

Leadership processes and leadership development: Reflections from a social constructionist paradigm

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This paper applies arguments about the processes of construction to leadership training, and development. It begins by noting calls for, and the benefits of, *paradigm diversity*. The second section outlines a 'social constructionist' paradigm in which the focus is on *socially and historically constructed realities* and the *processes of reality construction*. In this view, multiple social realities are simultaneously constructed – not as variations on 'real' reality or as subjective knowledge – but as different local ontologies or cultures. The last part of the paper explores how leadership training and development might be differently conceived, given this changed paradigm context. Useful practices are suggested to include ways that: (a) work with *local* leadership constructions; (b) *involve all participants* – not just formally appointed leaders; (c) generate and support *multiple* local constructions, and so; (d) construct and legitimate the principle of open multi-logical collaborative ways of relating.

Transitional Spaces, New Questions, New Possibilities

Talk about leadership processes and relations, as with all kinds of talk, necessarily implicates many taken-for-granted. Just what is assumed and what offered for discussion depends on the particular local-cultural narratives of communicating participants. 'Taken-for-granted' knowledge, also spoken of as assumptions, recently became the focus of many methodologies of change, development, and learning. For example, in organisational change work, programmes often work with clients to 'surface' fundamental assumptions and to explore particular practices, identities, and relations (see e.g., Argyris & Schon, 1996; Isaacs, 1993). A central notion in these and related methodologies is to open-up new possibilities, to re-construct meanings and relate practices so that the 'locals' find them more helpful and supportive of their identities and relations (e.g., Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar, 1995).

The above suggests some interesting ways to work with constructions of leadership. For example, analysis of leadership practices can identify some of their assumptions and pragmatic implications and, in so doing, create a transitional space for other realities, relationships and possibilities (see e.g., Bouwen and Hosking, in press). In principle, this space could permit a diversity of paradigms embracing radically different assumptions. Indeed, it seems that leadership researchers may already be calling for such contributions. For example, Bryman (1996) called for more work that problematizes the nature of leadership, that views leadership settings or cultures as fragmented and ambiguous, and that departs from "modernist" assumptions about the rationality of such settings. The latter have been described as the assumption of (a) individual rationality (b) empirical knowledge of an independently existing world, and (c) language as a means to represent the world as it really is (Gergen and Thatchenkerry, 1996).

Leadership researchers, suggests Bryman, should engage with ideas and standpoints from *different* inquiry paradigms characterised by different assumptions about actors and relations (Bryman, 1996, 1992). Openness to multiple paradigms and to dialogue between paradigms remains relatively undeveloped in the field of management and organisation studies (Weick, 1999; Bouwen & Hosking, in press), particularly in the 'sub' field of leadership. Achieving such openness and dialogue constitutes a major challenge in that communication "between paradigms" - like any other inter-cultural communication – is very difficult. It is hard to avoid imposing one local-cultural set of assumptions upon another, particularly when they are unstated and

unavailable for reflection. As a result, other offerings are likely to be 'read' as (poorer) constructions of one's own world-view and therefore as already (and better) said. Accusations of ignorance, irrationality and unnecessary obfuscation also are likely.

Perhaps a new sort of "voyage of discovery" (Harding, 1998) will allow that there are different paradigms characterised by different resources, different limitations, and different standards for evaluation. Perhaps it will be possible to construct what Sandra Harding (a philosopher of science) calls a "thinking space" in which "new kinds of questions can be asked" and "new kinds of possible futures... articulated and debated" (Harding, 1998, p. 17).

The purpose of this article is to introduce arguments about social construction processes to the field of leadership. The interrelated themes, shortly to be outlined, are developed as part of a paradigm that radically departs from the predominant "modernist" assumptions mentioned earlier (Bryman, 1992; 1996; also e.g., Gergen and Thatchenkerry, 1996). These arguments can help with the issues identified by Bryman and others. First, they problematize leadership by theorising *processes* ('the how') leaving 'the what' unspecified and open to local construction. Second, and relatedly, they show how processes construct multiple realities and relations. Third, these arguments present rationality as a more or less local-historical, local-cultural affair.

