

NOT LEADERS, NOT FOLLOWERS:

A POST-MODERN DISCOURSE OF LEADERSHIP PROCESSES

Dian Marie Hosking

Professor of Relational Processes

Mailing address

Utrechtse School voor Bestuurs- en Organisationswetenschappen

University of Utrecht

Bijlhouwerstraat 6

3511 ZC Utrecht

The Netherlands

E-mail : d.hosking@usg.uu.nl

Telephone number(s): 030-2539764 or 0416664174

Fax: 030-2537200

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Abstract

This chapter begins by noting calls for paradigm diversity in the leadership field and proposes a *post-modern discourse of leadership as process*. The second section outlines a view of local-cultural-historical processes as processes in which relational realities are constructed - including the (local) realities of leadership. The third and last section puts this post-modern, constructionist discourse to work in relation to practices of leadership training and development. Attention is directed to training and development possibilities that: go beyond overly simple ‘outsider’ assumptions about who are leaders and who followers; embrace the possibility of distributed - and not just focussed - leadership; take seriously the involvement of (what some might call) ‘followers’ in leadership processes, and; give space to developing ‘followers’ into leaders. 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 leaders and followers and leadership processes necessarily implicates many assumptions. Just what is assumed and what offered for discussion depends on the particularities of local-cultural discourses. Taken-for-granted knowledge and assumptions recently became the focus of many methodologies of change, development, and learning. For example attempts at organizational change often work with clients to surface fundamental assumptions and to explore particular practices, identities, and relations (e.g., Argyris and Schön, 1978; Isaacs, 1993). A central approach in this and related methodologies is to open-up new possibilities and to re-construct meanings and related practices so that the locals find them more helpful and supportive of their identities and relations (e.g., Barrett, Thomas & Hocevar, 1995).

The above approach suggests some interesting ways to work with leadership constructions – both in academic theories – and in other local leadership practices. Analysis of this sort could identify some implicit assumptions and pragmatic implications that, in turn, could create a transitional space in which to explore other possible realities and relationships (see e.g. Bouwen & Hosking, 2000). In principle, this “space” could include diverse and perhaps radically different “paradigms” (Kuhn, 1970), “discourses” (Deetz, 2000) or “intelligibility nuclei” (Gergen, 1994). Indeed, contributions of this sort have been called for by a number of leadership researchers (Bryman, 1996; Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Morley & Hosking, 2003). Bryman, using the duality of modern/post-modern, 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. Many modernist assumptions have been identified including 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, suggested Bryman, should engage with ideas and standpoints from different inquiry paradigms characterised by different assumptions about actors and relations (Bryman, 1986, 1996). Openness to multiple paradigms and to dialogue between paradigms remains relatively undeveloped in the field of management and organization studies (Weick, 1999; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000), 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 not easy. For example, it is hard to avoid imposing one local-cultural set of assumptions upon another, particularly when assumptions are implicit and unavailable for critical reflection. As a result, other offerings are likely to be read as (poorer) constructions of ones own world-view and therefore as already (and better) said. Accusations of ignorance, irrationality and unnecessary obfuscation also are common.

Perhaps a new sort of "voyage of discovery" (Harding, 1998) will allow that there are different discourses characterised by different resources, different limitations, and different standards for evaluation. Perhaps it is possible to construct what Sandra Harding (a philosopher of science) called 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 chapter is to introduce *post-modern* arguments about social construction to the field of leadership. This post-modern discourse can help with the (modernist) issues identified by Bryman (sic). First, it problematizes leadership by theorizing 'empty' processes i.e., 'the how' of leadership. In this way, abstract theory leaves 'the what' of leadership more open to local-emergent (rather than elite/a priori) construction (see Alvesson & Deetz, 2000) and side-steps the discourse of leaders and followers. Second, and relatedly, emphasis is given to multiple local-relational realities and relations as they are (re)constructed in ongoing processes. In this way, the post-modern discourse avoids the discourse of objective and subjective knowledge and 'external' reality. Third, rationality – including scientific rationality - is discourses as an emergent local-historical, local-cultural affair rather than universal and trans-historical or predictably contingent – as in Contextualism.

THEORIZING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Modernist tales

Talk of social construction has come to mean many things. Precisely what it means depends on the wider discourse of which it is a part. And many aspects of the wider discourse are implicit, leaving plenty of space for others to mobilise their own assumptions and interests as they listen and read. This said a "modernist" discourse is by far the most common. It embraces what Guba and Lincoln referred to as "positivist" and

“post-positivist” “paradigms” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The central discursive themes of these paradigms will be outlined in order to help clarify the changed themes that will later be presented in a post-modern discourse of social construction.

