

Leading with Limited Knowledge:

**An Application of the Theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating to
Leadership Practice**

Robin Andrew Hay

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2016

University of the West of England

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the
West of England, Bristol for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

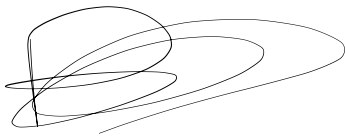
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Declaration

I declare that this research thesis is my own work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of the West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robin Andrew Hay

10 September 2016

Date

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Firstly all the people who have contributed to my life as a leader: Those people who took a chance on me, offered me a opportunity to step up and lead: from my first cub scout leader, to the Trustees of Redcliffe College.

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Abstract:

Leading with Limited Knowledge: An Application of the Theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating to Leadership Practice

Robin Andrew Hay, September 2016.

Leadership is predominantly articulated as being about knowledge, knowing what needs to be done, when it should be done, if not exactly how it should be done. When leaders don't know what to do they are at serious risk of becoming toxic (Hay, 2004). Stacey's Theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating (2011) offers a means to examine and practice leadership from a constructivist perspective but work to date had not translated theory into leadership practice.

In an age where the pace of change and the level of predictability is higher than ever, the traditional approaches to leadership fall short, leaving a disconnect between the theory and practice of leadership. I felt this in my own leadership experience and needed to bridge the gap both to sustain my own leadership and reconstruct it to cope with the experience of being a leader in these challenging times.

This longitudinal study conducted over 7 years used a mixed methods approach to examine the lived experience of leading. In particular to explore the effect on my leadership practice of acknowledging limited knowledge. It developed and integrated five different research approaches: reflective journaling, event-based reflection, longitudinal study, emerging practice observation and group reflective practice. This required the development of an approach to research ethics suitable for a constructivist approach and has application beyond this specific field of leadership studies. The research sought to live out in leadership practice, the implications of a CRPR perspective on leadership.

It demonstrates that the Theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating can be operationalised as leadership practice and offers a coherent bridge between

theory and practice. This is reinforced by the development of a conceptual framework presented as the Circles of Leadership (p.261) which brings the areas of leadership practice together in a wholistic, inter-relational model that is accessible to leaders, allowing them a way to approach leadership differently and explore the evidence and findings of the research in their own practice. In addition, it demonstrates an autoethnography flexible enough to capture the lived experience of leaders, evocative enough to portray its challenges and yet sufficiently robust in its analysis to provide credible evidence for change.

This extensive reflexive analysis, of complex narrative orientated data, that crosses the different aspects of research, leadership and teaching, and locates the learning between those different elements, offers a unique and substantial contribution of data, theory and method that challenges existing paradigms and theories of leadership. It offers both a practical response to the felt need of leaders and an invitation to engage in further research in this emerging field of CRPR orientated leadership.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research and its findings, locating its inception in the personal journey of the leader-researcher. It also briefly outlines the layout of the rest of thesis.

I am addressing the dilemma that leaders have to act even when they are not certain. Or as an academic colleague, with a somewhat pitying expression put it “These senior leaders often don’t seem to have a clue.” and he is right, often we don’t. This thesis is about how leaders can continue to act in spite of a lack of knowledge.

Leadership: experience and theory

It is rooted in my own experience of being a leader in numerous organisations over a twenty five year period and my engagement with existing leadership theory, teaching undergraduate and postgraduate leadership programmes for the last fourteen years. In particular it focuses on leadership practice since 2009 when I became Principal of a theological college and I led the organisation through a period of very significant change.

Over the course of my career I have occupied a broad range of leadership roles in commercial, public, voluntary and charity sectors, and worked with multiple organisations as a management consultant. My working life began on the Marks & Spencer’s management training scheme: this was widely seen at the time as one of the best programmes available and provided a combination of experience in a large retail organisation, with classroom based teaching and intentional mentoring. This was followed by several years in the National Health Service in different types of organisation, before taking over a floundering commercial start-up, providing management services to primary care practices. Freelance management consultancy with a range of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) followed, before

founding a start up business with a partner; this gave me more commercial experience. Three years working with an International Non-Governmental Organisation in Asia, leading a multinational team engaged in health systems capacity building, added cross-cultural experience and showed the added challenge of leading a multicultural team.

Returning to the UK I worked with Redcliffe College, initially lecturing in subjects including leadership, becoming a Director after three years and Principal four years later. Redcliffe College is an interdenominational Christian college that began in 1892 and draws students from all over the world who are training for cross-cultural Christian ministry. At the start of the research it was based on a three acre campus in Gloucester where it had moved after the first one hundred years in London. It offered an undergraduate degree and several Masters programmes, and had between 90 and 140 students. It had a regular staff team of about thirty individuals with about 30 more visiting teaching staff. As Principal I was responsible to a Board of Trustees for the operation of all aspects of the college. I operated with a leadership team, which during the life of the research was also called an Executive Team, and varied from 3 to 8 people. I was also Course Leader of the MA in Global Leadership in Intercultural Contexts, a course serving experienced leaders with extremely diverse cohorts in age, nationality and role.

From my first engagement with leadership theory in the early 1990s in the classic text by Johnson and Scholes (1997) through to beginning this doctoral research study, I have had a growing sense that leadership is approached as a scientific endeavour with the assumption that $A+B$, done well will equal C . However, I am increasingly convinced that leadership is also regarded as a superstition that cannot be questioned. This apparent contradiction is one example of the disconnect I experienced between being a leader and the narratives of the dominant leadership discourse, and this dissonance has made me increasingly uncomfortable.

In the tale of the Wizard of Oz we are told the story of a girl who regards herself as in need of leadership (advice, wisdom and guidance – the answer as to how to get

home). She undertakes a lengthy and at times dangerous journey with her faithful dog Toto. After a lengthy period of time she finally arrives at the palace and in fear and trembling approaches the great high Wizard. The Wizard has something of the other world around about him; he is certainly distant, different and beyond reach. There is an untouchable aura about him and it is perhaps this that reinforces why he was somebody worth journeying so far to see; if there is that sense of mystery it must be worthwhile. As the Wizard makes his pronouncement in response to Dorothy's question, Toto catches a curtain hanging to the side of the stage and pulls it down revealing the reality: a small old man working a much bigger contraption to give the impression of someone wise¹.

Throughout my career as a leader it has often felt as though people are looking at me as though I am wearing a long cloak, standing in an elevated position with great wisdom to dispense. Should I demolish the presumptions that caused them to see me as something I am not, or do I cling to it tightly, fearing that I might be revealed for what I truly am?

I have had a personal need to answer these questions that have been haunting my leadership but, given my teaching role, I have also felt a responsibility to answer them for the next generation of leaders coming through.

Since my involvement in 2001 in a roundtable event² on the leadership crisis in Christian mission, I had been aware of a reticence amongst Generation X³ to engage in leadership and I saw this caution continuing into subsequent generations. Amongst my leadership students, a number who had hesitantly reached for leadership roles, often felt themselves become toxic (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), struggling with the lack of transparency and their inability to meet expectations they felt were placed upon them (anecdotal from class discussions on Leadership Theory and The Darkside of Leadership 2004-2016).

1 With thanks to Rev Brian McLaren for this original analogy (McLaren, Brian, 2000)

2 This resulted in the publication of *Postmission: World Mission by a Postmodern Generation* (Tiplady, 2003), and from its reception and the subsequent events it is clear it resonated widely across more than one generation and across many different cultures.

3 Generation X is generally viewed as the cohort born between 1965 and 1980

In summary, much of the leadership literature, particularly the dominant discourses, are neat, straightforward and prescriptive (Hay, 2014) and are intended to impart the knowledge necessary to be effective. In contrast, my experience of leadership is that it is messy, complex and requires judgements to be made in the moment, often without the level of knowledge and certainty that one needs or would prefer. Further, much of the leadership literature has emerged out of the industrial age, finding its heyday in manufacturing and inevitably many of the key building blocks are not just shaped to fit that age but are born out of the cultural assumptions of the day (see chapter 2 for a discussion of this). Barrett, argues:

In an effort to control outcomes and deskill tasks, managers often attempt to break complex jobs down into formal descriptions of work procedures that people can follow automatically. In a perfectly rational world, such strategy makes perfect sense, but that's rarely the way work actually gets done. (Barrett, 2012 p.26)

“Limited knowledge” is not a term found in the leadership literature in a succinct and defined form, and it was not one that I immediately arrived at in my research. My engagement was with the unknown and was an embodied experience in my day-to-day leadership practice. Often the sense of ‘unknown’ loomed over me, which sometimes led me to shrink back. However, as I sought to examine such situations more closely in my research (see chapter 5, for example) I realised that I was not completely without knowledge, but rather, I was leading with limited knowledge. My experience was that ‘the unknown’ conjured up images of something indefinable, unwieldy and difficult to handle. At the outset this was a major research challenge. However, as I engaged in the research and moved back and forth between the findings, my experiences, and the literature, I became increasingly convinced that the thinking of the dominant discourses (see chapter 2 for a discussion on discourses), in both popular and academic spheres, and

therefore the values and skills we teach leaders, inhibit rather than aid this process. Viewing leadership from the perspective of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating (CRPR) not only significantly challenged many assumptions inherent in these discourses but in Stacey's view goes further, so that "If one mode of thinking resonates with, and makes sense of, our experience, then the other will not." (2012, p.4). The CRPR perspective also offered a way of taming the unknown, enabling it to be viewed very differently (Stacey, 2012, p.54). In my leadership practice it allowed me to recognise partial knowledge and work with it to both better understand and make sense of a situation that I only partially understood, as well as to act into 'the unknown', beyond the limitation of my knowledge.

Eight key themes developed

When seeking to understand how I could lead authentically whilst acknowledging my own limited knowledge, I was examining how I was enabled or constrained to act in my role as leader. Did limited knowledge prevent me from acting? At what point did the limited knowledge become sufficient to allow me to act?

The early recognition that limited knowledge was different from having no knowledge, focused the research to examining my leadership practice in the light of that limited knowledge and the development of eight themes that emerged in my leadership practice as a response to CRPR. Firstly I realised that leading is possible with limited knowledge but it does inevitably mean that what I am seeking is sufficient **(1) tentative certainty** to enable me to act. The acknowledgement of the tentative nature of the certainty then shaped both the way in which the limited knowledge was used as well as the actions of me as the leader. In understanding that any certainty was always tentative, came the realisation that perfection was not an option and therefore discerning what constituted **(2) good enough** in each and every situation was important, as that was the point at which I as leader could act. It could be good enough information, a good enough strategy or even a good enough attempt to lead in a situation that was changing quickly, characterised by

unpredictability and likely not to meet expectations or intentions. This acknowledgement of both the nature of tentative certainty and acceptance that what is being done is not perfect but only good enough, adds to a sense of increased uncertainty. Uncertainty can enable or paralyse, stimulate or inhibit individuals and an important task for me as a leader is to ensure there is a **(3) good enough holding of anxiety** to enable rather than inhibit. Ensuring staff are able to engage with the limited knowledge even before its extent is defined and understood, allows them to be part of the **(4) sense-making** process that leaders often individualise. Using the collective wisdom of multiple individuals involved in the situation allows for a fuller understanding thereby reducing the limitations on knowledge. It was this interlinked process of **limited knowledge** being faced, **tentative certainty** being acknowledged, a **good enough** solution being sought, and the engagement of staff in **sense-making** in an environment of a **good enough holding of anxiety**, that that whilst being challenging, enabled me to authentically **(5) act in the grey**. The grey here characterises the messiness of many leadership situations where facts aren't fully known, certainty is lacking and the situation is constantly evolving. Emphasising these themes in my leadership practice called into question the common assumption that the role of leaders is to know what needs to be done and ensure it gets done because I was illustrating in my actions that **(6) causality is uncertain**. If causality was uncertain then I had not only made the limitations of my knowledge explicit but also limited the role I could fulfil as leader. A logical consequence of this was that a leader would get things wrong and therefore **(7) space for mistakes** to be made and an environment that did not regard them as fatal, was necessary. This space for mistakes is largely absent from the literature and leadership practice, and challenges traditional assumptions of planning and control as the ways that organisations get things done. Therefore the need to **(8) plan differently** arose, seeing planning as being able to resource the emergent and unexpected, knowing what resources had been committed and on what assumptions, so that as those assumptions inevitably proved inaccurate

(whether substantially or marginally) the response could be reconsidered quickly and effectively.

Beyond the specific eight themes I developed, an additional point is pertinent to note. Stacey says that the primary implication for managers of CRPR is not 'quality of participation, conversation, diversity etc' although all these are, in his view important, but rather a 'quality of attention to participation'.

Certainly this could be described as the common thread underlying the theoretical framework CRPR offers, and from my own development of eight themes, this would be fundamental to them all. Despite this being evident in Stacey's work (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.188) it was only in the midst of my efforts to live this leadership as a responsive process orientated leadership practice, that its full importance became evident. It is also why, in the Conclusion, I finish with a recognition of the importance and difficulty of paying attention. Paying attention is important, not as a nice to have idea - simply a recommendation from academic research; but as an essential point for survival akin to an oxygen supply that allows life to continue at altitude. Because it is both vital and so difficult, it is the first and most fundamental need in the recommendations for further research, without which the wisdom of this research may be an unsustainable ideal.

The last seven years as leader at Redcliffe College have given me many opportunities to reflect on and study my own leadership practice through a variety of activities, challenges and changes: some of the most significant in Redcliffe's history. Appointed as principal when a merger was already underway with another similar college, the first year was largely about me trying to make the merger a reality. After the merger failed at the eleventh hour, the second year was spent unpicking the preparatory work of the merger and finding an independent way ahead for the college. A significant development from the merger that went ahead, was the inspiration of another training programme into Redcliffe. This involved reaccreditation of programs, integration of new seconded staff and a change to culture and work patterns. Alongside this integration, we had a challenge to the

legal framework within which we could recruit overseas students with the creation of the UK Borders Agency and introduction of a new draconian inspection regime, which eventually led to the withdrawal of our Tier 4 overseas student sponsorship status. This affected Redcliffe significantly in its strategy, financial income and ethos and also threatened colleges across the sector in similar ways. In response to this, work was begun to form a consortium, recognising that a larger entity, with greater student numbers, could provide greater resilience to such threats. This consortium began with discussions among 12 colleges and eventually formed into a group of 10, investing finance and time to intentionally form a consortium. I ended up chairing this process, and with a colleague in another college, effectively provided impetus and leadership for it. Although ultimately failing, this endeavour absorbed a significant proportion of my leadership over a two-year period and, during that time and subsequently, has fostered some individual explorations of small scale cooperation, merger or takeovers, none of which have been fully realised to date.

In summer 2014 a bureaucratic error on the part of the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), led to us being threatened with the loss of Student Loan Company (SLC) funding, which at that stage was providing 60% of the undergraduate fee income. As well as causing significant turmoil, this eventually led to a decision to close the undergraduate programme and began a process of radically rethinking how Redcliffe functioned. The process resulted in the sale of the campus, relocation to a new site and reorientation of almost every aspect of Redcliffe's work.

It was into this very busy and demanding leadership role that I have been focusing my research and of my leadership practice in this context that I asked the following research question:

The primary research question:

- To explore the effect on my leadership practice of acknowledging limited knowledge.

Research objectives arising from the primary aim:

- To explore and record in a systematic way the instances, nature and extent of limited knowledge experienced by the leader
- To develop a research approach that facilitates the exploration of organisational situations characterised by limited knowledge
- To enquire into the ways in which limited knowledge affects a leader
- To articulate and operationalise a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating in ways that are accessible to busy leaders seeking to lead authentically in situations characterised by limited knowledge
- To contribute to the limited literature on methodological approaches for using a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating in research studies

My leadership practice was not a laboratory experiment to examine in an objectified way, but rather was an experience I was living and for research purposes, a narrative to be examined. Therefore, the dominant research method used is autoethnography - my own narration of my leadership. Using that narrative, the analysis examines my leadership practice in the light of engaging with the theory of CRPR. Therefore, in the first half, the thesis sets out the broad context for this engagement and in the second half, focuses substantially on narrative, before in the final chapter, drawing conclusions and articulating my changed leadership practice.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This introduction chapter has considered the motivation for the research and its emergence in the form of unanswered questions, from my own leadership practice over twenty five years. The main research question has been clearly stated and the initial challenges this presented, have been highlighted. The eight themes developed empirically in the research in response to the question, are briefly outlined to assist in following the development throughout the thesis, as well as a brief explanation of the theoretical framework utilised.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The contested nature of the term leadership is recognised and then the literature of the traditional view of leadership, as well as more recent emergent theories, are outlined, including the complexity writers retaining a systems orientation, in contrast to the process orientation adopted in this study and discussed in chapter 3. In addition it is argued that leadership practice is influenced by two dominant discourses: the academic literature and the popular literature, and summarises each, identifying important gaps in relation to the experience of leading.

Chapter 3 – A theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating

The growing body of literature on the theory of CRPR is critically reviewed. A summary theoretical framework is developed for use in the process of analysis later in the thesis. CRPR is not a leadership theory but because of its focus upon processes of relating and the complex, responsive nature of those processes, can be readily applied to leadership practice. That process of relating is explored and examines the gesture and response, at the heart of human interaction, providing a viewpoint that acknowledges a lack of control whilst maintaining a belief in the

power of leadership. The chapter concludes with a discussion of why the theory of CRPR has been chosen as the guiding theoretical framework for this research study.

Chapter 4 – Research Approach

The research approach outlined in this chapter describes a methodology, theoretical perspective and epistemological assumptions, that are appropriate for the theoretical framework (CRPR) adopted. It is argued that this makes an important contribution to existing knowledge on research methodology, relevant both to researching the practice of leaders and to research conducted from a CRPR perspective.

Chapter 5 - Research Process

The chapter outlines how the research was done at each stage. A summary of the data collection methods used and then the analytical approaches adopted are set out. This provides a firm foundation for each stage as well as allowing the reader to see how the research builds through the overall process and the development of methodological approaches as well as theoretical learning.

Findings and Analysis

Chapters 6 to 9 cover three phases of research and chapter 9 includes a case study where further reflexive observation of the changed leadership practice in a team context was examined. Each of these chapters focuses on a different aspect of my leadership practice and utilises different research methods, and these are outlined in chapter 5.

Phase 1 – Becoming Aware – Discovering the extent of (my) limited knowledge

Chapter 6 – A leader confronts his limited knowledge

This chapter uses an extended narrative of the failed merger attempt that dominated my first year in a new role and extensive documentary analysis, to examines the process and identify, by correlation with field notes, where I as the leader encountered limits of knowledge. Five years on in a further analysis, I postulate the limitations of knowledge apparent in the wider process and examine their effects on me and the others individuals involved in the process.

Phase 2 - Exploring limited knowledge in leadership the light of the theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating

Chapter 7 – A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

In a shift from the previous chapter, where a large event dominated field notes and therefore the analysis, this chapter documents a daily journal process over a fourteen day period in my leadership practice. The theoretical framework developed in chapter 3 is used to pay attention to what was happening in my daily leadership. A number of activities and themes emerge and shape the focus of subsequent research chapters.

Chapter 8 – Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

The theory suggests that it is in the microprocesses of relating that we can find an understanding of how complex events unfold. This required me to find a way to record and track these detailed events in the course of a busy schedule. A research tool was developed to allow me to monitor my response to issues “in the moment” (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.84). This was utilised for several years during the research. Selecting three leadership issues that I tracked, the longest lasting 134 days, I was able to see nuanced insights into the observations already made on my leadership practice. In particular, understanding of the interaction

with others, and the effect of time and familiarity giving me the confidence to be intentional about incorporating these insights into my own day to day leadership practice.

Phase 3 - Changing my leadership practice - living the learning in my leading

Chapter 9 – Observing my emerging leadership practice

This chapter begins with a summary of the eight themes that had emerged from leading with a CRPR perspective, and how they work together to enable me to not just lead through the unknown but lead with the unknown. It observes how my leadership practice has changed in the light of the engagement with limited knowledge in the light of a theory of CRPR. Recognising that teaching and speaking on limited knowledge and a theory of CRPR, as well as continuing to lead the organisation has meant the application has been subtle, progressive and yet significant. The significance evidenced by a case study where my changed leadership practice was observed in a team context and a group reflection offered further insights as well as the confidence that this responsive process-orientated model of leadership practice, whilst still being a ‘tentative certainty’ was ‘good enough’ to work in the demanding life of a busy leader. In the light of this, the eight themes were revisited and articulated in a responsive process-orientated model.

Chapter 10 – Concluding...and yet a continuing journey

This final chapter relates the research and the learning back to the original research questions, making explicit the contributions to data, knowledge and method. The ongoing nature of the learning is highlighted and the thesis concludes with areas for further research.

Chapter 2: Leadership Literature

Undertaking any kind of literature review in the field of leadership feels like swimming in the Atlantic but just as in the Atlantic there are primary currents that can be identified, located and traced, so too in the field of leadership. Just as there are consequences of the gulf stream on the coast of Britain for the climate of this island nation, so too are there dominant discourses that affect the key areas I am looking at: the common understandings of what leadership is, how it has evolved, how people write about 'feeling' leadership and what they say when they feel they lack leadership. Ladkin (2011, p.183) in particular has suggested this could reveal new insight

The literature review is often described as mapping the terrain and yet for me it has entailed revisiting the map regularly whilst journeying through the landscape I had drawn, to correct, revise and tweak. I felt more like an old style cartographer who accompanies the explorer and finds the map drawn from a distance to be wanting, than a modern day cartographer using satellite imagery that gives a perfect snapshot.

When talking about the stages of research (Cooper, 1998, p.216) talk of how "Practicing researchers often skip over one or more stages and sometimes move backward as well as forward". This reflects my experience generally as I discuss in chapter 4, particularly the line between literature review and research methodology not just being one that is crossed in both directions but is actually blurred in certain approaches. The father of modern Grounded Theory Method (GTM) Barney Glaser, recognised this and advocated waiting to conduct the literature review until initial findings have been made, in order to not influence the researcher with preconceived ideas (Glaser et al., 1968, p.364).