Theorising Construction Processes

Talk of social constructionism has come to mean many things depending on the wider paradigm to which it is related. Perhaps the most general description would position constructionism's assumptions as *different from the "positivist" paradigm* and its:

- naïve realism (that real reality exists and can be apprehended);
- dualist/objectivist epistemology (self and other are bounded and separate realities; empirical findings to be judged in terms of their truth), and;
- scientific methodology (achieved in experimental manipulation and the verification of hypotheses (see e.g. Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Having said what social constructionism is *not*, further generalisations become problematic. Often accounts presented as "social constructionist" seem to reflect a "*postpositivist" paradigm* (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) characterised by the assumptions of

- "critical realism" (Cook and Campbell, 1979) i.e., the (now widely held) view that reality is only imperfectly knowable;
- revised dualism – self and other cannot entirely be separated, objectivity now is something to be striven for (but unattainable); and
- methodology shifts to falsification and multiple methods, along with attention to meanings.

The paradigmatic assumptions of the present view are neither positivist nor postpositivist. Briefly, the present concern is with

- "virtual" realities as they are constructed and reconstructed in relational processes.

These *virtual realities include everything we know* - ourselves, other people, relations... what's good and bad, right and wrong. In this paradigm,

- what we know, along with our relationship to these realities is assumed to be constructed in relational processes.

So, the dualist separation of ‘knowing subject’ and ‘knowable object’ - the potentially detached observer and objectively known reality - are themselves regarded as constructions. This means that attention shifts to constructions and processes of construction including e.g., constructions of leaders and non-leaders and their relations, of leadership as focussed or distributed... and many other possibilities not yet made real.

Most explicitly social constructionist work concerns socially constructed products as content (see Pearce, 1992) and leaves processes relatively unexplored. There are well known social theories that avoid the usual dualistic separation of the individual and organisation (or society) through talk e.g., of action (e.g., Berger and Luckmann, 1966) or structuration (e.g., Giddens, 1979). However, what might be termed the ‘detail’ of these processes has received relatively little attention. And yet there is a wealth of resources that can be drawn upon to theorise construction processes, for example, in the literatures of philosophy of inquiry, feminisms, critical and discursive psychology, and cognitive sociology (e.g., Arbib and Hesse, 1986; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Flax, 1987; Gergen, 1994; Harding, 1986; Sampson, 1993). Construction processes have yet to receive much attention in the literatures of management and organisation (but see e.g., Chia, 1995; Gergen and Thatchenkerry, 1996; Hosking, Dachler, and Gergen, 1995; also Thompson and McHugh, 1995).

Premises about construction are outlined in the rest of this section. However, it should be emphasised that they do not constitute substantive theory which could therefore be empirically tested. Rather, these premises concern "the trans-historical *potentials* of the phenomena that constitute the domain of inquiry" – potentials that may be very differently realised in the varying "empirical flux of events" (Cohen, 1989p.17, emphasis in the original). They are ‘put to work’ in a generative way in the last part of this paper.

Processes of relating

Social constructionist approaches share an emphasis on communication and on language as a means of communication. Sometimes the term ‘relational’ is used in order to stress that communications in some way connect, co-ordinate, or relate constructed realities (e.g., Hosking, Dachler, and Gergen, 1995). In the current view, relational processes are brought to the foreground. Persons and settings (identities and cultures) are viewed as social constructions constructed ‘inside’ these processes. The interesting question becomes how is someone constructed as a leader, how are e.g., leadership realities made, sustained, and changed?

Relational processes are conducted in written and spoken language, as well as through e.g., non-verbal actions, things, and events. Very often conceptual language is viewed as a means of representation. In other words, it is thought to represent (more or less accurately) how things really are. This view treats language as different from things, different from non-discursive actions (e.g., a knock on the door) and different from events (e.g., a search conference). However, another well established view – and the one taken here – joins conceptual language with non-verbal actions, things, and events. It does so by regarding language as performative, as bringing people, things, and events into being. In this view, processes of relating (words, things, events...) makes leaders, organisations, competition... real and makes them heroes and villains, good and bad, right and wrong... In other words, relational processes construct ‘thingness’ and ‘goodness’. Every word, act, and object is a potential contributor to communications and therefore to processes of reality construction.