Guba and Lincoln described "*positivism*" in terms of an ontology of "naïve realism", a "dualist" and "objectivist epistemology", and a methodology that is "experimental" and "manipulative" and centres the "verification" of hypotheses. On the first: this is the assumption that 'real' reality" exists 'out there' and is fully "apprehendable" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). The "dualism" of which they speak assumes that the knower and the object s/he seeks to know are independent 'things' existing in Subject-Object relation such that the former can produce objective knowledge (free from idiosyncratic bias) or subjective knowledge about the latter. This introduces the related "objectivist" assumption that language maps concepts "onto objects, properties and relations in a literal, unequivocal, context-independent fashion" (Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992, p.26) such that it can provide a "naïve reflection" of the world. Positivist methodological assumptions centre observation, induction, and hypothesis generation (the hypothetico-deductive method) and hypothesis testing i.e., a version of empiricism (see e.g. Gergen, 1994). In this discourse the scientist is assumed to be capable of correct reasoning. The discourse of science is (implicitly) given a special status such that the "context of justification" i.e., the 'meta- theoretical' assumptions about ontology, epistemology and methodology (traditionally viewed as the province of philosophy) is treated as if it were separate from the "context of discovery" (traditionally viewed as the domain of social science).

Guba and Lincoln described *post-positivism* as a different paradigm – one in which ontological realism became “critical” rather than “naïve”; one in which the epistemological and methodological assumptions of positivism are “modified” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). In this context: the term “critical” is intended to suggest that claims about reality cannot be certain and must be carefully examined (Cook and Campbell, 1979). The modified version of epistemological dualism recognises that Self and Other cannot entirely be separated such that objectivity, although strived for, is imperfectly achieved. Methodology shifts to from proof to falsification combined with a widened definition of what can be included within the empiricist remit. In sum, the shift is largely epistemological, accepting that we cannot know that we know the world as it really is, accepting a revised view of truth, and shifting to talk of probabilities. “It is in this sense that all modern (some would say modernist) western psychology has long viewed its knowledge as constructed rather than straightforwardly representative” (Hosking, 2005).

Modernist studies of leadership, leaders and followers, privilege the discourse of science, mobilising it as a tacit and un-discussable context of justification. Empirical work is written-up as if the scientist and his discourse of science – whether positivist or post-positivist - were ‘outside’ their discourse of leadership. Further, the scientist populates his/her discourse with (a) leaders and followers who have personal characteristics, who (b) act in relation to one another and in relation to other ‘objects’ in the world, and who (c) build and mobilise knowledge and power in their (modified) dualist relations.

Leadership studies of this sort include work that is presented as “social constructivist” or “social constructionist”. These modernist tales discourse Other as a sense-maker using, for example, individual-cognitive constructs such as perception, “informal implicitly held models” mind maps, and individual interpretation (e.g., Meindl, Erlich and Dukerich, 1985). They talk of information processing biases and “false assumption making” (Meindl, 1995, p.330). Leaders and/or followers are discoursed as having personal qualities such as needs, minds and personality. Mind is the locus of social construction. Constructionism of this kind continues to reproduce a modernist scientific interest in how things really are and continues to assume that the language of science may do the (more or less imperfect) job of representing some non-discursive world. Objectivism remains “a regulatory ideal” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.110; also Gergen 1994) to be pursued via an empirical (but not hard line empiricist) methodology.

The assumptions of the present discourse are neither positivist nor post-positivist, not modernist but post-modern. The present view does not discourse epistemology in terms of objective-subjective knowledge and does not discourse ontology as either realist or relativist. Methodology is regarded as a theory-laden process of construction rather than a means to generate data for hypothesis testing. The present view provides another map about another territory (Korzybski, 1933). This ‘map’ includes science in its discourse of social construction. In this sense science is positioned alongside (in equal/symmetric relation with) other local practices or “forms of life” (Wittgenstein, 1963). Social construction is also re-positioned. Social construction is not presented as an individual act. Rather our stories of individuals (and their qualities, minds, behaviours, sense-

making...) are regarded as social constructions. My present concern is with ongoing (re)constructions of what I shall call relational realities – including constructions of Science, of leadership, of leaders and followers. In other words, the present discourse ‘starts’ with processes and not persons, and views persons, leadership and other relational realities as made in processes. This means that our present tale is very different from other (modernist) tales of social construction, leaders and followers (cf Meindl, Erlich and Dukerich, 1985; Bligh, Kohles and Meindl, 2004; Meindl, 1995).

