop a deep psychological need to be perceived by others, and treated by others, as capable of taking responsibility for ourselves. (Knowles, 1984, p9)

What is striking for me about this is that in adult learning, the learner is working out of a sense of identity, expressing and exploring that identity in relationship with others. Learners' own experiences are seen as a fundamental resource for learning, and, so, approaches to learning need to involve much greater use of discussion, problem-solving and simulation. Adults become ready to learn when they experience a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively in the workplace. The orientation to learn is centred around being able to solve a problem or exploit an opportunity rather than learning a subject. Motivation to learn is seen as primarily intrinsic – self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life.

This raises an issue which is at the heart of my concerns about learning models, especially when used in executive education, namely power relations. The traditional model of learning seeks to vest power in the teacher, and to require the learner essentially to submit to this power. Elias sees the power imbalance as an aspect of the relationship between the teacher and the learner. One of the principal tools of that power relationship is shame, which can be invoked usually about the learner's relative ignorance on the subject matter. I believe that this model of learning, especially where inappropriately employed, develops not only the dispositions mentioned above, but also inculcates an implicit model of power relations which favours control over exploration. This is at the heart of the ideological difference I am describing in this paper between me and the traditional outlook of much of the executive education community.

The andragogical model, on the other hand, seeks to develop a power relationship model between teacher and learner which is not only more

equal, but contains the possibility for the development of knowledge and insights which neither party had before.

### **An insight to the ideology of the participants**

I argue below that it is not just the learning institution whose ideology may affect the nature and content of management learning, but that participants also join the programme already imbued with an ideology which may inhibit their learning to deal with messy changing situations.

In the case of participants, mainstream ideology manifests itself as a kind of pressure to become more powerful in the terms in which they understand power. Participants often disclose to me confidentially, or occasionally to the class, the weight of expectation they are experiencing from within, and from their employers. The power of the ideology from which they come to the programme is not just in how it shapes their thinking, but in the pressures it places on them to perform within the terms of that thinking. They have a view of management as a search for control of their areas of responsibility. Typically, being 'out of control' is taken as a sign of incompetence and can evoke considerable anxiety. Their desires from the programme are to learn how to gain a greater degree of control over their changing circumstances. Executive education is effectively a search for the levers of control.

In order to gain entry to the Executive Development Programme, the participant has been through selection procedures both at IMI and within her own firm. This places a mantle of recognition, one of the

“chosen ones” upon her. In addition to the cachet of feeling special, there is the counterbalancing set of expectations by the sponsor about the effects of this development on the managerial performance of the participant – much is given, much is expected. There is an implicit pressure to conform to, and thus perpetuate the ideology of management as control.

The question of the confidentiality of the discussions in the Programme is always an area of concern among participants. One major concern often raised by participants is whether or not feedback will be given to their employers on their performance in the programme. This is dealt with explicitly at the outset: no feedback is given to any third party. I understand, nevertheless, what prompts this concern. Control and the appearance of competence are part of their way of being, especially in a challenging learning situation like this. Enquiring, reflecting, learning in public and responding in the moment do not fit this outlook. The opportunity for genuine transformational learning is often squandered. We prefer to be in control than be effective according to Schön (1987).

In order to assist the development of the group’s ability to learn together, I ask them to describe their career experience to date. They describe experience and ability in guarded and desiccated terms: accountant, engineer; two years at this, three years at that. It is understandable, one’s life is not to be lightly offered for scrutiny and judgement. It is part of one’s identity. “There is a more subtle and perhaps even more potent consequence of adults’ greater experience: it becomes increasingly the source of an adult’s self-identity” (Knowles, 1984, p10) I wonder if all this experience has been tapped for its transformative potential.



The participants' typical questions indicate that they expect to experience a "normal organisation" (though they may crave something else) where I, as Director, have determined (on some unknown basis) what and how they are to learn (Rationalist Teleology (Stacey *et al*, 2000)) while they will be subject to the effects of a pre-determined process in which, while it may be "good" for them, they are relatively powerless to choose (Formative Teleology). This "Kantian split" seen in action in organisation is commented on by Stacey *et al* as follows:

Mainstream approaches to using the understanding of human organizations, therefore, preserve a split between Rationalist and Formative Teleology just as in natural science, but they apply both to human action in a move that Kant argued vigorously against. The way in which both of these teleologies are applied is as follows. Rationalist Teleology applies to the choosing manager (theorist, researcher, decision-maker), from whom the organization itself is split off as a "thing" to be understood. The organization, that which is to be explained and operated on, is then regarded as an objective phenomenon outside the choosing manager... equivalent to a natural phenomenon, to which Natural Law or Formative Teleology can be applied. There are two major problems with this move, problems that have bedevilled management thinking for decades. First, managers and researchers are humans participating in the very phenomenon their approach splits them off from: they cannot be objective observers in the manner of the natural scientist, but they proceed as if they can. Second, and closely related to the first, the split allocates human freedom entirely in the manager...and reduces the other members of the organization to inhuman parts without freedom, just as Kant warned. (Stacey *et al.*, 2000, p57)

In other words, even before the supposedly isolated event of this programme formally starts, all its players find themselves facing a range of influences which, if they remain outside awareness, will simply perpetuate themselves. My contention is that it is possible to view a programme like this as having a potential to display a kind of Transformative Teleology i.e.

...expressing continuity and transformation of individual and collective identity and difference at the same time. This is the creation of the novel, variations that have never been there before (ibid.)

Managers' attachment to a self-image as 'controller' seems to me to have not only an aspect of avoidance of self-awareness, but also an addictive quality in that the current dose of power is gratifying, if only in the present moment. Self-awareness is not a static body of knowledge about self, nor a kind of "radar", alert to changes in self or outside the self. Rather, I conceive of it as a relatedness to self which has co-primacy with our relatedness with others. This relatedness is in the conversations we conduct; or perhaps, more accurately, it is the conversations we conduct. Elias emphasises that all human relations are, to some extent, power relations. Without self-awareness we emphasise the "power" rather than the relations; attempts to influence are confused with relatedness. Therefore, it seems to me, that the issues facing a group of executives wishing to develop is how to develop their conversations. Part of the answer is, by having conversations.

### **About ideology**

In this final section, I argue that business schools, such as IMI, to a great degree, replicate the ideology of those who own and control them; that the purpose of the ideology is to maintain and justify the power of those who hold it, and to suggest to managers in training that their best interest are served by seeking more power in their lives over their uncertain environments, and that this is one of the roles of executive education.

There is an important issue which I have alluded to earlier in this paper; that is the extent to which the IMI and I may be (witting or

unwitting) carriers of a particular management ideology. Given the traditional power structure in business, which is replicated, lived and advocated daily in IMI, it is not surprising that the ideology of the “ruling class” is reproduced:

The class which has the means of material productions at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production...

(Rose, Lewontin and Kamin , 1984, p4, quoted in Dalal, 1998, p116)

Ideologies of management are attempts by leaders of enterprises to justify the privilege of voluntary action and association for themselves, while imposing upon all subordinates the duty of obedience and the obligation to serve their employers to the best of their ability.

(Bendix, 1956, pxxii, quoted in Czander, 1993, p266)

Given that my organisation is owned and controlled by those who benefit from the existing ideology, it is inevitable that there is a kind of tension between the desire for a perpetuation of the status quo and the desire for genuine transformation. Burgoyne and Jackson express it this way:

The management learning arena lives, arguably, in continual tension between being the place in which organizational revolutions of thought and practice can be formulated between people and the space in which incipient revolution can be spotted and suppressed by dominant coalitions supporting current unitarist agendas. (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997, p62)

Dalal (1988) in discussing the work of Elias points to the role of ideology in maintaining the power status quo:

Ideology helps keep people in their place by making it appear that the places that they inhabit are the natural ones. In other words by making it appear that the more powerful *belong there*, and the less powerful *belong elsewhere*.

(Dalal, 1988, p118, original italics)

The power of an ideology is its invisibility to those who operate in it, and equally its capacity to make itself seem like the natural order of things:

Now, ideology is always invisible to the conscious mind...Ideology is a means of preserving the current order by making it seem natural, unquestionable, by *convincing* all the participants that it is so.

(Dalal, 1998, p116)

What is this ideology, how is it transmitted and why is it so resistant?

The ideology which IMI propagates (and in which act I am complicit) is what is referred by Stacey *et al.* as the "dominant management discourse". It characterised by

...a way of thinking that focuses on design. Just as engineers do, managers are supposed to design self-regulating planning, performance appraisal and quality control systems. What causes an organization to become what it becomes is then thought to be the kind of control system they have designed and the actions they have chosen. (Stacey *et al.*, 2000, p7)

The overall impact of the structure of power relations in the dominant ideology which I encounter in my daily work is that "charisma is attributed to the more powerful 'us' and stigma to the less powerful 'them'" (Dalal, 1998, p119, on Elias). Power is to be had from classifying problems in ways that render them susceptible to 'technical solution', to seeing management as the implementation of control based technical solutions, and from inviting others (especially subordinates) to take up the same viewpoint. So, managers are drawn inexorably towards the charisma of power, and away from the stigma of powerlessness. I would go further and say that our manager is drawn to the "halo" of power (i.e. *anything* to do with, or suggestive of power) and away from powerlessness. This explains the persistence of this outlook, and is why I refer to this phenomenon as an ideology, and not simply as an intellectual viewpoint.

This drive is internalised early in working life and, in my view, exerts a powerful effect throughout a manager's career, especially on the self-image. What I mean by this is that a manager's sense of professional identity can become associated with a notion of action leading to results; more power leads to greater results. A sense of powerlessness can, in my experience, lead to great anxiety. I interpret the desire for executive development partly as a power-seeking drive conditioned by the dominant ideology.

Finally, I describe how the power relations aspect of the dominant ideology appears in my current working context, the classroom. If power seeking were the only dynamic experienced, one might expect participants to make constant attempts (subtle and otherwise) to develop their power at the expense of others, especially me. To be sure this does happen. But another dynamic becomes apparent as well – one which I experience as passivity. The participants respond little, venture little, risk little. Why might this be?

Knowles (1984) gives a plausible explanation which goes part of the way. He explains that managers who are dynamic and engaging in their jobs and personal lives take on this passivity when they re-enter an educational setting because it evokes a conditioning from their earliest experiences of socialisation viz. school and, possibly, college.

I have seen this pattern many times in my career as a management learning professional. My view now is that this paradoxical outlook can be mapped more or less directly onto the "Kantian Split" (Griffin, 2002) mentioned earlier. That is, the participants wish to become

powerful managers who can stand outside the organisational system, shape it, manipulate it, and in this, experience themselves as autonomous, self-contained and masterful (rationalist teleology); like lion cubs they will practice this on the programme in “play-fights”.

On the other hand they conceive of organisations, and therefore experience them, as having pre-existing structures containing deterministic systems which afford them little choice (Formative Teleology); nothing is fundamentally negotiable – the only way out of this prison of powerlessness is to become one of the powerful managers; meanwhile they experience the programme as yet another organisation. The programme is expected to be a parallel process of their organisational life, and management represents a socialisation of their expectations of control (Suchman, 2002). This situation is re-created, with my complicity, in the classroom.

Elias views power not as an object with an independent existence, but as an aspect of relationship: ‘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 1978, p75, quoted in Dalal, 1998, p90). Managers become deeply habituated towards power assessments in their relationships. Why, therefore, should I be surprised if they show up on my professional doorstep seeking to develop their own power? Furthermore, why should I be surprised if their habitual ways of exercising power emerge in the programme? If power is an aspect of relationship, then it follows that if a manager genuinely wants to develop more power, outside of the obvious route to greater control of material resources or formal authority, he/she must learn to develop relationships differently. This amounts to a type

of 'resocialisation' of the manager - a potentially profound process. This is a topic I shall take up in the next paper in this portfolio.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have examined a particular view of management as the control of an organisation dealing with clearly-defined problems, and how this view is increasingly irrelevant to the daily lives of managers. I have examined how this type of thinking also pervades the development of managers.

I have argued that an ideology of management can perpetuate itself in a learning ideology, and vice versa. That is to say, to a certain extent people learn to manage as they have learned to learn, and wish to learn (or wish others to learn) as they have learned to manage. In the case of my practice, the management ideology at the IMI which derives partly from the influence of its history and governance, is reinforced by, and reinforces a learning ideology which preserves the status quo concerning power relations.

## PAPER THREE: A Complexity View of a Leadership Development Workshop (October 2001)

### Introduction

The term leadership, in common use, is essentially a shorthand for acts which are intended to bring about a kind of coherence in a group. The coherence of the group is generally intended to be congruent with the group's goals. What is generally thought to differentiate leadership from the more administrative aspects of management is that the coherence of the group derives more from a voluntary commitment to the goals or ideals of the group than from compliance, however willing, with explicit structures or procedures. In essence, the concept of leadership implies an engagement with the inner life of the members of the group.

The task of this paper is to explore the evolution of a leadership development workshop from the standpoint of complex responsive processes as developed by Stacey and others, and thence to outline some conclusions regarding the role of leadership in a situation of great uncertainty. I begin with a discussion of the theory of complex responsive processes and the task of leadership. I account for the intention contained within the design of the workshop. I provide a narrative of the leadership development workshop upon which my reflections on leadership are based. Throughout the narrative I discuss a possible interpretation of the events from the perspective of complex responsive processes. The issues of anxiety and the role of silence are particularly dealt with. I discuss the interest of managers in the phenomenon of leadership, and I examine the contributions of some of



the principal writers on leadership in management. I examine the evolution of the workshop from the standpoint of complex responsive processes. Finally, I offer a view on the particular contribution of the leaders to this outcome and offer some general conclusions on the possible role of leaders in a situation of uncertainty.

Stacey's theory of complex responsive processes (Stacey *et al.*, 2000) draws on the theory of complex adaptive systems as a source domain to explore how organisations evolve and change in conditions of unpredictability. A complex adaptive system consists of a great many agents interacting with each other according to their own local rules and in doing so they are adapting to each other. The concept of complex responsive processes is an analogue to a complex adaptive system as it applies to a human context. It differs from a complex adaptive system in some important ways. Firstly, humans do not simply interact with each other according to rules; they continually make gestures that evoke and provoke responses from each other; therefore, they cannot be said simply to adapt to each other. Secondly, the term 'system' connotes a more mechanistic view of interaction than would be true of human interaction, and so the term 'process' is used. Finally, and most significantly, the agents of interaction in complex responsive processes are not the individuals themselves, but rather the themes that organise experiences of relating: 'These complex responsive processes take the form of coherent thought and communication. By demonstrating the possibility of self-organising processes and the emergent coherence they produce, complexity theory offers a way out of having to postulate some designer, programme or group mind to explain how the coherence comes about' (Stacey, 2000, p369).

I have said above that the term leadership describes acts intended to bring about a kind of coherence in a group. My intention is to see what this might mean in the light of the above elucidation of complex responsive processes. A traditional sense of the term leadership implies that coherence in a group is *caused* by the actions of the leader. From the viewpoint of complex responsive processes, coherence arises within a group as an emergent property of its own relatedness, the actions (or more properly, the *interactions*) of the leader being just one aspect of this relatedness. The view that this coherence is not centrally determined, that it is self-organising, does not mean that it is random or that there is no place for intention:

The response that any individual can make to a gesture is both enabled and constrained by the history of that person's relationships with others, as reflected in his or her current silent conversations with him- or herself. I am not free to choose to do what I am not able to do. However, I am free to respond to a gesture in a number of different ways that do fall within the repertoire available to me. Thinking about human relationships as self-organising complex responsive processes does not therefore mean that individuals have no free will. It simply means that people have the freedom to respond within the constraints of who they are and the relationships they are in. (Stacey, 2000, p367)

In exploring the possible role and meaning of leadership in the context of complex responsive processes, I am examining an aspect of relatedness, and, in particular, ways of developing the repertoire of gestures and responses which may lead to some (unpredictable) coherence within a group. It is central to the concept of complex responsive processes that the emergent coherence, which is a property of the patterning of the narrative themes, may replicate itself or recreate itself to give rise to novel emergent relational patterns: if there is too little content, connectivity or diversity in the themes organising experience, a group can lapse into repetitive patterns of behaviour; if

there is too much of these, human relating disintegrates or becomes random. 'At some critical range in information/energy flow, connectivity and diversity, the dynamics of bounded instability appears, that is the simultaneous presence of stability and instability, order and disorder' (ibid., p 367). It is in this range that free-flowing conversation arises. Conversation is the medium of interaction in complex responsive processes. This suggests that one of the roles of a leader in a situation of high uncertainty is to relate to her group in ways which will increase the chances of the group interactions moving into the critical range described above.

Stacey also points out two other factors which affect the dynamics of human relating and which will have their own impact on complex responsive processes. These are power difference and anxiety. On the question of power difference and its potential impact on complex responsive processes, Stacey says that the exaggeration of power difference through the exercise of an autocratic style may result in excessive compliance by the group (the dynamics of stability), or rebellion (disintegration); either way the group is no longer in the 'critical range' described above. On the other hand, abdication of power altogether is likely to give rise to 'sibling' rivalry (ibid., 368) as members seek to fill the power vacuum. The implications of this for leadership at least point to a need to pay attention to the issue of power difference and how it may affect the dynamics of interaction in the group. Additionally, the question of power difference also applies to relationships between members of the group, and not just with the designated authority figure. The issue of power and the authority figure is taken up below in the discussion of the role of the two workshop leaders.

## On Anxiety

Anxiety can have quite a significant impact on the dynamics of human relating, and so it is of considerable importance in the discussion of complex responsive processes. Free floating anxiety is a generalised form of fear, whose cause cannot be located (not that it does not have a cause). Individuals and groups engage many different forms of 'defences' to avoid feeling anxiety. For example, within organisations, procedures and structures may be set up ostensibly to achieve some task, but which have the actual (or additional) purpose of reducing feelings of anxiety. Typical of this type of 'anxiety defence', as Stacey points out, is the formalised routine of planning within an organisation even where the future is so unpredictable that the outcomes are worthless; the routine and pseudo-certainty serve to reduce anxiety. The important point about this example, and anxiety defences in general, is that they may reduce the capacity of the individual or group to deal usefully with the *real* unpredictable situation as it emerges. The question of anxiety and consequent 'social defences' is central to the thinking of the Tavistock Institute in its application of psychoanalytic thinking to the study of institutions:

Bion emphasises how difficult it is for human beings to relate to each other in a realistic way in a joint task (Bion, 1961). He describes the human being as a group animal: as such he cannot get on *without* other human beings. Unfortunately, he cannot get on very well *with* them either. Yet he must establish effective co-operation in life's tasks. This is his dilemma. Understanding his attempts at solving this dilemma, at evading it or defending himself against the anxieties it arouses, are central to the understanding of groups and institutions, since these attempts become permanent features of institutions. Such understanding is central also to practice orientated to helping institutions and their members to solve the dilemma more effectively and function better. (Menzies-Lyth, 1990, p27)

This quote points to one of the sources of anxiety, the interaction itself. This is something to be born in mind by the leader as she attempts to influence the nature and intensity of interaction in the group. In discussing the role of a consultant in assisting an institution to change, Menzies-Lyth points out that 'Serious change in a social institution inevitably involves restructuring the social defence system and...this implies freeing underlying anxieties until new defences – or better – adaptations and sublimations are developed' (ibid., p34). This latter point basically says that change in an organisation (or for that matter, an individual) will be accompanied by feelings of anxiety which, if they are not recognised and worked with, will invoke defences against that anxiety which may, in turn, divert the change effort. Working with the anxiety implies maintaining an optimal level of anxiety – not so little that there is no impetus to work, not so much that the institution is overwhelmed. I believe that sensitivity to anxiety levels is also one of the essential capacities of a leader. Writers such as Miller, of the Tavistock Institute, describe one of the tasks of a consultant as providing 'containment' or 'holding' for the anxiety as it arises (the image of a pressure cooker comes to mind) to maintain it at this optimal level.