In reality that may not be practical for a number of reasons and for me would have been artificial. I was not researching an unusual phenomenon with which I had no

experience, I was researching my own leadership and had spent the previous 10 years actively teaching leadership. I followed Charmaz's recommendation (2006) and undertook an initial review of the literature before the first data collection. This allowed me to understand what research had been conducted in the area already and then enter into an iterative process (discussed in chapters 4 and 5).

This chapter seeks to map some of the key terrain of the leadership literature accepting that the realm is vast and the literature plentiful⁴. Therefore no attempt is made to be exhaustive and the approach is shaped by two key criteria: 1. the key literature that directly relates to the research questions and 2. the major landmarks in the relevant areas of the terrain, with the aim of highlighting key gaps in the literature. This will serve to position the contribution of this research within the broader field in such a way that its importance and limitations are clear.

The extensive resources available in both academic and popular realms on the subject of leadership presents challenges for the researcher. The added focus of "exploring leadership practice" significantly narrowed the literature available.

Firstly I set out the challenges related to reaching a working definition of leadership as it remains a highly contested term. Then I consider the traditional leadership literature which has provided the basis of leadership theory for much of the last century. Subsequently, I examine a number of emerging theories in the leadership literature that have particular relevance to the research. I leave a review of the CRPR literature as the main theoretical framework on which the analysis rests until the following chapter but do examine the non-CRPR leadership literature positioning CRPR within this broader complexity context. I finish this chapter where I started, seeing interesting and useful things within much of the current literature, but I conclude that I share Stacey's view that the key problem in the current literature for practicing leaders is that it focuses on what leadership does

4 Amazon list 170,706 books with leadership in the title (as at 26/06/2016) and Cairnway Center for Servant Leadership Excellence estimate that there were four new leadership books published each day during 2015. <https://www.cairnway.net/why-are-there-so-many-leadership-books/>

rather than how it actually gets done.

Problems of definition of leadership

Leadership has continued to be problematic for scholars to form a consensus of definition even after 50 years work (Grint, 2005, p.14). Grint cites Yukl (1998) believed it was “too new to be defined” (2005, p.16) or perhaps beyond definition (Grint, 2005, p.17) or even worthwhile, but he does acknowledge that how it is defined has “implications or how organizations work – or don’t work” (Grint, 2005 p.17). So while I agree with Grint that it is a contested term beyond broad, even perhaps useful agreement, unlike him I feel the need to attempt a definition because it has implications as I try to examine how leadership is effected by limited knowledge.

Ladkin insists it is “more than the space between ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’” (2011, p.188) because we are trying to enact something together and she seeks to capture this in her leadership ‘moment’ (Ladkin, 2011, p.28) discussed on page 28. Having surveyed the field widely, Northouse emphasises that leadership is a process and that it uses influence, but even after all of his work concludes that we are more able to intuit than we can define it. These attempts at definition have focused on leadership’s purpose, none of them really examine how leadership happens, something that Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) highlight in their examination of the ‘mundane’. Ironically, traditional leadership theories (see page 18) examine the mechanics of leadership more than contemporary writing, perhaps giving evidence to suggestion that the traditional theories continue to provide the foundation for todays leadership practices citing (Ahrne, 2008; Parker and Ritson, 2005; Wren, Bedian and Breeze, 2002; Rodrigues, 2001; Golden Pryor and Taneja, 2010) as being in broad agreement.

The leadership gap

Leadership literature is divided into two groups: the academic literature of the discipline which has emerged since early leadership studies in the 1940s, and the popular literature which has become a major industry itself, significantly since the 1980's. This is partly attributable to the appointment of Theodore Levitt as Editor in Chief of the Harvard Business Review and the mainstreaming of the publication as a resource for practicing leaders and not simply graduates of the Harvard leadership programme. The relationship between the two streams of writing is not always entirely straightforward and easy to define as they are at times both complimentary and contradictory. In seeking to relate the two, Weick's work (2009, p.40) building on Thorngate's postulate, has been helpful in understanding this relationship. Thorngate's postulate says that "It is impossible for a theory of social behaviour to be simultaneously general, simple, and accurate." Thorngate (1976) developed a clock to illustrate the concept that a theory could be general and accurate but not simple, accurate and simple but not general, and general and simple but not accurate.

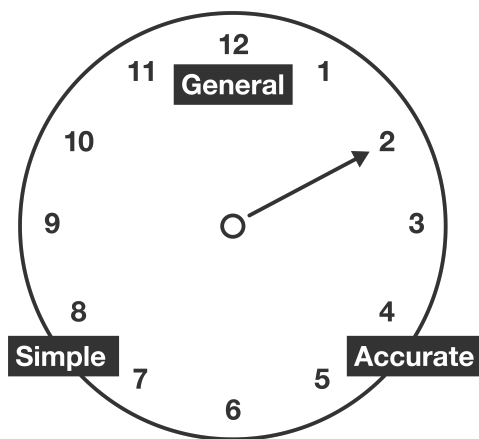


Figure 1: Thorngate's Postulate

Popular leadership literature focuses on maximum market appeal and therefore needs to be generalisable across the many contexts of leadership. Academic leadership needs to stand up to traditional peer review approaches from scholars in many different contexts but by the nature of peer review, findings need to be first

and foremost accurate. The 'general' readership that each appeals to is however different, with a gap which borders on disdain perceived by leadership academics when they view leadership practitioners (Simpson, 10/11/14) and out of touch when leadership practitioners view leadership academics.

Traditional leadership literature

Historically the divide between leadership and management has been contested (Zaleznik, 1977) and is still contested by significant numbers of scholars, for example (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Deal and Peterson, 1994; Northouse, 2009; Pfeffer, Jeffrey, 1977; Western, 2008; Williams and Deal, 2003). In examining the traditional literature I will treat leadership and management as synonymous for simplicity as the differentiation is not key to the research focus, neither is it a differentiation that Stacey (2012, pp.61-63) feels is necessary to make in CRPR, the main theoretical framework I examine in chapter 3.

Fayol's five key management activities: planning, organization, command, coordination and control (1949) provided the foundation for the development of management as a discipline and are regarded as continuing to shape contemporary management (Golden Pryor and Taneja, 2010) cite a cross section of authors in agreement (Wren, 1994, 1995; Bartol et al., 2001; Bedian and Wren, 2001; Rodrigues, 2001; Wren, 2001; Breeze and Miner, 2002). Certainly Fayol's five basic tools (Fayol, 1923 quoted in Golden Pryor, Mildred and Taneja, Sonia, 2010):

1. A general survey to assess - what organisational leaders want to achieve and what would be the probable future (i.e. outcomes)
2. The business plan [setting out] a series of activities which need to be performed in order to achieve the organisation's long-term goals
3. The operations report ...used in the evaluation of performance results
4. Minutes of meetings ... and communicat[ion] ... to help in controlling and coordinating ...

5. An organisation chart ... to assist in monitoring accountabilities and responsibilities

reflect the the patterns of leadership and management that underpin the dominant discourses today.

In contrasting a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating with current leadership theories Stacey uses the term 'dominant discourse' in a simple binary opposition (see page 35) but in reality there are multiple discourses that frame the leadership narrative and taking a moment to discuss discourse will aid us later. Discourse is described by Fairhurst (2009) quoted in Mabey (2012, p.2) as "an interpretive repertoire [. . .] tool bags of terminology, tropes, themes, habitual forms of argument, and so on, that, in effect, contextualize by supplying leadership actors with a set of linguistic resources'. In other words they frame leadership in a particular way for leaders and followers but this is subconscious (Western, 2008, p.282) . Western discerns four leadership discourses: 1. Controller, orientated to efficiency and productivity; 2. Therapist, emphasising relationships and motivation; 3. Messiah, focused on vision and culture; and Eco-leadership , prioritising connectivity and ethics. He sees them having emerged in sequence over the last one hundred years (Western, 2008, p.281 - figure 13.1) but emphasises that all of the discourses remain present and that whilst a single discourse may "dominate different sectors, organizations and departments...they usually co-exist" (Western, 2008, p282).

Western suggests that the leadership discourse shaping an organisation is revealed by their "cultures, language and symbols" (2008, p.290) but as well as 'co-existing' (Western, 2008, p282) Mabey warns that they "are not intended to be theoretically watertight boxes" and so the discernment of discrete discourses is difficult and contentious. It may be for this reason that Stacey adopts a binary and somewhat crude shorthand for the multiple discourses, calling them the dominant discourse and seeing many of the themes present as unhelpful and to be challenged by a CRPR perspective. I would want to argue that the issues he often cites in this

all encompassing dominant discourse are seen across the different discourses Western outlines: for example, the emphasis on control in discourse 1, individualism in 2, certainty in 3 and system in 4. In addition we see the coexistence and overlap between Western's discourses by looking at a current popular leadership book, Adair's classic - 'Effective leadership: how to be a successful leader' (2009) where the chapters describing the main leadership tasks are:

- Defining the task
- Planning
- Briefing
- Controlling
- Evaluating
- Motivating
- Organizing

This would suggest that not only are Fayol's ideas foundational but remarkably unchanged (Northouse, 2009, p.9) in current popular leadership literature. Writing in 1989 Mintzberg (1989, p.9) appeared to agree when he stated "if you ask managers what they do, they will most likely tell you that they plan, organize, coordinate, and control" but his observation is that what they actually do bears no relation to this. This potential disconnect between what the dominant discourses say leaders do, what they think they do, and what they actually do, is an ongoing point of contention. When linked to Alvesson and Sveningsson's (2003) concern that "little attention is paid in the leadership literature to the more mundane aspects of managerial work and leadership" it would suggest that further work is needed in this area.

The central role of the leader comes through clearly and the emphasis on directing and controlling are evident. Meindl has warned that "leadership situations have

tended to be defined from the perspectives of leaders and not of followers” (Meindl, 1995, p.329) and in an earlier paper (Meindl, 1985) developed the notion of the “Romance of Leadership” (RoL). This recognised that followers see great significance in the role of the leader “revealing a potential “bias” or “false assumption-making” regarding the relative importance of leadership factors to the functioning of groups and organizations” (Meindl, 1995, p.330). Bligh studying the twenty five years since the publication of Meindl’s original RoL paper says “we continue to have highly romanticized, heroic views of leadership: we are continually fascinated by what leaders do, what they are able to accomplish, and the general effects they have on our lives.” (Bligh, Kohles and Pillai, 2011, p.1059). This view of leadership, he suggests, can provide comfort and security, reducing anxiety and uncertainty and “providing a sense of human agency and control” (Bligh, Kohles and Pillai, 2011, p.1059) offering a way of coping with unknowable and indeterminate complexities. This view of leadership places immense expectations upon the leader both in their performance (to direct and control) and in their presence (to provide certainty and security). In leadership practice these two roles happen simultaneous and are interdependent, “control[ing] the future by acting now to reduce complexity and uncertainty and directing followers towards highly prescribed future states” (Plowman et al., 2007, p.343). These future states Plowman suggests are seen as foreseeable (Plowman et al., 2007, p.344) therefore “most approaches to the study of leadership emphasize the role of leaders in directing organizations towards seemingly knowable and controllable futures” (Plowman et al., 2007, p.342). It is clear that the traditional leadership literature placed a very high regard on the leaders knowledge.

“Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown

unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.⁵”

Donald Rumsfeld - US Secretary of Defense

Leadership continues to be regarded as a knowing process⁶ (Northouse, 2009, p.3): leaders are expected to be the ones with greatest knowledge, whether that is technical or strategic knowledge (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991, p.55), (Adair, 2005, p.136). Northouse describes this as personal power and sees leaders deriving power by followers seeing them as ‘likeable and knowledgeable’ (Northouse, 2009, p.7). This is reflected in the popular literature (Watkins, 2012) and has a long history (Slim, 1957) but is simplistic, both because it acknowledges only one type of knowing: intellectual, and because often it sees the process of gaining knowledge as a simple acquisition (Junarso, 2009, p.215; Blanchard and Miller, 2012, pp.35-42; Sowcik, 2015, Chp.15) and it is even discernible in academic literature where a focus on knowledge acquisition is postulated as a core leadership skill (Mumford, et al., 2000). Leadership scholars have in recent years begun to explore a broader understanding of ways of knowing as well as a more emergent orientated process of discovery.

Reason and Bradbury take this understanding of different types of knowledge further with what they call an ‘extended epistemology’ (2006, p.149), so called because it “...reaches beyond the primarily theoretical, propositional knowledge of academia.” They outline four:

5 Defense.gov News Transcript: DoD News Briefing – Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers, United States Department of Defense (defense.gov)". <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2636>

6 Northouse sees the broad skills perspective as majoring on this (Northouse, 2009, p.3) and French and Raven quoted in Northouse see knowledge as one of 5 bases of leadership power.

- Experiential knowing - through 'face to face encounter with person, place or thing' and say it is perceived through empathy and resonance.
- Presentational knowing - '...emerges from experiential learning...' but then expresses meaning out of that through presentation including dance, art etc.
- Propositional knowledge - knowing 'about something through ideas and theories expressed in informative statements
- Practical knowing is the knowledge to do something (in Aristotle's words, 'to act') with "skill, knack or competence" as Heron (1992) puts it.

Knack is a helpful term as it captures the sense of hunch and intuition, something many leaders talk of (Aarum Andersen, 2000) and this resonates closely with Stacey's 'practical judgement' (Stacey, 2012, pp.107-120), a term that brings out the need to act, to make a *judgement*, as opposed to passive knowledge pursued simply out of interest. Knowledge is rarely pursued for interest sake by leaders, they are usually driven by an urgent desire to *know* in order to *do* something.

One of the challenges for leaders is the expectations of followers on them to *have* knowledge. Simpson sees this as an increasing issue today

...the current focus on information and on knowledge generation and transfer has led to a situation where ignorance has a tendency to be understood as a state to be done away with as quickly as possible, rather than as a permanent and unavoidable systemic reality to be worked with and potentially to be learned from. (Simpson, and French, 2006)

Returning to Rumsfeld's admission of not knowing some of the things that he, as a leader would ideally have liked to know, caused consternation in the popular press (Graham, 27/03/14), (Rumsfeld, 2002) and yet others recognised that what he was saying was technically true (Pullum, 2003) and since then seen the admission

(taken at face value rather than simply a way of obfuscating and avoiding answering the question) as a strength. Slavich says such situations are helpful because “...when correctly identified, situations involving known unknowns represent excellent opportunities to learn.” (Slavich, 2007, p.27) but he also, using a context of doctors involved in diagnosis of mental health patients, recognises that leaders are under “...pressure to pretend to know the unknown...”.

It is not surprising that the admission of lack of knowledge is difficult, there are not many models for leaders to learn from. There is little reflection in the literature on what “not knowing” feels like and even some scholars who have written widely on knowledge, not knowing, negative capability and the apophatic say they have been accused of not paying sufficient attention to defining this (Simpson, 10/11/14).

In addition to the different ways of knowing (types) there are also different ways to gain knowledge (processes) and Calás and Smircich (1999, pp. 649-672) speak of reflexivity that constantly assesses the relationship between ‘knowledge’ and the ‘ways of doing knowledge’. Slavich, highlighting that the knowledge lacked is often of critical importance says “One thing we know we don’t know is the future, and in such situations, especially those involving patients, our success as clinicians is influenced greatly by the heuristics that we employ to make decisions” (Slavich, 2007, p.27).

Emerging leadership literature

Heuristics is centred around asking questions, something that Grint has highlighted an increased need to do. He draws on the work of Rittel and Webber (1973), describing what he calls ‘wicked’ problems. Those are new dilemmas which have not arisen before and for which there are no ‘right’ answers. Grint argues that leadership authority in these types of situations is by far the most difficult to enact because it involves asking “the right questions rather than providing the right

answers because the answers may not be self-evident and will require collaborative processes in order to make progress” (Grint, 2007, p.11).

This collective asking of questions is what Weick (1993, p.635) calls sense-making. Based on a constructivist worldview, it rejects the view of the leader being the sole source of insight and instead requires a group process to discern reality from intentional action to create order and gain retrospective understanding of what is happening in the moment. From doing this the participants are better able to explain both the situation and their own place within the situation (Gioia, 1986, p.61 cited in Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2007). (I develop the work on sense-making further in chapters 7,8 and 9 as a theme in my leadership practice.)

Grint also highlights the importance of a leaders role in ‘reframing’, something that Weick discusses whereby “leaders give meaning to emergent events by re-framing them” (Weick and Quinn, 1999 p.352 cited in Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2007).

Mindfulness is becoming a more common term in both academic and popular leadership discourses in recent years and has relevance for the sense-making that Weick and Grint emphasise but also has relevance for a key area of CRPR - the ability to pay attention.

Boyatzis and McKee, widely read writers in the popular leadership field, outline mindfulness as core to achieving the resonant leadership⁷ they see as effective. They summarise mindfulness as follows “Through purposeful conscious direction of our attention, we are able to see things that might normally pass right by us, giving us access to deeper insight, wisdom and choices” (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005, p.120).

In more academic terms, Zgierska, et al. define it as “the intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment” (2009, p.2). Mindfulness has many definitions

7. Resonant Leaders are in tune with the people around them. They know and can communicate what to do and why to do it (McKee and Massimilian, 2006, pp.45-49).

in the academic literature, surveyed and summarised by several including (Black, 2011) and (Chiesa, 2013) but the one that best defines what a leader has to do to achieve Stacey's state of "paying attention" to the quality of conversation is what French and Simpson describe as "...attending to what is, rather than to what used to be or might be, to reality rather than to his or others' aspirations for reality" (2014, p.1).

This is not easy and counter-cultural to common contemporary leadership practice where multitasking is viewed as a key competency for leaders. In fact Epstein (Epstein, 1999) defines multitasking as the opposite of mindfulness. Rather than the ability to juggle many different things at the same time, it is tuning the senses and awareness to what is present happening (Epstein, 1999). Johns definition (2004 quoted in Bolton, 2010b) puts this challenge in a more action-orientated way "a conscious exclusion of other elements of life, apart from that which is being attended to" (Bolton, 2010b, p.15). The "exclusion of other elements to concentrate on the immediate in hand" is something that leaders seem to struggle with, as reflected by the lack of writing in popular leadership books on this subject. Simpson and French (2006) explore this, commenting that the concept they term 'negative capability'⁸ "is not a fashionable one in organizational contexts today" and only cite Bennis (1998, p.148) and Handy (1989) as examples (Simpson and French, 2006, p.7).

Bolton (2010), and Simpson and French, both provided insights into mindfulness, but as the research progressed I saw parallels between their work and Stacey's. Bolton's focus on "accurate observation, communication, ability to use implicit knowledge in association with explicit knowledge, and insight into others' perceptions" was foundational for achieving Stacey's 'quality of conversation', and the very act of being a facilitator of conversation requires the leader to be able to think in the present (Simpson and French, 2006, p.245). Frank, (2004 quoted in

8. A phrase they take from the poet Keats and summarise as "capable of being in uncertainties..." (French, 2001).

Bolton, 2010) uses the concept of phronesis, meaning practical wisdom (a concept from Aristotle and explored practically on page 23 and with specific reference to Complex Responsive Process of Relating on page 57) and says that it is the “opposite of acting on the basis of scripts and protocols” and he is in no doubt that those are crude and limiting “those are for beginners, and continuing reliance on them can doom actors to remain beginners.” The ability, as Simpson and French so beautifully put it, to find thoughts that “as yet do not have a thinker” (2006, p.246). The ability to do this, to be mindful, can be the difference between being able to lead or not. As Bolton says there is a “loss of professional agency and responsibility, because we are unaware of things of which we so need to be aware” (Bolton, 2010, p.16).

This awareness is what Ladkin (2011, p.183) focuses on in her work on aesthetics in leadership. As already cited, she suggests exploring how leaders and followers feel could reveal new insights and suggests useful ways of approaching this. Firstly encouraging attention to the “immediate, visceral response” we may have to a person or situation. This might be a means of discerning limited knowledge as Mead (1895 cited in Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.76) suggests “emotions rise when a human being encounters a problem which cannot be resolved through instinctive action”.

Ladkin draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty, suggesting that our awareness, curiosity and ‘knowing’ the world and how to be in it, “arises as we move through it, not just as we think about it” (Ladkin, 2011, p.59). An autoethnography is an experience based narrative and this encourages me to not just narrate my thinking as I go through the world but my feeling too because “our minds are not capable of knowing without our bodies” (Ladkin, 2011, p.60). As well as what we think and how we feel, she also emphasises the leader’s context seeing leadership as a ‘moment’ (Figure 4 below) where the “entity [on leadership] ...cannot be separated from the context from which it arises. (Ladkin, 2011, p.178).