In this talk of construction, processes of relating words, gestures, artefacts of human activity ... construct someone or something. Realities are viewed as relational in that they are *co-constructed* rather than independently existing beings. These arguments do not 'start' with the presumption of 'real', separately existing and bounded entities. Rather relational processes are considered to construct entities as virtual realities. Furthermore, in this view, construction is co-construction even when contributions are separated in time and space. As should by now be clear, present references to 'relational' should not be understood as references to one person communicating in face-to-face relations with (an)other(s) – as seems to be the case with other 'relational' approaches.

If we do not wish to *start with* the presumption of entities and relations between persons (as independently existing entities) it becomes necessary to find some other way to speak of what is related to what. The terms "act and supplement" (Gergen, 1994) and/or "text and context" (Dachler & Hosking, 1995) have been used for this purpose. All acts are regarded as *potential* texts in the sense that they *may* be supplemented (con-text), so contributing to an ongoing process of constructing realities. All acts may be thought of *both* as contexts that supplement some previous act *and* as texts available for a subsequent co-ordination.

Possible supplements and multiple realities

These tools of text-context, act and supplement are helpful for making several points about construction. The first is that how a process 'goes on' depends on if and how it is supplemented. An act may be supplemented in many ways. For example, suppose that new posters about the latest change initiative are posted around a factory. The poster might e.g., be studiously ignored, covered in graffiti, or referenced in a team meeting. All potential texts are open to being *made* e.g., relevant or irrelevant, evidence of leadership, a sign of incompetence, good or bad... according to whether or not they are co-ordinated with and how (Gergen, 1995).

Constructing a particular text for example, as an act of leadership may implicate multiple simultaneous references to hierarchy, identity e.g., as a manager, individual or shared responsibility, organisational mission... along with perhaps national-cultural narratives of relations, business, and the like. Any reality construction – including those that seem so very natural, so obvious, so self evident - relies on *multiple text - context (act-supplement) relations*. Furthermore,

many of these relations will be tacit (Polanyi, 1967). Development work that uses the methodology of 'assumption surfacing' can never make everything explicit. Trying to make explicit what previously was implicit necessarily adds new implicits – adds more equivocality - in a never ending process (Garfinkle, 1967).

Finally, whilst a text may be supplemented in an infinite number of possible ways, very often only a limited range of supplements is probable. Indeed, processes can become 'ongoing' precisely because some degree of taken-for-grantedness develops and feeds back into the process. This is what is meant by talk about *culture*, local realities, or local rationalities. Processes vary in the extent to which they are open to realising previously unrealised possibilities. Relating can get 'stuck' in "games without end" (Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1974) where co-ordinations become almost canonical in their predictability.

Processes are local-cultural and local-historical.

The present account requires no assumption of natural and timeless laws concerning what is real. These propositions are about what works in some 'here and now' performance. They are offered

as a pragmatic framework for understanding how realities are constructed, maintained, and changed. Practitioners show themselves to be knowing by co-ordinating in ways that are warranted appropriate and ‘natural’ *in particular* local-cultural processes. For example, would be contributors to the leadership literatures must find ways to co-ordinate with the texts ‘already in place’ i.e., with existing conventions. Should their attempts be too different then communications may breakdown. Of course, similar issues arise in other leadership relations where what counts as a leadership contribution, and who/what are constructed as leaders, also is a *local* affair. The present paradigm assumes multiple local-cultural realities, that are more or less contested, and (in principle) are always contestable.

The present reference to *local* contrasts with general/universal presumptions about reality and a knower’s (independent and separate) relationship with ‘it’. Here, knowledge (reality) is viewed as local, the knower is part of what is known, and what is known (reality) is made and remade in relational processes. This is ‘inside’ knowledge – is knowing from within - remembering that ‘knowledge’ and action now are joined. Local also means local in a historical sense i.e., ‘here and now’ - ‘in the moment’ - rather than timeless realities. However, this is not a notion of ‘present’ in relation to conventional constructions of past and future. Rather, relating always supplements co-ordinations ‘already in place’ (the past is reconstructed in the present) and invites and constrains probable supplements (the future is in the present). Notions of ‘input’ and ‘outcome’ do not fit well with this concept of process. It makes no sense (non-sense) to pursue origins and endings.