Of course the above requires a rather special discourse of processes – one that does not view them as ‘intra’ and ‘interpersonal’ or as individual cognitions and acts. The present discourse talks about local-cultural-historical processes as moving constructions of what is ‘real and good’ (Gergen, 1994), so collapsing the modernist distinction between fact and value. Social construction is *not* discoursed as a social epistemology in the context of some independently existing and objectively knowable reality. Rather, our post-modern discourse makes no distinction between ontology and epistemology and construction becomes a matter of how we do our lives. This gives a new role to language - no longer the means for representing reality - but a (perhaps *the*) key process in which relating ‘goes on’ and in so doing, constructs people-world realities and relations.

Reality is no longer discoursed as objectively or subjectively known by the mind but as an ongoing construction in language-based processes. Relations are no longer reduced to an enforced and more or less sharp Subject-Object dualism. Instead, the modernist separation of the knowing subject (e.g., leader, scientist) and knowable object (e.g., follower, leadership situation) is itself regarded as a construction that could be otherwise.

Attention now shifts to 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 yet to be *made real*.

A post-modern discourse of construction processes has yet to receive much attention in the literatures of management, organization, and leadership (but see e.g., Chia, 1995; Gergen and Thatchenkerry, 1996; Hosking, Dachler & Gergen, 1995; also Thompson and McHugh, 1995). Fortunately there is a wealth of resources that can be drawn upon, 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). I shall continue by drawing upon these literatures to set out some central premises about relational construction processes. However, I should emphasise that these are not offered as substantive theory that 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, 1989, p. 17, emphasis in the original). They are 'put to work' in a generative way in the last part of this chapter.

A post-modern discourse of relational processes

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 et al., 1995). The current view brings relational processes to the foreground. Persons and con-texts (Self and Other, scientist and research object, leader and follower) are viewed as social constructions constructed 'inside' these processes. It then becomes sensible to reflect on the ways in which researcher, leader(s) and non-leaders (followers?) construct their relations and how particular constructions gain authority whilst other possibilities are un-realised or suppressed.

In the present view, reference to "relational" includes the relating of written and spoken language, as well the relating of nonverbal actions, things, and events. In this view, processes of relating (words, things, events...) make leaders, organizations, competition... real and makes these realities heroes and villains, good and bad, right and wrong... You could say that 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 other words, the present reference to "relating" should *not* be understood as a reference to one person communicating in face-to-face relations with (an)other(s); we are not speaking of inter-personal (or intrapersonal) processes between already known actorsⁱ. This means that it becomes necessary to find some other way to speak of what is related with 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 con-texts 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 supplemented and how (Gergen, 1995).

Constructing a particular act for example as an act of leadership may implicate multiple simultaneous references to hierarchy, identity e.g., as a manager, individual or shared responsibility, organizational mission... along with perhaps national-cultural discourses 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 relatings will be tacit. Linking back to our earlier discussion, 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 & Fisch, 1974) where co-ordinations become almost canonical in their predictability.

Processes are local-cultural and local-historical. The present account of social construction 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 reflecting on how realities are constructed, maintained, and changed. Practitioners show themselves to be knowing (locals) by co-ordinating in ways that are warranted appropriate and natural *in particular* local-cultural processes. Returning to our earlier example of the difficulties of paradigm diversity and inter-paradigm communication, would-be contributors to the leadership literatures must find ways to co-ordinate with the texts 'already in place' i.e., with existing constructions. 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 are a *local* affair. The present discourse presents reality: as multiple and local rather than singular and transcendental; as contesting or suppressing other realities, and; as (in principle) always contestable. One implication is that researchers, consultants and trainers might do well to let go of the

assumption that a particular organization has, or should have only one organization-wide culture, rationality and leadership reality.

The present reference to *local* contrasts with general/universal presumptions about reality and the modernist assumption that knower exists in an independent and separate relationship to 'it'. Here, the knower is viewed as part of what is known, and what is known is made and remade in relational processes. This is 'inside' knowledge – this is knowing from within - remembering that knowledge and action are now joined. Local also means local in a historical sense i.e., 'here and now' - 'in the moment' - rather than timeless. However, this is not a notion of 'the present' in relation to a modernist construction of past, present and future. Rather, the present view is that relating always supplements coordinations 'already in place' (the past is reconstructed in the present) and invites and constrains probable supplements (the future is in the present). This concept of process makes no sense (non-sense) of origins and endings, inputs and outcomes.