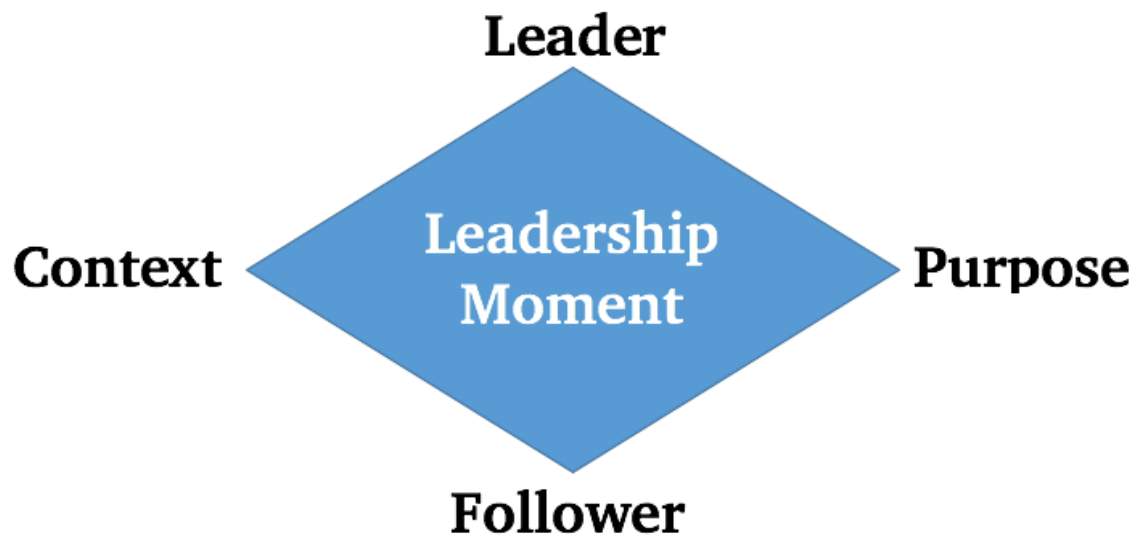


Figure 2: The leadership 'moment' (based on Ladkin, 2011, p.28)

Complexity

An interest in and acknowledgement of the relevance of complexity for leadership and organisations has grown and developed in recent years. Marion and Uhl-Bien have written extensively on a systems-orientated complexity (SOC) perspective on leadership and organisations. The SOC perspective shares many of my frustrations with the dominant discourses on leadership:

Conventional views of leadership are based on the assumption that the world is knowable and that effective leaders can rely on planning and control mechanisms to bring about desired organisational futures. However, complexity science suggests that the world is not knowable, that systems are not predictable and that living systems cannot be forced to follow a linear path. (Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2008, p.129)

They suggest that leadership has been seen as functioning with cybernetic characteristics – leaders regulating control of organisational behaviour to achieve results and many would share this perspective including (Lichtenstein and

Plowman, 2009; Goldstein, Hazy and Lichtenstein, 2010; Plowman, et al., 2007; Harle, 2011; Schneider and Somers, 2006). They challenge this view using analogies drawn from the physical sciences of systems (Anderson, 1999; McKelvey, 1999; Richardson and Cilliers, 2001, cited in Plowman, et al., 2007) insisting that complex systems are characterised by “dynamic, nonlinear interactions” and see “two important implications: causality is often uncertain and it is inappropriate to study the isolated parts of these holistic systems” (Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2008, p.159). This sounds very similar to CRPR language but is in Stacey’s mind fundamentally different as will be explored in detail in chapter 3 but the diagram on page 31 is a useful overview and contrast of the main characteristics and differences between a systems approach and a responsive process.

Working from a similar base but writing for a more popular audience Wheatley’s work has opened up complexity to a broader constituency and has arguably influenced practicing leaders more than any other complexity writer. Her first leadership book (1999) which was published in 18 languages, built on a broad cross-section of articles (www.margaretwheatley.com) that have grown substantially since and the second book (Wheatley, 2007) clearly addressed a felt need illustrated by the title ‘Finding our way: Leadership for an uncertain time’. She describes a “turbulent world makes a mockery of our plans and predictions ... keeps us on edge, anxious and sleepless. Nothing makes sense any more. Meaning eludes us.” (Wheatley, 2006, p.xi) and yet she sees this as positive “We live in a time of chaos, as rich in the potential for disaster as for new possibilities” the possibilities she believes we can embrace because of our “astonishing capacity to self-organise” but she warns that we “lose capacity and in fact create more chaos when we insist on hierarchy, roles, and command and control leadership” (Wheatley, 2008, p.65), something I observe later in my research.

These scholars and practitioners focus their work on Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), a position Stacey occupied in 1995 (Stacey, 1995), and they describe their SOC perspective as an “emergent view of leadership...”. They see themselves

challenging the assumptions that leaders specify desired futures, direct change, eliminate disorder and influence others to enact those desired futures. Stacey sees these other CAS orientated approaches to complexity as sharing some concerns but being fundamentally different in their view of system. CRPR will be explored as a distinct perspective from systemic complexity perspectives in the next chapter but it is useful to highlight the major differences here at the conclusion of this brief exploration of systems-orientated complexity literature.

Systemic process vs responsive processes

	Systemic process	Responsive processes
Entity	Parts of a system, which could be individuals, routines, etc., and which can be thought of as subsystems, such as mental models. Psychological assumptions are those of individual-centred cognitivism, etc.	Embodied interdependent human persons. A social, relational view of human psychology is taken.
Process	Interaction of parts	Responsive acts of mutual recognition by persons
What is becoming	The system, a bounded whole which exists at a higher level than the parts, has properties of its own, and acts casually on the parts.	Coherent patterns of interaction, of the process itself. Patterns of interaction produce further patterns of interaction and nothing else. These constitute individual and collective identities.
Causality	Dual causality of the rationalist, objectively observing autonomous individual and the formative cause of the system unfolding a mature form of itself imputed by the observer.	Transformative causality in which continuity and potential transformation emerge at the same time. The potential for transformation arises in the capacity of nonlinear interaction to amplify difference and in the inherent possibility of spontaneity in human agents.
Theory of time	Linear view of time where past is factually given and future is yet to be unfolded in developmental stages	Time as the living present in which both accounts of the past and expectations for the future are formed in the perpetual construction of the future in the present.
Conceptual space	Spatial metaphor of parts inside the system and the system outside the parts	No spatial metaphor in that human action itself is not inside or outside of anything. So there is no society or organisation at a level higher than human interaction.
Emergence	Not central to the process and, where used, equated with chance happenings as the opposite of intention	Central to the process of human interaction where emergence is understood in terms of the interplay of human intentions. Emergence is not seen as the polar opposite of intention and what emerges does so because of the interplay of what people intend to do, not by chance
Doubling of process	Autonomous individuals can stand outside a process, such as strategizing, and shape it, that is use another process to shape a process	No doubling of process since there are only the processes of human interaction and no one can take an external vantage point in relation to this
Practice	Practice is a system of routines, etc.	Practice is the local, social activity of communication, power relating and evaluative choice.
Experience	The use of tools and techniques to make decisions and act.	Historical, social processes of consciousness and self-consciousness in interaction with others. The world we together create in our thought.
Organisation	A thing to be moved around.	Patterns of relating in which one can only participate.

Figure 3: The differences between systemic process and responsive processes
(adapted from Stacey, 2007, p.265)

Conclusion

The understanding of leadership as a social construction is a theoretical framework that underpins much of the view of leadership articulated in this research. The emergence of this view through scholars including Mead, upon whom Stacey draws and Crotty, who provides the framing of the research approach, is taken up by Grint and others as they critique the dominant discourses. Particularly the question of ‘how does leadership actually happen?’ is increasingly being debated in the light of this epistemological examination? To this question I would add my more specific question from this research: ‘When the general context constantly has aspects of limited knowledge, how do leaders get stuff done?’ Plowman et al share this concern suggesting that whilst the debate focuses on the importance of leadership, CAS (and therefore even more significantly CRPR) “challenge[s] the fundamental premise of what leadership is” (2007, p.342).

Therefore I will seek to contribute in two key and underdeveloped areas: firstly, some aspects of how leadership actually gets done rather than just what it does and secondly, how leaders cope with limited knowledge.

To return to Thorngate’s Postulate (see page 17), I see the contribution I make as sitting at 6 O’Clock, with an emphasis on simple and accurate. This location of simple and accurate is appropriate for an autoethnography (see chapter 4 where I explore the implications for the Research Methodology) and likewise the acceptance of it not being generalisable fits with my articulation of tools I set out on page 55, where I require the concept of a master craftsman: someone rooted in a context with excellent understanding developed over many years of using the tools, to enable the application of the simple and accurate ‘tool’ in that particular situation.

Chapter 3: A theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating

This chapter emerged from the leader-researcher journey at the heart of my autoethnography, and recognised that the gap identified in the literature between theory and the lived experience of leaders could be bridged by the work on a theory of CRPR by Ralph Stacey and colleagues. This recent but growing body of literature is outlined and then the chapter focuses on drawing out some of the key theoretical ideas for leadership and organisations, as well as touching briefly on the implications for conducting researching. It concludes by summarising the implications of the theory, providing a foundation for the presentation of the empirical data and analysis in the four analysis chapters. A substantial review of the CRPR literature was an important element to include because the research approach seeks, through an iterative process (see Figure 6 below and chapter 5 for a full discussion), to test the theory - which is still evolving from the work of several individuals. Therefore direct quotes are used more than in the previous literature chapter to highlight differences, tone and emerging concepts. This is further drawn out in the critique of the theory in this chapter before it is used to construct a research approach in chapters 4 and 5 and integrated into leadership practice subsequently.

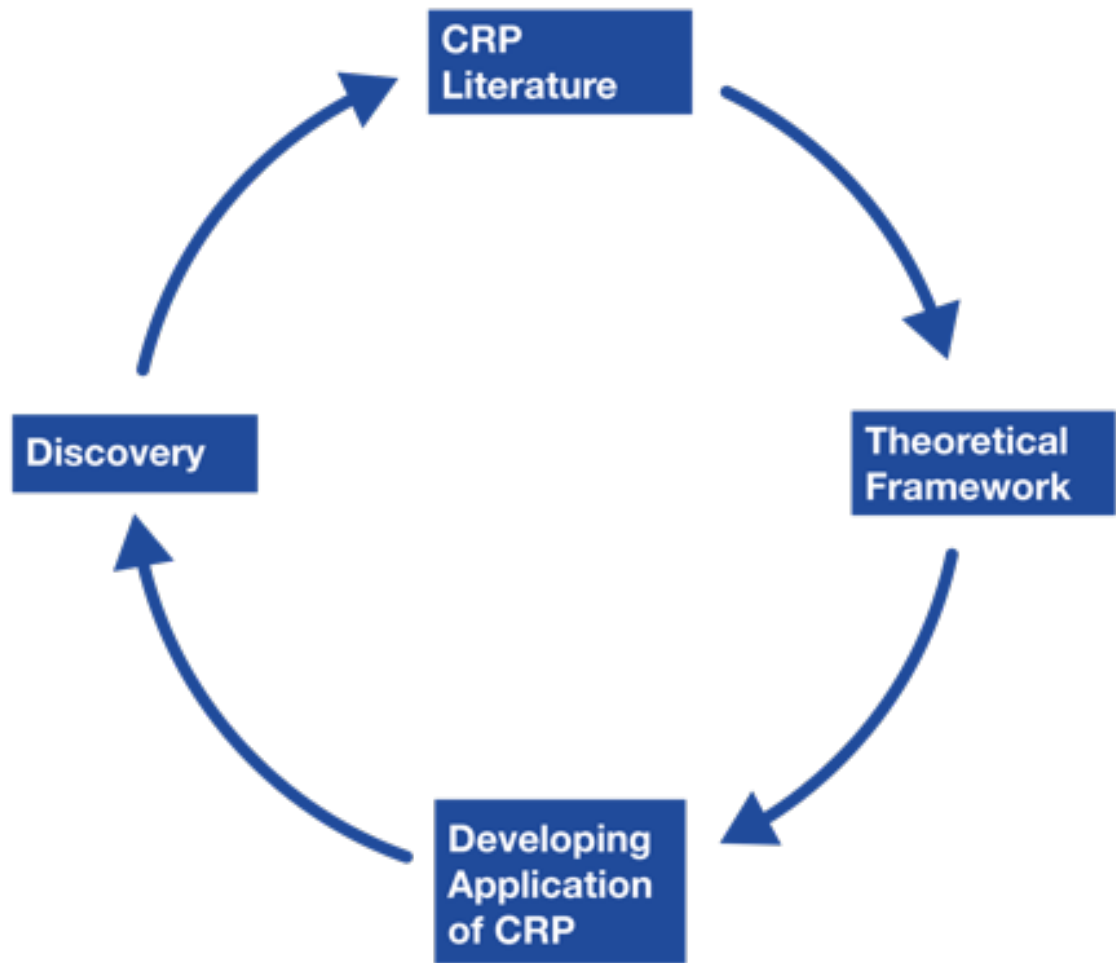


Figure 4: Literature Cycle

Stacey's development of a theory of complex responsive processes of relating

Ralph Stacey was until recently Professor of Management and Director of the Complexity and Management Centre at the University of Hertfordshire. It was here that he began the research for which he is most well known - exploring the implications of complexity theories initially developed in the hard sciences for understanding human organisation in various forms. He began life as an economist and before becoming an academic, was briefly a management consultant and these experiences have shaped his research emphasis.

Stacey's theory of CRPR is a social perspective on how organisations function,

developed in response to the disconnect between how he experienced organisations and how he had been taught to see them functioning. He explained this dissatisfaction as being rooted in the way the organisation is presented in the discourse as an “abstract notion” that is not recognisable as the “ordinary, lived reality of human beings” (Stacey, 2012, p.1). He went further, suggesting that the human beings, who are actually ‘the organisation’, disappear from view (Stacey, 2012, p.1). In the light of this organisational reality he challenged what he termed the dominant discourse⁹ (Stacey, 2012, p.40) of leadership in the academy, as inadequate for the felt needs of leaders (Stacey, 2012, p.15) and a re-articulation began, using the language of CRPR as more adequate for the lived experience of human relationships. The level of uncertainty Stacey increasingly saw present, was a key factor in this; “if we move from assuming underlying certainty to assuming underlying uncertainty, we begin to think in ways close to our ordinary, everyday experience” (2012, p.21).

In developing his theory Stacey also drew on work pre-dating the complexity sciences, using Elias, who articulated how “population-wide patterns of civilisation emerge in many local interactions” (2012, p.21). Stacey saw this as a profound challenge to the dominant discourse, which operated on the assumption that the local interactions will follow an imposed population-wide pattern and not vice versa.

The theory of CRPR presented a radical alternative, which conceived of organisations as being “perpetually constructed”. The construction was not a separate, objective and observable entity; rather it was patterns of behaviour developed out of “many local interactions” and existing in the present in those ongoing interactions (Stacey, 2012, p.4). It is in “the ordinary narrative of

9. In this chapter I continue to use Stacey’s term of ‘dominant discourse’, as he does; as a somewhat crude shorthand for the multiple discourses discussed in chapter 2 that dominate leadership practice. I do this partly to maintain Stacey’s ‘voice’ as I described at the start of the chapter (page 33) but also because it highlights the binary opposition he sees between the collective leadership discourse and a CRPR perspective.

everyday work life” where we see complex responsive processes in “conversation, power and ideology” where social engagement happens “with others in orderly and disorderly local interactions” (Stacey, 2012, p.38). Both the orderly and disorderly interactions are important in Stacey’s view; the emerging patterns are simultaneously predictable and unpredictable, something Stacey acknowledged as paradoxical but which ultimately makes the emerging pattern “fundamentally unknowable” (Stacey, 2007, p.305).

Key contributors to the theory of complex responsive processes of relating

Whilst his own writing remained predominantly theoretical with limited application, Stacey’s colleagues, Streatfield (2001), Shaw (2002; Shaw and Stacey, 2006) and Griffin (2002; Griffin and Stacey, 2005), sought to share practical implications from their own consulting practices and observations from client case studies.

Philip Streatfield

Streatfield, a supply chain specialist who undertook a PhD, supervised by Ralph Stacey, published a book out of his thesis (Streatfield, 2001). His work added an important element by exploring the way a leader needs to be in control but does not feel in control. He included a series of case studies from his own work. Examples of the application of a theory of CRPR to the lived experience of leading in an organisational context, are limited (even more so when I began this study) and Streatfield’s own work, which he describes as being a “management practitioner” (Streatfield, 2001, p.xii), provided case studies, which along with his writing on theory, particularly helped me grapple with understanding “who is ‘in control’?” (Streatfield, 2001, p.1) in an organisation.

Like Stacey himself, Streatfield was driven by a sense of dissonance, not just in the

daily life of the leader but even with the literature: “writers on management are more concerned with prescribing what ought to happen, rather than describing what actually does” (Streatfield, 2001, p.1); Streatfield’s work contributes significantly to narrowing the reality gap. The parallels between Streatfield’s own experience in Smith-Kline Beckman (SKB) and being involved in the merger with Beacham, and my own experience of trying to make sense of a failed merger, discussed in chapter 6, helped to bring into focus aspects of CRPR, particularly the realisation that the links between intention and design seen through plans, analysis and proposed actions, and what actually happened in the organisation, were at best tenuous.

Streatfield’s observation that throughout the two organisations the common experience and activity of all people, whether producing budgets, working on merging or rationalising, was that they were all having conversations; they were relating together, and that in the ongoing communicative interaction, the future of the company was being created. This was not simply in a planned-in-advance, structured and ordered way, but in the living present, between humans and the context they find themselves in. He observed that these “wider processes of communicative relating...” (Streatfield, 2001, p.84) were predominantly to do with power and that in the “endless conversations...” they were negotiating their “daily going on with each other” (Streatfield, 2001, p.79) and through this emerged the new identity of the organisation and the identity of individuals within that.

Particularly powerful, was his quote from Tillich:

“Creative, in this context, has the sense not of original creativity as performed by the genius but of living spontaneously, in action and reaction, with the contents of one’s cultural life... one need not be what is called a creative artist or scientist or statesman, but one must be able to participate meaningfully in their original creations. Such

participation is creative insofar as it changes that in which one participates, even if in very small ways...everyone who lives creatively in meanings affirms himself as a participant in these meanings. He affirms himself as receiving and transforming reality creatively. (1952, quoted in Streatfield, 2001, p.79)

Streatfield goes on to say, that “a manager’s role in such a process is to design tools which use that communicative interaction to construct the organisation’s future, without knowing in advance what the future will be.” and he sees this primarily as a meaning making process. Without a clear sense of meaning

‘helplessness in the state of anxiety can be observed in animals and humans alike. It expresses itself in loss of direction, inadequate reactions.’ When we are in this state we seek to defend ourselves in many different ways, and at least some of these ways may actually make it more difficult to restore meaning. (Streatfield, 2001, p.79)

When they struggled for meaning, they felt incompetent and became defensive, and a CRPR perspective helped them understand that a mix of intention, emotion and motives were in play. Rather than trying to set aside personal feelings, the role of the manager was to “carry on participating in the creation of personal and collective meaning, if only in small ways, in spite of the anxiety and helplessness engendered by the loss of direction” (Streatfield, 2001, p.80).

Undoubtedly the point of greatest connection was when Streatfield, talking of the seeming chaos that ensued following the merger between SKB and Beacham, described “Real life management” as “making it up as we go along” (Streatfield, 2001, p.7). I describe this in chapter 10 ‘Acting in the Grey’: having to act (as leaders) even when we do not have sufficient knowledge to know how to act.

Finally from a methodological perspective, Streatfield's style of writing was also helpful and mirrors my own approach. He says "I have deliberately kept myself in the stories in this book because I have become increasingly convinced that it is not possible to separate the 'reality' out there from myself 'in here'" (Streatfield, 2001, p.7).

Patricia Shaw

Shaw was a traditional organisational development consultant and studied her PhD under Stacey. She went on to work with Stacey and Griffin to set up the DMan Programme at the University of Hertfordshire. She described her role as a consultant in the light of a CRPR perspective as follows:

I have slowly developed a practical feel for the process of shaping and patterning in communication as I participate. I have a keen sense of the move towards and away from agreement, of shifts in power difference, the development and collapse of tensions, the variations in engagement, the different qualities of silence, the rhetorical ploys, the repetition of familiar turns of phrase or image, the glimpsing and losing of possibility, the ebb and flow of feeling tone, the dance of mutual constraint. I try to play a part in this by participating in the conversation in a way that helps to hold open the interplay of sense-making rather longer than would occur in my absence, to hold open the experience of not-knowing. (Shaw, 2002, p.32)

Her predominant focus and contribution was to further develop the work of Stacey in the area of conversation, exploring its nature and effects. She also drew on the work of Karl Weick regarding sense-making, seeing that conversations in

organisations are all about collectively making sense so that we know how to act. She suggests we shift from a “choose and design” (Shaw, 2002, p.i) approach to organisational future, to a participative one where we live with paradox and complexity (Shaw, 2002, p.150), sense-making so that we can “act with intention into the unknowable” (Shaw, 2002).

A case study (Shaw, 2002, p.18) was an early challenge to my leadership style, and I sensed that it was key in her own journey into operating with a CRPR perspective. Two significant discoveries were made:

1. Whilst working with the client, she attended a meeting about changing culture to which many of the invited individuals did not come but to which other last-minute and less carefully planned staff members came. That this not only appeared to work as a meeting, but began an irrevocable change, surprised everyone involved.
2. That this happened, simply by having the conversation and did not necessarily need it to be captured and documented, the findings disseminated and the action to be directed as a result, also became a significant theme in Shaw’s work.

As a result, she began to focus on “the invisibility of ordinary everyday conversation” (Shaw, 2002, p.18) and that is a key focus of my autoethnography and this overall study.

Douglas Griffin

Griffin, like Shaw was a consultant by background but with a focus on cross cultural team working and organisational development. He wrote several books individually and with Stacey and Shaw, but the two that were particularly relevant to this study were: (Griffin, 2002) and (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000). Griffin’s book on the emergence of leadership was particularly helpful in setting out a view

of ethics from a CRPR perspective. Despite the weaknesses I discuss in chapter 4, this helped to influence my own approach to the research and allowed me to engage with Christiansen (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, pp.74-109) as an example of applied CRPR theory to a research methodology. Griffin offers a radical challenge to the traditional systemic approach to ethics:

A significant weakness...in this...way of thinking [a systemic approach to ethics] is the manner in which it abstracts and distracts from our ordinary everyday experience of interacting with each other in the living present. Such an abstraction distracts our attention from our own responsibility for what we are doing and what happens to us in organisations. It leaves us feeling that we are simply the victims of the system. (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.21)

Instead he articulates what he calls “participative self organisation, where participation does not mean participating in a larger whole, but rather participating in the direct interaction between human bodies” (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.21). Griffin’s conclusion that the traditional view of ethics “tends to present utopian views of human beings harmoniously consenting to the greater good whole, providing theories of what ought to be rather than what actually is” (Griffin, 2002, p.209) called for a different approach. This contradiction between intention or hope, and actual experience, was reinforced at a recent lecture by Donna Ladkin on how leaders who set out to be ethical can end up having “an ethical misadventure” (Ladkin, 2016). Griffin explains that with a perspective based on participative self-organization, the ethical interaction happens in the interactions between people in their local situation in the living present and therefore he concludes that ethics cannot be something that is predefined as the traditional approach suggests.