Finally, social constructionism often is accused of assuming that ‘anything goes’ (see e.g., Burr, 1995). This may mean many things. In the present context, it is useful to remember what these propositions are intended to do. The present turning away from how things ‘really are’ makes prominent the limits constructed and reconstructed in relational processes i.e., *how things really are made*. As has been seen, limits to what might ‘go’ (e.g., what might be counted as a leadership contribution) here are viewed as local and conventional. They are none the less limiting as is well known by anyone involved e.g., in organisational change work or leadership development.

Processes make people and worlds

The processes of which we have spoken make and remake social constructions as realities. These realities are everything we know including what we know as ‘self’, what and who we know as ‘other’, and relations between these. The way someone can be and can be known is relational – constructed in relation to particular text-context (act-supplement) relations. Furthermore, any particular self-other ‘location’ is reflected in what appears to be ‘the way the world is’ - self is part of constructions of other. This being the case, multiple realities - multiple worlds – are ‘the order of the day’.

These arguments imply that all processes, for example, of leadership, organising, training... necessarily construct self and other, and self-other relations. If we examine existing leadership theories and practices we often find that they (re)construct self and other *in subject-object relationship*. Theorists and leaders construct leaders as ‘subjects’ when they are viewed as *active in knowing and influencing ‘other’* (persons, organisation, environment...). Leaders, as subjects, are the architects of organisation design and strategy, have vision, diagnose local contingencies, carry responsibility for success and sometimes for failure. Given this construction of a subject, ‘other’ (persons, organisation, environment...) can only be known from the subject’s (singular) point of view. Further, ‘other’ is treated as available to be influenced, mobilised, motivated, directed... by the subject (Hosking, 1988; Dachler, 1991; Dachler and Hosking, 1995).

Whilst self - other relations *may* be constructed as subject-object *they do not have to be*. Further, any *singular* claim that leadership *is* a subject-object relation - that this *is* how the world *is* –

neglects and suppresses other possibilities. This, in turn, suggests the value of theorising construction processes (including those of leadership) in relatively content free ways – in ways that are open multiple leadership realities. Furthermore, perhaps certain leadership constructions cannot be ‘heard’ whilst subject-object assumptions are in place. Development work might then usefully be directed to realising other (non subject-object) *possible* constructions.

Then how might particular constructions be changed? In particular, how might subject-object constructions be changed? Certainly not by some change agent (trainer, consultant, leader...) acting as a knowing subject in relation to some not knowing and formable other since the content of the message would be contradicted by the implicit relationship construction (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1974). This would be like ordering someone to volunteer. Attempts at radical change e.g., in substantive theories of leadership or in the content of leadership training, may fail for just this reason. Radical constructionist propositions allow and invite seeking alternatives to "power over" - tied as it is to subject-object relations. Possibilities include "power to" as it might be constructed in e.g., different but equal relations (see e.g., Gergen, 1995) or "power with" – as in a participative ontology (e.g., Reason, 1994b; Hosking, in press). But the power to reconstruct self and other now is clearly seen as constructed in relational processes and not an individual act or attribute.

Summary of relational propositions

- We know only ‘virtual realities’ and these are everything we know including ourselves, other people, ‘the facts of the market’, leadership...
- Realities are constructed in processes of relating text and context, act and supplement, including written and spoken language, non-discursive actions, objects, and events.
- Multiple text-context co-ordinations, including many that are tacit, ‘go together’ to construct multiple realities of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in relation. These realities, including the realities of leadership, often are constructed as subject-object relations.
- Realities are local cultural constructions. They are more or less contested and, in principle, always are contestable.
- Contesting subject-object constructions will reproduce them if the would be change agent acts to know and influence ‘other’, and if ‘other’ cannot have their own voice.