There [is] a shared recognition that both individuals and groups develop mechanisms to give meaning to their existence and to defend themselves from fear and uncertainty; that these defences, often unconscious and deeply rooted, are threatened by change; and that consequently it is an important aspect of the professional role to serve as a container during the 'working through' of change, so as to tackle not only the overt problem but also the underlying difficulties. (Miller, 1993, p7)

This has implications for leadership in complex responsive processes: 'The 'good enough holding' of anxiety is an essential condition for the free-flowing conversational dynamics that is the analogue of the edge

of chaos' (Stacey, 2000, 391). Stacey argues, however, that whereas in psychoanalytic thought this holding is located in the leader, in complex responsive processes it is located in the quality of the conversation itself: 'When [the themes organising the experience of relating] take the form of trusting interaction, they are themselves then forms of 'good enough holding' (ibid., p391).

I believe that understanding and working with anxiety is fundamental to leadership, and particularly to the development of complex responsive processes in a critical range of effectiveness. It is what enables the work to proceed:

The analyst's or consultant's responsibility lies in helping insights to develop, freeing thinking about problems, helping the client to get away from unhelpful methods of thinking and behaving, facilitating the evolution of ideas for change, and then helping him to bear the anxiety and uncertainty of the change process. This feature is notable in psychoanalytically orientated consultants and others whose work has been influenced by them. They stay around. (Menzies-Lyth, 1990, p33)

And leaders stay around longer.

An important point about working with anxiety is that it is not just something that 'gets in the way' of the work. Certain situations or issues may give rise to noticeable levels of anxiety in the group.

'Anxiety must function as a signal that calls for more attention, not less, and for greater study, not less' (Hirschorn, 1988, p249). For this reason the leader must be attuned not only to the existence of anxiety in the group, but also to how it changes in the emerging discourse, and in response to what.

In the above discussion of anxiety the terms 'analyst', 'consultant', and leader have been used. This indicates where my thinking has come from and is headed. In complex responsive processes much of the task of a leader is related to working with the process. The theory of complex responsive processes asserts that an organisation is not a 'thing' to be worked on; rather an organisation is a process of relating, forming and reforming itself. A leader is not a detached authority working on the process, but is a part of the process, forming and being formed by it. The task of a leader from this viewpoint is analogous to that of a consultant of the type described by Menzies-Lyth above; to work from within, as a member of the group in question, with the emerging themes which organise their experience of relating, influencing and being influenced by them. In this sense, it is a more consultative style of leadership. Much of the thinking which is helpful to understanding this type of leadership has come from relational psychology, and, in particular, disciplines such as Group Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy.

### **The Workshop**

This section describes the evolution of a three-day leadership workshop with a group of approximately twenty executives. I was present in the role of facilitator/teacher, and I was accompanied in that role by Terri, a professor of leadership studies at a university in the US.

The design of a workshop on leadership creates something of a dilemma for those designing it. The task here was to assist the participants to become more effective leaders, and not simply to know more about leadership. We wished them to learn not only at the level

of thought, but in deeper ways which would enable them to understand and act differently in difficult situations. We therefore wished the participants to experience a situation where they would encounter real leadership issues and to have an opportunity to exercise leadership on their own part. The dilemma is: what role could the authority figures in the room, in this case Terri and I, take up which could generate enough uncertainty for leadership to be a live issue in the room, and which would afford an opportunity to the participants to exercise leadership, and, at the same, time which would not be so unbounded that the participants might be overwhelmed and no useful learning might occur? Another way to look at the dilemma is simply to ask what kind of leadership could Terri and I exercise which would not inhibit participants from exercising their own? What kind of situation would help participants to understand their own (unquestioned) assumptions about leadership?

A common meaning attached to the term leadership is an attempt to bring a group to an intended goal. As mentioned later in this paper, much management literature describes leadership in a context of relative certainty about goals and views the leadership task as one of sophisticated persuasion, by an authority figure who is outside the group to be 'led'. The situation we wished to explore, and to help the participants to become more competent in dealing with, was the increasingly common one of high levels of uncertainty. The management literature does contain many useful attempts to identify approaches to dealing with uncertainty (e.g., Kets de Vries, 1995). The source domain for much of the thinking in dealing with uncertainty and change is in the general clinical practice of psychology, and, in particular, psychotherapy. Both Terri and I have had some training in



this area, in my case four years training in Group Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. As discussed in the section on anxiety above, the contribution of this training and experience was in suggesting to us the roles we might take up in this situation, and in assisting us to understand the similarities (and differences) in the leadership issues between this learning event and the therapeutic situation.

### **On the Role of Leader**

The founder of the Group Psychoanalytic school, S. H. Foulkes, says that the good group therapist sets out to wean the group from its wishes to be led and that in 'refraining from leading [in the ordinary sense] he shows up by default, as it were, what the group wants and expects from a leader' (Foulkes, 1964, p54, quoted in Anthony, 1991). Part of our approach in this workshop was to do just this, to refrain from taking up a directive role within the group, and thereby induce the group to experience a kind of leadership "vacuum", which they would have the opportunity to fill. This, however, is only part of the story. Terri and I could not simply sit in silence and "let it all happen" – we still had a job to do, a different kind of leadership to assert. For a start, we had the task of keeping the basic boundaries of task, time and territory, that is to open and close sessions, to invite people to work and to ensure that the working room was protected from intrusion. The work differed significantly from a therapeutic group in that we engaged in a level of conversation with individuals also in a certain level of explanation where we felt this would be helpful to the learning. A large part of our task lay in working with the learning process of the group as it evolved; identifying themes which appeared to arise within the group, offering small pieces of explanatory theory, and drawing

attention to what appeared to us to be happening in the room, or to what we ourselves were experiencing. Our style of engagement was gentle, respectful, and somewhat tentative. We worked with the exploration of the group's relationship with us (and eventually with each other) and this developed a kind of authority for us. Foulkes describes the importance of this in the therapeutic setting:

Without having this basic authority at the back of him, the conductor might simply lose all prestige by behaving as he does. The group might be bewildered and anxious, succumb to a hopeless feeling of frustration, and interpret the conductor's reluctance simply as weakness and incompetence. In its despair, it would look for another leader; not necessarily for another therapist, but worse still, would elevate somebody sufficiently vociferous out of its own ranks into the position of leader. (Foulkes, 1964, p62, quoted in Anthony, 1991)

Our intention was to demonstrate in our exploration of the topic of leadership, a style of leadership on our part which may suggest to the participants how they might take up their own leadership roles in the workshop, and eventually in their working lives.

While we drew on many of the precepts and practices of the practice of therapy, our work differed in some significant ways. Firstly, and most obviously, our goal was different: learning rather than therapy (although it could be argued that therapy is a fundamental form of learning). Secondly, there was no need for the authority figure to work alone – I had the rare and rich pleasure of working with a colleague. 'The advantages of having at least one colleague are inestimable. Indeed, it may not be really advisable to work alone. It is an old Tavistock Institute principle that it takes a group to study a group: or, at least, a person working alone needs his own consultant 'to come home to'' (Menzies-Lyth, 1990, p39). Moreover, both our personal dispositions, professional training and our fruitful experience of

working together in the past ensured that there was a free flow of quite challenging conversation between us during the sessions and outside of them. The changing themes which arose in our conversations were important to the development of conversational flow in the group as a whole.

I opened the workshop by putting the topic of leadership in the context of the learning of the programme and explaining the general outlines of the schedule. I then introduced Terri and invited her to begin the work. She began by putting a question to the group asking them how many of them had found themselves in the situation that she now finds herself in, that is, in a position of authority where a group of people needed and expected a lot of her. Most hands in the room went up at this stage. She then posed a second question asking what they thought her options were for dealing with the situation. A number of responses came which would basically fall into the category of explaining leadership, giving a lecture, recounting her experiences, or otherwise providing them with knowledge and direction. She then posed a third question asking what they thought this would do for what they are feeling right now. The overall consensus was that this might reduce the sense of strangeness and anxiety which they had begun to feel in this line of questioning. The next question from Terri asked why she might want to reduce their anxiety. This provided an entry into the discussion of the topic of anxiety and the leader's task in maintaining an optimal level of anxiety and directing that towards the task at hand. A discussion then followed on the nature of anxiety and its impact on leadership effectiveness.

It would be tempting to describe the unfolding of events in the room in terms of a phenomenon objectively observed by the workshop leaders, as if we were somehow not part of what was happening, and not affected by it. Certainly, we would have been able to classify the initiatives and responses of the participants in terms of the theories and concepts we were bringing. However, this would have been the ultimate example of 'work avoidance': the leaders themselves would have dealt with the anxiety of facing a group by engaging in a work avoidance practice disguised as leadership; it would have been to engage in leadership by cliché: old wine in new bottles, to coin a phrase. It would also have been to regard ourselves as being outside the web of relatedness of the group as a whole.

The truth of the situation was that I personally felt a considerable level of anxiety throughout the workshop, and especially in the early stages. I cannot easily identify the sources of this anxiety; I know that part of it was a kind of performance anxiety – would this workshop achieve its objectives? I always experience a level of anxiety at the start of any workshop or programme, not least because the professional stakes are high. Equally, I have led or been on the staff of many workshops with a "here and now" character, so the confidence of experience also accompanied the anxiety which I felt. My anxiety, and my general presence in the room were part of the unfolding story of this workshop; I was affecting and being affected by the rest of the group. Therefore, how I made sense of what transpired had to be made from the subjective standpoint of a participant in the process.

## On Silence

One of the behaviours of the workshop leaders, which contributed to the disorientation of the group, was how we dealt with silence in the group. Essentially, we sat with it. Early in the workshop some group members claimed that this was a manipulative technique, part of a spurious and contrived process, and that we knew what was really going on all the time. This was contrary to the expectation that we knew what was happening and therefore what to do; in a sense, the group had a look at the naked leader; that is, they had a look at leaders stripped of normal disguises of anxiety defences. In later conversation in the group, it emerged that none of them had ever experienced a person in authority who was not discomfited by silence, or who did not rush in to fill the silence. Just because nothing was being said did not mean that nothing was happening. In essence, this experience went against the grain of expectations of leadership: that it would be active, articulate and have answers. Management texts are replete with exhortations about listening, taking risk, different ways of operating, and seeing all organisational participants as having leadership roles. The real challenge for the group was to make the move from knowing this to actually embodying that message.

The role of silence is an important one in considering the efficacy of this kind of leadership workshop. As Terri pointed out towards the end of the workshop, there are many possible meanings of silence. Some silences are comfortable, some less so. In the case of this group, silences tended to become more comfortable over the course of the workshop. I believe that silence has an important symbolic quality in

the developing life of a group. It signifies an opportunity to anyone to contribute to the discourse of the group. Further, in their refusal to simply 'fill' awkward silences, the authority figures are 'defaulting' on their expected role (Foulkes, 1994) of providing directive leadership, and thereby 'taking care' of the group by reducing anxiety. This frustration of dependency needs is part of the process of renegotiating the anxiety defences of a group. Temptations lie in the path of the leader: 'Part of the difficulty will come from within himself, because leadership of a dependent group... can be a seductive experience' (Miller, 1993, p185) The capacity to withstand the anxiety of holding silence is part of the self-discipline of the type of leadership which is being advocated in this paper.

In my experience, there is a paradoxical quality to silence in a group in that, in the absence of any apparent activity, it calls forth an intense quality of attention in the group. It reminds me of the moment when a train stops in a station and the passengers in a carriage suddenly become uncomfortably aware of one another, and may long for the oblivion of the moment when the train re-starts its movement, and they can return to a more comfortable trance-like state. Silence may serve to bring a group from a period of highly unrealistic conversational stability (Stacey, 2000) into the critical range of co-existing stability and instability. It is one of a number of gestures which may do this. From the standpoint of complex responsive processes silence is itself a gesture which will call forth an unpredictable response, which may give rise to a different patterning in the themes organising the experience of relating, that is a potential change in the coherence of the group's relatedness. In this sense, holding silence could be said to be an act of leadership.

Stacey emphasises the freedom that any member of a group has to attempt to influence the evolution of complex responsive processes. This is at the heart of the discussion in this paper: what can a leader do to attempt to influence complex responsive processes towards some kind of useful functioning? It certainly would be possible for an authority figure to act, to speak as a matter of reflex, from some habit of authority. Acting in a way which maintains the conversation in the critical range of free-flowing conversation requires thoughtful interventions. It is important for the leader to claim time to think before making an intervention. In maintaining her own silence, the leader claims time to think, to reflect, and to listen to the inner conversation before responding.

The theory of complex responsive processes takes the view that an organisation is not a 'thing' – it is a process of interaction among the themes organising experience, where the medium of interaction is conversation. Stacey quotes the sociologist Mead (*ibid.*, p337) who argued that an individual mind is an inner conversation that the individual holds with herself; mind emerges in social relationships, and is the 'internalisation' of those relationships. The individual, in this view, is the singular and the group is the plural of the same phenomenon, namely relationship. From this standpoint, apparent silence in a group is not a separate phenomenon or a withdrawal from relatedness, but is a different aspect of the same thing; this time attention is drawn to the inner conversation. The inner conversation may have been affected by what has preceded the 'silence' both within the group and within the individual. The 'silence' is a continuation of the same relatedness (how could it stop anyway?). Silence is not only

not problematic, it is an integral part of the development of the group and the individual. This is another way of explaining why the leader in this situation must see silence as part of the process and not attempt to distort it.

### **The Workshop continues**

The next individual reflection exercise asked the participants to write about the way in which they may engage in work avoidance, as defined in the morning session, how they may disable themselves and their own organisations, or how they may have experienced others doing it. The plenary discussion of this felt quite resistant and slow. One of the participants, John C, said he found the "break", meaning the period for reflection and group discussion, too long. He is a senior manager in a software firm and told the group of the pride he takes in getting the job done; he was not used to sitting around like this. This was the first real challenge to authority in the group; it was accompanied by some wary looks. It felt like a significant symbolic event. I asked what might help; a discussion followed within the group about the appropriate length of time for the individual and group work; whether it was useful, whether they should have spent most of the time with the "experts". Terri drew the attention of the group to what was happening in the group: John's leadership in raising an issue related to the effectiveness of the group, the feeling that despite the apparent confusion of the day there was something significant happening. The parts of this exercise seem so trivial, yet leadership is being exercised all around us in the moment.



The opening plenary session on the second day was concerned with reviewing the experience and learning from the first day. While there was a sense of unease and some anxiety about being unable to grasp fully the concepts, there was also a sense of something significant having happened. A very diverse range of views was expressed about the value of the previous day. Brian, one of the participants, was clearly somewhat distressed about the experience, and possibly also about speaking out. I asked him what he thought it might have looked like if it were better organised. He replied that that there would have been more information and direct instruction from the leaders. John C then said – so you want them to do the leading here. I noticed that several members in the room appeared to become quite pensive at this point – as if a realisation had come. There was a debate about what had actually happened the previous day, several people pointing out that they had actually been quite a lot of instruction as the opportunities had arisen in discussion, but that somehow it didn't feel as valuable as if it had been delivered in a structured session.

Terri took an opportunity to ask the group if they thought that Brian had exercised leadership by raising such a difficult issue. Some said no, he was 'just' trying to sort things out. Terri - Why was this not leadership? A discussion followed as to whether it was, or not, with many reluctantly agreeing that it was. I say 'reluctantly' because it appeared to many that Brian's intervention was too mundane to be considered leadership. Terri continued by saying that most acts of leadership occur in this way, and are often responses to other people or to events.

Terri offered the analogy of learning to ride a bicycle – try learning to do it from a book. Diane, a rather forceful HR manager in the Irish manufacturing operation of a global IT firm, said she too was troubled by the previous day, but not because it felt irrelevant to her experience; it felt just like her experience of trying to lead a team in a chaotic business environment (her firm had just announced serious losses); she felt there was something serious going on here and wanted to understand it better; she felt she was in the right setting to learn about it. She had been sent by her firm on all kinds of courses which offered solutions, but she had never been forced to face up to the unsettling chaos of the real environment. She related an experience of attempting to provide leadership in her own situation of great uncertainty and stress where the real challenge was to contain the anxiety of the group while working with them to identify and work on their adaptive challenge (Heifetz, 1994).

David, a senior project manager with a global telecommunications firm, had been a strong participant in the programme up to now and had contributed significantly from his own experience. He had established a position of influence within the group and had frequently led project groups in discussion. He appeared to think of himself as quite a political operator in his firm, out of necessity, he claimed. He said quietly - there is something here, and I want to learn more about it. Keith, another participant, agreed.

David described a situation in which he was managing a group which was in danger of being laid off due to the downturn in the global telecommunications business. He painted a somewhat heroic picture of his leadership role in the situation in which he had to provide

leadership. He said it was not really an adaptive challenge, simply a matter of implementing the firm's strategy. The group probed and discussed the case sympathetically for a few minutes. Helena, a manager in a small software firm which services telecoms providers, led a challenge to David, supported by John C. She quizzed him on why he felt it was not an adaptive challenge, and also how honest and open he really was being with the workers whose jobs were under threat. David resisted strongly and skilfully, and after several minutes of this Helena appeared to give up on her pursuit.

Séamas, a banker with a rather earnest style, quietly questioned David on whose interests he was really protecting in the possible lay-off situation – the workers, or his own? The tension in the room was palpable at this new level of challenge. David stared at the floor for a while and responded with an ironic smile – really it's more my own, but it's hard to say that here, I want to be a heroic leader. He had been telling the workers in his section that they were safe from lay-offs to maintain their performance, when in fact he could not guarantee that. The discussion which followed centred around the morality of leadership, having to do things in the interest of an employer which may hurt people; facing difficult choices; furthering one's own interest by representing them as common interest. David made one final sally by querying the invocation of morality – it's just strategic. This brought out several strong responses from Séamas, Helena and some others who had not yet spoken. Kate, an accountant with a manufacturing firm, recounted an experience when she had found a financial irregularity attributable to a colleague with whom she had been friendly; she described the awfulness of the situation, but knew that she had no option but to report it to management; the colleague was

dismissed. Kate became quite upset upon re-iterating her distress at the time. There was a very palpable emotional shift in the mood in the room in response to Kate's disclosure. This appeared to have been a significant moment for Kate, because her engagement with the group felt quite different after this; she appeared to engage more than she had on the first day.