Key themes in a theory of complex responsive processes of relating

Within a theory of CRPR which provided a broad theoretical framework that allowed exploration of how leaders function with limited knowledge, certain themes emerged as particularly relevant. These relate to the identity of the leader and the leader's role within the organisation. These are now explored in more detail.

Major themes

Leadership and management

Stacey sees the dominant discourse making a neat “distinction between managers as traditional and rational while true leaders are charismatic” (Stacey, 2012, p.4) and he rejects this as an overly simplistic idealisation. Given his concerns about abstractions (see below) this is understandable and the rejection also highlights another implication of his CRPR perspective, namely that it views leaders as being in control. He suggests that the dominant discourse characterises or at least caricatures leaders as responsible for choosing the direction and managers for implementing the choice. This is explored below in ‘Planning and Control’.

In the light of these concerns, Stacey uses the terms leadership and management interchangeably. I accept Stacey's concerns and would want to reject the neat divides made by the dominant discourse (Zaleznik, 1977) as artificial at best and misleading at worst (see the ‘Role of Leaders’ below), but as I articulate in chapter 2 whilst the terms are blurred, they do reflect subtle differences in understanding and approach to the task of ‘leading and managing’. These differences are important given the focus of this research on the perceptions of leadership and my attempt to narrate the experience of leading as a lived phenomenon. For this reason I continue to simply use the term leadership as I have defined it in chapter 2. Additionally, the need to engage with the messiness of the dominant discourse is

a subject I highlight in the 'Implications of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating' at the end of this chapter, and see this as one of the significant contributions of this research.

Complexity sciences

Stacey challenges the dominant discourse of leadership in the academy (2010, p.23) as inadequate for the felt needs of leaders, describing it as “magico-mythical thinking, dressed up in the rational sounding jargon of the dominant management discourse”. He does this by drawing principles from the field of the complexity sciences, that Stacey cautions are in their infancy and represented by numerous, sometimes conflicting theories (2007, p.205). His early work rested on a theory of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) as most clearly laid out in his 1995 paper *The Science of Complexity: An Alternative Perspective for Strategic Change Processes* (Stacey, 1995) and drew from the fields of “nonlinear and network feedback systems, theories of chaos, artificial life, self-organization and emergent order” (Stacey, 1995). Within the complexity sciences he favours the work of Kauffman, Goodwin and Prigogine rather than Holland, Gell-Man and Langton; rejecting the mechanistic, reductionist approach of the latter as inadequate to explain the unpredictability of emergence in organisations, which he sees as arising from self-organisation at a local level rather than simply the random mutation and competitive selection seen in Holland, Gell-Man and Langton. Several aspects are worthy of note here to understand Stacey’s development of a theory of CRPR over the last 20 years. Firstly, the complexity theory he seeks to appropriate for use in understanding organisations, leaders and the relationship between them, is grounded in the sciences. The engagement with complexity science is careful, nuanced and subtle and this is difficult to do within an emerging field. The importance of those subtleties is highlighted by his emphasis that self-organisation plays the dominant role in emergence and not a random mutation. This subtle point explains some foundational aspects of a CRPR perspective; that attention to

the local, the interaction and the particular are vital in the complexity equation and that generalisations must be resisted.

Throughout his work he highlights the importance of terminology and “rejects any notion that chaos means unpredictability” (Stacey, 2012, p.11) despite this being the common term within the mathematical world. Rather he emphasises that it is about seeing patterns where we originally may have thought there were none.

In his later work (post-2000) he finds the inclusion of the word ‘system’ as increasingly problematic, seeing an implied linearity (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000, Chp.4). He rejects linearity as inappropriate language and an insufficient explanation of his own experience of organisations (Stacey, 2012, pp.9-11) writing with feeling that it is “contrary to traditional science’s linear models, which assume fundamental certainty in the universe, the nonlinear models of the complexity sciences reveal the fundamental uncertainty of the universe” (Stacey, 2012, p.21). The CAS assumptions from his early thinking that provided a “source domain for analogies in the human sphere” (Stacey, 2012, p.14) are rejected as inadequate for human interaction. By 2012, when his book on Tools and Techniques was published, the shift was complete. “Since human agents differ in major ways from digital agents, it is a highly dubious procedure to simply apply the notion of complex adaptive systems to human interaction” (Stacey, 2012, p.14). A CRPR basis is viewed by Stacey as adequate and sufficient for the lived experience of human relationships. The level of uncertainty is seemingly the key factor in this, “if we move from assuming underlying certainty to assuming underlying uncertainty, we begin to think in ways close to our ordinary, everyday experience” (Stacey, 2012, p.21) and he again sees this as putting him at odds with the dominant discourse as they point to a fundamentally different way of thinking about organisations (Stacey, 2010).

Organisations

Stacey suggests that the disconnect he experienced between how the organisation functioned and how he had been taught to see it functioning, is common place. More than that, he believes there is a widespread dissatisfaction “with the dominant discourse on organisations and their leadership”. He explains this dissatisfaction as being rooted in the way the organisation is presented in the discourse as an “abstract notion” (see Second Order Abstractions below) that is not recognisable as the “ordinary, lived reality of human beings”. He goes further, suggesting that the human beings who are actually ‘the organisation’ disappear from view (Stacey, 2012, p.1).

The “...alternative way of thinking about organisations” (Stacey, 2012, p.2) that Stacey sets out, sees organisations simply and solely as “patterns of interaction between human beings and these patterns emerge in the interplay of the intentions, plans, choices and actions of all involved” (Stacey, 2012, Preface). From that interplay of intention, choice and action, each of which are unpredictable in themselves, evolves the multiplied unpredictability of organisational life. That unpredictability is usually viewed negatively and power exercised to reduce it, but Stacey sees this as the source of so much that is vital and essential in making sense of the lived experience, as well as renewing and sustaining vibrant organisations.

Stacey also draws on work pre-dating the complexity sciences, using Elias, who articulated how “population-wide patterns of civilisation emerge in many local interactions” (Stacey, 2012, p.21). Stacey sees this as the most profound challenge to the dominant discourse, which operates on the assumption that the local interactions will follow an imposed population-wide pattern and not vice versa.

Having called into question the ability of such a mix of intention, choice and action to be controllable, Stacey argues that inevitably the power in an organisation is muted significantly. The leaders and ‘coalitions of power’ that are assumed in the

dominant discourse to “objectively observe” (Stacey, 2012, p.40) and then to use “rational tools of analysis” (Stacey, 2012, p.61) to lead and manage the organisation, are given a false sense of control. Whether in relation to strategic intentions like vision-casting and objective setting, or at the level of the implementation process, procedure and operations, the ability of anyone to be in control is brought into question; this affects the role of the leader and has implications for planning and control - both discussed later in this chapter. Stacey is consequently dismissive of the suggestion in dominant discourses that leaders can “choose the outcomes for their organization” and that doing so “will enable them to be in control of the strategic direction of their organization” (Stacey, 2012, p.1).

A CRPR perspective offers a radical alternative, conceiving organisations as being “perpetually constructed”. The construction is not a separate, objective and observable entity; rather it is patterns of behaviour developed out of “many local interactions” and existing in the present in those ongoing interactions (Stacey, 2012, p.4). Rather, “the ordinary narrative of everyday work life is about the complex responsive processes of conversation, power and ideology, reflecting choices engaged in with others in orderly and disorderly local interactions” (Stacey, 2012, p.38). Both the orderly and disorderly interactions are important in Stacey’s view: the emerging patterns are simultaneously predictable and unpredictable, something Stacey acknowledges as paradoxical but which ultimately makes the emerging pattern “fundamentally unknowable” (Stacey, 2007, p.305).

The image of an organisation from the perspective of the dominant discourse is significantly different to that viewed from a CRPR perspective. If one makes sense, then the other will not (Stacey, 2012, p.5) and the underlying thinking is contradictory. Within the dominant discourse Stacey sees two tendencies in common practice: to reify and to anthropomorphise an organisation. The first tendency, reification, defined in a more general sense as to concretise an

abstraction, is used by Stacey in a more particular sense (although the popular meaning conveys much of Stacey's concern). Stacey draws on Wenger's work (1998, cited in Stacey, 2007, p.99) on the negotiation of meaning. He sees organisations as a projection that individuals make upon the world to understand it. The organisation is a construct in the mind of an individual, made for the purposes of navigating how to live and function, but the concretising, the reification, causes problems by fixing the construct which then becomes a fixed point in the ongoing negotiation of meaning, rather than part of the construct requiring constant renegotiation for meaning to be correctly interpreted (I explore this further below in 'Second Order Abstractions').

The second tendency is to anthropomorphise an organisation (Gilbert and Abell, 1983, p.103), (Idowu and Louche, 2011, p.13), speaking of it as if it can act, think, learn and behave as only a human being can behave; as "social selves emerging in social interaction" (Stacey, 2012, p.60). This anthropomorphising is problematic because it disguises the reality of organisational life as primarily informal, self-organising and transformative in nature (Streatfield, 2001, p.1). Consequently it often provides a false sense of order and security, contributing to a perfectionism that can distract when 'good enough' is sufficient for the needs of the day (see chapter 10 for a summary of this theme).

The role of leaders

The experience of being the ones "in charge" but repeatedly finding that they are not "in control" is a very familiar one to managers and yet one that they feel uneasy with (Anderson and Anderson, 2010, p.97), (Gabel, 2001, p.11). Stacey *et al* say that "managers don't feel in control but things get done anyway" (2000, p.5). However, contrary to some other writers in the area of complexity and leadership, despite having called into question the ability of leaders to exercise control and power, Stacey does not see power being absent but rather would see power and

ideology as central and having an increased importance (2007, p.397). He sees power as being constantly at work, played out in the interaction between individuals and that this makes power and ideology central to institutions (Stacey, 2012, p.7).

This power, in Stacey's view is exercised by leaders; good leaders don't "limit choices" but rather they "develop fresh approaches and open up new issues" (Stacey, 2012, p.4). (This role of opening up of new issues is explored further in 'Holding Anxiety' below.) Good leaders inspire people to follow them and their ideas by "project[ing] their ideas into images that excite people" (Stacey, 2012, p.4) or, as Weick describes the vital role leaders play in organisations, by "giving meaning to what is happening, telling others how things might be rather than how they are" (Weick, 1995 quoted in Plowman, et al., 2007, p.351).

Stacey recognises that the view of leaders he is articulating is radically different to the dominant discourse where "organizational outcomes are chosen by powerful managers and then implemented" (Stacey, 2012, p.5). The CRPR perspective would see discernible effects and outcomes emerging out of the ongoing interaction of individuals, often many individuals, whose behaviour and interaction is characterised by a mix of intentions, conscious and unconscious actions and strategies rather than out of a directly linked choice and action by a leader.

What this means for leaders is that they are constantly acting into the unknown. Shaw emphasises the constant and continuous nature of this with the phrase "moment to moment" (Shaw, 2002, p.18), and in my own experience this is the difference between my own evolving practice (illustrated in the autoethnography in chapters 6-9) and the models and processes of the dominant discourses. Shaw writes about witnessing this dissonance:

The world they inhabited and the world they presented to and discussed with each other seemed, at best, tenuously connected. There did not seem to be a way to talk about this

officially other than to continue tinkering with models and implementation plans. (Shaw, 2002, p.18)

In many ways, the discomfort was not primarily because they did not feel competent but rather because in trying to act in the way they intuitively felt they should, they could not make the planning approaches and models match with their natural intuitive approach.

This raised an interesting question beyond the scope of the study but one that warrants further research: whether the models and processes we are given, through policy and legislation in organisations, and the values and practices we are taught through the leadership development offered in business schools, inhibit more natural instincts to lead. Would these instinctive ways of leading cope better with a complex, non-linear and unpredictable environment?

Despite what is so obvious, a great many people simply refuse to seriously consider the consequence of not knowing what is happening, which is that there is a major contradiction between the organizational reality of uncertainty and the beliefs that we have about the capacity of executives to know what is going on and be in control. (Stacey, 2010, p.1)

That ability to act into the unknown whilst acknowledging that the context is actually acting upon and shaping the leader, is what this study, in its field research is focused on. Streatfield in his chapter entitled “Real life management: making it up as we go along” describes this as ‘management praxis’ and says it is “...the art of acting in an organisational context in order to change that context, changing personally in the process” (2001, p.1).

Streatfield and Stacey both share the same fundamental question of what the role

of the leader is in a complex world, and the inadequacy of the dominant discourse to answer this question drives both of them on. Shaw's supposition builds on this and brings the discussion closer to the focus of this study: "That acting without clear outcomes in mind does not mean acting randomly without intention" (2002, p.70).

Holding anxiety

An acknowledgement of the non-linear, complex causal and emergent nature of organisational life is a requirement of a CRPR perspective and yet this view of reality that is so different from the dominant discourse naturally raises anxiety with its unfamiliarity. Additionally, it engages individuals in meetings without agendas, conversations with disparate groups of people and coping with significant diversity, all things that for many people are contributors to a feeling of anxiety. Stacey takes this anxiety seriously, seeing it as both helpful and unhelpful, essential and limiting.

For instance, he sees a tension when "meetings which have very loose agendas may well be conducive to reflexive inquiry", something he sees as a helpful technique, but only "if the anxiety that tends to be aroused by what looks like a lack of agenda...can be lived with" (Stacey, 2012, p.115). Stacey is not requiring an absence of anxiety, (often a response of the dominant discourse as discussed in chapter 2) as he sees anxiety as a sign of dissatisfaction with the status quo, a primer for emergence of an alternative scenario, solution or assumption, and an absence of anxiety as unhelpful and an inevitable consequence being a 'stuckness' or atrophy (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.137).

'Holding anxiety' is his recommendation at a 'good enough' level (see the relevant but broader discussion of Good Enough - summarised in chapter 9). This level is good enough that the quality of conversation is maintained and Stacey advocates that the role and skill of a leader is primarily about using "techniques' to keep opening the conversation up," or "closing it down" when anxiety is no longer

manageable (2012, p.115). This use of enabling and constraint are key tools in Stacey's view for leaders to learn and develop, but he sees these inquiry techniques as very different from the tools of "the instrumentally rational" dominant discourse (2012, p.115).

Shaw highlights this process; "the transformative potential of conversation may be blocked by demands for early clarity or closure" (2002, p.70). This is something I witnessed in my case study late in the research process (see chapter 9) and describe my attempts as the leader to resist this desire.

The suggestion that the role of the leader is to 'hold anxiety' rather than eradicate it, changes the perspective on a number of the core functions of leadership articulated in the dominant discourse. Communication, recognised widely as an essential function in organisational life and a key responsibility of any leader is usually lamented as being inadequate both in the literature (Northouse, 2009, p.5-6), (Waugh and Streib, 2006), (Dewan and Myatt, 2008), and in experience (see the issues tracked in chapter 8), but the recognition of a legitimate and essential place for anxiety, combined with a co-constructing view of reality and the practising of a 'good enough holding of anxiety', means this can and should be viewed differently. Communication had always felt insufficient for the needs of the individuals in the organisations I had led, despite the introduction of more and more complex communication and information distribution systems, and seemed to inevitably leave a level of anxiety. A CRPR perspective revealed that the desire to eradicate all anxiety through communication was an impossible dream; the unknown could only become known by individuals in a process of collective sense-making, in the midst of a day to day interaction with the unknowns.

What if there is no alternative to a situation where information is all over the place and where meaning can only be made by many different people making sense together in many different groupings and conversations? What if this is the most effective

way of developing knowledge when the future is so unpredictable? (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000, p.5)

Therefore the quality of the conversation, the role of the leader in facilitating it and the gesturing (a term used quite specifically in CRPR (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p. 300) and discussed in detail on page 230) into a co-constructed understanding of what is happening is vital.

Planning and control

A core tenet of the dominant discourse is the role of leaders to plan actions and exercise control to ensure agreed objectives are achieved. Stacey sees this as a fallacy. In attempting to plan and control, leaders are:

1. having to work with the future and that is something that is unknown (Stacey, 2007, p.305)
2. acting, and yet the consequences of a leaders actions, particularly beyond the immediate, cannot be predicted (Stacey, 2012, Preface)
3. facing the interplay of intentions of people and these are complex and uncontrollable (Stacey, 2012, p.28)

When you combine these three, it is clear to Stacey that “leaders and managers cannot choose the future of their organizations, no matter how much planning and envisioning they do” (2012, Preface). However, he sees this as contrary to the dominant discourse and therefore says

Despite what is so obvious, a great many people simply refuse to seriously consider the consequence of not knowing what is happening, which is that there is a major contradiction between the organizational reality of uncertainty and the beliefs that we have about the capacity of executives to know what is going on and be in control. (Stacey, 2012, p.7)

This causes him to ask “if they cannot achieve what they want simply by planning, then what are they and everyone else doing to accomplish whatever it is that they accomplish?” (Stacey, 2012, Preface)

Stacey’s journey into CRPR, began with the failure of the dominant discourse to adequately explain the experience he lived as a leader and, specifically regarding planning and control, he cites as a case study a business situation he was involved in:

...despite having followed the plan, the company was incurring a loss and a very large cash outflow. The response was to put more effort into planning on the grounds that we obviously had not done enough analysis, had not made good enough forecasts, had not gathered enough information and had not dealt strongly enough with incompetent managers. Our response to this ‘failure’ was simply to repeat more firmly what we had been doing. (Stacey, 2012, p.10)

He saw repeated examples of where leaders attempts to forecast outcomes of action taken had failed; “over and over again we found that we were not able to forecast what the outcomes of the actions taken would be” (Stacey, 2012, p.10) and added that “there is no scientific evidence that planned culture change produces changed culture” (Stacey, 2012, p.15).

It is easy to see Stacey as dismissing planning as irrelevant and control as impossible; “we cannot forecast what the outcomes of our action will be and this problematizes planning” (2012, p.2). However, as with much of what he says, the key to understanding it is to understand the nuance he brings; having little control is not the same as having no control. He believes that plans are essential but acknowledges that the implications, the difficulties he raises with planning, are fundamentally challenges to the role of the leader. “If everything emerges, is there

any need for managers and leaders? What is the role of leaders in an unpredictable world? How does complexity affect the way organizations are structured and function?” (Stacey, 2012, p.2)

The highly structured processes we utilise do not allow for the ‘human factor’ because “the designed rules and routines are highly likely to be taken up in ways not expected or desired by the designers” (Stacey, 2012, p.106). Therefore, Stacey sees control as more subtle and yet, if understood correctly, still a very powerful force. “Control is achieved through the constraints of power, through ideology, through the social background all are socialized into, and through the control of human bodies using the techniques of disciplinary power” (Stacey, 2012, p.2).

So whilst outcomes cannot be chosen and controlled, leaders can control human bodies (in the interactions that make up organisational life in a CRPR view) but the control is not simple and linear. It is not a causality based control, because “members of an organization are not rule-following entities” (Stacey, 2010, p.35), they are people who “practise the arts of resistance” (Stacey, 2012, p.2) and through that, challenge and limit the degree of control exercised upon them.

Therefore Stacey, far from seeing the acknowledgement of complexity as requiring us to give up on planning and control (Stacey, 2012, p.13), sees it as asking new questions of leaders and organisations. Strategic thinking, away days, reviews etc. all tend to focus on business models and no regard is paid to ‘how things get done’ to the point that sometimes staff talk about how they are not even sure how things do get done and often acknowledge that it feels like it is in spite of the system, rather than because of the system. Stacey makes sense of this by seeing strategies as “emergent patterns of action arising in the interplay of choices made by many different groups of people?” (Stacey, 2012, p.8) The planning and strategising is conducted not as a static, forward-looking process that relies on linear causality and predictability but rather through constantly “co-created webs of mutual constraint and enablement” (Shaw, 2002, p.70) and the leader can often exert

more influence in that process of co-creation than followers.

This view of planning and control raises two further points relevant to the focus of this research: Firstly, that the leader's ability to feel "in control", depends upon these forms of causality and the predictability they promise" (Stacey, 2012, p.13) and secondly, Stacey concludes that whilst "rules and routines can guide competent performance, ...expert performance is to a degree outside the possibility of leadership and management control" (2012, p.106). I explore these further in 'Holding Anxiety' and 'Practical Judgement' below.

Tools and techniques

Stacey recognises the place of leadership tools and techniques as central to the dominant popular form of leadership thinking, but sees the way in which they are used as far more subtle. He would refute, on the basis of the issues relating to causality already highlighted, that leaders can "choose and control future direction" (Stacey, 2012, p.53). He does allow that "many of them are essential in modern organisations and societies where some degree of control has to be exercised from a distance" (Stacey, 2012, p.65). However, he sees two key problems with their mainstream use.

Firstly, they are "used to provide a veneer of rationality" (Stacey, 2012, p.65) and the impression of rationality, that Stacey has already firmly rejected as being reliable enough to be beneficial, can then not be assumed and relied upon. Stacey's own work seems to avidly avoid any mention of tools and techniques for the first 18 years and this explicit distance feels necessary to break the unconscious reliance on rational tools and techniques traditionally emphasised. Stacey sees the tools and techniques commonly used in leadership and management as "so limited...they actually amount to a form of discipline rather than the direct cause of organizational stability and change" (Stacey, 2012, p.3), and he emphasises further that they can restrict spontaneity and block the "development of practical

judgement” (Stacey, 2012, p.65), something I explore further.

Secondly, he explains that “Heuristic and algorithmic rules, instrumentally rational tools and techniques, cannot cope with the unpredictable, unique situations which require intuition, the ability to cope with accidents and to tolerate ambiguity, all characteristics of expertise” (Stacey, 2012, p.55). The recognition that certain situations require intuition is important in Stacey’s work generally and as background to his work on practical judgement discussed below.