Finally, it is important to connect with a frequently mobilised critique of social constructionism, namely that it assumes a relativist ontology and therefore allows 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-conventional – but none the less limiting. Furthermore, this charge of

relativism relies upon modernist assumptions and therefore seeks to impose local-cultural assumptions (in this case, a particular ‘paradigm’) that differ from those presently intended (sic).

Processes make people and worlds. The processes of which we have spoken make and remake everything we know including what we know as ‘self’, what and who we know as ‘other’, and self-other relations. The way someone can be and can be known is relational – constructed in particular text-context (act-supplement) relations. A common construction of self and other and relation is the *subject-object construction*. For example, leaders and scientists are often constructed as Subjects in the sense of being active in knowing and influencing ‘Other’ (‘followers’, organizations, the research design and methodology...). Leaders, as subjects, are seen as the architects of organization design and strategy, have vision, diagnose local contingencies, carry responsibility for success and (perhaps) failure. This means that ‘Other’ (persons, followers, organization, environment...) is known from the Subject’s (singular) point of view and is discoursed (by S) as available to be influenced, motivated, led, studied and manipulated... (Hosking, 1988; Dachler, 1991; Dachler & 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* – suppresses other possible realities (sic). This, in turn, suggests the value of theorizing construction processes (including those of leadership) in relatively content free ways (“empty processes”) – in ways that are open multiple local leadership realities.

Perhaps certain leadership constructions cannot be 'heard' whilst subject-object assumptions are in place. Perhaps development work might usefully be directed to realising other non subject-object constructions e.g., of leadership, leaders and followers.

How then 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 – this would simply be 'more of the same' (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick et al., 1974) and would be rather 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. A post-modern discourse allows and invites 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, 1994; Hosking, 2000). But the power to reconstruct self and other now is clearly seen as co-constructed in relational processes and not as an individual act.

Summary of relational propositions

- We know only relational realities and these are everything we know including ourselves, other people, 'the facts of the market', leadership...
- Relational realities are constructed in processes of relating text and con-text, 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 relation.
- 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’ does not have a voice.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In the preceding discussion the most general theme concerned the identities and relations constructed between Self and Other. Positivist and post-positivist paradigms were suggested to construct Self and Other as separate identities in subject-object relations. In the subject position, some person(s) (e.g., a leader, trainer, or consultant...) is discoursed as knowing and influencing Other – constructing Other only as knowable and formable by Self as Subject. Given our present post-modern discourse relations and identities of this sort can be constructed in all social practices *but so too could 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, and (b) generating locally grown ‘content’ (c)

in multi-logical processes. Such practices (remembering that theory and methodology are now seen as joined) seem to meet Bryman's call (sic) 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; Sorohan, 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 or follower. For example, it makes sense to give leadership training only to managers if *only* managers are leaders, if *only* leaders need know, if leaders can and must speak for 'followers' 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 – one that is especially acute given the present discourse - is the absence of 'followers' and the absence of leadership relations as an ongoing context of 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,

leadership may be theorised as distributed rather than focused (e.g., Gibb, 1969; Brown & Hosking, 1986; Gron, 2003; Parry & Meindl, 2002), and theories may de-centre leaders and followers 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 leadership training and development, 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 organization's activities (e.g., Janov, 1995; Weisbord, 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 something with which some trainees co-ordinate by supposing that they are being 'othered' as not knowing Objects by senior management and/or trainers 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. Again, this would be the equivalent of ordering some one to volunteer. Of course, it is possible to "customize programs" to fit local needs. Some companies indeed try to do this, and there are many reasons why such an approach might be desirable (see Conger, 1992, chap. 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 apparently embraces the notion that different leadership skills are required at different levels of the organization – 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, program content could be minimally pre-defined and multiple voices could generate their own local and multiple constructions of leadership. Identities may be given space 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 program content in multi-logical relational processes and this could be 'the point', so to speak. I shall return to these possibilities.

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' (especially senior executives) conceptual and analytical skills may be developed in the area of strategic visioning 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 must learn how to form and mobilise others, how to negotiate and inspire... how to gain commitment to their own vision and projects (see e.g., Rifkin, 1996a; Conger, 1992).