The theme for reflection and small group discussion in the afternoon session was the ambition and aspiration of the participants themselves in relation to leadership. By contrast with the morning of that day, the group felt pensive, generous in disclosure and, above all, very present. Views and ambitions were aired much more freely, and developed with significantly less inhibition. There were some quite strikingly long silences; Terri commented on these, saying that there were different qualities of silence; I offered the view that this silence felt more benign and inclusive than those of the previous day – just because we are silent, it doesn't mean that nothing useful is going on. Helena concurred, saying that she would be content to stay silent within the group like this, because it felt comfortable and a lot of thoughts about her own role were being processed in her mind just sitting there.

Several people in the group said that the group setting felt very different to how it had felt on Day One; there was not necessarily any less uncertainty present, but it felt like a legitimate part of the process; it felt possible to comment on what was happening in the moment, to propose ideas or challenge the authority figures without feeling 'punished' by them. Helena commented that the periods of silence felt much more comfortable, and that she felt able to stay with her thoughts. The group appeared much more capable of maintaining itself

in the critical range of free-flowing conversation described by Stacey as necessary for the maintenance of complex responsive processes. As the end was coming in sight, much of the anxiety which had been present throughout the workshop appeared to be ebbing.

### Making sense of this

The participants experienced in a very truncated way the learning trajectory of many managers in their jobs. At the heart of the learning event was the difference between what they were experiencing and doing, and what they believed they *ought* to be experiencing and doing. In the following sections I explore these elements; what did they expect and where did these expectations come from about leadership, and learning about leadership? How can the critical events in the workshop, and the workshop as a whole, be understood from the standpoint of complex responsive processes?

To understand the distress of the participants, it is important to see that the workshop did not introduce the topic of leadership to a *tabula rasa*. The participants in the workshop had an average age of 35, had typically more than 10 years' business experience, and were in posts of significant responsibility. They arrived into the situation with sets of expectations and frames of reference for leadership and how it is learned. These come not simply from direct experience, but what they are taught to pay attention to in order to make sense of their experience. Much of that sensemaking is driven by the management ideology in which they gained their experience.

It may seem a little late in this paper to ask why we, as managers, are concerned with leadership? How does it help the organisation to achieve what it must? How would we know if there was good leadership, or any leadership? To gain some insight into these issues, I look at the outcome of this workshop. By the end of the workshop the group was paying quite intense attention to its own lived experience. They generally agreed that they were experiencing something they described as leadership. Moreover, the actual experience was available to them for learning. What did leadership feel like? Where did it come from?

Many theories of leadership direct attention to the actions and ideas solely of the figures in authority, whom they would designate as the leaders. Insight, ability and wisdom (or the lack of these) are attributed to these figures (e.g. Bennis, 1989). They would be deemed to have caused the successful outcome of the workshop. Many mainstream theories of leadership locate the focus of attention in the authority figure within the organisation. All others in the organisation are referred to as 'followers'.

Leadership is concerned with the development of a purposeful coherence in a group of co-workers. Earlier in this paper I stated that the theory of complex responsive processes views an organisation as a process of relating. From this standpoint leadership appears to me to be an aspect of that relatedness. This is not new; for example, in discussing the use of leaderless groups by the War Office Selection Boards in World War Two to identify officer potential, Miller (1993, p. ix) recounts that 'It recast the conventional conception of leadership: the focus shifted from the qualities of an individual in isolation to the

demonstration of actual behaviour in relation to others'. Leadership appears to me to be primarily a group phenomenon, and so it may be more useful to pay attention to the group as a whole, and its internal dialogue, rather than simply the qualities or behaviour of the authority figure.

How do leaders make a difference? The process of making sense of the satisfactory resolution of a challenging situation will inevitably involve questions concerning causality. What, or who, brought about this satisfactory state of affairs? Given the predispositions brought about by history or upbringing mentioned above, it seems inevitable that there would be a search for figures who would have made a unique contribution to the situation. In tandem with, or possibly irrespective of, their actual contribution to success, there is also a vacancy for an individual who can act, in retrospect, as a focus for the group's need for a figure not constrained by their anxieties and sense of powerlessness. Thus, the mythical leader is born. The circle is completed in subsequent similar situations when, as a shortcut to the actual work of dealing with the complexity, uncertainty and anxiety of the situation at hand, the search is initiated for the leader who will perform the functions of simplifying, interpreting and above all, reassuring.

A common theme in the literature on leadership is the role of leader as visionary. For example, the argument put forward by Bennis is that members of an organisation need a sense of purpose and of being part of a greater entity dedicated to achieving that purpose; vision – “a target that beckons” (Bennis, 1994, p50) - meets these needs. Bennis' leader consults widely and considers prevailing conditions before

*choosing* a vision which will meet the needs of the organisation. The task of the leader is then to “sell” the vision to her followers. The goal is for the organisation to have a shared vision which will then enable the members to act in concert and with purpose.

Several points are worth noting about this model. Firstly, the model proceeds on the basis of thought before action; implicitly, once action has begun, the circumstances forming the basis for action will remain unchanged, either by the action or otherwise; there is no concept of concurrent or recursive thought/action. Secondly, leadership, leaders and positions of authority are seen as synonymous; moreover, leadership is an exclusive act of a person in charge; there is little sense of interaction with other members of the organisation. Thirdly, referring to the “Kantian split”<sup>9</sup> developed in an earlier paper in this portfolio, the leader is seen as external to the entity to be ‘led’; she is not affected by it other than as part of a consultation process. Equally, the organisation which has ingested the shared vision will then be able to act only in accordance with this new internal programming. Effectively, this version of leadership is nothing more than a psychologically more sophisticated, and emotionally more attractive, version of the old control model. Fourthly, and of particular relevance to this paper, uncertainty and complexity in the environment lead to “organisational vertigo” and “myopia”, which can only be dealt with

---

<sup>9</sup>The term “Kantian Split” is used by Stacey *et al.* (2000) to describe a misapplication of Kant’s view of causality in Nature. Kant asserted that natural phenomena were subject to Formative Causality in which they could only develop into mature forms of themselves, i.e. could only unfold that which was already enfolded in their makeup. Kant said that man was not subject to this causality, and was able to choose his future autonomously. Stacey *et al.* argue that mainstream management literature treats managers as if they could shape the form of the organisations which they manage, and at the same time act as part of the same organisation. This paradox is dealt with by dealing with each pole of the paradox separately, effectively denying the paradox.



by reducing these scourges with a “coherent view of the future”, if the organisation is not to be “shattered” (Bennis, 1994, p53). Finally, this sunny picture of emotional commitment to a ‘shared vision’ is not marred by the shadow of anxiety generated by it, nor of the inevitable acting out of anxiety issues which remain ignored because they do not fit the picture.

Edgar Schein differs from the mainstream or “heroic” school of leadership in two important ways. Firstly, he pays greater attention to the organisational context into which the leader acts, particularly its unconscious aspects; he describes the task of a leader as shaping and influencing the culture of an organisation:

Neither culture nor leadership, when one examines each closely, can really be understood by itself. In fact, one could argue that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to understand and work with culture. If one wishes to distinguish leadership from management or administration, one can argue that leaders create and change cultures, while managers and administrators live within them (Schein, 1995, p5)

Interestingly, he argues that leadership can really only be understood in relation to the culture of the group, and is to be understood as an attempt to influence that culture.

How might complexity theory assist in making sense of leadership in general, and this group experience in particular? As I have stated above, leadership is concerned with the development of coherence and drive in an organisation which are congruent with its goals. The theory of complex responsive processes offers an alternative perspective on how such coherence might arise in the daily, ‘messy’ life of a group.

The essence of this theory has been reprised at the beginning of this paper.

Why should the concept of complex responsive processes as applied to leadership be any more useful than other theories? My answer to this is that the theory of complex responsive processes proposes a radically different way of looking at organisations. Rather than seeing them as fixed 'things' which then have to be manipulated, the of complex responsive processes sees them as processes in constant interaction with themselves and their surroundings. Change in an individual or an organisation is not seen as a shift in a thing which is at rest, but as an aspect of a process which is constantly progressing. This casts leadership in a different light. The starting point is now different: leadership, rather than being seen as the manipulation of an inert *thing* can now be seen as participation in a living *process*.

I believe that this concept of leadership is of greater relevance in an environments which is characterised by unceasing change. Many of the participants of the workshop came from firms and other working environment which are characterised by radically changing bases of competition, questioning of long-held assumptions, compression of time, and breakdown of traditional hierarchies where they are being constantly urged to exercise leadership, without knowing clearly what this means beyond a vague sense that it would result in a more coherent and purposeful work group. The voluntary commitment of energy and personal intellectual resources by highly autonomous professionals is no more likely to occur in their organisations in response to clichéd urgings of an authority figure than it ever would have in the past. Many descriptions of how companies and other

organisations faced up to difficult periods of change clearly describe, or at least hint at, very complex interactions within the organisation in determining the issues to be addressed, and how to make sense of them anew as the situation developed. However, true to mainstream management ideology, especially in the popular literature, the outcome of their efforts is then attributed to some superior being, (e.g. Gerstner, 2002). Leadership is represented as an act of shaping or influencing a group towards a future which has been determined by the leader. These ideas appear to be based on unexamined assumptions about the organisation which is being led. Essentially, the organisation is regarded as something fixed; the group of individuals who comprise the collective are treated 'as if' they were one entity, without examining what might bind that group together, and forgetting the 'as if' altogether (Griffin).

The theory of complex responsive processes offers the view that an organisation is comprised of the interactions of its members, including their personal internal conversations. Essentially, an organisation is a process. To the extent that these conversations display coherence, for example in a sense of purpose and reality congruence, and a capacity to pay attention to, make sense of, and potentially adapt to changing circumstances, leadership can be said to be present in the group. That coherence arises from the multiple local interactions of all the themes that organise the experience of interacting together, that is from its conversations. The leadership within the group constantly creates itself with a capacity for change or to retain its current form, just like a fountain is not the water, but rather the *movement* of newly arriving water. The stability of leadership, most importantly seen in a turbulent environment, is a kind of dynamic stability, like that of a bicycle – it

has to keep moving forward. What this means is that it is the capacity of members of the group, especially those in authority, to stay in the process and challenge others to do likewise, that maintains leadership. This includes spotting and resisting attempts to systematise the process or otherwise reify it.

Initially the 'texture' of the diversity was quite coarse; essentially, the interaction was polarised between a (disappointed) group and the leaders. In responding to the situation as they found it differences of opinion became apparent and were expressed. The initial diversity was sufficient to be able to lead, via shifting patterns of interaction (conversation) to an awareness and an expression of other aspects of diversity within the group. Another salient example of diversity was the argument concerning morality versus instrumentalism in the discussion about David's failure to inform his staff of the potential danger to their continuing employment in order to cast himself in a more favourable light with his bosses. By Day Two I noticed that the members of the group felt more comfortable expressing and exploring differing opinions as they arose; the available diversity became finer, richer and distributed around the group. In the early part of the workshop, the group largely ignored its own internal differences, preferring instead to focus on what it had in common, a sense of disorientation and resentment towards the 'incompetent' leaders. It was only from the second day, when the group really began to explore its own internal differences, that it was able to think creatively about what might be happening and what this might mean for their thinking about leadership.

The process felt chaotic and orderly at the same time. On the one hand, the boundaries of time, territory and task were respected. On the other hand, however, at times the chaos felt like it would overwhelm the group; I could see individuals struggling with it or even opting out psychologically. Personally, I felt at times internally conflicted about the level of uncertainty I was experiencing. There were eventual expressions of confusion and even hostility at times representing internal states of chaos. These expressions served to enrich the pattern of diversity further, but also to prompt offers of meaning-making, to offer a perspective of coherence. For example, one of the earliest offers of this kind came from David who said – they're not going to spoon-feed us, we have to figure it out for ourselves, that's what's going on.

Over the course of the three days the connectedness of the group changed in quality. Initially, interactions were focussed on dialogues with Terri and me. There was little enthusiasm for interaction with others, as if, somehow, it would not be as fruitful. It was very noticeable that this changed over time to a readiness to engage spontaneously with the comments of others. Moreover, the sophistication of the interaction increased; for example, the challenging nature of interaction became more exploratory and less antagonistic. I interpret this as a capacity to hold and work with diversity.

Power relations also changed over the course of the workshop. At the outset, they were somewhat polarised, and focussed on the authority figures while the group felt a kind of unity in their (self-created) powerlessness. One of the most visible assertions of power within the group was David's (partially successful) attempt at bullying Helena – which was subsequently explored with Terri's assistance. More subtle

assertions of power involved the establishment of bases of legitimacy for speaking, generally through the recounting of stories. Diane explained how the situation in the room, far from being artificial, accurately replicated her chaotic situation at work, and how the experience of the workshop had given her an opportunity to explore real issues safely. The authority of her story made this quiet moment one of the turning points of the workshop for me; from this point on it felt that the group engaged with the situation in the room as a legitimate and realistic learning ground.

The mainstream emphasis on choosing courses of action which will result in desired outcomes is very deep-rooted and is closely associated with notions of competence. In the case of this workshop, if the leaders were 'competent' they would have strongly asserted their authority to establish a system which would 'deliver the learning'. The leaders did not take up the roles implicitly assigned by the group. However, what they later said was increasingly intriguing and kept drawing them back to the process, was that the 'incompetent' leaders appeared undisturbed by the group's confusion with their role and continued to support them in their efforts to explore what was happening:

One may need to give a good deal of support to the client to go along with the process, especially a client who is accustomed to using the 'expert' and expects him to produce a definitive answer quickly. If one resists this pressure, one may be bitterly attacked as though one is delinquently withholding goodies to which the client is entitled – or, failing that, the client clutches at straws and magical unrealistic answers. (Menzies-Lyth, 1990, p34)

The distress and the learning difficulties of the participants arise not only from the initial failure of the workshop to meet their expectations, but also from the failure of their repeated attempts to rectify the situation using the same control model. The group is acting out its own

ideology; the experience of separating from its ideology is disorienting and anxiety provoking.

## Conclusions

The essential point of the workshop is that in the search for leadership, participants have to discover that they have been taught to look for systems, roles and people in control, and not to pay attention to their own experience. The essence of the workshop is to assist participants to pay attention differently. What I am also arguing here is that leadership is a matter of how one pays attention to what is going on and makes sense of that. The changing patterns of meaning-making prompted attempts at articulating thoughts on the leadership issues in the group and the nature of leadership in general. For example, Séamas said that in a situation like this you have to help people understand things in a different way, and that's what we have to do here.

What the group sought was to reduce uncertainty and anxiety with a search for stability, regularity and certainty. That is, it sought an experience which would be congruent with its mainstream ideology; what it got was an experience which was congruent with its own common lived experience, which it had learned to ignore. It was no surprise that the two who still had difficulty on the morning of the second day (Kate and Brian) were an accountant and an engineer, two professions whose ideologies assiduously embrace notions of objectivity and cybernetic control. An effective leader, in their view, would have supplied these.

What the group experienced was the development of a temporary organisation. The organisation grew not because of the formal assignation of roles, boundaries, purposes and envisioned futures (which did not happen), but because it was assisted in paying attention to what was actually happening in the moment. It learned to pay attention to things other than a search for systems congruent with its learned ideology; members learned to get into the present and interact in real time. The organisation which they formed consisted not of a chart or systems diagram, but of the dialogue which individuals were having with others, or quietly within themselves. The organisation was not 'reified' into having a concrete identity separate from those who made it up, but was experienced, in a pure form, as being a process. It was the sum of its own conversations.

The picture of leadership which has emerged in this paper is one which is principally concerned with awareness of and engagement with the process that is the organisation. How groups identify actual themes relevant to their organisation's survival and find ways forward are the subject of strategic leadership. Learning to do this will be the topic of the next paper.



## PAPER FOUR: Leadership, learning and skill development: a complexity perspective. (August 2002)

### The Central Argument

The issue at the heart of this paper concerns human agency. Stacey holds that human agency arises in interaction between individuals. Much of the management literature reviewed in this paper, referred to by Stacey *et al.* (2000) as 'mainstream literature', implicitly ascribes human agency to individual action. Stacey claims validity for his theory of complex responsive processes in organisations by arguing that it better explains how organisations *actually* adapt to changing circumstances, and to a certain extent, create their own futures.

Based on the argument begun in Paper Three, I argue here that management is concerned with coherent action in organisations, and that leadership concerns willing and informed participation in that action. This willingness arises from the ways in which circumstances are understood, that is their meaning, and the consequent implications for action. Drawing on Mead, Stacey argues that meaning arises in the social act in which the gesture of one and the response of the other are inseparable phases, and so the emergence of new meaning cannot be ascribed to any one individual. This then problematises the traditional notion of a leader as one who makes meaning for others, while at the same time posing a further challenge of validity to Stacey: if his claim to validity is that it explains the *fact* that organisations do adapt to changing circumstances better than 'mainstream' theories, it must also explain the *fact* that certain individuals do make a considerable difference in this process of adaptation. That is, individuals *do* differ in

the impact they have on the emergence of organisational futures; how does the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations account for this?

My answer to this is skill, (in addition to the more obvious issue of power); in particular the skills of noticing and drawing attention to what is emerging in interaction, that is to emerging meaning. Such skilled people are not directly affecting the thematic patterning of interaction itself; rather, they are directly influencing the other participants' responses through their gestures. This directly influences the thematic patterning. Leadership is concerned with the process of meaning making. To the extent that an individual is experienced by a group as being skilled in this way, she will be seen as a leader.

My practice is concerned with the development of the skills of leadership. Using the same argument as in the above paragraph, these skills cannot be directly influenced by a teacher of leadership, but the teacher, by his choice of gestures, can influence the responses of the other, thereby influencing the emerging pattern of knowing, i.e. the skill of the student (as well as that of the teacher!).

The central argument in this paper is as follows:

- Leadership is concerned with working within a group or organisation to assist it to move into an unknown future; this requires the continuous emergence of meaning. New meaning cannot be commanded to appear; rather, it emerges as thematic patterning from the communicative interactions of persons,

principally in conversation.

- New meaning arises from interaction, and is more likely to emerge in conversation which is characterised by richer diversity of themes and greater spontaneity, than one which is characterised by static, sparse, repetitive patterns in which little new emerges.
- No one, including leaders or teachers, can take up a position outside this interaction and attempt to influence it from there. The only way to influence the emergent thematic patterning is to participate in that interaction, that is by being there, and by the particular gestures-responses one makes.
- The people participating in this process are not all the same: some are more powerful than others; some are more skilful than others in noticing and drawing attention to what is emerging between them. The more powerful or skilful people will exert more influence on the responses of other participants and hence, indirectly, on the emergent thematic patterning of the interaction in which they are engaged. Leaders are those who are experienced by the group as being skilled in this process.
- The task of a leader is to participate in and thereby attempt to influence the interactions (principally conversations) that constitute the life of the group, and to do so in a way that pays attention to the interactions, in particular to surprises, irregularities and misunderstandings which give rise to potential changes in the patterns or conversation. Therefore, leadership is concerned with

the emergence of new patterns of thinking and knowing, that is, with joint exploratory learning.