Paying attention

The quality of conversation is key to a CRPR perspective and a focus is on the quality of the conversation which Stacey says should be characterised by trust (Stacey, 2007, p.287). The leader's role is to pay attention to what is happening and to keep on paying attention and ensuring that others are paying attention to the quality of participation, both their own and others around them. The mutual responsibility for paying attention to the quality of engagement is what makes the theory of CRPR primarily a theory of relating.

The dominant discourse is largely silent on the issues of conversation and participation as qualities of leaders, with Alvesson and Sveningsson arguing that the leadership literature pays little attention to the more mundane tasks that leaders and managers carry out (Stacey, 2012, p.64). Paying attention is initially an individual skill; we need to be able to develop a level of self-awareness: ‘What am I feeling?’, ‘Why am I feeling like that?’ and ‘How is that affecting my engagement in the conversation?’ Only after that is it a group process (Stacey, 2007, p.286), where we can pay attention to our own reactions and others with whom we are interacting (in the moment) and, particularly for leaders (although Stacey would say we all have a ‘shared leadership role’ here), in the skills of helping others to be able to pay attention.

There is, as we saw in the literature review, a renewed interest in mindfulness generally and an increasing focus on how it might apply to leadership specifically and this has application to ‘paying attention’ but is both broader in its implications and more specific in its focus. Stacey sees the dominant discourse as quite individualistic in its approach (Stacey, 2007, p.28) and the seemingly simple skills of noticing, engaging in and facilitating conversation, take on a greater importance with a social co-constructing view of leadership and organisations. This use of conversation for gaining understanding, increasing knowledge and reducing anxiety, is what Shaw is emphasising when she says “we must pay proper attention to this process of prospective sense-making rather than only attempting to piece together a picture of our situation that we may then seek to change” (Shaw, 2002, p.70). We do this by “using reflective narrative to evoke and elaborate on the experience of participating attentively in the conversational process of human organising” (Shaw, 2002, Preface): see chapter 4 where I discuss this.

Practical judgement

Practical judgement is the main practical response Stacey outlines to the challenge of a CRPR perspective. An unusual term, only found elsewhere in limited leadership literature (for example Kostera, 2008 and Bolden, Witzel and Linacre, 2016), he defines it as “the experience-based ability to notice more of what is going on and intuit what is most important about a situation” (Stacey, 2012, p.108). This does not sound radically different from some characteristics assigned to leaders (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991; Lord, et al., 1986; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948; Stogdill, 1974) and he goes on; “it is the ability to cope with ambiguity and uncertainty, as well as the anxiety this generates” (Stacey, 2012, p.108) which moves it closer to dominant discourse definitions rather than demarcating it clearly.

Where we see significant difference is in the context in which the practical judgement is carried out. With similarities to Ladkin’s Leadership Moment (2011,

p.28) see Figure 4 on page 28, the function of leadership is only seen as ‘making-sense’ in the context of ordinary life. Stacey says that “practical judgement relies on ongoing participation in the conversational life of an organization in ways that widen and deepen communication” (2012, p.8) and rejects any sense of the leader being distant and standing outside of the system directing things. Ladkin herself says “ultimately, the aim of practical wisdom is continually to get better answering the question, ‘What should I do?’” but recognises that enacting it is harder and “still requires courage” (2011, p.182).

Stacey also recognises the value of experience as key to developing practical judgement, suggesting it involves a “pattern-recognizing capacity [that] is developed through experience...” but also sees that it can be “enhanced by using ‘techniques’ of supervision and mentoring, reflexive inquiry, widening and deepening communication, sensitivity to group dynamics and adroit participation in the ordinary, everyday politics of organizational life, making use of rhetoric and truth telling” (2012, p.123). This insistence on engagement, whether leader or follower, in the ‘here and now’ from the limited perspective of an insider, is different from traditional theory discussed as a dominant discourse in chapter 2.

Likewise the emphasis on ‘truth telling’ is only found in limited ways in the dominant discourse with terms like ‘interrogating reality’ (Scott, 2009), but Stacey sees this as happening in conversation, in the day to day. It requires a diverse cross-section of the people involved in the process, each of whom can contribute from their limited perspective and yet together offer a combined construct that is more accurate than any one individual can offer, even if that individual is an appointed leader. The truth telling can simply be a rigorous ownership of that which is not known. This simple act can reverse the traditional focus on the known which has the consequence of disguising or minimising the unknown.

How practical judgement is developed, beyond experience, is initially and fundamentally through the process of “ongoing inquiry” that “takes narrative,

reflexive forms” (Stacey, 2012, p.110). Two key points in this are firstly that it is ‘ongoing inquiry’ and what is required from leaders is ‘ongoing practical judgement’. This is not a wise point in time, when a decision is made, but rather a recognition that what is best at one moment, may not be at the next moment and the leader’s task is to keep on making that practical judgement (Stacey, 2012, p.8). Therefore the ‘techniques’ Stacey discusses are not just about “‘techniques’ of practical judgment” (Stacey, 2012, p.8) but “‘techniques’ that foster and sustain the capacity for practical judgment” (Stacey, 2012, p.8) because “practical judgment requires ongoing reflection on the judgments made and the consequences they produce” (Stacey, 2012, p.8). It is this reflection that highlights Stacey’s second point: the inquiry takes ‘narrative, reflexive forms’ because practical judgement can only be exercised as part of the narrative and the information being reflected on is not some neat scientific data but the story of what is happening in the interaction; it is the combined narrative of the individuals in the interaction, whether that is two people in a conversation or a large business engaged in a strategic review.

The dominant discourse on leadership values action; “many who define leadership agree that a leader is defined by their actions and not by job title” (Beauman, 2006, p.2), and leadership inaction is sometimes seen as lack of leadership. Therefore the temptation to act, simply to be seen to be doing something, to be seen to be responding to a situation, is strong. In the final case study in chapter 9, my work to prevent us deciding immediately, each day, was hard work, because it was counterintuitive to our images of leaders and the training we have received. This often results in rapid, knee-jerk and ill-considered action, but Stacey warns that “mindless action does not yield practical judgment; instead, mindful action is required in which the actors reflexively think together about how they are thinking about what they are doing” (2012, p.8).

That practical judgement is “essentially a social and political activity” (Stacey, 2012, p.121) shapes Stacey’s discussion about the skills and practices it involves. He suggests “a well-developed sensitivity to group dynamics, an ability to judge

when to hold ongoing conversation open and when it is necessary to reach temporary closure, an ability to improvise and an ability to engage in the organizational game of politics in persuasive and effective ways” (Stacey, 2012, p.121). Therefore reflexive inquiry is best undertaken by members of a group, together (Stacey, 2012, p.121), and the skill of the leader is in “knowing when to close down and when to open up” (Stacey, 2012, p.115).

Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ articulation quoted in Stacey (2012, p.54), that “human understanding is more than knowing facts and rules; it is, more importantly, the skill of knowing how to find a way of acting in the world”, is what Stacey suggests is the heart of practical judgement and I enlarge upon this as a key theme for leaders to focus on more generally; how are they to act, particularly when they are aware of possessing limited knowledge? This is far more than following a set of rules; leaders with limited expertise rely on following the rules and Berliner likens them to young musicians “laden with technique...” and yet “poor at improvisation because they lack voices, melodies, and feeling” (1994, p.792, fn. 17 quoted in Weick, 1998, p.552). Whereas experienced leaders “exercise practical judgment derived from their experience” (Stacey, 2012, p.53). Even the nature of assumed knowledge is different; “an expert in this sense does not know it all because this is impossible in ambiguous and uncertain situations. Instead, such an expert risks making practical judgments and then responds in an ongoing manner to the consequences” (Stacey, 2012, p.57) - this is an act of risk.

A term from the wider literature that Stacey references is the Greek word “phronesis” which is translated as practical wisdom and characterised by Stacey as being “...pragmatic, context-dependent and oriented towards action” (Stacey, 2012, p.56). He further unpacks this saying that practical judgement is both knowledge embedded in local experience and practical skills focused on adapting to changing circumstances. It is only acquired through experience (Stacey, 2012, p.7), and can only be understood by taking a reflective stance in relation to that experience (Stacey, 2012, p.56).

Stacey is also clear that an “insistence on the tools and techniques...[of instrumental rationality]” (Stacey, 2012, p.56) precludes *phronesis* - practical judgment, but this is not to dismiss the value of tools and techniques, rather to again point out the subtlety of Stacey’s argument about how tools and techniques are perceived and understood. If the tools and techniques are in any way perceived as removing the *ongoing* need for exercising *ongoing* practical judgement, then they are unhelpful and an abstraction. “The expert and the merely competent actually display different forms of knowing.” (Stacey, 2012, p.6) and part of the impossibility of systematising this process of exercising practical judgement is that Stacey sees it as involving “some degree of spontaneity and improvisation” but he concedes that “there are ‘techniques’ which can make people more aware of this” (Stacey, 2012, p.8). He also cautions that whilst he regards practical judgement as vital and what sets able and experienced leaders apart from others, it should not be idealised to the point that we dismiss other forms of knowledge “*episteme* and *techne*” (Stacey, 2012, p.56).

Conversation and gesture

The co-creation at the heart of a CRPR perspective happens in conversation and broadening this from simply the ‘verbal’, is what Stacey calls gesture. By gesture he means the signs, means and symbols of interaction. This embodied conversation is how we co-create the future with one another (Shaw, 2002, p.70). “[T]he ordinary narrative of everyday work life is about the complex responsive processes of conversation, power and ideology” and that these are constantly “reflecting choices engaged in with others in orderly and disorderly local interactions (Stacey, 2012, p.38). From these conversations, what Stacey terms ‘local interactions’ (the ‘particular’), coherent emergent patterns are seen across a wider population (the ‘general’ - see Particular vs General in chapter 2) (Stacey, 2012, p.40). Whilst seeing these patterns as difficult to predict Stacey rejects the suggestion that they are random and insists they are simply complex: “there is no mystery or chance in

emergence; it is precisely the product of many, many local interactions” (Stacey, 2012, p.15).

Shaw, in her book on changing conversations in organisations (2002) which suggests that to effect change we need to effect the conversation of the organisation, says that we need to “understand ourselves as engaged in the co-created, open-ended, never complete activity of jointly constructing our future, not as the realisation of a shared vision, but as emerging course of action that make sense of going on together” (Shaw, 2002, p.70).

The difficulty Shaw sees is that despite organisations being all about conversation as our means of engaging in the “...ongoing ordinary politics of everyday lived experience in organizations.” (Stacey, 2012, p.38), we have been so systematised that the conversations are largely invisible (Shaw, 2002, p.18). We don’t have agendas for many other parts of our lives and yet still seem to navigate them as successfully as we do our work and organisational lives. Recognising this Stacey says that “...a move to thinking in terms of complex responsive processes shifts the focus of attention from the long-term, big-picture, macro level to the details of the micro interactions taking place in the present between living humans in organizations” (Stacey, 2012, p.3).

Stacey, Streatfield and Shaw call into question the traditional means for structuring the conversations we have in our organisations, seeing them as limiting conversation and shifting focus off the conversation itself, rather than allowing us to pay attention to what is being said and who might be needed in the conversation. The question of who needs to be included in any conversation is not easy to discern and having clearly agreed roles in the conversation (such as chair, expert etc.) are “not always needed for useful participation” (Shaw, 2002, p.70).

One other key area of relevance to this research from Shaw was the obligation people felt to capture conversations rather than just have them:

... people were anxious that unless something – our ideas, our learning – was captured in a report, a proposal, a summary, the satisfaction would prove illusory, would escape us, dissolve, cease to exist and, worst of all, that nothing further would happen. And yet my sense was that the conversations had changed things – our perceptions of ourselves in a situation – subtly but irrevocably. (Shaw, 2002, p.18)

My own research highlights that quality conversation requires attention to be paid to the conversation itself rather than the mechanisms surrounding it, that there is a diversity of inputs into the conversation, and that conversations change things – they do not need to be captured in a report to effect change.

In addition to the implications for how we understand leadership and organisational theory, the breadth of Stacey's concept and understanding of 'gesture' and the 'invisibility of conversation' identified by Shaw, raises challenges for the research approach and these are explored later in this chapter.

Minor themes

Second order abstractions

An abstraction is a legitimate technique that we use to rationalise or to simplify: to make something, often a part of something bigger, simple enough for us to deal with it. When we have many variables, we can be tempted to assume one variable is fixed to allow us to cope with other variables; however, the reality is that it is not fixed but continually changing. Once we fix something, we then use that as a point of reference for everything else and thereby incorrectly position other variables in relation to an incorrect starting point. It is a concern with the effects of oversimplification and, in particular, the compound effect of oversimplification that

has occupied Stacey. He sees it as distorting reality and resulting in leaders portraying as fixed, things that in the lived experience of both leader and follower are not.

A key source of abstractions are the very tools we use to make leadership work and he describes these as “tools and techniques of instrumental rationality” and is in no doubt that they “are second-order abstractions from lived experience” (Stacey, 2012, p.5). He does not dismiss the need for such abstractions but is concerned when they are taken from a specific context and applied generally. He says that “such abstractions have to be made particular, in particular contingent situations characterized by some degree of uniqueness” (Stacey, 2012, p.53) and the difference between the specific and the general is pertinent to this concern regarding abstraction.

Particular vs general

The particular is a point in time, a place in space, where something occurred with some people involved and an outcome happened. Stacey sees a major problem with the approach that any safe assumptions can be made about outcome when any one of those things change and therefore the ability to take a ‘tool’ that worked, and apply it generally, will inevitably be “characterized by considerable uncertainty” (Stacey, 2012, p.5). He bases this work on Elias’ rejection of “any notion of human interaction as a system” (Stacey, 2012, p.16). Elias saw the interaction between individual human bodies as the sole cause of change, behaviour and outcomes; rejecting the idea of being able to exist outside of that interaction and exert control or influence. He did not reject the ability to exert influence but saw it only being possible in the midst of the interaction, by being a part of the interaction and therefore by the interaction exerting influence over all parties to it. This means that Stacey does not dismiss a link between local interaction (the particular) and population-wide patterns (the general) but sees the

relationship as abstract rather than direct, influential rather than causal and characterised by uncertainty rather than control (Stacey, 2012, p.16).

Novelty and innovation

One area of inadequacy in the dominant discourse for Stacey is the explanation of novelty which he sees entirely lacking and goes as far as saying that “the tools and techniques of instrumental rationality cannot be the cause of change or improvement” (Stacey, 2012, p.6). If organisations are viewed as systems and individuals as ultimately controllable by leaders, Stacey is at a loss about where novelty and innovation can come from. His logic is that the acceptance of uncertainty is a prerequisite for explaining the source of novelty and innovation (Stacey, 2012, p.6) and that “the theory of complex responsive processes points beyond habits, rules and routines themselves to the improvisational, spontaneous ways in which they are tailored to unique local situations” (Stacey, 2012, p.105).

Good enough

One of Stacey’s early observations about the dissonance he experienced between what he heard the dominant discourse saying and his own experience in organisations, was how, despite the shortfalls of the systems in use and the gaps between theory and experience, organisations worked, people achieved things and life happened. This caused him to reflect on the circumstances that allow that to happen and he observed that a great deal could happen when things were ‘good enough’. “We cannot adequately explain either the crisis we face or how we nevertheless continue to get things done” (Stacey, 2012, p.33).

Several examples in case studies used by Griffin (2005, p.137), and Streatfield (2001 p.137) demonstrate the concept of good enough, illustrating that when we don’t know what is happening we often don’t know exactly how to approach

finding out, but what sometimes feel like crude and ill thought out attempts are often sufficient. This recognition stands in stark contrast to the dominant discourse which would suggest that we need to get the right people, in the right process, so that we can organise the right outcome.

Shaw, highlighting the centrality of conversation says “in a changing world the need to ‘make sense’ of experience is vital. Gathering helps do this. If you can’t make sense – how do you set an agenda to achieve that – gathering in confusion without a structure to solve it may solve or at least alleviate” (Shaw, 2002, p.23). It is good enough that we are making sense of gathering and gathering to make sense in one confused and combined local interaction.

Implications of a theory of a Complex Responsive Processes for Relating

CRPR offers a theoretical framework to move beyond the feeling of impotence. It says that the leader can be an effective actor in a scene where the lines are not all scripted for the other actors. However, there has been little application of CRPR to date and no explicit exploration of the effects of leading into an unknown future. This study looks at how "unknown" affects me as a leader, my leadership and whether there is benefit in making explicit the unknown nature of all leadership and how it would change the experience of leading and being led. There are many implications from this ‘radical challenge to systems thinking’ but key ones to focus on as I move forward are:

- ongoing enquiry *requires* (that takes) narrative and reflexive forms;
- ongoing participation in the conversational life of an organisation in ways that widen and deepen communication;
- an ability to be spontaneous and improvise;
- be aware of the ordinary politics of everyday life where the

techniques of rhetoric play a part and the matter of ethics becomes important.

In particular, the challenge is summed up in Stacey's book by the same name (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000):

Managers are supposed to be in charge and yet they find it difficult to stay in control. The future is first recognisable when it arrives but in many important respects not predictable before it does. We sense the importance of difference but experience the pressure to conform. (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000, p.5)

But this does not, in Stacey's mind, render leaders impotent. We can't control and we don't know, but by collectively talking we can more accurately sense-make and therefore we have the ability to 'act with intent' even when we do not know for sure what the effect of our 'acting' will be.

Implications for research

Griffin, one of the few people to have seriously applied CRPR in research, recognises that the traditional approach of ethical considerations begins before research commences, identifying both those at risk and the risk to them. However, with CRPR because, "a researcher is writing about his or her own personal experience of his everyday work activities", he suggests this is not practical and the "best that can be done is to inform colleagues in general about what one is doing and then write about the experience in a way that does not reveal their identities but still presents a "reliable" account of what is going on" (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.26). Therefore he concludes that in the challenge of bringing CRPR and traditional ethical research considerations together, "there is no general ethical rule to guide the researcher" in any approach that is focused on "thought before

action” (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.19). A CRPR perspective in ethics, as all areas of life, requires “ongoing negotiation with those with whom one is interacting” (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.26). Effectively rejecting traditional assumptions about ethics is the first of several challenges to developing a research approach consistent with a CRPR perspective.

In referring to the work of (Stacey, 2007), Aasen and Johannessen (2007) point out that systems dynamics work does not take account of the emergence of novelty; radical change must be designed outside the system and ‘installed’. They point to the work of authors who have taken a CAS viewpoint, and attempted to understand change as an emergent, self-organising process, applied to the innovation process (Carlisle and McMillan, 2006) and the leadership of innovation (Surie and Hazy, 2006, Plowman et al, 2007, Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009). Stacey rejects this and every other systems-orientated approach and therefore another pillar of traditional research, the ability to observe, is rejected because there is no system to stand outside of.

And finally the ‘Uncertain Causality’ that I outline in chapter 9 “means that the value of research is brought into question. Because Stacey says that “reflecting on what we are already doing cannot yield in an uncertain world the kinds of generalities appropriate for all contexts that can only apply to a certain world” (Stacey, 2012, p.ix) and yet he insists that he is developing CRPR as an adequate framework for his experience, I was left in a dilemma; the traditional research approach won’t work ethically or methodologically and the findings cannot be generalised. In light of this I had a challenge to even begin research and yet one of four areas he suggests leaders focus on is “ongoing enquiry that takes narrative and reflexive forms” and so my research begins with that.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to give an overview of the development and major implications of a theory of a Complex Responsive Processes of Relating including the key contributors, the foundational theories and the fields drawn upon. It then focused in greater detail on some of the key themes relevant to understanding how a leader can respond to limited knowledge. In the ‘Implications of a theory of complex responsive processes of relating’, I summarised the major implications derived from a growing understanding of the theory, how it can be applied, evaluated and meaningfully researched.

There are several areas of critique of the work to date on a theory of CRPR, for example Luoma (2007, p.192) on the relationship between attention and action, Norman (2009) highlights the lack of peer-review, and Cannell (2010) laments the lack of work to apply the theory. Some of these were evidenced in this research on the application of the theory to leadership practice and new areas of concern emerged. These are discussed in subsequent chapters as they were encountered in the empirical research. They include, significant shortcomings in research approaches generally (page 73), the epistemological foundations of such research approaches (page 77) and the ethical issues raised by research from a CRPR perspective (page 117). I also argue that there is a general lack of application of CRPR theory to practice (page 135) or even a comprehensive examination of implications for practice (page 133). The two areas where existing work on CRPR theory might be more obviously applied: ‘paying attention’ and ‘quality of conversation’, lack application in the existing literature. I question how paying attention is to be done and what the cost is to the leader of doing so (page 182) as well as highlighting the limited definition of what constitutes quality conversation and how it might be facilitated by a leader (page 183).

In the next chapter I begin to construct a research approach suitable to the needs of this study.

Chapter 4: Research approach

This chapter provides a comprehensively constructed research approach from epistemology to methods used and explores the ethical issues encountered.

It sets out the research aims and an outline of the research arena, before utilising Crotty's research model (1998) to construct a research approach. It then examines some specific aspects of a theory of CRPR that impacted on the research approach, before reconstructing that research approach in the light of these. This reconstruction introduces an iterative pattern of reflection on theory, method and methods; application of a theory of CRPR; engagement in a process of discovery,¹⁰ review of the results and a revisiting of the problems. Finally it reconsiders the ethical implications in the light of this reconstruction, recognising that viewing the world and individuals within a CRPR perspective poses particular problems.

The research that began as a theoretical exploration of CRPR to understand how leaders cope with the unknown, quickly and unexpectedly became something that began to change my leadership practice. This had significant implications for the research aims, approach and the ethical challenges it involved, but it also drove me to seek a robust research approach because I was being impacted by my engagement with CRPR and I needed to know that I could both trust and defend the deeply transformative research experience.