Leadership Training and Development

In the preceding discussion the most general theme concerned the identities and relations constructed between ‘self’ and ‘other’. Dualist and revised dualist paradigms were suggested to construct self and other as separate identities in subject-object relations. In the subject position, some person(s) (e.g., leaders, trainers, consultants...) are knowing and influencing ‘other’ – constructing ‘other’ only as knowable and formable. Relations and identities of this sort can be constructed in all practices as, of course, can other identities and relations. The present discussion will focus on three aspects of leadership training and development: who participates, who defines programme content, and the ‘content’ itself. Possible subject-object constructions are suggested to include: (a) training only appointed leaders; (b) predefining program content, and (c) training in individualised skills and attributes, rationality, and "power over". Other (non subject-object) possibilities are suggested to be: (a) inclusive participation (b) generating locally grown ‘content’ (c) in multi-logical processes. Such practices seem to meet Bryman’s call to problematize the nature of leadership, to treat leadership settings as fragmented, and to leave aside "modernist" assumptions.

Who participates

Leadership training has become big business (see Rifkin, 1996a; Soroohan, 1995). In 1995, over 70 percent of American companies with more than 100 employees sent *managers* on leadership training courses and leadership courses for *senior management* and chief executives have expanded enormously (e.g. (Rifkin, 1996a; Fulmer & Vicere, 1996). The practice of training/developing only managers seems implicitly to separate and oppose the categories of manager/leader and non-manager/non-leader. It makes sense to give leadership training only managers if *only* managers are leaders, if *only* leaders need know, if leaders can and must speak for others and act to structure some common reality.

Of course there are many pragmatic reasons why managers might be the only ones to attend leadership courses. However, an obvious potential limitation is the absence of 'the led' and leader-led relations as an ongoing context for training. Furthermore, leadership is not necessarily something that appointed leaders have and/or do with others who are not leaders; other relations are possible and may be desirable (see also Barker, 1997). Indeed, there are formal theories that deal with a variety of possibilities. For example, there are theories that view *leadership* as *distributed* - rather than focused in one appointed official (e.g., Gibb, 1969; Brown & Hosking, 1986; Gron, 1999); and theories that de-centre leaders as separate identities and instead theorise leadership as a collective activity or process (e.g., Grob, 1984; Hosking and Morley, 1991; see Bryman, 1996). Returning to current leadership training and development practices, a few programs work with intact work teams or with "a majority of managers and employees" (see e.g., Conger, 1992, p.199). Such practices have the potential e.g., to blur leader-non-leader divides, depending on other aspects of the training.

Other relational possibilities arise when development work is conducted with 'all' participants. 'All' includes not just managers and employees, but also community groups, suppliers, consumers... all who are in some way implicated in and affected by the organisation's activities (e.g., Janov, 1995; Weisbord et al, 1992; see also Conger, 1992). 'All' also includes the trainers/consultants as, in some sense, having equal voice with others; we shall return to these possibilities.

Who defines programme content

Training often delivers predefined content that concerns 'the what' of leadership. Predefined packages may be more or less driven by academic research and theory (see e.g., Blanchard and Hersey, 1996; Fiedler, 1996) and/or by corporate policies (see e.g., Rifkin, 1996b). The predefinition of course content may be an 'act' with which some trainees co-ordinate. They may do so by constructing a context in which they suppose they are being 'othered' as unknowing objects. Trainees' may view e.g., senior management and/or trainers to be acting as subjects by seeming to believe: there is some (one) thing that *is* leadership; that they (trainers, senior management...) know what this is, and that; they are ready to impose their definitions on local practices. In other words, trainees may construct the relationship message as subject-object (e.g., Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick, 1990). This can constrain (rather than resource) the training content if the latter is intended, for example, to enable participants; it would be the equivalent of ordering someone to volunteer.

Of course, it is possible to "customize programs" to fit local needs. Some companies indeed do this, and there are many reasons why such an approach might be desirable (see Conger, 1992, ch. 9). Customised programs can vary in the range of participants they include, and may be more or less open to the notion that leadership may not be a singular affair. Conger describes General Electric's (GE) curriculum as involving action learning in teams working with local business

problems. Further GE's approach embraces the notion that different leadership skills are required at different levels of the organisation – at different stages in a manager's career.