- Developing the skill of leadership must therefore involve the enhancement of an individual's capacity to pay attention to this process, to be fully present to the changing patterning of interactions as they emerge, as well as being fully present to the changing patterning of internal dialogue in one's self. This change in skill is a type of new knowledge, or more accurately, a change in patterns of knowing, and this constitutes learning. In effect, since leadership concerns continuous learning, becoming a leader involves *learning to learn in a new way*.
- This change in skill is itself a change in the characteristic patterning of an individual's internal dialogue. This learning is achieved through the experience of dialogue in a group with skilled participants. The role of a teacher is similar to that described above for a leader. They are engaged in a similar task: participating in and contributing to conversation in skilled ways. The teacher (in this case me), as part of the process, is also learning while helping others to learn.

In Part One of this paper, I explore some theories of organisational change which have helped me to understand what I have encountered in my practice, and the extent to which they explain how leaders deal with movement into an unknown future, with a particular emphasis on learning and knowledge creation.

In Part Two, I explore the same issues from the standpoint of complexity theories. I place particular emphasis on developing a different view of my role as teacher/consultant.

### **Part One: A Comparison of Views**

My practice as a teacher and consultant is concerned with enhancing the leadership capacity of organisations and individuals principally by helping them to make sense of their experience, and, thereby, determine options for the future. A number of schools of thought have helped me to make some sense of my own practice; they have brought me some distance, but have also left me with questions. In what follows, I explore the principal theories which have influenced me, how they have helped, and what they fail to account for.

In order to compare how different schools of thought view learning and knowledge, I shall take a brief vignette from my own practice which occurred during the writing of this paper. I was asked by a colleague to join him in a meeting at the office of the president of a University. The request which had been relayed to him simply said it had something to do with project management, an area in which both of us teach, among our other duties. We met Paul, a senior executive at the office of the president. The project he was concerned with was the future of his institution. He explained the overall strategic development of the university and the high levels of investment which it was undertaking. My colleague, Eoin, took some notes as he spoke; I did not. I simply listened. Paul described the various pressures which the university was under: falling student numbers, funding tied to student numbers, increasing pressure for research output. It was

necessary to get the heads of each of the faculties to participate fully in the planning process.

“We have an agreed strategic plan which everybody understands. The thing is that the individual schools and faculties don’t really see it as having anything to do with them. They’ll just see it as something to do with the President’s office.”

“And your point is that it is relevant...” I offer.

“Of course, the future of the university will be made by these people”.

“So, they have to see themselves as an integral part of the future of the university” I said.

“Exactly. Now, what we really need is an operational plan from each of these people, really a kind of project plan”

With Paul in the room is Simon, a retired top level civil servant who is acting as an advisor to the strategic development process. “Most of these people really have little or no experience of planning. When we ask them for plans they give us a list of action points, which have no coherence and no relation to an overall strategic concept. I know from experience that it’s very hard for people to begin to think in this way. We were hoping that you might be able to teach them a kind of template. What would you use here?”.

Eoin reassures Paul and Simon that we have plenty of models and approaches to planning.

I offer the idea that it is not difficult to give plans, but would this result in committed action? Would they really grasp what Simon could see? The task facing us is still eluding me. Simon and I appear to be disagreeing about what is important. He is concerned that nothing practical and organised will emerge from the day. Paul nods, tight-lipped. He looks uneasy when I say that all the people concerned need to engage in dialogue about their projects with colleagues. We are making sense differently in our dialogue, right here. I stay with the conversation.

“Dialogue is all very well, but we need clear action plans” – Simon

He is concerned about pointless talk; his concern comes from long experience. I am concerned about smart independent people being given formulae to deal with the future of their schools, simple solutions to complex problems, which they would reject, or, worse still, accept. My concern also comes from long experience. Our discussion has the potential to become dichotomised and sterile, or even entrenched. I could lecture about topics such as engagement, claim authority as an expert, or even try to scare them a little about the consequences of not doing things ‘my way’. Would this get me anywhere with an experienced pair like Simon and Paul? I still don’t know what we’re really trying to do in this meeting or what we might usefully do at another time with this client. I decide to stay with the ‘not knowing’, and instead enrich the picture.

“Paul, can you tell me about the people and their jobs?” I enquire. Paul speaks about a group of highly motivated, idiosyncratic professionals. We explore their history of organisational learning.

My mind is beginning to appreciate Simon’s point, while holding on to my own. This is the dilemma. “How do they work in their daily lives?” – I ask, not quite knowing where that question came from. Simon is watchful.

“Oh, very informal, quite intense – and they’re all very different people”. – Paul replies.

Simon looks pensive: “Mmmm, yeah” – looks at me differently, quite engaged - “they wouldn’t want to be told what to do. I don’t really mean a template, but they have to see things a little differently, and come out with a result”.

A different picture is emerging for me now, a sense of what we might be trying to achieve, and why it is so difficult. “You know, you really have quite a complex, diverse organisation” – I comment.

“Yes, we do...and we still have to get somewhere” – Paul

“So, how do we get some drive and consistency in the planning and recognise the real complexity of the situation – is that our question?” I ask.

“That’s really it. It’s a kind of guidance, to fit in with the university’s strategy”.



I ask: "What is needed now?"

Paul paused briefly in his flow: "I think some kind of workshop". I sensed an unspoken "but".

"Have you any thoughts about that?" I inquire.

"Well the thing is, they've had consultants and templates up to their eyeballs, and they're all very busy. Yet we have to get them together and working on the implementation of the University's strategy. Most of them just want to focus on the "day job". They don't really see this stuff as relevant".

I was forcibly struck by a thought about this situation: "The thing about strategy is that for it to really work it has to become a part of daily conversation, the thing that guides our thoughts and interactions. In other words, it has to become mundane, not esoteric".

Paul was nodding encouragingly. He responded by taking up this theme of the ordinary and describing a view of the future where this type of talk would be common among senior faculty and executives. "How can we get them to plan, to look forward with some vision?"

I suggested that the best way of getting this going was to engage them in conversation prompted by some straightforward questions. It seemed that what had started out as a possible course in project management had become something else. I asked Paul if he was

finding the conversation helpful: “Very much. This is helping to clarify some issues for me”.

What had happened here? At the outset of my teaching and consulting career I would have anxiously tried to please this potential client by selling him a course which would address his needs, as defined by me. I would have planned and prepared for the meeting and produced the fruits of this in the meeting, seeking clarity and a clear course of action. Now, I entered the meeting ready to engage and to see where the conversation would take us. I listened fully to Paul, allowing the themes in the conversation to provoke further ideas in me to put out into the conversation. Understanding of what the issues were and what to do next changed as the conversation progressed. Was this consulting? Teaching? Action, or just preparation for action?

I shall first explore some traditional approaches to learning and consulting to determine the extent to which they help with understanding this theoretical challenge.

Writers on Knowledge and Learning in Organisations.

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) knowledge exists in two forms: tacit and explicit. Their model is based on the work of Polanyi (1969), who argued that all knowledge is, ultimately, tacit. Tacit knowledge resides within an individual mind and includes insights and know-how based in a particular way of seeing and getting on in the world. It exists primarily below the level of awareness and is not accessible by direct reflection or by ‘interrogation’ of the individual possessing the knowledge. It can be observed when an individual is

seen to engage in skilful action. When tacit knowledge is codified in written form, or in organisational routines or systems, it can be easily communicated, shared and modified and is called explicit knowledge. This form of knowledge is located outside of people. Its principal value is in its ability efficiently to transmit knowledge to others. Of principal concern to Nonaka and Takeuchi is the range of methods through which knowledge can be transmitted from one individual to another. This is especially of interest in organisations where valuable information should be shared so that all may benefit from the buried treasure of unique knowledge residing in individual minds. They do not explain how individual tacit knowledge arises in the first place, but take it as a starting position. They propose four mechanisms which transmit knowledge within and between its two forms:

Tacit → Tacit: this occurs through active mimicry without articulation; for example, this is one of the ideas underlying the practice of apprenticeship.

Tacit → Explicit: this occurs when individuals or, better, teams try to articulate through speculation and hypothesis what their actual skill or insight is and how it works.

Explicit → Tacit: this occurs when something is explained and put to some use, with the expectation that the knowledge will be 'internalised' within the individual mind, and may subsequently operate without the individual being aware of the extent of their skilled action.

Explicit → Explicit: This involves the direct transmission of symbols, tools and artefacts which are said to 'capture' knowledge.

Much of the management development industry could be said to think of itself as functioning in this way. Effective managers, leaders or industries are observed in order to 'surface' tacit knowledge (in a process of research), which is then translated into universal principles (explicit knowledge) to control and predict the future. Management expertise is thus 'technicised'; the practical knowledge that is vital to the practice of management is lost. These principles are learned in programmes and are applied to learners' own situations in order to be internalised. This approach reifies knowledge and enables it to be 'commoditised' for purposes of control and dissemination.

In the case of the university vignette, the interaction with Paul and a possible meeting with the group could be seen in this way. I, as expert, would bring relevant explicit knowledge to be given to the group for application to their own situations. Change would come about through this process of learning. Thus, learning from me would consist of at least two modes of knowledge transmission. Tacit knowledge within the group might also surface and become explicit. The initial interaction would be seen as checking to see if I had the 'right' explicit knowledge to bring to bear on the situation at hand; the process of the meeting would not be of particular concern. This theory says that knowledge arises within the individual, but does not account for how this happens. The experience of interaction is essentially a type of transaction.

The unknown is principally dealt with as a type of void to be filled. Knowledge generation is conceived as a type of mining process where it is extracted in 'raw' form from the mind of an individual, refined and distributed. This view of knowledge and learning ignores the opportunities for, and quality of, interaction occurring in the mundane acts of engaging with a client. Agency for change is principally located within the (explicit) knowledge which then becomes the focus of attention in both consulting and teaching. No learning is directly attributed to the 'live' experience of interaction.

Yet, in my practice, when asked what had contributed to useful learning, participants actually consistently and emphatically point to interaction, formal and informal, as being critical to the development of their skill and insight. When evaluating learning sessions (as they are asked to do) they are frequently quite critical of events which they experience as consisting principally of attempts at knowledge transmission, for example, lecturing. It is interesting to me that in making this type of criticism managers are paying attention to their actual lived experience, in this case, of the class. In the setting of learning, as in their actual work setting, managers are acutely aware of the importance of interaction, even though they may not necessarily be able to articulate this, or even openly acknowledge its importance.

When asked to describe their actual lived experience of managing and leading, I notice that participants on my programmes speak of an intense and unpredictable quality of daily engagement with others around issues of concern, which are constantly being re-understood in the light of these interactions. One of the things that has always puzzled me about teaching management is why it is felt that the best

way of helping individual managers to learn to succeed in this world of engagement with others and with their own emerging thinking is to remove them from it. I explored this issue in Paper Two.

One of the schools of thought which strongly influenced my practice in earlier years, and one which could guide my work with the university, is Organisation Development (OD) (Lewin, 1963, Kolb and Frohman, 1970). This school grew out of Kurt Lewin's development of 'Action Research' which was an attempt to develop an approach to social science which would be principally concerned with the social practice of individuals, and whose approach to research would be characterised by co-operative learning among the group or entity to be studied. The practice of OD combines rational choice (Where are we? Where do we want to be? How do we get there?) with an approach to learning which is seen as an individual cognitive process. Learning is carried out as a cycle of: action → reflection (What have I learned?) → hypothesise (How do I understand the world?) → plan further action. To use the terminology and argument developed in earlier papers, this is rationalist causality with some learning added. That is, the manager (or consultant) stands outside the process and autonomously chooses a future for it. The unknown is dealt with by diminishing it through repeated cycles of learning.

One of the ways in which this theory is put to work is to gather, in a workshop, representative groups from the organisation which is the subject of consultation. The whole organisation (conceived as system) should be present in the room in a representative way. The group is asked to describe a desired future in the light of anticipated changes in their environment and their current (presumably unsatisfactory)

situation. They are then asked to propose practical ways of bringing about specific parts of the desired change, which would all fit together as a kind of jig-saw puzzle. The groups would re-assemble at intervals to review progress on individual projects, evaluate learning, adjust their views on how they understood the organisation, and propose a new round of activities. In the case of the university above, something similar would be suggested to bring about the necessary change. All sections would be represented in the room, and they would attempt to design the university's organisational future. Meetings with Paul would have the purpose of designing the group meeting, including deciding who should be there, and who should not.

The Rational Causality of this model appealed to the engineer in me. The organisation was a static 'thing' which could be worked on separately from the interaction of the people which constituted it. The future of the organisation could be chosen and created with a few 'adjusting meetings' before settling into its new form. As if considering the organisation to be some kind of ice sculpture, Lewin's maxim of 'unfreeze – change – refreeze' was the guiding motto. Any conflict occurring reflected human-induced imperfections in the process. On a human level, it depended on the well-intentioned compliance of those involved; this generally turned out to be something of a naïve assumption. It was not difficult to get organisation members to distance themselves from the organisation (and from their own experience) and see it as a separate entity external to themselves which could be shaped and controlled at will.

Consequently, the approach had also a great appeal to clients, particularly at the outset of the assignment. It was difficult to object to

this approach as it was so logical and, moreover, in keeping with the general ideology of management, as discussed in Paper Two. The principal difficulty I experienced with this approach was that fundamentally it dealt with an unknown future by assuming that it could be modelled sufficiently accurately to make it 'manageable'; reality is dealt by caricaturing it as a 'whole' and dealing with it from the 'outside', rather than by actually *experiencing* it in a partial way.

My experience was that, rather than the change iteratively converging on the desired outcome (as a cybernetic system "*ought*" to) the upset and questioning within the organisation often deepened as assumptions which were being revealed were examined, scepticism about the process turned to cynicism about personal interests. The attempt was to stabilise and unify a view of the organisation and its future. The assumption was that power and politics played benign roles, if any. As will be discussed in Part Two, these constitute highly questionable bases on which to proceed.

Management typically responded in a number of ways involving a mixture of direct control and turning the change into a cult with its own heroes, often called 'champions of change'. But change *did* sometimes actually come about in the course of such exercises, albeit often after a crisis in the process, and not, I believe, for the reasons claimed. I now believe that in such cases the principals involved in the change quietly abandoned the notion of the change process as a separate system which 'drove' their efforts and took to intense personal negotiation. In other words, the putative 'change system' did little to change the organisation-system largely, in my view, because agency had been assigned to something outside the people involved, who then



wondered how to regain control of 'it'. Where it happened, change resulted from the emergence of intensely responsive relationships which, for ideological reasons (outlined in Paper Two), could not be highlighted publicly, or even noticed, personally. What I am arguing here is that this approach directs attention to the wrong thing and justifies this in a process of *post-hoc* attribution of cause. Leadership in this theory is exemplified in the popular literature as a kind of heroic championship (for example, see Gerstner, 2002)

Two writers within this field particularly affected my practice and my thoughts about it. Firstly, the concept of process consultation developed by Schein(1988 ), appeared to address some of the more literal approaches of OD. Essentially, Schein proposed a role for the consultant that involved observing the overt and covert communication occurring within a group and their apparent effects on the functioning of the group. This communication was received, and was potentially affected by individual perceptual distortion. This web of communication and interpretation gave rise to 'norms' in the organisation. The consultant feeds back her perceptions of the group and invites the group to *choose* the changes it wishes to make. This is an elaboration of the same message: issues affecting performance are drawn into awareness and a future is chosen. Irregularities, chance events, are seen as hindrances to the idealised smooth functioning of the group. The consultant is an external, neutral, non-participant. I never succeeded in maintaining this stance, as I generally began to see greater potential in responding to something a group member had just said than in maintaining a distant composure. Nonetheless, the idea of a web of communication forming an aspect of organisation appealed to me.

The second writer who particularly influenced my practice was Argyris with his notions of Defensive Routines and Double-Loop Learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974). The concept of Defensive Routines appealed directly to my experience. This idea says that when people feel threatened by certain issues they act in characteristic patterns which will save them from embarrassment or loss of influence, and that these routines, in turn, distort the generation of data necessary for the OD process. Argyris was concerned to close the gap between what people said motivated their actions (espoused theories) and what actually motivated them (theories in use). With sufficient reflection, individuals could come to an awareness of the 'reasoning' or rules affecting their behaviour and then choose to change it. In effect, we attempt to question the assumptions underlying how we think. This theory appealed to me in engendering a sense of awareness of an inner world which affects how we understand ourselves. I had not really entertained the concept of infinite regress which Stacey (2001) points to in such a theory – becoming aware of becoming aware of how I think, and so on to infinity.

Both Schein and Argyris move towards an increasingly complex understanding of causality in organisations, but having recognised it seek to deal with it by reducing it, in order to manage it. The message for would-be leaders is: find out what's going on and control it. Shaw (2002) in discussing Argyris makes the point, which I would now extend to many of the schools of organisation change that the consultant 'is forced to pursue an arduous and exhausting 'mining' of experience for elaborate propositions and explanations for actions and their underlying motivations, ignoring any idea that this kind of

interaction might be an ongoing creation more than an uncovering of what was 'there'. This alarming thought, that we may be creating what we are trying to explore as objective phenomena, has been one of the biggest shifts in outlook for me since I began this doctoral programme. It has been an awakening to realise how, in common thought, including mine, ideas which help us to think about social interaction *as if* they were real systems take over our thinking and we forget the 'as if' (Griffin, 2002) and so have encouraged me to explore aspects of organisations as if they really existed and this would be helpful to understanding.

Schön, a collaborator of Argyris, introduced the concept of the 'reflective practitioner' which has significantly influenced part of my approach to learning and to the design of executive development programmes (Schön, 1983, 1987). Schön also believes in reflection to surface tacit knowledge and choose a future. Schön's notion of 'artistry' is an attempt to describe a quality of attentive engagement in the minutiae of the practice of management in which practitioners are constantly creating the worlds with which they engage. It was an affirmation to see Schön's work as I had long appreciated the role of reflection in learning, and had often encouraged students to write their thoughts following a period of activity, and to share these where possible. Even in consulting activities, I often asked client groups to take individual 'time out' to write down their thoughts following a period of intense debate or exploration. They often found that new thoughts arose in the process of reflection. This is illustrated in the case of SSL, a manufacturing firm to which I consulted, in Part Two.

A key notion developed by Schön, and later elaborated by Heifetz (1994), is the distinction between problem types: the first type of problem is one where a routine solution is available, even though it may be technically quite sophisticated, and so it requires little change in assumptions or fundamental learning; the second type of problem is one to which no routine solution exists and which challenges assumptions – those involved have to learn their way into the future. This is a recognition of the uncertain nature, not only of the future, but of the present. It is also a recognition of the key role of joint learning or exploration as part of the work of a leader in the move into the unknown.

So, for example, in dealing with the case of the university, my attention would be directed towards getting Paul to reflect on the current situation, and to encourage him to see himself and his colleagues learning their way into dealing with a unique future for their institution. While working in this way in the past, I have had many powerful conversations with individuals and groups which I had conceived of as a sharing of reflections rather than as a creative process in itself. Increasingly now, my attention has been drawn to the discussion itself as a kind of 'crucible' in which ideas are explored and where I make contributions, which I term 'micro-teaching'; that is, where an idea spontaneously arises which I feel may be helpful, I contribute it, and work with whatever response it may evoke in others. This requires me to pay attention to the discussion as a living process of creation, and not simply as an exposition of pre-given thoughts. Schön (1987) describes the concept of the 'practicum' as a forum for learning this type of skill, but does little to elaborate explicitly his

concept of practical knowledge, or why this is the best (or only) way to attain it.