¹⁰ This is not discovery in a positivist sense but rather as used by Karl Weick encompassing a process that both "creates new organization and reaffirms organization already in place" (Weick, 2001, p.15).

Research aims:**Primary aim:**

To explore the effect on my leadership practice of acknowledging limited knowledge.

Research objectives arising from the primary aim:

- To explore and record in a systematic way the instances, nature and extent of limited knowledge experienced by the leader
- To develop a research approach that facilitates the exploration of organisational situations characterised by limited knowledge
- To enquire into the ways in which limited knowledge affects a leader
- To articulate and operationalise a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating in ways that are accessible to busy leaders seeking to lead authentically in situations characterised by limited knowledge
- To contribute to the limited literature on methodological approaches for using a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating in research studies

These aims will be pursued in the field by examining my experience of leadership as a college principal. The primary data for the study will be gained from detailed observation and recording of how I and others around me cope with the uncertainty of working in situations characterised by limited knowledge. Others involved include my executive team,¹¹ my board, my staff team and selected peers in other organisations.

¹¹ The nomenclature in use changed from executive team at the beginning of the study to leadership team later.

Crotty's research approach

Crotty sets out a comprehensive approach to research (Creswell, 2014, p.22) which moves from an epistemological basis of knowing, to a theory of how that knowledge can be derived, into a methodological approach and then the individual methods used to gain the knowledge (Crotty, 1998).

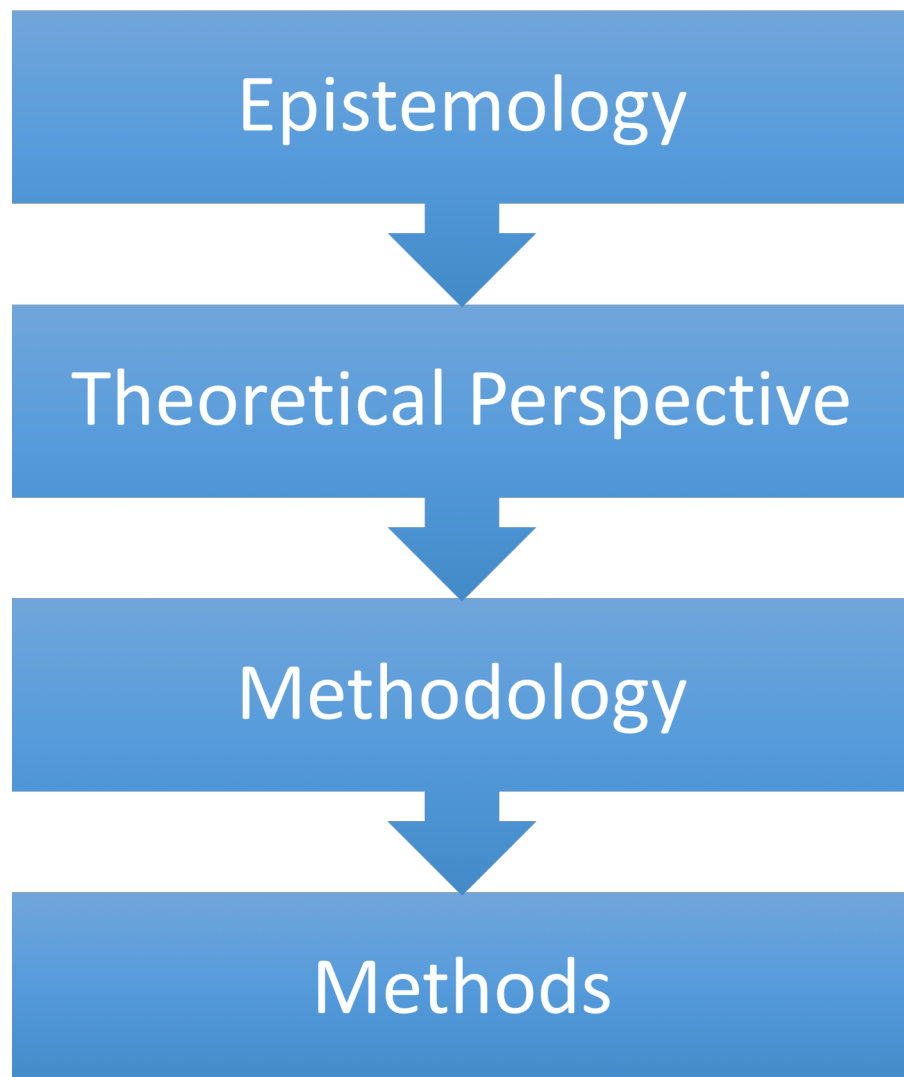


Figure 5: Crotty's Research Approach (adapted from Crotty, 1998, p4)

I value and use the term 'approach' quite specifically to differentiate it from the narrower term 'methods'. "It indicates a coherent epistemological viewpoint about the nature of enquiry, the kind of knowledge that is discovered or produced and the kinds of methodological strategies that are consistent with this" (Giorgi, 1970

quoted in Holloway and Todres, 2003, p.3).

Constructing an approach and making it coherent

Utilising Crotty's model allowed a logical consideration of each element of the research approach to ensure that it was using methods consistent with the underlying epistemological assumptions. The cohesiveness of the whole was as important as the individual constituent parts. The need was to develop a robust overall approach that would do two things:

1. answer the gap in the Stacey's work (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2002; Stacey and Griffin, 2006; Stacey, 2007; Stacey, 2008; Stacey, 2010; Stacey, 1995; Stacey, 2003; Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000; Stacey, 2001; Stacey and Griffin, 2005; Stacey, 2005; Stacey, 2011; Stacey, 2012; Stacey, 2003) with regards to research methodology (see below)
2. allow for the integration of an iterative process to research, in a way that honoured the responsiveness in a theory of CRPR and enabled the use of a constructivist grounded theory that "allows us to address *why* questions while preserving the complexity of social life [my emphasis]" (Charmaz, 2008, p.397)

Complex responsive processes of relating and research

The literature on research methodology relating to CRPR is underdeveloped. What has emerged from Stacey and his colleagues is sparse.

"The method of research is this making sense of one's own experience." (Griffin and Stacey 2005, p.27)

The only dedicated text on research from the fifteen plus books to date covering Stacey's work and that of his colleagues, that has emerged from the Hertfordshire

University group, 'A complexity perspective on researching organizations: Taking experience seriously' (Stacey and Griffin, 2005), does little to lay out a coherent approach. Bjørner Christensen provides the only serious attempt within this text to define methodology in chapter 4 with his articulation of 'Emerging Participative Exploration'.

In short, Christensen says that "emerging participative exploration is about making sense of how people are making sense of what they experience together as they participate in the ongoing, paradoxical iterations of interactions in the living present" (Christensen, 2005, p.113). He emphasises participation because the current conversations conducted in the present perpetually construct the future (Christensen, 2005, p.100), but the definition of the methodology is then hard to define as he states, "I experience methodology itself as emerging and participative" (Christensen, 2005, p.89) and says "emerging participative exploration cannot be described in detail as a methodology in advance" (Christensen, 2005, p.101).

This is then followed in the book by three chapters comprising of case studies of research/consultancy by three DMan students who use the approach outlined by Christensen (Stacey and Griffin, 2005). Stacey, introducing the writer of chapter 5 (and the introduction could apply to all the subsequent chapters) highlights the adoption rather than discussion of this approach "She does not explicitly discuss the methodology but instead demonstrates what it means to employ the kind of methodology discussed in previous chapters" (Stacey and Griffin, 2005).

In common with many researchers according to Crotty (1998, p.4) the work of Stacey et al has given limited attention to the foundations on which the methods rest, namely methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology.

Likewise in the area of research approach and methodology, as more generally, Stacey has shied away from peer review publication and this means he is easily

rejected by many scholars (Rosenhead, 1998.). A more thorough treatment of methodological approaches and foundational considerations of epistemology and theoretical perspective were required for the confident development of my research approach.

This is not to dismiss the attempts to date of researching in a way that is compatible with Stacey's work. There is much to commend attempts undertaken, but there is a need to engage with scholars in adjacent fields and co-construct a robust approach that will withstand peer scrutiny. The field of research methods has moved significantly in the last two decades (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.ix), particularly with regard to taking many of the issues he highlights seriously:

- appreciation of the open-ended, improvisational nature of ongoing human communication (Shaw and Stacey, 2006)
- drawing attention to the way ideas and concepts emerge 'live' in all conversations in organisations (Shaw and Stacey, 2006)
- different ways of thinking about the relationship between consulting to organisations and researching them (Stacey and Griffin, 2005)

The socially constructed nature of reality that is constantly referred to in Stacey's writing is what qualitative researchers across many approaches within the broad discipline are engaged in acknowledging, but a robust approach will not be developed in isolation.

A constructed approach

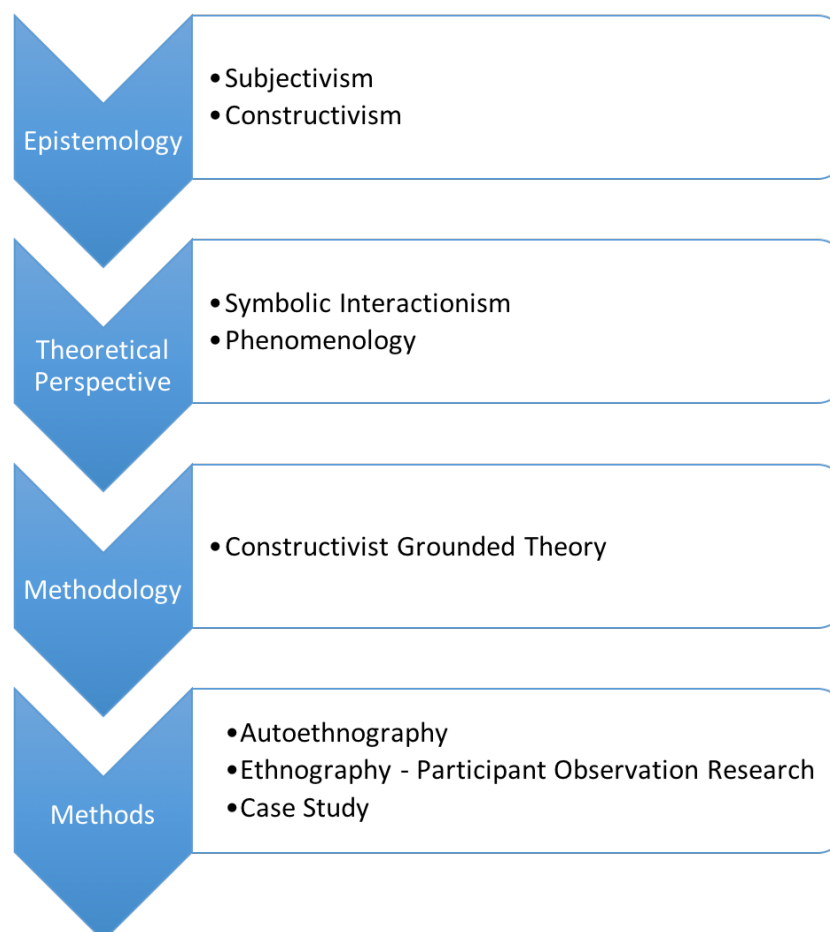


Figure 6: Overview of methodology (based on Crotty, 1998, p.4)

We need to identify our approach to qualitative enquiry in order to present it as a sophisticated study, to offer it as a specific type so that reviewers can properly assess it... (Creswell, 2013, p.69)

Within the general research field, there is a 'looseness' that often characterises research approaches; using vague and confused terminology. This stands in stark contrast to Creswell's definitions and Crotty's approach, but is often characterised by a catch all use of 'research method', 'methods' or 'methodology' when in reality they are often including unexplored epistemologies and theoretical perspectives.

(Harding, 1987, p.3).

Harding writes in the area of researching feminist theory. There appear parallels between Harding's perspective on research approaches for feminism in 1987 and those currently available for CRPR orientated research (Harding, 1987). Just as she refuses to simply "add women' to traditional analyses" the approach of simply adding the characteristics of CRPR to existing methodologies will not help us to find and demonstrate the distinctiveness of the theory; a more thorough consideration is required.

In the following sections I will explore each component that is used to construct the research approach within Crotty's model, utilising what Creswell calls a multi-method approach (Creswell, 2015, p.3), whereby a number of qualitative research methods are combined to more fully answer the question being researched.

Epistemology

Evolving a clearer understanding of the epistemological assumptions inherent in Stacey's work (Stacey, 2007, pp.101 and 11) as well as gaining the clarity that is often lacking around terminology (Harding, 1987, p.3) was a key part of the work undertaken.

Two key pillars on which a theory of CRPR is built are that i.) there are no systems for us to be part of, and ii.) whatever we do feel we are part of is created by us gesturing to one another. Therefore Stacey concludes "Clearly, there can be no objective validity for the obvious reason that the research is an interpretation, a subjective reflection on personal experience" (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.27). CRPR rejects any hint of positivism (Stacey, 2007, pp.10-11; Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.27) and would suggest that all truth is subjective.

Seeing no reality of an organisation beyond the individuals in it, is at the heart of CRPR (Stacey, 2007, p.21) and means that it privileges the position of the

individual. Whilst this has unlocked new thinking in organisational studies (Suchman, 2002, p.2), there is a danger that in assuming 'my interpretation of a received gesture is my reality and that reality is the only reality I respond to', could imply that there is no underlying reality that exists independently of perception (Yazdani, Naveed et al., n.d., p.7). I do not believe this simplistic interpretation is what Stacey seeks to imply, instead seeing his stance as constructivist (Crotty, 1998, pp.42-65). But the logical consequences of some of his emphases could lead researchers to adopt subjectivist tendencies and I would argue that this has limited the work to date on research methodologies¹².

This assertion is perhaps where the confusion around subjectivism and constructivism in the articulation of CRPR begins. Crotty says that this confusion is a common one in research approaches (1998, p.9). In developing an epistemology for this research I was trying to articulate how we know something in a lived life. Maynard, like Harding, works in the area of feminist research and the work that they have done focuses on the lived experience of women to develop a theory of feminism and this focus on the lived experience had many similarities to my own work.

Maynard's definition of epistemology, drawing on Harding (see below), highlights the key elements that comprise an epistemology "Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Maynard and Purvis, 1994, p.10). The three measures of possible, adequate and legitimate, guided me as I scrutinised the established epistemologies for one that was consistent and coherent with a CRPR approach.

What knowledge is possible is widely debated within social and natural sciences.

12 The structure and layout of the book (Stacey and Griffin, 2005) highlights the way in which many research methodologies are dismissed - "An important intention in emerging participative exploration is to avoid following a prescribed, detailed 'scientific method'" (Stacey and Griffin, 2005) and the simplistic approach discussed above adopted, simply because "the perspective of complex responsive process leads one to a view of methodology which is essentially exploratory and emergent" (Stacey and Griffin, 2005).

Harding says an epistemology “answers questions about who can be a ‘knower’” (Harding, 1987, p.3) but this question needs to be combined with the next, - What knowledge is adequate?

I argue the adequacy of knowledge varies with reference to the concept of ‘good enough’ which is contextual but this directly challenges scientific positivism’s empirical stance that absolute knowledge is knowable and required. Knowledge sufficient for the day/task, is what I argue is required and this has weight here for seeking adequacy. An epistemology should answer “what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimised as knowledge” (Harding, 1987, p.3) and whilst this is not straightforward, there would undoubtedly be a need for the limited knowledge of each individual to be pooled through conversation and that it is in the pooling that the clearest knowledge emerges. Therefore answering Harding’s questions of who is a knower, the answer is potentially anybody who can contribute to that knowledge from their partial perspective and no individual possesses a total and unassailable knowledge.

What knowledge is legitimate asks the status of the derived knowledge: “What kinds of things can be known (can ‘subjective truths’ count as knowledge?)” (Harding, 1987, p.3). Harding gives a useful list of strategies for justifying beliefs including “appeals to the authority of God, of custom and tradition, of ‘common sense’, of observation, of reason, and of masculine authority are examples of familiar justification strategies” (Harding, 1987, p.3). In traditional research approaches, which are often rooted in positivism, only observation and reason are usually considered valid bases of belief. Developments in the social sciences are challenging these and Harding’s writing was at the forefront of this in 1987. In this study the aspects of custom and tradition are important as shall be seen in the use of phenomenology and in the ‘cultural’ of autoethnography, as well as in the practice of Participant Observation Research (POR). Similarly power structures are brought into focus by reflective practice

(Bolton, 2014, p.164); the place and influence of faith; and the 'practical judgement' (Stacey, 2012, p.107) of common sense; these are all seen as contributing knowledge that has validity in painting the artistic representation of truth that is judged a good enough representation of the reality experienced by those in the conversation.

Harding says "Epistemological issues certainly have crucial implications for how general theoretical structures can and should be applied in particular disciplines and for the choice of methods of research" (Harding, 1987, p.3). The task here was to build a consistent research approach that was grounded in an appropriate epistemology.

Subjectivism/subjectivist

Crotty cautions that "subjectivism...often appears to be what people are actually describing when they claim to be talking about constructionism" (Crotty, 1998, p.9). Whereas objectivism placed the emphasis on the researcher to discover an epistemologically sacred entity - the accurate meaning of the object was there to be discovered. Subjectivism reacted against and reversed this and gives the accurate meaning to the researcher and therefore it is whatever the researcher wants it to be; they impose meaning, rather than discovering it (Yazdani, Naveed et al., n.d. p.5).

This implies that there is no underlying reality that exists independently of perception (Yazdani, Naveed et al., n.d, p.7) and it suggests no value in the interplay between subject and object (Crotty, 1998, p.9): the object makes no contribution to our knowledge; the knowledge is only based on how we perceive something and the meaning is simply imposed on the object by the subject.

Subjectivism has its roots in the post-structuralist and postmodern reaction to objectivism which was the dominant epistemology. This gives no room for

perception (Outhwaite and Bottomore, 1993) but it continues to reinforce the subject-object divide of the earlier epistemology and simply swings the basis of understanding from the one extreme to the other, from object to be discovered, to subject to be observed. In reality what shapes and controls the meaning we ascribe to the object is a complex mix of who we are and what we have learned: our values, childhood and life experiences, cultural, geographical and socio-economic locations, for example. As Crotty bluntly puts it: “meaning comes from anything but an interaction between the subject and the object to which it is ascribed” (Crotty, 1998, p.9). The importance of culture, and experience was seen in an incident when I was living in Nepal, but it also highlights how perception, even an educated perception, does not accurately interpret in isolation:

One New Year's Eve, as often happens in expatriate communities, we gathered in the home of British colleague (Jasmine) who was working with Peace-corps and had an evening playing traditional English games with English colleagues. The only non-English people there were the Peace-corps worker's Landlord and family. After several games and a hearty meal Jasmine proudly announced that we were now going to play the ultimate English cultural game: apple bobbing. In an instant, my face which had begun to break out in a smile, with fond memories of my childhood filling my mind, creased as a horrifying realisation hit me. As I looked across to Esther, an experienced missionary with many years spent working in the country, I could see my concern was justified.

How could we be so thoughtless and culturally insensitive? In a Hindu culture you do not even share a cup for drinking purposes, instead you tip your head back and hold a water

bottle or jug six inches above your mouth, pouring the water freely, in what can often with the newcomers be a very messy initiation. Hindu culture says that uncleanness passes through water and therefore it would be completely culturally unacceptable to put my mouth in a bowl of water and then ask the landlord or his family to do the same.

It was therefore with great confusion, that I witnessed Mr Thapa, with no hesitation, follow the example Jasmine had set, and thrust his head deep into the water and pull out a large apple. He proceeded to double up with laughter and insist that all of his family have a go at this wonderful game.

So what had gone wrong? Why had something completely unacceptable in a culture, suddenly become acceptable? In later discussions I discovered that the keyword was 'game'. Because it was a game, the rules were suspended; cultural expectations were put on pause, and my assumptions from my cultural training about meaning were entirely wrong. Culture is important as highlighted by both Chang (2008, p.229) and Bochner and Ellis (2002, p.412) in their approaches to autoethnography (see Figure 9 below).