However, yet greater departures from subject-object relations can be imagined. Possibilities include shifting further from pre-defined notions of a singular (managerial) hierarchy of authority, individual identities, and individual action. So, for example, the scope of leadership relations and relational processes could be expanded to include those who are not employees but who have other sorts of relations with the company (supplier, consumer, environmental activist...). In addition, programme content could be minimally predefined and multiple voices could generate their own local and multiple constructions of leadership. Identities may be allowed to be more open and fluid through practices that position e.g., corporate officials and trainers/consultants as 'not knowing' and as having no greater authority to 'form'/influence content than any other. Everyone and no one could define programme 'content' in multi-logical relational processes and this could be 'the point', so to speak. Again, these possibilities will be returned to.

The content of training

Leadership training has been said to aim to "grow individuals" who have "experience, wisdom, and insight" (Fulmer & Vicere, 1996, p. 35), to focus on "soft" (people?!) issues, and on "touchy-feely concepts such as self awareness" (Rifkin, 1996b, p.110). In his discussion of "learning to lead", Conger (1992) identified four areas of training and development: personal growth, skill building, conceptual development, and feedback. Courses very often combine these elements in varying degrees of emphasis. Those aimed at personal growth may include development of leaders in the areas of trust, respect, problem solving, self-confidence, listening skills and the like. Leaders' conceptual and analytical skills may be developed in the area of strategic visioning (especially senior executives) and e.g., to diagnose and learn (through feedback) the strengths and weaknesses of their leadership style. However, these skills of 'knowing' are of little value unless the results can be 'put to work'. This means developing leaders' ability to achieve influence over other people and events i.e., to do some 'world making'. So leaders learn how to form and mobilise others, to negotiate and inspire...to gain commitment to their own vision and projects (see e.g., Rifkin, 1996a; Conger, 1992).

From a social constructionist perspective, training of the sort outlined may too much remove trainees from the relational processes in which their identities and acts, as leaders, are made sensible. Such approaches may do much to construct the "self contained" individual who "possesses" a certain identity and relatively stable characteristics (see Sampson, 1993; Dachler and Hosking, 1995) and who may develop self-knowledge. Rather than firmly locating skills and attributes in their relational (i.e., act-supplement) settings, skills are individualised and attributes are seen to be under individual control. In addition, "modernist" assumptions (Bryman, 1996) are implicitly referenced. For example individual rationality is assumed - as is empirical knowledge about self and the world – viewed as singular and as objectively (though imperfectly) knowable realities. Influence skills are the skills of "power over" where one generalising 'logic' (the leader's) defines how things are and should be – in implicit subject-object relation.

The point is not that these assumptions and practices are wrong. Rather it is to consider what other possibilities arise when our paradigm gives us 'permission', so to speak, to shift from subject-object constructions. Social constructionist arguments warn against decontextualised notions of personal characteristics and, more generally, of knowledge (e.g., Burr, 1995). They invite a more "dialogical" approach (Sampson, 1993) that attends to the relational processes in which leadership (or indeed any reality) is constructed. Training and development then may shift from a mono-logical construction of what 'some-one or some-thing *is*' to multilogical processes as they reflect the cultures and times in which we live. Only by nourishing multiloging can leadership realities be something other than subject-object; relating that constructs "power to" can support multiple

realities in different but equal relation

Inclusive, locally grown, multi-logical processes

Additional possibilities for leadership have been identified as arising in practices that break away from subject-object identities and relations. These practices:

- embrace inclusive relations and locally generated realities (rather than outsider expertise);
- leave aside practices that rely on the notion of a singular 'real' reality (e.g., rational analysis and influence to create consensus);
- enable multiple rationalities (as local cultures and not 'individual' subjectivities), and
- construct "power to" in relations of interdependence (rather than "power over" in relations of control).

These are not offered as replacements for existing practices. However many contemporary societal, organisational, and technological developments seem as though they might be well served by practices of this sort. These include, for example: moves towards widened participation in decision making, attempts to empower and facilitate local initiative, the development of internal markets and trading relationships, practices of supply chain management, team working, flatter hierarchies, diversity programmes, truly world wide organisations and global communication technologies.