Schön's distinction of situation types is helpful in that it explicitly acknowledges the existence of the type of situation which is beyond direct control or knowability, thus rendering much management thinking effectively useless, and so raises the question of how a manager can usefully engage with such a situation. Up to this point, much management literature simply regards this type of situation as a temporary aberration which is always susceptible to being rendered into a controllable problem through the agency of an appropriate theory and/or a 'competent'<sup>10</sup> manager. In acknowledging a 'not-in-control' aspect Schön is implicitly relinquishing Rational Causality at least as the sole basis for action of the manager. But Schön essentially simplifies complex reality into two distinct types of situation and then dichotomises them; that is, he deals with complexity by restructuring it. Heifetz, drawing on Schön, compounds the dichotomy by elaborating an approach to leadership, based largely on the Tavistock<sup>11</sup> viewpoint, for dealing with the unstructured type of problem. Using a similar argument of separation of situations, Kotter (1999) distinguishes management, dealing with the routine, from leadership, dealing with change.

Streatfield (2002) also acknowledges the existence of an aspect of the manager's job which is not in control, but holds that this co-exists simultaneously with the 'in-control' aspects of the job and that these two aspects are inextricable. In fact they give rise to each other in a

---

<sup>10</sup> See Paper Two for an elaboration of this idea of 'competence'

<sup>11</sup> See description and comments on the Tavistock Institute later in this paper.

kind of dialectic. He deals with this situation, not by attempting to separate out these elements and learning to deal separately with them in different ways, but by accepting the paradox of their co-existence and then learning to deal with this. This is part of the argument in this portfolio.

Many of the organisations I work with claim to be, or wish to become 'learning organisations'. This phrase was coined by Senge (1990) in his book *The Fifth Discipline*. It signifies his advocacy of taking a whole systems view of an organisation, and its capacity to adapt through learning on a collective basis in order to change underlying structures which cause behaviour. Senge asserts that behaviour in organisations is caused by 'system archetypes' which are pre-existing categories of tensions which may limit growth. These are to be surfaced and described for a given organisation, and a fulcrum point is to be found where efforts for change can be made which will have a disproportionately beneficial effect. Effectively, Senge advocates doing on a collective basis what the previously mentioned writers described individually: explore, describe and change a system which causes behaviour. Sophisticated concepts provide methods of learning about deeper and more obscure causes of behaviour. Senge particularly advocates learning through processes of dialogue in organisations, which suggests a view of the dialogical reality of organisations, although his phrase, the 'learning organisation' suggests the opposite, an organisation which has an existence separate from the interactions of its members. One of the critical issues I am emphasising in examining the role of learning in the development of leaders is how attention is directed by a teacher. For example, in the case of Senge, attention is directed to a search for regularities or patterns in

behaviour, to which is then attributed an existence, which he terms *system archetypes*, and which 'cause' that behaviour.

In practice, I have not encountered any organisation which systematically engaged in the process suggested by Senge, and saw it through to the end. Some have started the exercise, and run out of energy, or have been distracted by where their dialogue brought them. This point is significant, because it points to a widening divergence which I encounter between the attractiveness of an elaborate theory to explain what might be happening in an organisation, and what happens when the same organisation tries to put that theory to use. Many theories such as Senge's have little impact on daily life in organisations for a variety of reasons which I am exploring in this paper, but which amount, in practice, to one mundane observation: the actions which they advocate do not fit easily into the intense self-patterning interaction of everyday life. Therefore, it is to daily life that my attention has been increasingly drawn.

Senge's interest in dialogue as a source of collective learning draws heavily on the work of David Bohm. I first encountered Bohm's ideas of learning and dialogue at a conference dedicated to his work. Bohm idealised dialogue as a unique style of interaction in which judgement is suspended, and through which a mystical coherence, which he termed 'the implicate order', made itself known. (Bohm, 1983) (It should be born in mind that Bohm was a physical scientist by initial training). He was clearly trying to explain the familiar phenomenon of coherence or novelty arising from the dialogue of a group of people without being attributable to any one person or set of ideas. He felt this was the emergence of a mystical 'implicate order', made possible

through a unique and skilled form of dialogue<sup>12</sup>. That is, skilled participation in a group gave access to causes of behaviour in the group which existed *outside* the simple interaction of the group; no novelty could therefore arise from the group itself – this is another form of Formative Causality. One of the speakers at the Bohm conference was a Native American, a group to which Bohm attributed special abilities of dialogue. I did not notice these special abilities in his speech or my subsequent personal dialogue with him, but I was very taken aback when he asked something fundamental: why do you have such problems with change? His answer was that we are obsessed with fixity, we think things should stay the same and invest a lot of ourselves in doing it. Our language, he said, is full of nouns which suggest permanence; his native language uses verbs and a sense of process to suggest transience. This set me thinking about assumptions of permanence, and how language can create a world of ‘things’. This issue of how language constrains and creates thought and, for example, in the case of the English language, processes become things, is taken up later in this paper in the discussion of the contribution of Elias.

A view of organisations and individuals as open systems combined with a psychoanalytic view is an approach pioneered by the Tavistock Institute. Individuals constitute ‘sub-systems’ within the larger system and relate to each other across the ‘boundary’ of self. Equally, subsections of the organisation also constitute systems. Relationships are conceived of as intersystemic. A key concept is that of the ‘primary task’ of the organisation – that which it must perform in order to survive or otherwise justify its own existence. This primary task could

---

<sup>12</sup> Personal comment: For me, coming from a nation of talkers (and sceptics), I found it difficult to elevate dialogue into a mystical art to which few have access.



include learning or knowledge creation. The organisational entity is then conceived of as a 'task system'. In order for individuals to carry out the functions of the task system they must take up roles within the task system. (Miller and Rice, 1967). Leadership is primarily concerned with the control of behaviour at the boundary of systems, including the protection of the integrity of systems and subsystems.

The psychoanalytic element is as follows. The group members contribute to the performance of the primary task of the group and so constitute what Bion (1961) calls a 'sophisticated work group'. At another level, the feelings of group members towards each other and the situation in which they find themselves, shaped by their personal histories, could be thought to form another more primitive group. This group behaves as if unconsciously motivated by shared basic assumptions of fight-flight, dependency or pairing. This is referred to as a *basic assumption group*. In effect, the perception of reality is distorted by elaboration in fantasy, and so forms a distorted basis for action.

The sophisticated group and the basic assumption group exist at the same time. The essence of the Tavistock approach is the study of the effect of the basic assumption group on the functioning of the task system. If the basic assumption mode of the group remains in the background, it may well support the primary task of the group. If, on the other hand, basic assumption mode affects the work of the group, the performance of the primary task will be disrupted. The basic assumption mode, including behaviour or fantasies, is said to have been 'imported' into the task system. Part of the task system may have to operate to contain the basic assumption behaviour, constituting an

organisational defence, thus potentially sub-optimising its performance.

The Tavistock approach, therefore, is to attempt to limit the potentially damaging effects of the basic assumption mode (i.e. shared unconscious fantasy) by strengthening or clarifying task system structures, reducing the opportunity for fantastic elaboration in basic assumption mode, or enhancing individuals' capacities to understand (in these terms) and deal with systemic issues. For example, within the task system, clarifying task, role and authority relationships; procedures and structure to contain anxiety (social defences) and enhanced leadership i.e. regulation of boundary issues.

Psychologically, this model moves from cognitivism, where mind consists of processes of representing external reality, to one where an 'inner world' is *created* with possible distortions of reality through processes of fantasy and repression. Within the context of the approach of complex responsive processes of organisation, as elaborated by Stacey *et al.* (2000), the Tavistock is placed squarely within the framework of systems thinking, and assumes the dual causality of Formative and Rationalist Teleology, which I have explained in Paper Two. Equally, individual and social are seen as separate phenomena, with distinct sets of explanation for related phenomena.

How is this complex theory put to practical use? In the case of the vignette above, my primary task would have been to engage with the university to understand *its* primary task, and to establish a way of detecting how the shared unconscious of the system may be affecting the performance of that task. Neumann (1994) refers to this initial

phase as 'crossing the boundary' into the client system. In describing the negotiation of a working relationship with a potential client, she deals with the difficulties and tensions which arrive through a combination of the approaches described above. Harmony and clarity are the goal, lest they disturb the work of the consultant. Turbulence in relationship is a potential distraction from the task, although it may be regarded as a source of data. Typically, the Tavistock approach continues by producing an hypothesis, often in written form, which is put to the group in question for their reaction. This would be discussed and explained to enable learning to take place. The idea here is that this action may draw into awareness for members of the system under study an understanding of the underlying dynamics of the system, and thus enable it to change. Although this is still a form of Action Research, it is an essentially psychoanalytic viewpoint in which coming to awareness, aided by an external agent, plays a significant role.

In practice, this approach can take quite an amount of time before anyone in the client system feels any change, and even then the pace can feel quite slow. The approach is initially explanatory and is often experienced as quite cerebral or even fanciful, requiring special interpretations, which can alienate members of the organisation. Many members of client systems experience the feedback of the hypothesis as confrontational and reproachful, potentially further alienating them from the process. The style of engagement depends heavily on the articulation of individuals' feelings and insights, which places those with less confidence (in themselves or this approach) or less fluency at a strong disadvantage for learning. I have participated as a staff member in group relations conferences modelled on this approach where the primary task was learning about leadership and change. The

comments above also apply to this learning experience. I did find them to be sources of considerable learning for me and for *some* of the participants, though, in my view, not by reason of the explicit model employed. Individual personal differences, idiosyncratic approaches to the task, the constant interchange and reforming of groups, minor incidents which take on disproportionate significance, and discussions 'off-line' would seem to be responsible for a considerable part of the value of this work. Note the unpredictable amplification of minor diversities, the quality of engagement in the previous sentence, which point to a more-complexity oriented view of a theory which will explain how learning (a type of novelty) arises. The appeal of this sophisticated theory is its attempt to deal with the complexity of human organisation by bringing together the study of the unconscious with a view of its context of as an interconnected social system.

Overall, the Tavistock approach attends to that which does not (or should not) change, or should be returned to a state of idealised systemic functioning through remedial action. Miller emphasises that an organisation must attain a new steady state if it is to survive (Miller, 1993). Elias (1978) points out an attitude in much sociological thinking "[t]hat anything which changes must be ephemeral, less important, less significant and in short less valuable, passes for almost a self-evident proposition, constantly reinforced by silent consensus" (p114).

Organisations and individuals are reified as different phenomena, thus leading to the paradox of dual causality elucidated by Stacey *et al.* (2000) and Griffin (2002). Organisational futures are chosen/managed, and insofar as unconscious processes have impact on the choice of future, these too must be managed for, if not directly controlled.

Learning occurs through direct propositions of theory and a systemic/psychoanalytic elucidation of experience. The origins of novel thought are ultimately not explained.

Reflecting, from the perspective of this DMan programme, on my personal period of study at the Tavistock Institute, and my involvement with Tavistock-inspired activities, I believe that much of what I have learnt has derived from the interactive experience with skilled colleagues, rather than from the insights offered by the theory. Interaction in the Tavistock has an instrumental purpose rather than in any sense constituting the ultimate phenomenon under study. I now find it strange that a discipline which derives partly from clinical practice underplays the big lesson from such practice: what is critical in the understanding and practice of change, personal or organisational, is the *experience* of interaction. This represents almost the ultimate technicisation of knowledge.

## **Part Two: A Complexity Viewpoint**

The theory of complex responsive processes in organisations developed by Stacey and colleagues, and which I am exploring in this thesis, draws my attention differently in the vignette with the university. Attention is paid to interaction as a source of new meaning; this is interaction among the themes which make sense of the experience of being together. It is also interaction which occurs in everyday conversation, in ordinary conversations in which every one participates as part of their daily experience of 'going on' together. The themes patterning interaction give rise to further patterns of interaction, and do this unpredictably, and without central intent.

Turning my attention in this way to the vignette of my visit to the office of the president of the university, I am aware that my conversation with Paul is not simply about our future possible interaction, it *is* our interaction – we are interacting in the living present, making meaning together. When Paul said the group did not need any more consulting models, I was struck by this statement. It had an unusual ‘arresting’ quality for me. Based on my own personal history of relating, new meaning came to me as to how to make sense of what they were trying to achieve, and how I might understand my relationship with Paul and his colleagues. Responding to his statement, I said that the main thing about what we might do together would be to make the university’s strategy part of daily mundane conversation.

My experience of this moment was that rather than looking principally for elements in my conversation with Paul which would fit with a theoretical system of how to ‘go on’, I remained open to what might emerge between us, and this new thought arrived. I had never really had that type of thought before. This apparently ordinary moment in which a new idea arises in interaction is an example of what I am attempting to describe in this paper. Furthermore, I believe that, had I entered the conversation with an agenda, the nature of our interaction would have been fundamentally different and there would have been less chance that new thought could have arisen in this way. Stacey describes knowledge as the process of patterning of interaction, that is to say, it is not a static thing, but represents the movement of interaction. New meaning arose in this conversation as changes in the pattern of interaction between Paul and me, and also in the patterns of dialogue within us as individual persons.

In Part One I introduced the principal writers who have influenced my practice as a teacher and consultant, indicated where they helped to explain my practice and what they left unexplained. I have illustrated by means of a real-life vignette how each of these approaches to consulting and knowledge creation would have guided me in dealing with the situation at hand. I have begun to introduce the alternative viewpoint described by Stacey and colleagues, viewing human interaction as complex responsive processes, and to show why I believe this may better explain the nature of my current practice, as well as guiding my attention in the future. In what follows I will deepen the exploration of the relevance of this theory to my practice.

#### A different View of Knowledge

The question of knowledge creation, and how it can be influenced, is at the heart of this inquiry for two reasons. Firstly, my practice is concerned with assisting managers to learn to be effective leaders through understanding their experience and their current situations in the light of exploration with me and with their fellow students, and with appropriate inputs of theory, where this may be helpful. Learning arises in the sense we make of experience. Knowledge is created as the managers in this process gain a different understanding of their situations and how they can act effectively. Thus, a concern of this inquiry is what difference a teacher can make to a person trying to make sense of her lived experience, especially where that person herself is trying to make a difference to that experience, i.e. to change something.

The second reason concerns the nature of leadership and strategy. From a complex responsive processes perspective, strategy is a thematic patterning of the processes of communicative interaction, which expresses the identity of an organisation (Stacey, 2001) and includes its purpose. Leadership involves the maintenance and development of this sense of identity and purpose. I argue in this paper that leadership is particularly concerned with assisting a group to move purposefully into an unknown future, and that this is a creative act requiring the constant emergence of new meaning. Thus, leadership itself is concerned with knowledge creation, and so, as a teacher, I am concerned that the managers with whom I work learn about this. Furthermore, I am concerned with how these managers can best learn to influence this process of creating new knowledge, and thus enhance their leadership ability.

In Part One of this paper I described the extent to which certain theories of organisation and knowledge with which I have worked help me to understand my practice better. One of the principal shortcomings of these theories, according to Stacey, is that they do not, on their own, account for how novel thought arises. Given the importance of novel thought outlined in the above two paragraphs, I cannot entirely account for my practice solely in terms of these theories. This is where the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations helps. A primary focus of Stacey, and of particular concern to this inquiry, is how new knowledge arises. Describing the systems view of knowledge creation he states: 'The knowledge creating system is basically one in which tacit knowledge already stored in the heads of some individuals, already enfolded as it were, is unfolded by processes of conversion. Mental models are already there,



as are the learning models according to which they are supposed to be changed and so are the visions that are supposed to guide the learning and knowledge creation of the whole system.' (Stacey, 2001, p239).

However, he continues with a critique of this view:

'...[the]systems perspective cannot succeed on its own as an explanation of how new knowledge is created. It can only explain how already enfolded knowledge is unfolded by the system. Within its own terms this systems view does not, indeed cannot, explain how completely novel knowledge arises, It simply assumes that it arises as tacit knowledge in the heads of some individuals, or exists in a common pool of meaning, and starts from there...It follows that the origin of novel knowledge, and of the vision supposed to guide it, lies outside the system and it is here that rationalist causality is relied upon...It is special individuals, an elite, standing outside the system, who make autonomous choices...The choices arise in dialogue that employs metaphor and analogy as well as rational reasoning but there is little explanation of the origins of creativity within that dialogue. In the end even the move from formative to rationalist causality fails to explain how truly new knowledge is created. (ibid.)

One of the important aspects of this type of thinking to my inquiry is the nature of knowledge, knowing, and knowers, and it is necessary to examine the philosophical underpinnings of systems thinking and of Stacey's theory of complex responsive processes in organisations to appreciate the latter's ability to account better for the origins of new meaning. Stacey traces the origins of systems thinking at least as far back as the philosopher Kant. Kant took the self, the knowing subject, as a given. The categories through which we know are given outside our experience; we come into the world with knowledge as *a priori* categories. Kant does not explain how new knowledge arises within the individual. Knowledge is reified, and knowing is, effectively, the possession of knowledge. It follows, therefore, that teaching and learning involve the transmission of knowledge from those who possess knowledge to those who do not. This is at the heart of the teaching/learning processes in mainstream thinking.

Stacey's theory is based on the work of Mead, Elias and others in the Hegelian tradition. The view of knowing presented by Hegel is fundamentally different in that it is essentially socially based. Knowing and knowledge arise through interaction with others and this interaction inevitably involves aspects of power and conflict. Persons do not enter social interaction with *a priori* identities; these arise through the interdependency and mutual recognition which are aspects of social interaction.

For Stacey, knowledge and its creation cannot be controlled or managed:

Knowledge creation is an evolutionary process of reproduction and potential transformation at the same time. In other words knowledge is neither stored nor shared because it is not an "it" at all but a process. It is communicative action, particularly in the form of conversation. Knowledge is the themes organising the experience of being together and knowledge evolves as active experience. Knowledge is created as changes in the thematic patterning of bodies relating to each other and that thematic patterning organises itself...Knowledge cannot be grasped, owned by anyone or traded in any market and its creation is a process of communicating and power relating that is both stimulating and anxiety provoking at the same time. (ibid., p220)

My argument in this paper proceeds from this point. One of Stacey's principal claims for the validity of his theory of complex responsive processes in organisations is that it better accounts for the emergence of novelty, that is, it better accounts for a critical aspect of *lived experience*. It is central to this theory that the emergent themes in communicative interaction cannot be directly controlled.

However, it is *also* a matter of lived experience that leaders *do* influence their situations (in many cases), and that (some) teachers *do* influence managers in learning to be better leaders. That is to say, although

knowing is a self-organising pattern, this does not mean that it cannot be *indirectly* influenced, by influencing the pattern of interaction. If the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations is to have practical value for managers, it must not only account for novel thought, it must also, paradoxically, account for how managers can make a difference in their organisations, and how teachers can make a difference to their students. Accounting for the capacity to influence this interaction, as a participant in the process, is at the heart of this paper.

Given that my practice principally concerns helping managers to learn from their own experiences, I must turn my attention to two related questions. Firstly, what is the nature of “teaching” in processes where new knowledge arises as the emergence of new patterns of meaning *between* individual persons, and where knowledge itself is seen as a process? Given that a future, including a future knowledge, can not be autonomously chosen by an individual, what is it that I am usefully doing as a teacher participating in a practice claiming to produce knowledge? The second question follows from the first, and it concerns the nature of skill. I am trying to assist my students to develop better skills as leaders and strategists, to improve their practice; what are these skills? If, as a teacher, I am employed because I have a skill in joining with others with the intention of developing their leadership skills, what skills do I employ?