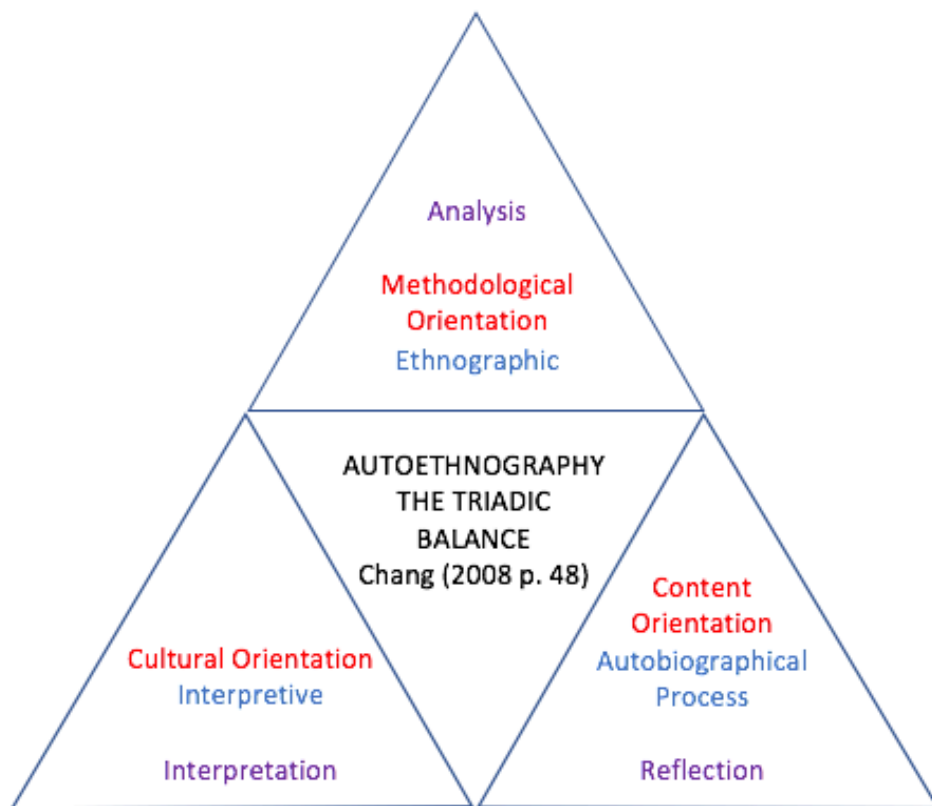
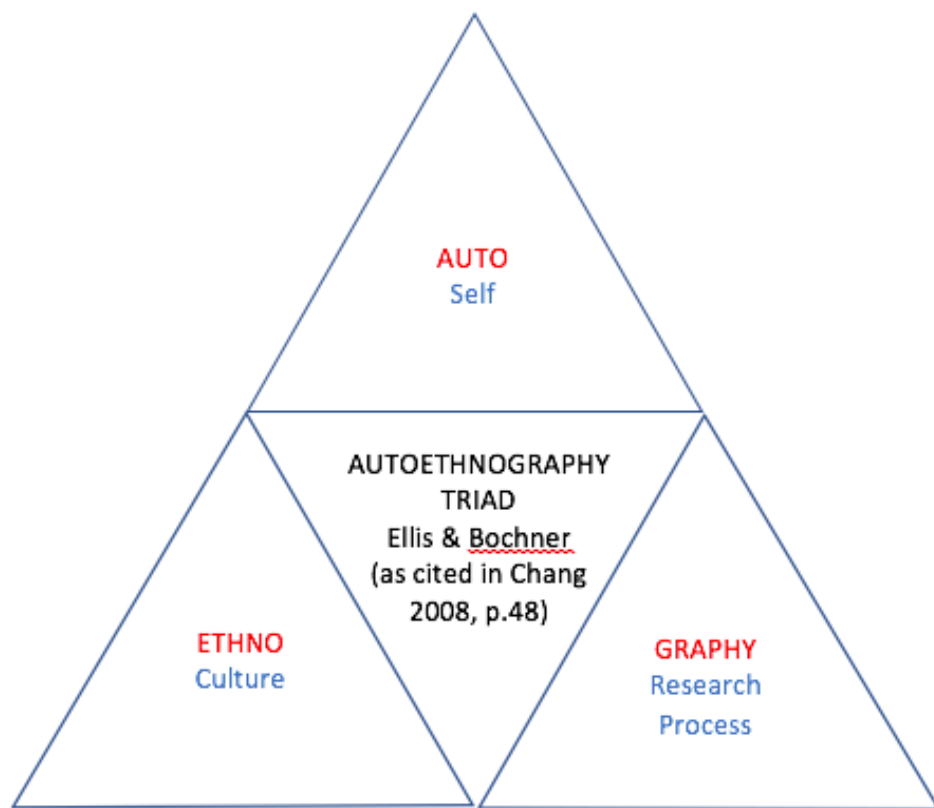


Figure 7: A comparison of Chang and Ellis and Bochner's Triads (adapted from Snyder, 2015, pp.93-96)

Crotty (1998) says that confusion between these epistemologies (subjectivism and constructivism) is not unusual but if we examine constructivism carefully, the importance of the difference in the construction of a coherent approach can be seen. However, the accurate interpretation of what happens, as illustrated in Nepal, is only discerned through a co-construction, a social process.

Constructivism

Constructivism, rejects the view that there is an objective truth waiting to be discovered. Rather, truth and meaning is constructed out of the engagement of our minds with the world. The constructionist stance maintains that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon, such as between those in different eras or cultures (just as I had done with our experience of Nepali apple-bobbing) (Crotty, 1998, p.9).

Whilst not explicitly stated, Stacey's epistemology appears to be constructivist with his consistent emphasis on gesture and response (2007, pp.271-273) and talk of co-constructed realities (2007, pp.101-102).

Constructivism or constructionism

One area of loose terminology is in the interchangeable use of Constructivism or Constructionism and Crotty, picking up on this (Schwandt, 1994) says

It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term constructivism for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on 'the meaning-making activity of the individual mind' and to use constructionism where the focus includes 'the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning. (Crotty, 1998, p.58)

Given that leadership is about collective action (Wood, 2005, p.1115), and I would

argue collective decision-making; the constuctivism-constructionism debate can move from an interesting theoretical dichotomy to an additional point of clarity in understanding how to develop a research approach. Crotty says "whatever the terminology, the distinction itself is an important one. Constructivism taken in this sense points up the unique experience of each of us. It suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect", but he concludes this with an important and very relevant caution that perhaps highlights constructionism's postmodern roots: "each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby *tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit* [emphasis mine]" (Crotty, 1998, p.58).

This lack of dialectic grates painfully against a responsive process and profoundly brings into focus that it is not a postmodern acceptance of all that would seek to render everything of equal value. His commitment to meaningful gesture and the expectancy of a counter-gesture in the form of response, which neither overrides the original gesture nor can be responded to by a dismissal of that response, but demands a new gesture in response to the original response (Stacey, 2001, p.79), is a commitment to dialectic; the argument that seeks understanding and clarity through the back and fore. This is a social constructionism that acknowledges we are all individually shaped by our culture; it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world. Postmodernism does little to celebrate this difference, often leaving us feeling that it is something we need to get past, to do away with, so that we can avoid the difficult questions and just accept each other.

Social constructionism on the other hand does not need to imply that; the differences are what make us human, shape the way we see things, even how we feel things. Stacey's work gives us an opportunity to celebrate difference, to value it and to use it to help us understand the reality of what we each see and feel better. Therefore, as we seek a robust research approach, it is clear that the degree

of robustness correlates to the commitment we have to recognising and reconciling of our individual worldview-shaped understandings into a common socially constructed understanding.

I found in constructivism an epistemology that not only allowed for the emergent pattern of knowledge creation that Stacey outlines, but helpfully facilitated it. The language of constructivism and the language of Stacey were similar and the exploration of constructivist orientated research methodologies and methods, allowed development of useable techniques (Yazdani, et al., n.d., p.6), which in turn allowed for suitable exploration of the context in which I was operating (Charmaz, 2008, p.398).

Theoretical perspective

We need to understand the assumptions we bring and apply to the methodology, and the choice and implementation of methods. “They [meaning our assumptions that shape our theoretical perspective] largely have to do with the world the methodology envisages” says Crotty (1998, p.66). Taking the example of participant observation research, Crotty highlights this:

...some of the assumptions [we make in our choice of participant observation research as a method] relate to matters of language and issues of intersubjectivity and communication. How, then, do we take account of these assumptions and justify them? By expounding our theoretical perspective, that is, wherein such assumptions are grounded. (p. 7)

I use two interpretivist perspectives: symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. These two are not necessarily comfortable bed-fellows; Crotty describes their two perspectives as ‘For and Against Culture’ and yet I will demonstrate that together

they can offer a firmer platform for a robust research approach.

Symbolic interactionism

Taking seriously Stacey's dominant supposition that organisations are simply collections of individuals having conversations (Stacey, 2007, p.351), symbolic interactionism allowed me to apply those assumptions to my research approach.

Herbert Blumer, the father of Symbolic Interactionism defined it as follows:

- people act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them, and
- these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation.

(Blumer, 1969)

It parallels Stacey's concept of gesture and is something that is required for emergence and creation of new knowledge (Stacey, 2007, p.260), which in the process of being formed, then constructs meaning.

The concept of the individual as 'meaning maker' is central to Symbolic Interactionism and to a complex responsive way of relating (Stacey, 2007, p.85), but that meaning making is not a solipsistic, individualised process but rather a social process witnessed in the gesture and response at the heart of Stacey's work.

...research by interactionists focuses on easily observable face-to-face interactions rather than on macro-level structural relationships involving social institutions (McClelland, Kent, 2000, p.1)

The model of the person in symbolic interactionism is active and creative rather than passive (Holloway, 1997, p.150). It recognises independent action on the part of individuals; pragmatic actors, to use McClelland's term (2000), who must

constantly modify their behaviour to the actions of other actors, and through this process meaning is constructed. That meaning, and the temporary and constantly renegotiated reality construct, then, in turn, influence the actions of the individual and the iterative cycle repeats, constantly. Helpfully researchers taking a symbolic interactionism approach have readily recognised that they cannot remain detached observers and have most commonly used participant observation. McClelland says

...close contact and immersion in the everyday lives of the participants is necessary for understanding the meaning of actions, the definition of the situation itself, and the process by which actors construct the situation through their interaction.
(McClelland, 2000, p.3)

Social reality is 'negotiated' between people and our understanding of it depends upon an aggregation of our understandings of individuals in relationship to each other and involves the concepts of negotiated meaning, shared and differing perceptions and collective sense-making. The concept of the individual as 'meaning maker' is central to symbolic interactionism. Data in this perspective is not the objective facts of scientific positivism but the constructs people make of reality, demonstrated by their words in their conversations and their actions in their interactions. Therefore, there is no one truth, but multiple realities, each interpreted constructs of what is happening. That interpretation is an ongoing iterative cycle or spiral which reflects the increasing depth of knowledge through coherence of accumulated data by repetitive action.

Validity for symbolic interactionism is demonstrated in terms of plausibility and usefulness for understanding, rather than in terms of the objective facts and this is seen clearly in the use of autoethnography as a method. Similarly, findings are recognised as being specific to the context in which they were found but generalisable in a heuristic rather than statistical sense, recognising that they show

meaning of a lived human experience (Holloway, 1997).

Phenomenology

The phenomenology of the phenomenological movement is a first-person exercise. Each of us must explore our own experience, not the experience of others, for no one can take that step 'back to the things themselves' on our behalf. (Crotty, 1998, p.83)

The only way we can understand something is to experience it. Ladkin (2011, p.6) says “phenomenology recognizes the subjective nature of knowledge and pays close attention to lived experience as a valid source of knowing.” It is not the storied account of an individual’s experience of an event, but the “common meaning” (Creswell, 2013, p.76) of an experience or event for a group. It seeks to distil down the core meaning, what Ladkin calls the “nature of a thing” (2011, p.16) experienced by all involved to in Van Manen’s words “grasp the very nature of the thing” (1990, p.177).

However, I reached a point in the research where the thing I wanted to grasp the very nature of...was nothing. What was happening when nothing appeared to be happening? Creswell says that phenomenology “places an emphasis on a phenomenon to be explored” (2013, p.76), and at times it felt as though I was trying to conduct anti-phenomenology research as the narrative based autoethnography, coupled with key principles of Stacey’s theory, focused me on the ordinary and the everyday; effectively what was happening when nothing was happening. Therefore, the study consciously examines how leaders and their followers engage with non-events, when little or nothing appears to be occurring. Leaders are often defined by their actions (Beauman, 2006) but I suggest that inaction is an important aspect of leadership behaviour in times of uncertainty.

There are similarities between symbolic interactionism and phenomenology and the two approaches have a similar stance on 'research quality' (for example Ladkin, 2011, p.24). Both emphasise that the research process must be made transparent in the way it is reported, and be seen to be disciplined and rigorous; this can be seen as the equivalent of reliability within quantitative research. The research outcomes should be insightful and the heuristics, or intuitive judgements, emerging from it, must be useful; this can be seen as the equivalent of validity (McClelland, 2000).

Methodology

There is considerable overlap in terms of procedures and techniques in different approaches to qualitative research. These approaches often share a broad philosophy such as person-centeredness and a certain open-ended starting point. Researchers using these approaches generally adopt a critical stance towards positivist perspectives and search for meaning in the accounts and/or actions of participants. (Holloway and Todres, 2003, p.2)

The research approach has consistently been challenged by the call to research (and therefore to live and lead) in the interplay of people, situations and worldviews. Piecing together my own experience, that of others, and the effect of a situation, context or experience required a multi-methods approach (Creswell, 2015, p.3), and ensuring those combined approaches were coherent was important. I understood the "disenchantment" with earlier, more traditional approaches and their failure to capture the experiences and perspectives of the people whose lives, thoughts and feelings are being explored" (Holloway and Todres, 2003, p.2) and saw this reflecting the gap I explore in chapter 2, where leadership is either treated as an unknowable mystery or analysed and dissected like a corpse (a natural

sciences methodology which (Yazdani, et al., n.d., p.4) describes as being inadequate to capture the realities of social science). Holloway and Todres offered many helpful insights as I sought to explore the different methods and consider how to combine them into a coherent research approach. In particular what they call a 'family approach' where similarities are considered more important than the differences, helped me to begin to utilise a multi-method approach. This is not a wanton, careless mixing, as they also highlight the need to understand clearly the purposes and relative appropriateness of procedures and that this helps the researcher discern what can and cannot be mixed. Their guiding principle is "to respect as much as possible the primacy of the topic or phenomenon to be studied and the range of possible research questions, by finding a methodological approach and strategy that can serve such inquiry" (Holloway and Todres, 2003, pp.3-4).

Multi-method was a contested approach, but is becoming more widely practised and accepted (Mcmurray, et al., 2004, pp.301-302). In fact Johnson and Onwuegbuzie go so far as to say that "methodological pluralism or eclecticism, ... frequently results in superior research (compared to monomethod research)" (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.15). Being able to consider and experiment with various methods and then revisit the implicit ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, allowed me to arrive at an approach that was consistent, coherent and robust. However, the correct balance between consistency and flexibility was a challenge and one that others have recognised. Van Maanen errs on the side of flexibility saying "a standard uniformly applied methodology in such qualitative areas of research would neuter or destroy the inquisitive and adventurous" and recommends a research approach that "remains open to a relatively artistic, improvised and situated model of social research" (2006, p.18) and avoids becoming a slave to the methodology: committing what Janesick calls 'methodolatry' (2000).

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT)

Most humanities 'research' is the self-indulgent pursuit of obscure hobbies that neither need nor merit funding and produce only unsold, unread and unreadable books.

Quote from my office wall - source unknown

Whatever research approach I used, it needed to allow the feel of a living study to come through. This was no dry exercise in researching an interesting theory that offered a vague theoretical interest; this was the most significant discovery in my own leadership after 20 years as a leader. What I needed was something that explained why it was so important and allowed me to explore how I could trust these discoveries to be key building blocks in a changed leadership practice. Charmaz (2008), having discovered challenges similar to those found in a theory of CRPR, in the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) she learned as a disciple of Glaser (1968), seemed to offer this from her own adventure into research methodology: “I show how a grounded theory informed by social constructionism can lead to vibrant studies with theoretical implications that address *why* questions [my emphasis]” (Charmaz, 2008, p.2).

Initially, grounded theory had not appeared as a helpful or usable methodology if I was to maintain my golden rule of consistency and coherence. In fact Van Maanen (1998 quoted in Charmaz 2008, p.400) says

Traditional qualitative research had roots in Enlightenment values, including beliefs in reason, objectivity, scientific authority, and notions of progress through science. Grounded theory became known as the most realist and positivist of the modernist qualitative methods.

Charmaz’s critique of Glaser and Strauss confirmed my reservation: “Glaser and

Strauss did not attend to how they affected the research process, produced the data, represented research participants, and positioned their analyses. Their research reports emphasized generality, not relativity, and objectivity, not reflexivity” (Charmaz, 2008, p.399). This generality is irreconcilable to Stacey’s view that absolutely everything is only a localised interaction and nothing more (Stacey, 2007, p.317).

Charmaz reinforces the positivist basis of Glaser and Strauss’s founding theory, but goes on to highlight how many of their followers continued in that vein and only in the last decade has a broader approach to GTM emerged that recognises it does not have to be built on a positivist epistemology with all its assumptions, but can be more seen as sitting on a strongly constructivist base.

Most critics could not see beyond Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) early statements of the grounded theory method--and other critics still cannot (Dey, 1999, 2004; Layder, 1998). As a result, until recently (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006; Clarke, 2003, 2005, 2006; Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003; Willig, 2001) the flexibility and potential versatility of the method remained hidden--and its promise for innovative social constructionist study remained unfulfilled. (Charmaz, 2008, p. 401)

Locke helpfully takes GTM into the management arena, drawing together the work of a number of researchers in the management and organisational realm. Partington 2000 quoted in (Locke, 2001, p.96), believes that GTM is particularly helpful in Mode 2 management research¹³ which is concerned with closing the “gap between the academy and practice domains...” and acknowledges in attempting to do so, that because “mode 2 management research is trans-disciplinary” it is “less

¹³ Mode 2 is a theory of knowledge production set out in (Gibbons et al., 1994) characterised by being context-driven, problem focused and interdisciplinary.

likely to bring with it mature theoretical frameworks developed within the boundaries of particular academic disciplines.” This is where Locke sees GTM with its “insistence on pragmatic usefulness as a criterion of good theory, is particularly adept at bridging theory and practice” (2001, p.96).

Charmaz studied under Glaser and perhaps because of this, she feels a greater freedom, or perhaps more obligation to challenge, change and reconstruct GTM into a truly Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014, pp.xiv-xix). The research area as the place of interplay, presents challenges to researchers, and Locke’s encouragement that “grounded theory style adapts well to capturing complexities of the context in which action unfolds...” was reassuring as I experimented with different ways of identifying, exploring and understanding what was going on. She says it enables researchers to “better understand all that may be involved in a particular substantive issue” (Locke, 2001, p.95).

Working in the area of organisational research, with all of its inherent complexities, Martin and Turner say that GTM is “well suited to the study of complex entities” because it can produce a multifaceted account of organizational action located in its context” (Martin and Turner, 1986). Likewise the holistic view of GTM fits with a CRPR approach (Stacey (2007) because it sees any attempt to study constituent parts rather than the whole, as problematic) and it challenges the traditional research approach that Orlikowski describes as “focusing on discrete outcomes, such as productivity, systems quality, and development costs, while neglecting the intentions and actions of key players...the organizational context within which such events occur” (Orlikowski, 1993, p.309).

Returning to the avoidance of research as a self indulgent pursuit, Locke, in a section entitled ‘Linking well to practice’, says that because GTM combines examination of substantive issues and seeks to give a theoretical account for them, it has “proved especially useful to help [individuals] gain a perspective on their own work situations” (Locke, 2001, p.95). This is not done in isolation and Locke

highlights a view shared by Charmaz but not all of the GTM purists, that in practice “researchers selectively integrate the logic and practices of other qualitative research styles with those of grounded theory” (Locke, 2001, p.100). What is common in the adopted approaches, is that the inductive nature of GTM and its corresponding methods increase the “chances of discovering the unanticipated” (Locke, 2001, p.97), and this was particularly important as I sought to explore emergence in my own leadership experience.

One more area where Glaser’s GTM (Glaser, Strauss and Strutzel, 1968, p.364) and Charmaz’s CGT (Charmaz, 2006b) differ, is regarding the literature review. As already highlighted in chapter 2, the debate is around whether the literature review should be wait until after initial findings from the data are available, so as not to influence the researcher and cause him to miss what the data could be saying with pre-conceived ideas from the established literature. I have not felt the need to adopt Glaser’s restrictive approach, as I was already working in an area in my role (and teaching in that same area) and so was already familiar with much of the literature. Additionally the focus of the study was to become familiar with the literature of Stacey and his colleagues and explore what it did to my own leadership practice.

Charmaz’s summary of the characteristics highlights the constructionism inherent in her approach to GTM. Such research seeks to focus on “(1) the relativity of the researcher’s perspectives, positions, practices, and research situation, (2) the researcher’s reflexivity; and (3) depictions of social constructions in the studied world” (Charmaz, 2008, p.407) and these are where the individual research methods will focus.

Methods

St. Pierre (2004) argues that 'We are in a new age where messy, uncertain multi-voiced contexts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and inter-textual representation.' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.15)

This was a multifaceted approach that I used to understand the nuances of both reality and perception in my leadership, in the reaction of those around me, and in the co-constructed representation of experience in my autoethnography.

The methods I used included:

- Autoethnographic writing on my own leadership, experiences I had and issues I faced
- Autoethnographic reflections on the interactions I had with a variety of people including: my board, my staff team, students, peers, competitors and general public
- Ethnographic field notes on board meetings, staff team meetings, internal committees and formal meetings with external organisations
- Participant observation research in the midst of leading
- Case Study - using a specific time-bound case towards the end of the research

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is becoming a particularly useful and powerful tool for researchers and practitioners who deal with human relations in multicultural settings... (Chang, 2008, p.51)

Leadership is about people, their interactions, motives, desires, ambitions, and the role of a leader in making sense of these, harnessing them and using them to achieve something. Leadership is affected by so many different factors and it is the interplay of these factors that creates the greatest leadership challenge (and I would argue, also the greatest leadership opportunities). Autoethnography offers a way of not only coping with this interplay in research, but providing a method for living in the space of interplay.

From the outset, my research was about my own leadership; exploring my lived leadership experience and being a researcher in it and on it. Therefore autoethnography was a very obvious, if less than straightforward choice. Sarah Wall entitled her autoethnography “Easier said than done” (Wall, S., 2008, p.38.) and this sense of autoethnography as something that is difficult, is commonly expressed (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010, p.8; Clark, 2005, p.8; Jackman, 2009, p.41). It is difficult for a number of reasons:

It is personal and exposes vulnerabilities in the researcher-writer

...autoethnography does not merely require us to explore the interface between culture and self, it requires us to write about ourselves. (Etherington, 2007, p.140)

The important and often misunderstood key to autoethnography is that it *has* to

expose the writer and make them vulnerable, for it to work. Ellis says it is the evocative nature of the narrative that gives autoethnography its validity (Ellis, 2004, p.124). She sees validity as searching for verisimilitude in that it “evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (Stow, 2005, p.27).

Cultural anthropologist Reed-Danahay defines autoethnography as “exploring a particular life, to understand a way of life” (2000, p.737) and I accepted that I was unpacking my own life to understand it. I hope that by doing it in all its fullness (evocatively), others who read it will understand something of the way of life of a leader and perhaps read their own leadership experience into it too. As Ellis puts it “showing more than telling — bringing the readers into the scene, taking them into the details” (2004, p.142).