Many of these developments are intended more evenly to distribute responsibilities and power and to ease collaborative processes in the context of differing local logics or rationalities. Put slightly differently, these ways of (re)organising involve relational processes amongst participants whose constructions of what is, what is good, how this may be known ...are very varied. In a "post colonial" era (Harding, 1998) very different peoples and worlds - very different local rationalities - are interdependent and wish to co-ordinate without having one voice or rationality subjugate others (see e.g., Barker, 1997; Dachler, 1999; Weisbord et al, 1992). The time has come to look in a little more detail at practices that have the potential to facilitate inclusive, locally grown, multilogical ways of relating.

Consultants as not knowing. Moving away from subject-object relations means shifting from practices in which change agents act as knowing about leadership and act to form what trainees need to know. This means that consultants must be part of, rather than apart from, development processes. Some consultants work this way although, as yet, mostly outside the leadership area. Such practices often are spoken of as "collaborative" or "dialogical". For example, Harlene Anderson (1997), and those involved in the 'Public Conversations Project' (e.g., Chasin, Herzig, Roth, Chasin, Becker, and Stains, 1996) have developed collaborative approaches to family therapy and have moved these practices into other consulting arenas.

In collaborative approaches, consultants act from a stance of '*not knowing*'. This means many things. It is partly a reference to what here has been called content or 'product' knowledge (see e.g., Pearce, 1992). Consultants are freed from having to be an expert e.g., about particular local constructions (Anderson, 1997), about diagnostic tools and categories, or in 'strategies for fixing this or that situation' (Weisbord and Janov, 1995,p.7); they resist importing non-local theories about content (e.g., leadership is 'K', problems are X...). Just as importantly, '*not knowing*' means resisting invitations to facilitate interpersonal dynamics - '*not knowing*' includes process knowledge. Instead, consultants act to invite a certain sort of 'container' as a context for collaborative working - joining with others to expand their ways of 'going on' in relationship

(e.g., Anderson, 1997; Bass and Hosking, 1997, 1998; Farrelly and Brandsma, 1974; Hosking and Bass, 1998). As Weisbord and Janov (1995) have said '...we set up conditions under which people can choose new ways of relating' (p.8) and take responsibility for how they will 'go on' together.

Change work includes direct 'face to face' conversations between consultant and client (e.g., in therapy) along with multiple, crosscutting, and often indirect co-ordinations with large numbers of participants. Speaking of the former, Anderson tells how therapists' may ask questions and co-ordinate with texts in ways that reflect a 'being-informed' rather than a knowing stance. When many participants and relations are involved, consultants may act to facilitate "a setting conducive to dialogue' (Weisbord, 1992, p.7) where the emphasis shifts to *dialogical (multi-logical) ways of relating between clients*. Such settings include e.g., 'future search' (Weisbord, 1992), 'leadership summits' (Janov, 1995), 'the Public Conversations Project' (Chasin et al, 1996), and the MIT 'Dialogue Project' (Isaacs, 1993).

Multiloging and constructing "power to". In methodologies such as 'future search' multiple and changing groupings of participants work on a variety of tasks to generate their own 'content'. Such practices have the *possibility* to construct non-hierarchical, multilogical processes in which multiple local rationalities are voiced and locally warranted. This could be one way to implement a "fragmentation" perspective of cultural change (Martin, 1992; Bryman, 1996 p.285) including change in what some might call leadership realities. In work of this kind participants can learn new, non subject-object ways of relating, i.e., can construct 'power to' go on together in new ways. Of course, they also can continue to reproduce relations of "power over", right-wrong, competition for whose reality constructions will prevail!

Multilogical methodologies work with "whole systems" where possible, not just appointed leaders or even employees. The reference to "whole systems" is, of course, a metaphor – one intended to suggest working with all those whose actions are interconnected (Weisbord et al, 1992). In Future Searches, hundreds may participate at once or in successions of meetings. Its not just the presupposition of leaders that is set aside, but also the presupposition of leadership as a relevant and useful language tool. So multilogical methodologies – in so far as this is possible - work with initially 'empty processes' so to speak. The process does not 'start' with leadership, participants are not related to as "passive receptacles" or "imaginative consumers" (see Bryman, 1996 p.286), and all participants are potentially active contributors to local realities. Such processes can leave space for participants to generate multiple local cultural realities.