The Case of SSL.

To explore these questions I will use the example of a company, Scully and Sons Ltd, manufacturers of materials handling equipment. The

firm is now chaired by one of the sons, Steve. His father, the founder, and two brothers, have no involvement in its management.

Headquarters and manufacturing are located in a rural location where over 200 are employed. There are sales offices in the UK, France, Germany, Scandinavia, Australia and the US. The firm had grown rapidly since Steve took over in the mid-1990's and it had developed a small range of technically advanced products. Many of the managers had grown with the firm, although in recent years some had also been recruited directly. I had been contacted by the firm to give a course on strategy and leadership. I met with Ted, the CEO, at his office in a rural location, and he began to speak in terms of the possible content of a course.

#### Leadership and the Move into the Unknown.

We began to discuss holding a one-week workshop with the top managers in the firm. I asked Ted what he needed to achieve in the week. Above all, he emphasised, he needed the managers to gain a strong understanding of the firm's new approach to its business and a commitment to it. Up to this point, discussion with the firm had been of a one-week event which was essentially driven by a teaching agenda. Despite his professional reserve and the apparently clear content requirement for the work, I began to feel something else, a kind of tension. I sensed a very deep need on Ted's part to make significant progress in this week, and I tested this out with him. 'I think this is going to be a very important event for you'.

'To be honest, there's a lot riding on it. The whole future of the firm depends on this group.' he replied.

We discussed the future of the firm and the uncertainties about it. Would sales pick up after a recent lull? Would the market respond to a renewed promotional campaign? Were they investing in the right areas - market development and some product development? Did they have the right people to drive the growth of the firm?

I was struck by the sense of 'the unknown' in our conversation. Ted was trying to move SSL forward into an unknown future and was evidently trying to find a way of dealing with both the task of this, and the feelings that accompanied it. My mind went off into a minor excursion about how this is the nature of strategic leadership: dealing with the unknown, while maintaining the purpose and identity of the organisation. This is not an existing 'unknown' awaiting discovery; it is an act of creation in the moment. So many of the metaphors we use to describe strategy evoke images like discovering a previously unseen path through a jungle; it all seems obvious after the fact. It is said that history is written by the winners; no less so in business. Descriptions of useful strategies are not only written after the fact (Mintzberg, 1987, 1994, --- *et al.* 1998, Whittington, 1993), they completely overlook the creative moment in facing the unknown<sup>13</sup>. And 'facing the unknown' is the issue – the temptations to flee it, or disguise it with a veneer of 'known' is irresistible..

In our conversation I also noticed my own anxiety rising somewhat; I was also facing the unknown here in my conversation with Ted, and in

---

<sup>13</sup> This is echoed in the oft-quoted maxim in business – 'when things are going well, it's never too late to put a strategy in front of it'

my future work with SSL. How could I be of service to Ted and SSL in dealing with, and in learning to deal with the unknown.?

Elias explores the issue of not knowing, in the context of knowing. He says that this experience is too terrifying an experience to withstand, and so the gap in knowing is filled with fantasy: '...fantasy knowledge can take deep roots in the lives of human groups. It can give to such an extent the impression of being reality-congruent that it blocks the search for more reality-congruent symbols' (Elias, 1991, p57). This is of particular relevance to my work because a significant aspect of managers' lives is 'not knowing', especially about the future, but also about the reality of the present and the past.

Equally, in my own practice it is personally and ideologically unacceptable for a teacher not to know what things mean and what is going to happen next. Yet Elias argues that it is only in the experience of staying with the 'not knowing' that fantasies can be recognised which do not serve learning or work, and that truly new knowledge can arise. 'But without throwing oneself for a time into the sea of uncertainty one cannot escape the contradictions and inadequacies of a deceptive certainty.' (Elias, 1998, p270). One of the temptations in dealing with uncertainty in working with SSL was to supply a reliable 'way forward', for example a comprehensive strategy. This would have dealt with an aspect of the uncertainty of SSL's future by providing some certainty. It would also have moved the conversation away from the creative experience of staying with the unknown.

Therefore, one of the struggles in learning concerns the balance of reality-congruent knowledge and fantasy knowledge. This requires a

certain measure of probing and questioning to begin to surface unquestioned assumptions, and to see how this changes the picture. For example, with SSL, assumptions emerged about how success was measured, and what customers really wanted. This can be a disorienting and anxiety provoking experience: 'Unquestioned assumptions, the basic structures of thought that we take over with the words of our language without further reflection, are among the indispensable means of orientation without which we lose our way' (ibid). Anxiety and the responses to it are not a particular concern of Elias. The issue of anxiety has been explored in Paper Three. Also, it does not automatically follow that any experience, especially those intended as learning experiences, and including the experience of not knowing, will result in an increase of reality-congruent knowledge.

The principal emphasis of much of the literature reviewed in Part One is of knowledge and regularity as a way of dealing with not knowing and with 'messiness'. What I am arguing here, as a starting point, is that the reality of the situation facing a leader like Ted is that part of the essence of leadership is in acting, with intent, into the unknown and recognising the uniqueness of the situation, while maintaining the purpose and identity of the organisation.

I explored with Ted how the week could make a difference to the firm, rather than simply teaching them about management. He immediately warmed to this change of emphasis, and said that the managers had to learn to engage more strategically with the firm and display more leadership. We arrived at an agreement which would have two objectives: firstly, to learn some of the fundamentals of strategy and strategic leadership; and, secondly, to make progress on the strategic

agenda facing the firm. We would attempt to achieve the former through dealing with the latter. That is, we would attempt to learn new ideas by making sense of experience, in this case the experience of the members of SSL.

Already, for both of us, the meaning of our possible work together was changing through our interaction. This had come about through my response to his apparent anxiety; his anxiety had come to the fore as a response to my probing. By maintaining attention on what was happening between us in the moment, by participating in the interaction in the living present, the story was changing for both of us. The schools of knowledge creation reviewed in the previous section essentially prompt one to look outside experience to find an understanding of it, and to find a way forward. My experience of myself, which is what prompted my question to Ted, would not have been taken into account. I was dealing with the unknown in our relationship by staying with it. As we discussed the current situation of SSL, I noticed that different future possibilities arose; we discussed future business prospects in varying markets and in different product sectors. I also noticed Ted revisiting the past occasionally from a new perspective.

### Irregularity and New Thought.

The act of creation in the strategic move into the unknown arises in interaction, principally in the form of conversation. John Shotter is a social constructionist who focuses on the 'living' quality of interaction and its capacity to create new understanding by paying attention to aspects of conversation which may ordinarily be overlooked or taken



for granted. These aspects can include the use of language, connections between ideas, or simply thoughts which have a particularly noticeable or 'arresting' quality. Shotter refers to this type of thinking, in which the meaning of past and future mutually form each other continuously as they emerge from interaction, as 'relational-responsive' (Shotter, 1996).

Stacey criticises Shotter for distinguishing this from any other kind of conversation, claiming that this creates two kinds of conversation, a 'dualism', which ignores the potential of ordinary daily conversation also to act as a source of novelty. While not denying that all interaction has the potential to pattern further interaction, what I am focussing on in this paper is how interaction can be skilfully influenced. I think that what Shotter is attempting to say that it is possible to be more (or less) present to the creative potential of a conversation, while being part of that conversation; that is, it is possible to make a difference to a conversation with skill and intent, and thereby enhance its potential. This skill includes awareness and sensitivity to the living nature of the interaction. It also includes seeing the potential in going in one direction more than others, based on experience; it is not a *laissez-faire* approach. I am claiming this as my skill, both as the skill of a leader and as the skill of the teacher who seeks to assist others to learn from experience.

To express this point in complexity terms, movement into an unknowable and uncontrollable future arises continuously from multiple interactions, but this does not mean that we cannot seek to know and influence this from within the interaction. In my case, I seek to influence the continuous arising of new patterns of knowing, while

accepting that I cannot do this directly. This is at the heart of my stance as a teacher. In the case of Ted, I sought to influence him, not towards some pre-determined outcome, but in continuous response to the meanings arising in our conversation.

In discussing the organisation, the conversation felt less fruitful. The conversation (and the organisation) felt more than a little 'stuck'. A stable repetitive pattern emerged, and I wondered what I could do to influence it. The issue of influence is central here. As discussed earlier, it is not possible, from the perspective from which I am arguing in this paper, to stand outside the conversation and control it; it is only possible to gesture, albeit with skill and/or power, with the intent of evoking responses in the other, and so jointly affect the thematic patterning which arises. I was part of the conversation with Ted, and I was drawing his attention to alternative perspectives, but I could not directly influence how our conversation would evolve.

The principal issue, which emerged quite quickly with Ted, was, as he saw it, that some of the managers were less evidently committed than others. I asked him what he attributed this to. Essentially, his response was a circular argument: they were less committed because they were less committed. I began to wonder what rôle the story and style of the firm had played in engendering the current level of commitment. Also, how accurate was Ted's perception of commitment; what did it mean to him, how would he recognise it? I probed a little further, asking him to describe for me what would be happening differently if there were greater understanding and commitment in the firm. The reply was of an organisation which would be more responsive to the requirements of the top management. I began to listen for hints about the quality and

extent of discussion and interaction in the firm, but these were notably sparse. There was little sense of engagement in the description. There was little sense of engagement in our conversation. I noticed the stability of meaning of the present and the past in our conversation. I wondered how I would be able to be of service to SSL. This was still an unknown for me.

### Novel Thinking in SSL.

The top 22 managers, including the CEO, Ted, but not Steve Scully, the principal shareholder and executive chairman, gathered in a hotel on a Sunday night for the week's work. We began on Monday morning in a small meeting room with my introduction of the work. I explained that we would use the company as a 'living case' as we learned some of the principles of leadership and strategy from their actual practice of work. I gave them an outline timetable along with a caveat that we would vary this to suit needs as they arose. The mood in the room felt a little edgy with anticipation. I started by asking what had been happening in the past two to three years that they felt had been significant.

'We've been much clearer about our strategy, about what we're trying to achieve' – Brian, who manages the operation in France.

'Yeah, that's right, and the new range of machines are real winners' – Nigel, a robust north of England salesman. Nods and murmurs of agreement on this point.

'Well, it's a different company than it was two years ago' – Dave, who manages the sales team in Ireland – 'I can see where we're trying to get

to, it's much clearer to me, and the customers are really pleased with what we're producing'.

There is much talk of the new range of machines and how good they are. 'A lot of that is down to you, Paschal' says Kevin, Sales Director, nodding at the head of manufacturing 'you're really producing the goods'.

This goes on a bit and I feel irrelevant except to raise minor point of clarification. I feel some energy ebbing. The conversation feels self-congratulatory and more than a little inauthentic. Ted, the CEO, pipes in – 'We have not made our sales targets in most of our markets, it has to be said'.

'Well, that's true, but we're on the right track, and the customers are really pleased' – Nigel, again, seems to be trying to get back to the 'good place'.

I feel suddenly moved to speak about this – 'It's not your job to please customers'. I have surprised myself with this. Puzzled looks from the rest of the group. I continue 'No, it's not – you're not Santa Claus' I get the "what is he on about?" looks. 'Your job is to meet certain of their needs at a profit to you. Are you doing this? I don't hear much talk of profitability or value creation'.

The silence that followed reminded me of an old western movie where the stranger says something in the saloon, and the piano and all conversation stops. It felt like a critical moment. Where would this go now?

Kevin broke the silence saying quietly – ‘He’s right, that’s part of our problem’ The mood had shifted. ‘What do you mean, Kevin?’ queries Tomás.

‘Well just that we’re not guided by profitability, as if that was Ted or Neville’s (the Chief Financial Officer) concern.’

The conversation continues in this re-adjustment to how think about success. The pattern of conversation is now organised by a different theme. I have contributed to this shift in change by my interjection, which was in response to the theme organising the conversation up to that point. I did not know when, or if, this point would arise; I was responding in the moment to something that struck me. My response was dependent on my own history, which was part of my knowing, and so part of my skill. A novel form of thought has arisen from the conversation to assist the move into the future.

Shotter (1996) asserts that it is in such ‘relational-responsive’ interaction that novelty can arise: ‘the new ideas, or thoughts, or images, that we think of as coming to guide our ways of acting in the world do not just spring into our heads ‘out of the blue’; they originate in differences (in relations) which have a sensed connection: whose origins are to be found in our spontaneous, unnoticed, responsive or dialogic reactions and relations to our surroundings.’ (ibid.). What is significant in Shotter’s view is that the very thing which mainstream thinking, in its drive to homogenise, disparages or ignores is what gives rise to novelty, that is *difference*. My understanding of Shotter is that it is not just the existence of differences which give rise to new

thought, but the disposition of the interlocutors (or, at least, one of them), and their readiness and capacity to engage 'live' in the constantly changing landscape of meaning, a 'dialogical way of being' (ibid). Part of my unique contribution as a teacher seeking to make a difference is in my 'way of being' as *part* of the group. I had a different way of looking at the situation facing SSL; something in the conversation grated with me outside my awareness and this eventually 'surfaced' as an impulse, a spontaneous act. Certainly, this act derived from my practice, but why might this have any greater validity than, say an act which is determined from the start without any reference to what is going on in the conversation?

Part of the answer to this question is that there is so much 'going on' (Shotter) in daily life that we can only pay attention to part of it, but which part and why? Shotter quotes Wittgenstein:

When it comes to trying to grasp the relation between our behaviour and its surroundings, to suggest that we behave as we do because of certain hypothetical mechanisms within us, is to ignore the part played by just those aspects of our behaviour in which we relate ourselves to our circumstances spontaneously. Whereas: if we are to develop new liveable forms of life, new ways of relating ourselves to our surroundings, it is precisely amongst those spontaneous aspects of our activities, where we are already acting successfully, in practice, that we can find the new possibilities we require. It is only within the flow of our practices that we can say or do anything that can make a difference to them; we must work outwards from within them. Indeed, as Wittgenstein puts it, "we talk, we utter words, and only later get a picture of their life" (1953, p209); thus, you must "let the use words teach you their meaning" (1953,p220).' (ibid.).

My spontaneous comment has come from within the flow of my practice. My history of relating and acting is now at work in the room with SSL, as are theirs, and are producing novel thought to move into the unknown.

## The Capacity to Direct Attention.

We spent a considerable amount of time exploring the practical implications of a new-found view of strategy. For some, old certainties had disappeared. SSL appeared to be facing bigger questions than many had expected to be dealing with. We spent the bulk of the second day working the issues, delving into appropriate theory to gain clarity or insight and looking at the immediate implications for each one in the room. On day three, I rejoined the group after lunch. Simon (a colleague) had spent the morning working on questions raised by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>14</sup> concerning implications for individual behaviours and awareness. I felt a need to reconnect with them so that we could work, to renew our working alliance. On re-entering the room I felt quite distanced from the group.

I asked them straight out how they were feeling. Kevin was feeling uneasy, others concurred; Tomás felt filled up. I asked what their impulse was – what do you feel like doing right now? Nigel said he wanted to hide; others said they wanted to run away; some said they wanted to do *something*. I then asked them to go away for a few moments alone to write their answers to these questions: What am I learning about myself as a leader? What do I need to do differently to be effective? What am I learning about this group? What do we need to do differently?

On their return Tomás said he felt they were on the edge. Kieran, the new HR director, talked about mutual accountability, and recounted an old story about ‘your end of the boat seems to be sinking’. Harry talked about lack of openness affecting business performance and how he felt

---

<sup>14</sup> A type of psychological profiling instrument

some weight come off his shoulders. Kevin said he did not want to go back to the feelings of isolation. We discussed the relevance of all this for the performance and growth of the business. I introduced the concept of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1969; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) and how it flowed around the organisation. We discussed the human capital of the organisation, its social aspects, and a need for an awareness of the 'background music'. Brian said he was aware that he was not doing eighty per cent of the job of leadership – communication. Terence, who had said little up to this point, said he was getting a different view of leadership. Tim, the new head of the US operation, said that if we were looking for the future of the firm, "don't look outside this room – talk to yourself first". Tomás offered the view that leadership involves developing other leaders, not just followers. Kevin joined this comment, saying that they had to give everybody the opportunity to be a leader. Nigel said he had been given the space to work and to grow – he wanted to invite others to 'the edge'.

This conversation felt qualitatively different to me than those earlier in the week. It was more optimistic, self-reliant and future-focussed than I had experienced. I felt that in the latter conversation the group was exploring its own power.

As I mentioned earlier, I often ask students to write down their reflections. I first draw the attention of students to a particular idea, experience or question. I have also asked students the more general question about their own experience "What do you notice? Write it down." In both cases I am asking them to pay attention to their own experience, and I pay attention to my experience of their responses.



Mead's theory of symbolic interaction is an important basis of the theory under exploration here. From a perspective of complex responsive processes, communicative interaction, which includes conversation, is a process in which gestures by the leader will call forth, evoke or provoke responses from other participants in the interaction. These responses are paradoxically evoked by the gesture and simultaneously selected by the responder. This selection depends on the history of the responder. These responses in turn constitute gestures, and what is emerging in the process of interaction is the thematic patterning of that interaction. More skilled participants in the interaction will be more adept at noticing what is emerging between them, and more skilled and/or powerful participants will have a greater capacity to draw attention to emergent patterning. Hence, more skilful or powerful participants will be able to exert more influence on the other participants, and thereby, on the emergent thematic patterning.

Mead speaks of the capacity to direct attention:

'Man is distinguished by that power of analysis of the field of stimulation which enables him to pick out one stimulus rather than another and so to hold on to the response that belongs to that stimulus, picking it out from others, and recombining it with others...Man can combine not only the responses already there, which is the thing an animal lower than man can do, but the human individual can get into his activities and break them up, giving *attention* to combining them to build up another act. *That is what we mean by learning or by teaching a person to do a thing.* You indicate to him certain specific phases or characters of the object which call out certain sorts of responses.' (Mead, 1934, p94, italics added, p95)

Mead's description of teaching speaks directly to my practice; I am working with meaning which arises from my gestures and their associated responses in the group, and vice versa. I notice the

responses of the group and point to aspects of them, and this forms another gesture to which members of the group respond: '[O]ne can say to a person "Look at this, just see this thing" and he can fasten his attention on the specific object. He can direct attention and so isolate the particular response that answers to it. That is the way in which we break up our complex activities and thereby make learning possible.' (ibid., p95). I cannot say what will be significant for any one in the group, but I can point, using a question or an observation.

Earlier in the week I had introduced the concept of value creation as a measure of strategic effectiveness. The Chief Financial Officer, Neville, was unfamiliar with the concept. This is one of the critical measures which outside investors would examine; basically, they would want their investment to grow. I had stayed with this theme continually since Monday, often referring to Neville in a complimentary way, while obliquely implying that he had to get on top of this concept and its implications for the firm. Now I had added more demands to the group – the supposed demands of the investors. I asked Neville straight out how the revenue and cost curves of the firm were doing.