Given our present discourse, training of the sort outlined may too much remove trainees from the relational processes in which their identities - as leaders and acts – as leadership contributions are made sensible. Such approaches may do much to (re)construct the modernist discourse of the "self contained" individual who "possesses" a certain identity and relatively stable characteristics (see Sampson, 1993; Dachler & Hosking, 1995) and who may develop self-knowledge. Rather than firmly locating skills and attributes in their relational (act-supplement) settings, skills are individualised and attributes are seen to be under individual control. Modernist assumptions are further referenced in the assumption of individual rationality – together with the emphasis on empirical knowledge about self and the world – viewed as singular and as objectively (though imperfectly) knowable realities. Modernist assumptions are further reflected in the discourse of influence skills as individual skills of "power over" where one rationality (the Subject's e.g., the leader's) defines how things are and should be – in implicit subject-object relation with 'followers' and other Others.

The point is not that these assumptions and practices are wrong. Rather the point is to consider what other possibilities are made available by a post-modern discourse that opens-up alternatives to subject-object constructions. The present discourse warns against de-contextualised notions of personal characteristics and, more generally, of knowledge (e.g., Burr, 1995). A more "dialogical" approach (Sampson, 1993) is invited – one 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 'leadership is' to multi-logical processes, to processes that construct "power to" 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 the context of multiple local interdependent realities (rather than "power over" in relations of control). These are not offered as *replacements* for existing practices. This said, many contemporary societal, organizational, 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 initiatives, the development of internal markets and trading relationships, practices of supply chain management, team working, flatter hierarchies, diversity programs, truly world wide organizations and global communication technologies.

Many of these developments seem 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 e.g., of what is and what is good 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, 1992). The time has come to look in a little more detail at practices that have the potential to facilitate inclusive, locally grown, multi-logical 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 act as 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 et al., 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 'strategies for fixing this or that situation' (Weisbord & 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 & Hosking, 1998; Farrelly & Brandsma, 1974; Hosking, 2004). As Weisbord & 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 coordinate 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 *multi-logical ways of relating between clients*. Such settings could include something likeⁱⁱ 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 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 an attempt to work with all those whose actions are interconnected (Weisbord, 1992). In Future Searches, hundreds may participate at once or in successions of meetings. It is not just the presupposition of leaders and followers that is set aside, but also the presupposition of leadership as a relevant and useful language tool for reality construction. 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 as "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 (see e.g. Hosking, 2004).

CONCLUSION

This paper began by noting calls for greater paradigm diversity and for 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's and standards. In this context, certain social constructionist themes were introduced and developed in ways that departed from "positivist" and "post-positivist" paradigms and therefore from the "modernist" discourse. 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 relational 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 – including the researcher/theorist and her discourse of science.

These themes were applied to leader-follower-ship to suggest that new development possibilities can be imagined and can seem sensible in the con-text of this post-modern discourse. The discourse 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 *particular* 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 can seem 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 ceases to be 'the only game in town', "new thinking spaces" are "opened up" (Harding, 1998; also Manicas and Secord, 1983). The present chapter has begun to explore a post-modern discourse of leadership as a process of social construction. In so doing, the three themes identified by Bryman (1996) in his handbook review were addressed: by treating 'leadership' as problematic, cultures (leadership settings) as fragmented, and by departing from "modernist" assumptions about rationality.

Finally, and as we noted earlier, the purpose was *not* to offer a substantive theory for subsequent empirical testing. Our premises concerned *abstract* ways of thinking and *potentials* that can be differently realised in different local-cultural-historical processes. In this view, empirical testing is viewed as a process of social construction – one in which ‘theory’ and ‘findings’ are inextricably interwoven. This means that empirical work no longer has the central and definitive role given to it by positivism and positivism. No. As stated at the start, our purpose *was* to offer a changed "thinking space" which might invite "new kinds of questions" and might open-up "new kinds of possible futures" (Harding, 1998, sic). This brings us back to Bryman’s call for work that problematizes leadership, assumes multiple realities, and departs from modernist assumptions. So, our present focus on *processes* rather than constructions (as content) made it possible to show how leadership (and all relational) realities may be variously constructed in different local-cultural-historical processes. Further, by emphasising language as ‘world making’ and ‘worlds’ (realities, facts) as theory-laden constructions, modernist assumptions about rationality (and empiricism) lost their foundations. This was a different sort of “voyage of discovery” (sic) intended to open-up new worlds – new questions, new possibilities and new standards for evaluation.

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ⁱ In other words, we are not ‘starting with’ a priori constructions of what it is to be a person, or of particular individuals (e.g., as leaders or followers) but giving more space for locally emergent constructions.

ⁱⁱ I say “something like” for the reason given earlier – in the present discourse, methodologies’ are neither independent of theory nor singular ‘things’.