Multi-logical development work generates different perspectives that are 'allowed to be different' rather than dominated or worked into a consensus position. This is very different from practices that aim to diagnose the past, to analyse problems in self-other relations, and then to change these known realities. For a start, relational premises provide no basis for declaring some acts to be acts of analysis (diagnosis) and others as intervention. Indeed, in a relational perspective, acts of diagnosis (e.g., asking questions) are also acts of influence over how the process goes on. In addition, rather than e.g., try to unblock 'old' identity constructions, multilogical methodologies may be directed towards enabling new possibilities in the present. Development practices may work with ever moving and multiple realities; from the present point of view, this is 'the point' so to speak

Conclusion

This paper began by noting calls for greater paradigm diversity and sensitive dialogues between paradigms. Some of the difficulties in communicating 'between paradigms' also were noted - it is hard to avoid imposing one's own taken-for-granted and standards. In this context, certain social constructionist themes were introduced and developed in ways that departed from "positivist" and "postpositivist" paradigms. These themes dealt with the *potentials* of construction processes –

potentials that might be very differently realised depending on the particularities of text-context relations. Central to this enterprise was: the focus on virtual realities (leaving aside questions of what is 'really' real); the treatment of these as ongoing constructions, and; the treatment of these constructions as necessarily embracing the knowing/acting participant.

These themes were applied to leadership to suggest that 'new' development possibilities can be imagined, and can seem sensible, *in this paradigm setting*. The paradigm is crucial. Practices such as e.g., teaching influence skills or listening do not 'make sense' in their 'own right' and do not have just one meaning. Rather, they mean very different things depending on the wider context of assumptions to which they are related in text-context relations. Certain practices were outlined that might seem non-sensical, crazy, or commonplace, depending on the paradigm context. For example, for consultants to act from a "being informed" rather than knowing stance could seem absurd from a certain point of view. Similarly, finding ways to 'make space' for multiple leadership realities seems frivolous (to say the least) if one supposes that knowledge is objective or subjective, right or wrong.

That different cultures have different ways of knowing offering different resources and constraints, that none is 'perfect', and that there is no single, sufficient standard by which all could be judged, now is widely accepted – at least in some literatures (see e.g., Gergen, 1994; Harding, 1998). Once positivism ceased to be 'the only game in town', "new thinking spaces" were "opened up" (Harding, 1998; also Manicas and Secord, 1983). The present article has begun to explore how leadership training and development might take certain propositions and 'put them to work'. In so doing, the three themes identified by Bryman (1996) in his handbook review were addressed. The first was to treat 'leadership' as problematic, the second – to treat cultures (leadership settings) as fragmented, and the third, to depart from "modernist" assumptions about rationality. By focussing on *processes* rather than constructions, it was possible to allow leadership realities to be locally determined and to vary in relation to different local-cultural texts. Further, by emphasising language as 'world making' and 'worlds' (realities, facts) as theory laden constructions, modernist assumptions about rationality lost their foundations. Rationality became a local-cultural affair, multiple rather than singular, constructed rather than inherent in some 'real' reality of human nature and real world contexts.

Working on 'taken-for-granted' has become an increasingly popular methodology for organisational change work (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Barrett, Thomas & Hocevar, 1995; Isaacs, 1993) and is beginning to be a practice in leadership development (see Conger, 1992, p.196). At the same time, leadership development work is increasingly employing a wide range of techniques. These include e.g., developing creativity, emotional sensitivity, acting skills, meditation... These techniques, like everything else, are theory laden'. Their meaning varies depending on the taken-for-granted to which they are referenced. The leadership field could benefit greatly from an increased sensitivity to this. However, this does not have to mean yet more deconstructions of the leadership concept and more internal critique. Increased sensitivity to multiple paradigms and to the theory-laden nature of practices provides another way to 'perform and transform'.

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