To my shock he said that costs were rising faster than revenues, and that at current trends they would meet in a few years. Ted had told me nothing of this. This is not an uncommon situation in firms, especially manufacturing firms. All firms are constantly engaged in attempts to widen the revenue/cost gap. The second shock was to observe the impassive response of the group to his words. I asked the group – 'do you know what he has just said?' Little response. 'You are going out of business'. There were some questions about details and some about increased sales. I said 'I wonder if you heard that – you are going out of business'.

There was silence. I went on to elaborate why what we were doing was critical to the firm's future. The group felt a little traumatised; I worried that I may have pushed them too far, but slowly a discussion got underway in which the future of the firm was discussed with a seriousness which I had not seen earlier. I noticed that many of the ideas which had been introduced were being used in the debate. For me there was a sense in which understanding had shifted.

As discussed above, one of the acts of leadership is drawing attention to what may be significant so that new sense can be made of a situation. Indeed, Mead appears to assert the superiority of the psychology of attention over the psychology of association. In this case in SSL, the tools of analysis were being put to work in a new appreciation of the situation facing the company. Mead taught that meaning is jointly constructed in human interaction in the totality of gesture-response. But responses do not arise entirely anew: history, memory, and, therefore, previous learning, play a role. 'It was not until the psychologist took up the analysis of attention that he was able to deal with such situations, and to realise that voluntary attention is dependent upon indication of some character in the field of stimulation. Such indication makes possible the isolation and recombination of responses' (ibid.). Put simply, he is more convinced by a theoretical explanation which deals with human relatedness than one characterised by introspection. For me this suggests an emphasis in my practice which should understand learning to derive from the *act* of interaction. 'Intelligence and knowledge are inside the process of conduct.' (ibid, endnotes to section 13).

Several interesting points follow from this for me as a teacher. If meaning is jointly constructed then it follows that I, as one part of the dyad, cannot simply *choose* what meaning arises from our interaction, although I am free to have intention about it. In the systemic theories of organisational learning reviewed earlier, the implicit theory of learning is that the meaning of interaction can be chosen (by the teacher), in the same way as they imply that organisational futures can be chosen (by the manager). Just as a manager has to let go of the idea of control of the organisation as an ideology of management, so a teacher has to let go of the idea of the control of meaning as an ideology of learning. The teacher cannot then be a 'manager of meaning', deciding what something means from outside of an interaction of which I am part. This is not to say that the teacher has no influence in the process of meaning-making, just that it is not what systems ideology would imply. As part of the continuing process of gesture-response, the teacher can skilfully notice responses within herself and others to what is going on in the group, and gesture towards those which appear most fruitful to pay attention to; this will evoke/provoke responses in others present, potentially transforming the emerging thematic patterning. The teacher, therefore, has the potential *indirectly* to influence the emergence of novel thought as a participant in communicative interaction. To put it another way: What is left for the teacher now, having lost the (delusionary) protection of omniscience/omnipotence? What is left is to continue to engage in the continuing process of gesture-response, paying attention to the constantly emerging patterns of meaning.

It also follows that learning involves the continual production of new meaning. Why is this? For example, if I contribute an idea exactly in a

way that I have done many times before, not only is this new to the student, but in making meaning of it she is responding from her own history of relating; the meaning is potentially new to both of us. The response of the student constitutes a new gesture to which I will respond, again potentially making new meaning.

### Learning about Change.

From this point on in the workshop the group focussed almost totally on the business issues facing the firm. At the beginning of the week, Ted had mentioned to the group that he and Steve, the chairman, were in contact with some sources of venture capital with a view to recapitalising the firm to assist its growth. I reminded them of this, and offered my opinion that if the firm was going to go this route the game would change immeasurably. To explain this point I offered a view that up to this point the firm had measured its success in largely historical terms, using a mixture of narrow accounting measures and impressionistic views of success. The essential difference with the involvement of venture capitalists would be that the firm would have to look like a good investment in the future. That is, it would have to be able to demonstrate a plausible likelihood of a continuing profit stream into the medium term future.

The measures of performance would focus on the likelihood of success in the future, rather than success achieved in the past. To use the jargon, they would use 'leading indicators' in addition to 'lagging indicators'. These leading indicators would include: market acceptance of current offering; achievement against milestones in current business plan; progress in technical development; establishment of key relationships with customers, industry groups and other elements of

the industry value chain; the continuous building of talent. I then formed project groups to develop proposals to strengthen the firm's performance in each of these areas. They were to present their views on the issue as it related to SSL and their suggestion for the first practical steps to concrete activity.

There was considerable discussion about the relevance of these topics and their importance to the future of the firm. The introduction of the likely demands of the venture capitalists seemed to both threaten and energise the group. My own view was that the firm was not remotely ready to take on the demands of venture capital partners; it did not have a clear enough sense of its proposition to the market, the product/service was not clearly enough established as a radically different offering, and the standard of management was not sufficiently sophisticated to cope with the level of complexity which they were taking on. This view had been forming since Monday morning and continued to get stronger. Why, therefore, had I introduced the spectre of the demands of venture capitalists at this time? Since Monday I had worked through most of the standard issues in strategy: value creation, customer value proposition, competitive advantage and its sources, competitive strategies, strategic organisational capabilities, and so on. The group had taken up these concepts with various levels of skill and interest. We had worked through many issues concerned with leadership.

In introducing the question of the demands of possible venture capitalists I was, I believe, attempting to supplant the role of the Scullys as the arbiters of performance, with a harsher and, in my view, more realistic set of demands. In effect, I wanted to hang them over the abyss. More than that, I wanted to deny them the comfort of

unthinking reassurance that things would be OK, if only they could please me. There had to be only one way out, and that was to work through the strategic issues. The phantasy venture capitalists had to become proxies for the wider capital and customer markets. My task was to hold their feet to the fire.

### On Knowledge.

For Elias, knowledge arises in the interaction of individuals in a 'figuration', a web of interdependent individuals; it is a social phenomenon. More importantly, knowledge is not seen as having a separate existence; it is an aspect, along with thought and speech, of the same entity, which he calls 'symbol'. The important aspect of his 'symbol theory' for this paper is Elias' view that knowledge is 'mistakenly broken down into three mutually exclusive functions: there is knowledge (the thing itself), how it is stored (thoughts) and how it is communicated (language)' (Dalal, 1998, p96). Thoughts are already contained in language, and are structured by it. Moreover, our psyches are structured by language. The significance of this for the inquiry of this paper is how language may constrain and enable the development of new knowledge, that is learning. However, a changed use of language is not, therefore, simply the use of a different tool; it is a change in thought and in psyche, because they are different aspects of the same thing: 'This basic similarity, perhaps *identity* is ...at the root of the possibility to convert speech into thought and thought into speech.' (Elias, 1991, p81, quoted in Dalal, 1998, p99). Stacey takes up the theme of identity in his theory of complex responsive processes, saying that 'conversational processes, having transformational potential, by their very nature threaten the continuity of identity'

(Stacey, 2001, p182). This is because Stacey asserts that identity is, in effect, the characteristic patterning of the knowing of an individual. Recall also, the earlier definition of strategy as concerning the identity of an organisation, that is, its characteristic patterning of knowing. In relation to my practice, I take this to mean significant learning, that is changes in thought processes, may be experienced as significant challenges to identity. My identity has changed over the week as I have participated in the changing thinking of the group. I have experienced my self at times as having different levels of competence, as harsh and gentle, intransigent and accommodating. As the week progresses, I find myself increasingly in need of 'time out' by myself to contact my evolving identity. This experience also allows me to appreciate the experience of others in the group.

Elias' principal contribution is in his fundamental re-examination of the nature of knowing, and especially of the assumptions which underlie classical epistemology, i.e. 'the notion of a knowing subject which stands opposed to the world of knowable objects, from which it is separated by a broad divide. The problem was how the subject was to gain certain knowledge of objects across this divide' (1998, p281). His idea that issues of concern in social interaction, like knowledge, are part of a continuous process and do not have a separate existence place my work in a different conceptual context. As knowledge is, for him, a social phenomenon arising through interaction, this is a much closer description of what I am part of, as opposed to seeing me as someone attempting to 'hand over' knowledge *despite* the 'messy' social context. My practice is intensely interactive and Elias is saying that this is precisely how knowledge (or more accurately, *knowing*) arises. My



understanding of my practice is not the transmission of static reified knowledge to individual contained minds, it is the participation in a continuous and active process of knowledge creation. This more accurately describes my practice, and the management practice of my students; that is, it more closely describes lived experience.

### On Language.

Languages and words have always attracted my interest, so it is no surprise that my attention is particularly drawn to the importance of language in my work. I am aware of the power of language to enable expression and the creation of new thought; I am equally aware of its power to constrain thought, whether that constraint be a helpful disciplined focus or simply inhibition. In working with SSL, part of my practice has been in emphasising the use of language to describe and explore their situation. Although I have supplied much of the vocabulary, its meaning has arisen among us, in its use in the situation. Beyond this purveying of words, I am also aware of my use of language as part of the flow of relating. My contribution does not consist of closed free-standing sentences; rather, I attempt to use language to invite response, comment, disagreement, question. Shotter emphasises that 'this kind of 'shifting', 'mobile', relational form of understanding may be unfamiliar to us – at least against the traditional theoretical and philosophical background of what the nature of our understanding is usually taken to be i.e. as some thing 'in' our individual heads or minds, rather than something 'in' our social practices' (Shotter, 1999).

Equally, it should be said, I am learning the language of SSL, or more accurately, the language of SSL is evolving amidst our interaction. As a teacher I am aware, therefore, of the importance of language in my practice. This is not a disembodied manipulation of words, but one of the principal means by which my whole self can engage with others in the creative act of moving into the unknown. Shotter emphasises that we are using language and our whole selves to participate responsively in conversation: 'Indeed, in our use of language, in our speaking of our words, we embody a way of proceeding, of 'going on', of orchestrating the flow of our energies, a rhythm of acting, shaping, stopping, reflecting, switching positions, revising, looking back, looking forward and sideways, and so on – we embody ways or styles of responsively relating to our circumstances, shifting between different activities at different moments'. (Shotter, 1999, p84)

The importance of language is also seen by Mead as a way of holding meaning: 'Language as a social process has made it possible for us to pick out responses and hold them in the organism of the individual, so that they are there in relation to that which we indicate' (Mead, 1934, p97). I take this to mean that multiple meaning can be held, explored, and recombined to give rise to new meaning, that is new knowledge. This also points to the commonality of meaning attached to language. This is reminiscent of Elias' statement that language 'represents a unified canon of speaking which has to be observed by a whole group of people if it is to maintain its communicative function' (Elias, 1991, p22, quoted in Dalal, 1998, p97). For me this points to the need to maintain a consistency of language, but more than this, it suggests that I must periodically revisit the language in order to re-mind (*sic*) myself of meanings which can be combined anew.

## On Power .

As the mood of the group has changed with the growing realisation of the seriousness of SSL's situation, Ted's demeanour has also changed, as has his relationship with the group. He has begun to sound more like the CEO than just another member of the group. Some of the group talk as if the information had been withheld, some acknowledge that they had not really been paying attention to SSL's trading position. The discussion begins to turn to the future and what they have to do as a result of their meeting. The theme organising conversation is to do with survival. The atmosphere is becoming a little more edgy. There is a perceptible deference to Ted and his senior managers. The play of power is now more visible. The principal argument in this paper is that effective leaders are those who are the more skilful participants in the process of communicative interaction. However, in addition to skill, I also argue that the more powerful will exert more influence on the other participants, and hence, on the emergent thematic patterning of the interaction in which they are engaged. Learning about leadership requires learning about power, especially about its influence on knowledge.

Knowledge and the apparent truth it expresses are the outcomes of social processes and reflect another of Elias' great interests in human interaction – power. Elias says that *all* relationships are power relationships where there is interdependence. This aspect of the relationship exercises a kind of constraint on both parties, which, while limiting the relationship in some ways, may also enable it. For example, with my students, I serve a function for them which constrains their freedom of action, but also enables them to engage in a

learning process. Simultaneously, they constrain my range of actions, but enable me to discharge my responsibilities, to earn a living, and to learn from them. Elias also points to the relationship between knowledge and power, saying that what is known or not known will also reflect the interests of the power structures of the time, i.e. their ideologies and make it seem natural that it should be so (see Paper Two on this point).

### On Capacity, Skill and Intelligence

One of the areas of concern of my inquiry is how I can help other people, as well as myself, to develop the capacity for new knowing. Elias mentions this when discussing 'the spiral staircase of consciousness' (1998, p278)<sup>15</sup>, (itself a spatial metaphor!). 'How far up or down one climbs this staircase depends not only on the talent, personality structure or intelligence of individual people, but on the state of development and the total situation of the society to which they belong. They provide the framework, with its limits and possibilities, while the people either take advantage of the possibilities or let them lie fallow.' (ibid.). To me, there is a somewhat static, immutable quality to this, as if a person's capacity to learn depended on unchanging qualities within themselves, were an accident of birth as to which society one was part of, or depended on a simple choice to take up opportunities as they are presented. His view is essentially on a large scale, both regarding society and the sweep of history. Novelty, new knowing, arise from the everyday actions of members of society to deal changes in society. He pays little attention to the minutiae of those

---

<sup>15</sup> Elias argues that many of the constraints in our thinking arise from the use of spatial metaphors in language to express abstractions. It is interesting that he falls into the same difficulty here in the use of the metaphor of the 'spiral staircase'.

interactions, and certainly does not question why some interactions may be more effective than others in creating knowledge. At this micro level, Elias does not help.

Ultimately my practice of teaching is concerned with the enhancement of my students' sense of their own agency. Mead speaks of this as intelligence:

Intelligence is essentially the ability to solve the problems of present behaviour in terms of its possible future consequences as implicated on the basis of past experience – the ability, that is, to solve the problems of present behaviour in the light of, or by reference to, both the past and the future: it involves both memory and foresight. And the process of exercising intelligence is the process of delaying, organising, and selecting a response or reaction to the stimuli of the given environmental situation. The process is made possible by the mechanism of the central nervous system, which permits the individual's taking of the attitude of the other toward himself, and thus becoming an object to himself (Mead, 1934, p100)

In other words, we are back to the question of the emergence of self-consciousness, discussed above. If a person becomes an object to himself he can also gesture to himself. Indeed, Mead's definition of a significant symbol is one which calls out the same response in himself as in another, and thought is a continuing process of gesture and response. He is also raising the issue of time, of the possibility of choosing to delay a response and says that through this possibility of selective reaction 'intelligence operates in the determination of behaviour. Indeed, it is this process which constitutes intelligence' (ibid., p99).

Skill and the Theory of Complex Responsive Processes.

It would not, however, be an accurate reading of Stacey's theory simply to imply that the task of the teacher is concerned with finding

and adjusting to the appropriate level of understanding/misunderstanding to sustain a free-flowing conversation in which coherence would emerge . As argued above in several places, the nature of the coherence cannot be predicted although it may be influenced. But there are other considerations too. Firstly, many managers, and certainly the majority of those in SSL, are not skilled in dialogue. They do not have the familiarity with, nor do many of them see the legitimacy of the type of dialogue in which they were engaging during the week. They were learning to reflect, to engage, to query, to notice, and to stay 'in the room'. The emergent patterning of conversation was reflected in an emergent patterning in the internal silent conversation that is individual mind, awareness and identity. I am emphasising that it is not easy to enter and sustain this type of conversation. Stacey says little about skill development beyond the need for participation: 'The source of skilled behaviour is not tacit knowledge locked in an individual's head but the ongoing participation in patterns of relating' (2001, p210).

I argue that this is one of the principal issues which will affect the success of attempts to put the understanding of the theory of complex responsive processes in organisations to work. Ultimately, the task of the teacher is as a conversational partner who attempts to draw his student into a different kind of dialogue. But this process is true also for me. I am also drawn into a conversation where new possibilities are continuously opened up. With each step the picture changes and new options for conversational routes open up. Part of the skill of the teacher is in sensing a path of greater advantage and gesturing towards it. It is not possible to know in advance what meaning will arise.

## On Knowing Oneself.

Towards the end of the week, a small event occurred which I found revealing. The group was debating an approach to dealing with one of the business issues examined in the presentations. The discussion rapidly became trapped in tangential issues, none of which was dealt with before having another one added. This pattern of conversation seemed familiar. I felt my self-control ebbing. I intervened forcefully, saying I could see why no progress was being made – everybody in the group had a veto on progress. What was this obsession with checking on detail? I commented that the group seemed to have an addiction to detail to the exclusion of the main issues.

Where had this spontaneous comment come from? I had recently been reading a book (Real, 1997) on dysthymia, covert depression, which had made a lot of sense for me, not only on an individual level, but also as a possible unconscious group phenomenon. The essential point was that in order to deal with underlying issues which may be masked by addictions, including addictions to certain behaviours, it is necessary to stop the addiction and deal with the (painful) real issues as they become apparent. In the case of this group, a very strong image had come to me of the group being engaged in jargon-laden babble without really engaging with each other or significant issues. Part of my task was to contribute in a way that may enable them to see what was happening. This moment at the very end of the week seemed to capture the essence of what we had been working on for five days. I was reminded of how difficult change can be in the presence of very stable patterns of interaction, and how easy it was, despite all our gains during the week, to revert to it.

It had an equally important lesson for me concerning my identity. On reflection, the strength of my emotional reaction told me of the investment I had in seeing myself, despite all I have said, as being personally responsible for 'bringing about change' with this group. Some part of my thinking still had me standing outside this group attempting to design changes to it. The stability of my own thinking patterns are even more instructive as to the difficulty of change. Nonetheless, I was not unchanged by the week with this group. My learning on the DMan programme had attuned me to the possibility of a different 'way of being' with a group, and I had attended to that this week. In attempting to influence the patterning of thought which forms the identity of the participants and also forms the group, my patterning of thought, my identity, had been formed. Much remained the same, much had been transformed. This thought played in my mind for some time and led me to reflect on the nature of my agency as a teacher, which is what this paper is about. I also wondered about the sense of agency of the managers with whom I had been working. In bringing difference, or more accurately, in *being* a difference, I had hoped to make a difference to their own sense of their agency. Certainly, at the end of the week, in our final meeting, they were highly reflective.

### On Reflection and Self.

Of particular importance to a community of managers is Mead's assertion that 'Reflection or reflective behaviour arises only under the conditions of self-consciousness, and makes possible the purposive control and organisation by the individual organism of its conduct with reference to its social and physical environment...' (Mead, 1934, p91). In other words, human agency arises in interaction enabled by



self-consciousness. What this suggests to me, given my earlier assertion that a large part of my practice is concerned with helping my students develop their sense of their own agency, is that a significant part of my practice is also concerned with the emergence of self-consciousness. My experience, however, is that reflection and self-consciousness give rise to each other. A significant part of my time with SSL was spent in reflective discussion. It was notable in these discussions that the managers began to speak about themselves in different ways. The character of the conversation changed in these interactions. I found myself responding to these conversations in ways which I could not have planned or predicted. In similar exercises with other groups, participants have often described having a different sense of themselves, a different awareness.

#### On Internal Dialogue and the Role of the Teacher.

The above suggests a link between the external and internal dialogues. This is no surprise to me personally, considering my four years' of training in Group Analysis. Referring to the discipline of psychotherapy, Shotter asserts that the therapist's engagement with the client in this way eventually gives rise to the client's own capacity to engage in a variation of this kind of dialogue within herself. 'And so doing, he can move from talking with the therapist (reflecting on her practice), to a similar dialogue within himself...In this shifting dialogicality, he can move among and be responsive to a whole range of situated realities' (Shotter, 1999, p88). He is referring to a type of change of mind occasioned by the process of mind, i.e. a process of social interaction. What does this mean? Recall Elias' assertion that mind is a process, and a social one at that. In engaging in a social

process, such as dialogue, there is the possibility of the client changing in some way. Shotter is saying that this is more likely if at least one side of the dialogue engages in a way that is characteristic of a 'relational-responsive' view, thus potentially giving rise to a similar style of engagement by the client with the therapist, and so with himself. (Recall, also, that Mead described the individual mind as a continuing internal conversation.) Shotter's point is also that this dialogic process is at work in all everyday conversations, if we did but notice. He is not describing an esoteric practice, a special kind of dialogue, as suggested by Senge or Bohm, or as Stacey is concerned about.

The process in the above paragraph is at the heart of the learning process which I am attempting to describe in this paper. It is seeking to develop the capacity of others to engage in meaning-making, attentive, live conversation by doing it. It is characterised by 'giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook' (Wittgenstein, 1953, quoted in Shotter, 1996, p215). However, Shotter also points out that this must be done in the context of our daily flow of life 'for only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning' (ibid.). My practice is intensely involved with the actual lived experience of my students, and I seek to notice with them the very things that do not make sense, which cause anxiety or which may lead them into theoretical ways of classifying their experience without really attempting to 'enter it' or understand it. Moreover, I seek to remain in the paradoxical experience without trying to supply a one-sided idea which will settle the matter. This is, as Shotter calls it, 'joint action'. 'In joint action, the organising centre, so to speak, of communicative activity is neither in the individual, nor in the linguistic system, but in the momentary situation, in the 'interactive moment',

within which communication is taking place' (ibid.). What is critical to the argument of this paper: 'And what is especially important about this dialogical form of practical understanding, is that it is not an individual achievement' (ibid.).

Shotter, in his exploration of Wittgenstein essentially adduces a similar argument to Griffin (2002), that is, that what matters, what is real, is what is happening between us, and that this is not being controlled by (reified) external forces:

...as he sees it, it is the very insistence on the classical search for an already existing order hidden behind or beyond appearances, and our belief that we ought to convince others of the truth of our claims by systematic argument, that deflects or precludes us [from] coming to a grasp of what is utterly unique and novel in the moment by moment emergence of appearances (our voicings) as they unfold before our very eyes (or, better, in our ears). (ibid.)

In the debate on organisations, the management lexicon is laden with concepts (such as 'strategy', 'culture' and even 'intellectual capital') which act to propose an already existing hidden order. It is one of the greatest ironies for me as a management teacher to spend so much of my practice attempting to attract attention to managers' actual lived experience, and away from concepts which have come into common usage through the efforts of earlier management teachers, and which have become a competing reality. As a teacher I am not writing on, or, more correctly, interacting with a *tabula rasa*. I am interacting mostly with managers who have quite well developed concepts and language to help them to deal with their daily working lives. If asked how I might be of assistance to them, they would respond that I should produce new concepts to help them better understand and, so, better control some aspect of their world.

### Summary: A complexity view of my involvement

In Paper Three, I described a view of a leadership development workshop as a process of complex responsive processes in a theory developed by Stacey. Stacey views organisations and individual minds not as 'things' with a fixed nature, but as processes which are characterised by unique patterns of interaction which are continually reproduced and simultaneously have the potential to change. Equally, knowledge is not a 'thing', but a pattern of interaction arising from communicative interaction between bodies in the 'living present'. Knowledge and knowing are patterns of coherence which are continually reproduced, and which have the potential to change, or remain the same; that is, change or continuity.

How might this change my view of what I am engaged in? In engaging with SSL, I am not trying to change a 'thing' which is outside the room. SSL consists of the pattern of communicative interactions in the room, of which I am, albeit temporarily, a part. Therefore, if I wish to make a difference to this organisation it will be as a result of my interaction with the people who are also part of the process. However, because I am only part of the process (however influential) I cannot *choose* the outcome. Equally, if knowledge is a pattern of communicative interaction I can only make a difference to knowledge, that is, help people to know more or know differently by participating in the process that is knowing and knowledge creation. It also follows that if I am engaged in this process of knowing my own knowing will be changed simultaneously. I may say that I am teaching SSL, but they are also teaching me. There is a further dimension: it also follows that if knowledge is a process, then *what* I want the managers to know is the

same as *how* I wish them to know. That is, the process *is* the learning. The one week workshop is not the 'container' of knowledge – it is the knowledge. Insofar as I wish them to learn about organisations, leadership and strategy, these will be experienced as aspects of the process of continually reproduced coherence of interactive communication with the potential for change that is the organisation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abercrombie, M., (1982) *The Application of some principles of group analytic psychotherapy to higher education*. London: Institute of Group Analysis
- Ackoff, R., (1992) "Rethinking Education" in *Journal of Management Consulting*. (Fall 1993) Vol 7, No. 4
- Anthony, E., (1991) *The Dilemma of Therapeutic Leadership: The Leader Who Does Not Lead*. London: Institute of Group Analysis
- Aram, E. and Noble, D. (1999) "Educating Prospective Managers in the Complexity of Organizational Life" in *Management Learning* (1999) Vol 30, No. 3, pp321 – 342, London: Sage
- Argyris, C., (1970) *Intervention Theory and Method*. Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley
- Argyris, C., and Schön, D., (1974) *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Bailey, A., and Johnson, G., (1993) "How Strategies Develop in Organisations" in Faulkener, D., and Johnson, G. (Eds.) (1993) *The Challenge of Strategic Management*, pp147 – 178, London: Kogan Page
- Banet, A., and Hayden, C., (1977) "A Tavistock Primer" in *The 1997 Handbook for Group Facilitators*. pp155 – 167, London: University Associates
- Bennis, W., (1989) *On Becoming a Leader*. London: Hutchinson
- Bennis, W., Parikh, J., and Lessem, R., (1994) *Beyond Leadership*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Bion, W., (1961) *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*. London: Tavistock Publications
- Bly, R., (1993) *Iron John*. Shaftesbury, England: Element Books

- Bohm, D., (1983) *Wholeness and Implicate Order*. New York: Harper and Rowe
- Brown, D., (1998) "Foulkes' Basic Law of Group Dynamics 50 Years On: Abnormality, Injustice and the Renewal of Ethics" in *Group Analysis* (1989), Vol 31, pp391 – 419
- Brown, J. and Duguid, P., (2000) "Balancing Act: How to Capture Knowledge Without Killing It" in *Harvard Business Review* (May 2000) Vol 78, No. 3, pp73 - 83
- Burgoyne, J., and Jackson, B., (1997) "The Arena Thesis: Management Development as a Pluralistic Meeting Point" in Burgoyne, J., and Reynolds, M., (1997) (Eds.) *Management Learning: Integrating Perspectives in Theory and Practice*. pp54 – 70, London: Sage
- Burgoyne, J., Pedler, M., and Boydell, T., (1994) *Towards the Learning Company: Concepts and Practices*. London: McGraw-Hill
- Burkitt, I., *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity & Modernity*. London: Sage
- Clegg, S., Vieira da Cunha, J., and Pina e Cunha, M., (2002) "Management paradoxes: A relational view" in *Human Relations* (2002), Vol. 55, No. 5, pp483 - 503
- Conger, J., (1998) "Qualitative Research as the Cornerstone Methodology for Understanding Leadership" in *Leadership Quarterly* (1998) Vol 9, No. 1, pp107 - 121
- Courtney, H., (2002) "Making the most of Uncertainty" in *The McKinsey Quarterly* No 4, (2001), retrieved from [www.mckinseyquarterly.com](http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com)
- Curry, L., and Wegin, J., (1993) *Educating Professionals*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Czander, W., (1993) *The Psychodynamics of Work and Organizations: Theory and Application*. New York: Guilford

- Dalal, F., (1998) *Taking the Group Seriously: Towards a Post-Foulkesian Group Analytic Theory*. London: Jessica Kingsley
- Drath, W., and Palus, C., (1999) *Making Common Sense: Leadership as Meaning-making in a Community of Practice*. Centre for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, North Carolina
- Dunne, J., (1993) *Back to the Rough Ground : 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*. Indiana: Notre Dame
- Dunne, J., (1999) "Professional judgment and the predicaments of practice" in *European Journal of Marketing* (1999), Vol 33, No. 7/8, pp707 - 719
- Eagleton, T., (1983) *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Eisner, E., and Peshkin, A., (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Elias, N., (1978) *What is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press
- Elias, N., (1991) *The Symbol Theory*. London: Sage
- Elias, N., (1998) Norbert Elias On Civilization, Power and Knowledge: Selected Writings Mennel, S., and Goudsblom, J., eds. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.
- Elias, N., (2000) *The Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Elias, N. and Scotson, J., (1994) *The Established and The Outsiders*. London: Sage
- Follett, M., (1924) *Creative Experience*. New York: Longmans, Green
- Foulkes, S.H., (1964) *Therapeutic Group Analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin



- Foulkes, S.H., (1975) *Group-Analytic Psychotherapy: Method and Principles*. London: GordonBreach.
- Foulkes, S.H., and Anthony, E., (1984) *Group Psychotherapy: The Psychoanalytic Approach*. London: Marefield Reprints
- Gergen, K., (2001) *Social Construction in Context*. London: Sage
- Gerstner, L., (2002) *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?: Inside IBM's Historic Turnaround*. London: Harper Collins
- Gleick, J., (1987) *Chaos: The Making of a New Science*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Goodwin, B., (1999) "From Control to Participation via a Science of Qualities" in *ReVision* (Spring, 1999) Vol 21, No. 4, pp2 - 10
- Goudsblom, J. and Mennell, S., (Eds.) (1998a) *Norbert Elias on Civilization, Power and Knowledge..* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Goudsblom, J. and Mennell, S., (Eds.) (1998b) *A Norbert Elias Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Griffin, D., (2002) *The Emergence of Leadership: Linking Self-organization and Ethics*. London: Routledge
- Grumet, M., (1990) "On Daffodils That Come Before the Swallow Dares" in Eisner, E., and Peshkin, A., (Eds.) (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*, pp101 -120, New York: Teachers College Press
- Guba, E., (1990) "Subjectivity and Objectivity" in Eisner, E., and Peshkin, A., (Eds.) (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*, pp74 – 91, New York: Teachers College Press
- Guba, E., and Lincoln, Y., (1994) "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research" in Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y., (1994) (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage

- Hart, S., (1992) "An Integrative Framework for Strategy-Making Processes" in *Academy of Management Review* (1992), Vol 17, No. 2, pp327 - 351
- Heifetz, R. A., (1994) *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, Mass: London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
- Heifetz, R., and Laurie, D., (1997) "The Work of Leadership" in *The Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1997, pp 124 – 134
- Hirschhorn, L., (1988) *The Workplace Within:: Psychodynamics of Organizational Life*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press.
- Hoggett, P., (1991 ) *Partisans in an Uncertain World*. London: Free Association Books
- Huff, A., and Reger, R., (1987) "A Review of Strategic Process Research" in *Journal of Management*. (1987)Vol 13, No 2
- Hussey, J., and Hussey, R., (1997) *Business Research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave
- Katz, A., and Shotter, J., (1996) "Articulating a Practice from Within the Practice Itself: Establishing Formative Dialogues by the use of a 'Social Poetics' in *Concepts and Transformation* (1996) Vol. 1, No. 2, pp213 – 237
- Katz, A., and Shotter, J., (1996) "Resonances from Within the Practice: Social Poetics in a Mentorship Program" in *Concepts and Transformation* (1996) Vol. 1, No. 2, pp239 - 247
- Kets de Vries, M., (1995) *Organizational Paradoxes*. New York: Routledge
- Knowles, M., (1984) *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

- Kolb, D., and Frohman, A., (1970) "An Organization Development Approach to Consulting" in *Sloan Management Review*. Fall 1970, pp 51 – 65
- Kotter, J., (1999) John P. Kotter on What Leaders Really Do. Boston: Harvard Business School Press
- Lave, J., and Wenger, J., (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. London: Cambridge University Press
- Lawrence, W., (Ed.) (1979) *Exploring Individual and Organizational Boundaries: A Tavistock Open Systems Approach*. Chichester: Wiley
- Lewin, K., (1963) *Field Theory in Social Science*. New York: Harper and Row
- Lewis, M., (2000) "Exploring Paradox: Toward a More Comprehensive Guide" in *Academy of Management Review* (2000) Vol 25. No. 4, pp760 – 776
- Lindblom, C., (1959) "The Science of "Muddling Through"" in *Public Administration Review* Vol. 19, No. 2, pp79 – 88, 1959
- Mead, G., (1934). *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* Morris, C. W. (Ed.), Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Menzies-Lyth, I., (1990) "A Psychoanalytic perspective on social institutions" in Trist, E., and Murray, H.,(eds) (1990)*The Social Engagement of Social Science, Volume 1: The Socio-Psychological Perspective*. London: Free Association Books.q
- Miller, E., (Ed.) (1976) *Task and Organization*. Chichester: Wiley
- Miller, E., (1993) *From Dependency to Autonomy: Studies in Organization and Change*. London: Free Association Books
- Miller, E. and Rice, A., (1967) *Systems of Organization: Task and Sentient Systems and Their Boundary Control*. London: Tavistock

- Mintzberg, H., (1987) "Crafting Strategy" in *Harvard Business Review* (1987), July-August. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Mintzberg, H., (1994) *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. Harlow: Prentice-Hall
- Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B., and Lampel, J., (1998) *Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Management*. London: Prentice Hall
- Neumann, J., (1994) "Difficult Beginnings: Confrontation between Client and Consultant" in Casemore, R., Dyos, G., Eden, A., Kellner, K., McAuley, J., Moss, S., (Eds.) (1994) *What Makes Consultancy Work? - Understanding the Dynamics*. Proceedings of the International Consulting Conference. London: South Bank University Press
- Nitzgen, D., (1998) "From Demand to Desire: What do we Offer When we Offer Group-Analytic Training?" in *Group Analysis*. (1999) Vol 32, pp227 – 239, London: SAGE Publications
- Nonaka, I., and Takeuchi, H., (1995) *The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create Dynamics of Innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Oakeshott, M., (1962) *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. New York: Basic Books
- Phillips, A., (2002) *Equals*. London: Basic Books
- Pines, M., (1986) "The Contribution of S.H. Foulkes to Group Therapy" in Pines, M., (Ed.) (1986) *The Evolution of Group Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Polanyi, M., (1969) *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Real, T., (1997) *I Don't Want to Talk About It*. Dublin: Newsleaf

- Reason, P., (1994) "Three Approaches to Participative Inquiry" in Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y., (1994) (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage
- Rose, S., Lewontin, R., and Kamin, S., (1984) *Not in Our Genes*. London: Pelican
- Schein, E.H., (1978) *Career Dynamics: matching individual and organizational needs*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Schein, E.H., (1988) *Process Consultation: Its Role in Organization Development*. New York: Addison Wesley
- Schein, E.H., (1993) "How Can Organizations Learn Faster? The Challenge of Entering the Green Room" in *Sloan Management Review* (1993) Winter, pp85 – 92
- Schein, E.H., (1995) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Schofield, J., (1990) "Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research" in Eisner, E., and Peshkin, A., (Eds.) (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*, pp201 - 232, New York: Teachers College Press
- Schön, D.A., (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. London: Ashgate
- Schön, D.A., (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Schwandt, T., (1994) "Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry" in Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y., (1994) (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage
- Senge, P., (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*. London: Century
- Shaw, P., (1997) "Intervening in the Shadow Systems of Organizations: Consulting from a Complexity Perspective" in

*Journal of Organizational Change Management*  
Volume 10, Number 3.

- Shaw, P., (2002) *Changing the Conversation in Organizations: A Complexity Approach to Change*. London: Routledge
- Shotter, J. H., (1993) *Conversational Realities: Construction of Life through Language*. London: Sage Publications Limited.
- Shotter, J. H., (1996) "Articulating a Practice from within the Practice Itself: Establishing Formative Dialogues by the use of a 'Social Poetics'" in *Concepts and Transformation*, (1996) Vol 1, No. 2/3, pp213 - 237
- Shotter, J.H., (1997) "The Social Construction of Our 'Inner' Lives", manuscript submitted to the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* (1997)
- Shotter, J., (1999) "Living Moments in Dialogical Exchanges" in *Human Systems* (1999) Vol. 9, pp81 - 93
- Stacey, R.D. (1992) *Managing the Unknowable: Strategic Boundaries between Order and Chaos in Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Stacey, R.D., (1994) "The Science of Complexity: An Alternative Perspective for Strategic Change Processes" in *Strategic Management Journal*, (1995), Vol 16, pp477 - 495
- Stacey, R.D., (2000) *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics: The Challenge of Complexity*. London: Prentice-Hall
- Stacey, R.D., (2001) *Complex Responsive Processes in Organizations: Learning and Knowledge Creation*. London: Routledge
- Stacey, R., Griffin D. and Shaw, P., (2000) *Complexity and Management: Fad or Radical challenge to systems thinking?* London: Routledge
- Streatfield, P., (2002) *The Paradox of Control in Organizations*. London: Routledge

- Suchman, A., (2002) *Linearity, Complexity and Well-being* (unpublished manuscript)
- Torbert, W., (1976) *Creating a Community of Inquiry: Conflict, collaboration, transformation*. New York: John Wiley
- Tranfield, D., (2002a) "Formulating the Nature of Management Research" in *European Management Journal*, Vol 20, No. 4, pp378 – 382
- Tranfield, D., (2002b) "Future Challenges for Management Research" in *European Management Journal*, Vol 20, No. 4, pp409 – 413
- Tranfield, D. and Starkey, K., (1998) "The Nature, Social Organization and Promotion of Management Research: Towards Policy" in *British Journal of Management* (1998) Vol 9, pp341 - 353
- Trice, H.M., and Beyer, J.M., (1993) *The Culture of Work Organizations*. London: Prentice-Hall
- Usher, R., (2001) "Telling a Story about Research and Research as Story-Telling: Post Modern Approaches to Social Research" in Paechter, C., Preedy, M., Scott, D. and Soler, J., (2001) *Knowledge, Power and Learning* London: Paul Chapman
- Wenger, E., and Snyder, W., (2000) "Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier" in *Harvard Business Review* (2000), Vol 78, pp139 - 147
- Weick, K., (1995) *Sensemaking in Organizations*. New York: Sage Publications
- Weick, K., and Sutcliffe, K., (2001) *Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Whitaker, D., (1991) "Transposing Learnings from Group Psychotherapy to Work Group" in *Group Analysis* London: SAGE Vol 25 (1992) pp 131-149

Whittington, R., (1993) *What is Strategy and does it matter?* London:  
Thompson

Wittgenstein, L., (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell

Wuhrmann, S., (1996) "Shareholder Value and Group Analysis" in  
*Group Analysis* (1999), Vol 32 pp 217 – 226, London:  
SAGE Publications