Illustrating just how vulnerable a narrative can feel, Skipp, exploring his own journey to authentic leadership (and therefore also his acknowledgement of inauthentic) quotes Ellis saying,

‘...that perhaps every story worth telling is a dare, a kind of pornography, composed of whatever we think we’re not supposed to say, for fear of being found out, or drummed out.’ This kind of writing makes me think about being in the situation they’re in, doing what they’re doing, or imagining what I’d do in the same situation. (Skipp, 2010, p.53)

It remains a contested research method

Explaining one challenge leaders face in the use of autoethnography, Gockel and Parry in 2004 warn that “there is little evidence that the methodology frequents the minds of business and organisational researchers” (2004, p.8). All of the examples

of leadership autoethnography that I could locate were from after this date, so whilst the situation appears to be changing, it is still early days. I hope Chang's approach (2008, p.229), that has significantly influenced my own research, of refusing to be drawn exclusively to either the evocative emphasis of Bochner and Elis (2002, p.412) or the analytical lens of Anderson (2006) discussed later in this chapter, but insisting that for leadership we have to research in the tension of a robustly analysed evocative voice, will help leaders utilise autoethnography in a robust way, that does not lose its evocative voice.

Even beyond the business research arena, autoethnography is still contested in some areas of social science research as it crosses a number of lines in traditional approaches. The combination of research and practice, usually separated and differentiated in traditional research, is an inseparable, iterative cycle in autoethnography. Dilworth cited this as recently as 2008, saying that the state Heron described ten years earlier was still true: "academic institutions are still closed to the integration of intellectual learning with experiential and practical learning" quoted in (Heron, 1992 quoted by Dilworth, 2008, p.212). This not only limits the use of autoethnography, but also inhibits practitioners from becoming the researcher-practitioners we need, if we are to move the literature forward with a deeper engagement with how leadership happens rather than just focusing on what it does.

Additionally, autoethnography challenges traditional views of objectivity as well as writing style and convention (see below), but some using autoethnography argue this is not only a valid approach but provides a much needed stimulus to boring and lazy academics. Taking Crawford's comment on subject-object tensions, "autoethnography removes the assumed researcher privilege in the research situation, and makes the presence of the researcher in the text unavoidable" (1996, p.158). Stow says "this on-purpose subjectivity brings to light the way that traditional social science texts have pushed academics toward becoming passive,

unengaged readers and writers” (2005, p.27). Autoethnographers don’t see subjectivity as something to be ashamed of; instead they “accept their subjectivity, embrace it, and explore it” (2005, p.27).

You have to be participant and observer

[Auto]ethnographers-as-authors frame their accounts with personal reflexive views of the self. Their ethnographic data are situated within their personal experience and sense making. They themselves form part of the representational processes in which they are engaging and are part of the story they are telling. (Atkinson, et al., 2004, p.62)

Living in the interplay, is what a complex responsive process of relating is all about; seeing individual interaction as the reality of all existence, and inherent in that, the emergence of meaning and sense-making. This sits well with the situated telling of experience in an autoethnography that creates data and coterminously analyses it, but it raises further challenges for researchers engaging in it. Because “we don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are” (Nin, quoted in Epstein 1999 quoted in Bolton, 2006) and therefore it involves “gazing inward toward the self and looking outward toward social and cultural aspects of their experience” Reed-Danahay (1997 cited in Schwandt, 2007), or as Marshall puts it in the title of her remarkable work, it is “Living life as Inquiry” (1999). Dilworth says that this is a demanding methodology balancing personal introspection, not usually visible in traditional research (in the words of Anderson (2006, p.382) “confessional tales” reserved for an appendix) with “...rigorous attention to the inquiry at hand” (Dilworth, 2008, p.146). Talking of subjectivity, Atwood’s definition (1976, p.167) is apposite for understanding the deeply personal process involved in an autoethnography; “a structure of meaning within which I can understand my own experience”. This process of self discovery through “writing the self” (Gannon,

2006) is what makes autoethnography so puzzling to traditional approaches, and indeed this dual existence is seen as an anathema to traditionalist researchers and Bochner and Ellis clearly see it as intentionally subversive:

Autoethnography seeks to knock down the false modernist ideals of researcher objectivity, neutrality, and omniscience – in hopes of getting the reader to question the usual canonical stories produced by traditional empiricist social science. (Bochner and Ellis, 2002)

You have to commit to regular reflections.

Autoethnography is a journey, not simply a data collection phase. It is something to which you have to be committed, not least because the times you have the most to reflect on, are the days you feel least like writing. They are the tough days, the days when the last thing you want to do is revisit horrors of the day - living them once was hard enough.

Autoethnographers have to be willing to do the hard work of feeling the pain and learning through the process of writing, approaching autoethnography not as a project to be completed, but as a continuous learning experience. (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010, p.9)

You have to write well

Boyle and Parry talk of the need for an autoethnographer to be both “wordsmith and storyteller” (Boyle and Parry, 2007, p.6) and describe the writing as more akin to a screen play for historical documentary than an interview transcript. In fact, although that may suit traditional research approaches, they caution that if it reads

like a transcript, they believe the impact on the reader will be compromised. Ellis talks of asking the reader to join the experience of a collaborative journey (2004, p.53) and Skipp (2010, p.55) cites Krizek's challenge to narrative researchers: "in short, we often render our research reports devoid of human emotion and self reflection. As ethnographers, we experience life, but we write science" (1998, p.93).

Exactly what autoethnography is capturing and portraying is debated and substantially shaped by the two dominant streams that have emerged: evocative and analytical. Evocative emerged first, made popular by Bochner and Ellis (2002) and the second, offering an alternative option, rather than a critique of the first, is analytical, developed by Anderson (2006). Evocative is described rather than defined by Ellis, but is characterised by: making the reader feel as though they are there in the narrative; causing the reader to tell their own similar story; usually written in the first person and using the present tense. It aims to evoke a response and issues an invitation for the reader to join in the narrative, to share the feelings and possibly to tell their own story. It has parallels with Stacey's concept of gesture.

Analytical autoethnography seeks to develop empirical data that will do more than "capturing 'what is going on' in an individual life or social environment" (Anderson, 2006, p.387) and will allow for generalisations to be made, in what Anderson describes as a 'data-transcending' goal.

When undertaking autoethnography in the realm of leadership and organisations, the evocative as espoused by Bochner and Ellis (2002) felt too soft. Leaders and organisations have a responsibility to others, be they stakeholders, shareholders, staff etc, and the approach of Bochner and Ellis, Muncey (2005) and others coming to autoethnography from a social care and health background, often felt self-absorbed, reflective and self-seeking. This did not feel helpful as a leader seeking to understand and live with responsibility and expectation. Anderson's (2006) 'analytic autoethnography', seeking to give a more scientific approach (McIlveen,

2008), appeared harsh and clinical, devoid of the emotion that leadership often embodied and the 'felt sense' I was particularly keen to explore and understand. Chang (2008), (2007) offered a useful compromise, seeing Bochner and Elis' autoethnography as leaning "too far toward the autobiographical than the ethnographic end" and rejecting the ubiquitous use of Anderson's term of 'data' (Anderson, 2006, p.11) as being too scientific, preferring the term 'field notes' (Chang, 2007, p.5).

Autoethnography shares some similarities with a complex responsive process of relating approach, as highlighted by Boyle and Parry:

We argue that the process of creating an autoethnographic account involves, in one sense, an acknowledgement that there is no guarantee of a correlation between the degree of control a researcher exercises over the research process, and the resultant impact on a reader. (Boyle and Parry, 2007, p.5)

In autoethnography the writer seeks to develop awareness, surface issues, reflect on events and relationships, and develop an ongoing mindfulness, all amidst the regular daily practice of life (and in my case leadership). It accepts unpredictability and aims at its best, for an evocative connection with the reader, that provides an alternative paradigm to the generalisability of traditional research methods.

Autoethnography is defined by two of the foundational scholars in the broader qualitative research field as:

Autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look

inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations.
(Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.739)

Building on Denzin and Lincoln's definition Chang (2008, p.48) says "autoethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation and autobiographical in its content orientation".

Ethnographic captures the 'lived in' sense of the research. As Hammersley and Atkinson summarise,

...ethnography involves studying peoples actions in their everyday contexts...by studying a range of sources including participant observation research and often informal conversations. The collection of data is usually unstructured both its collection process and its analysis technique. The number of cases studied are usually small and the "analysis usually involves interpreting meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices.
(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3)

Cultural acknowledges the location of the 'lived in-ness' recognising that individuals do not act in isolation and without regard to their surroundings. Cultural scholar Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind" (2005, p.4). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner say that it is "the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas" (1993, p.6) and Lewis says that cultures have different "notions" (2000, p.4) of how we do things. These simple definitions acknowledge that cultural context significantly influences behaviour. They also helpfully allude to the fact that this influence is often

subconscious, something discerned rather than discovered.

Autobiographical is telling your own story (Anderson, 2006, p.11) and this is the final key ingredient in Chang's definition. The acceptance that you are both the centre of the story (Anderson, 2006, p.382) and its interpreter and sense-maker (Boyle and Parry, 2007, p.5; Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang, 2010, p.3) is vital. This recognition allows you to own being the centre of the autoethnography, understand the limitations that this can place on the research but also see its strengths. You understand that you are seeking to tell your story (Boyle and Parry, 2007, p.6), not in an idealised and detached way but one that roots the experience you have in the shared experiences of those who occupy the same spaces that you do (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010, p.7), whilst acknowledging and exploring the context and its cultural influences. In seeing these different aspects and their impact, we can strengthen the sense-making function (Parry, 2008, p.130) at the heart of autoethnography.

Autoethnography raises some challenges for researchers and how those are handled dictates its assessment against traditional measures of validity, measurability and consistency, even if as autoethnographers how we demonstrate those differ from traditional understandings (Boyle and Parry, 2007, p.3; McIlveen, 2008, p.1; Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang, 2010, p.3).

Specifically focusing on autoethnography, Richardson's criteria for autoethnography papers in the first edition of the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, remain a useful benchmark and are those I have sought to meet in this autoethnography:

- Substantive contribution - does the work contribute to our understanding?
- Aesthetic merit - is the text artistically shaped?
- Reflexivity - is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure?
- Impact - does this affect me, does it generate new questions?

- Expression of a reality - does it seem to be a true and credible account?

(Richardson, Denzin and Lincoln, 1994)

I agree with Dilworth that “autoethnography remains a challenge within the field of orthodox research, including the qualitative traditions, in that it claims legitimacy for what some researchers dismiss as stories” (2008, p.211), and yet it is as Crotty puts it, “an essence distilled from everyday accounts of experience, a total synthesised from partial accounts” (1998 p.83).

Limited application

As demonstrated, autoethnography is a relatively new method and whilst it has been a significant development in social sciences, its use in leadership and organisational research has to date, been limited. Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang, give a helpful, but not exhaustive, summary of autoethnography in her section ‘A Variety of Autoethnographic Tales’ in (Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang, 2010, p.1). Notable attempts to extend its use into these two research fields are highlighted below with a summary of key learning offered and how it shaped this approach.

Limited application in leadership

Angela Kelly’s PhD thesis “*The Chameleon Principal: A Reconceptualisation of the Notion of Leadership as Seen Within the Context of a Rural Primary School and Its Community*” (Kelly, 2008) utilised autoethnography to undertake a longitudinal study over a ten year period, of the experience of becoming principal of a school in North America. She explores the situatedness of the school in the community and the resultant role of the principal being leader in the community and not just the school. This understanding of the leader role beyond the boundary of the organisation being led, had parallels with my own experience and helped me to consider how to explore, conceptualise and write this aspect.

A similar context in a secondary school in UK was the setting for Jonathan Clark's PhD thesis "*Every Day Feels Like Friday, Every Friday Feels Like the End of the Term: Restarting 'the Worst School in the Country': An Autoethnography*" (Clark, 2005). This used autoethnography as a coping mechanism, as well as learning tool. He began after taking on the role of deputy headteacher of a school for boys with "emotional and behavioural difficulties", which had just been placed into special measures. He explores his identity as a professional and a leader, examining the challenges to these, during the life of the autoethnography. He also discusses the vulnerability in the capturing and telling of messiness, in the journaling, the attempts to sense-make, and even in the writing up, and this was helpful to read as I navigated those same feelings.

The number of autoethnographies that are principals or head teachers, who are adjusting to new roles or seeking understanding of their roles, is interesting. Gerald Jackman sets out to "portray the experience and understanding of the participant/observer in comparison to his training and preparation to become" the leader in the role he occupied. This unusual and quite specific autoethnography was insightful as I sought to understand what my training had prepared me for and what it had not. His use, not only of personal reflections, but also ethnographic texts of school records, also had similarities to my own approach (Jackman, 2009, p.446).

In attempting to understand the nuanced differences between leader and leadership, I found the co-produced autoethnography of James Stewart's first three months in a chief operating officer role helpful (Kempster, Stewart and Parry, 2008; Kempster and Stewart, 2010). The autoethnography focuses on and explores the development of leadership practice from a "relational, social and situated perspective"; effectively the exploration of what leading is. That it is co-produced with Kempster and Parry, experienced academics in relevant fields, who engaged in a joint writing process with Stewart, gave it a credibility that the PhD thesis

autoethnographies could not provide.

Whereas the other autoethnographies examined are focusing on beginning a leadership role and written during the role, Nasson's is a 'long-term' autoethnography which looks back on a career journey. It seeks to understand how the leader today has been shaped and in particular the authenticity that has developed in his leadership. I had begun this reflective journey, conscious of my own potential to become toxic and previous work (Hay, 2003) on toxicity had highlighted the inauthenticity¹⁴ of such leaders. He also looks at the 'transformative power' of autoethnography as a learning tool for leaders. As I sought to articulate how leaders could not just cope with the unknown but occupy the unknown and work with it to provide a better leadership, this contributed to my thinking and introduced me to the concept of life stories¹⁵ (Shamir and Eilam, 2005 quoted in Nasson, 2009, p.14), as means whereby reflection can increase self-understanding and authenticity.

Limited application in organisations

I found very limited application of autoethnography in organisations and what was discovered was often event or subject focused within an organisation rather than designed to explore the organisation, its nature or life.

Ann Cunliffe is a leading academic in this field but writes methodologically (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe, 2004) rather than autoethnographically herself, although her work on reflexive practice in organisations was helpful as I wrestled with the constructs and discourses in organisational theory (see chapters 2 and 3). Similarly Michael Humphreys' work, setting autoethnography within a broader emphasis on reflexivity, adds an unusual dimension that focuses on how an autoethnography is

14 I am using inauthentic here to describe a gap between what the leader was experiencing and what they admitted to themselves and their followers. Authentic leadership is a much broader and contested term as set out in (Gardner, et al., 2011).

15 Nasson defines Life Stories as "the life stories of leaders provide insight into meaning and interpretation that they attach to significant life events and to guide followers" (Nasson, 2009).

read. Alongside this he emphasises the challenge of ‘writing well’, something I had already understood theoretically from engagement with (Boyle and Parry, 2007) and (Krizek, 1998) but which was illustrated in Humphreys’ autoethnography. The three vignettes he uses are from his own career and so set within organisations. The vignettes also highlight the themes of authenticity, exposure, reflexivity and application, aspects that I focus on in my own autoethnography (Humphreys, 2005).

In my own journey into autoethnography, I describe the tension I felt between the two key schools of autoethnography: the evocative and the analytical. As I explain later in this chapter, I found both schools inadequate for the lived experience of leading. Manning’s paper describes how she started from a point of scepticism with autoethnography and became a strong advocate. A turning point was when she encountered Richardson saying as a qualitative researcher she was “taught to not to write until she knew what she wanted to say” (Richardson, 2000, p.925 quoted in Manning, 2008). Richardson goes on to conclude: “I used writing as a method of data analysis by using writing to think; that is, I wrote my way into particular spaces that I could not have occupied by sorting data with a computer program or by analytic deduction” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011. p.970). I shared Manning’s concern about self-indulgence, but came to conclude that it was only in writing that I discovered that the autoethnography, if written well could be evocative and if worked with sufficiently, could be a source of knowing equal to Anderson’s hard science-orientated analytical autoethnography.

The exposure highlighted in Humphreys (2005) above felt very significant as I contemplated placing myself as the sole source of data and focus of reflection. Whilst Humphreys’ account touches on exposure, Yarborough’s autoethnography (Yarborough and Lowe, 2007) emerges out of an ‘executive counselling relationship’ and his very personalised account of a leader considering whether to succeed his father running the family business. It is an embodied account,

betraying feeling, as few other leadership autoethnographies do, which combined with the context of close relationships makes it more than a simple business setting. Yarborough does for leaders what Chatham-Carpenter (2010) does for anorexics (see my discussion on this and my consideration of my own sense of exposure and vulnerability at the end of this chapter.)

Ethnography

Ethnography was not my main method but rather ethnographic elements became a supplementary and supportive method that allowed me to locate the experience explored in my autoethnography in a wider context. It gave me the means to understand the cultures of the various collectives I was a part of: staff team, board, Association of Bible College Principals, the Redcliffe community. It also gave the ability to check my own reflective writing against key documents that either reflect a particular situation I wrote about e.g. meeting notes/minutes, or gave background e.g. a report or proposal, developed for a discussion I then reflected on in my journal. This was, in Reeves' words (2008, p.2) effectively an ethnographically appropriate form of triangulation.

Just as I was seeking to sense-make in my own autoethnographic writings, an ethnographic exploration of the environment in which the events took place, helped me to check this process. As Crotty summarises

Ethnographic enquiry in the spirit of symbolic interaction seeks to uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people participating in the research, viewing these understandings against the backdrop of the people's overall worldview or culture. (Crotty, 1998, p.7)

In a constructivist epistemology as I have adopted, meaning is not discovered, but

constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. As I sought to understand how I reacted, I also needed to understand how my team were reacting and what they perceived. Ethnography offered a way to do this as it is about group behaviour. Wolcott says “ethnography is not the study of culture, but a study of the social behaviours of an identifiable group of people” (1999, p.252). I wanted to be able to understand the behaviour of the people around me and observe their reactions even whilst I reacted and indeed, caused some of the reactions. “As a process ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people” (Creswell, 2013, p.90).

Participant observation research (POR)

The problem with the scientific methods in the social sciences is that no one can stand outside human relating. Any activity named 'observation' may influence both the scientist and the social 'system' observed in ways no one can know of beforehand. (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.80)

In Stacey's understanding any kind of research is participatory and the autoethnography and ethnography already discussed, both recognise this (Crotty, 1998, p.9). POR allows for the actions of the participating researcher to evoke response and elicit understanding. Kate Fox, an anthropologist by background, has used POR creatively, for instance, exploring concepts of privacy in English society by consciously invading people's privacy (whether their personal space or their garden), to test people's response and study their reaction. Fox defines POR as “... participating in the life and culture of the people one is studying, to gain a true insider's perspective on their customs and behaviour, while simultaneously

observing them as a detached, objective scientist” (Fox, 2008), but recognises this is an idealistic view and the idea of a detached observer is naïve (Fox, 1999, p.52). What makes Fox’s approach to POR unorthodox and yet more interesting and revealing, is the she does not just participate by behaving as expected but by studying what happens when she behaves outside of the norm of what is expected (Fox, 1999, p.xxxviii). This was an approach I utilised in my own POR with questions like *“What would happen if I don’t seek to provide reassurance, as I have often sought to do in the past? Would they live with anxiety or would it become too much?, What if I am not positive, optimistic and providing a very clear lead?”* This conscious ‘acting’ in a particular way to explore reaction, was key to understanding aspects of my own leadership, as well as how the team and others interacted with me on a day to day basis. This had particular challenges for considering the ethics of the research as I explore below.

Case study

Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting...in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case)...over time...using multiple sources. (Creswell, 2013, p.97)

A late addition to the research, at the writing up stage, was a case study outlined in chapter 9. Whilst unplanned, this proved very useful to bring the learning of five years into a focus, in leading the team through a recent difficulty. It also allowed the focused involvement of the team in reflecting on their learning through my changed leadership practice. The case study benefitted from having a short timeframe for a longitudinal study (the events lasted about two months in total and the detailed case focused on a seven day period). Notes of the meetings were taken by my PA and the team was able to take time to discuss the case some two months later and reflect in a group discussion, which was again noted extensively by my

PA.

The approach of a case study seemed obvious for what I was trying to achieve here; as Yin says “the main research questions are how or why, a researcher has little or no control over behavioural events, the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon” (2013, p.312). I wanted to examine how the leadership team approached a particular issue noting my own response, theirs and the interaction between us.

Data analysis

Having engaged with Chang significantly in my search for the most appropriate style of autoethnography (Chang, 2007; Chang, 2008; Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang, 2010), I found her approach to data analysis and interpretation appropriate for my research. She acknowledges that this step in the research process is ‘methodologically nebulous’ and accepts the inevitability of a hybrid approach whilst warning of the need for patience with uncertainty (Chang, 2008, p.126).

Having undertaken the textual analysis of field-notes manually on paper (as well as for a larger section using Nvivo and Devonthink Software), I identified with her description of this stage as being the challenge of turning a “messy pile of fragmented bits...” into a “...cogent account of observed phenomena” (Chang, 2008, p.126).

Chang warns that data analysis and interpretation is not a straightforward, linear process with a defined endpoint, but when dealing with autoethnography, it is “always emergent, unpredictable and unfinished.” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.479 quoted in Chang, 2008, p.125). As the researcher, you have to give a culturally meaningful account for the data. “Instead of merely describing what happened in your life, you try to explain how fragments of memories may be strung together to explain your cultural tenets and relationship with others” (Chang,

2008, p.126). This can involve categorising, reviewing, rearranging and sometimes simply gazing at collected data “to comprehend how ideas, behaviours, material objects, and experiences from the data interrelate and what they really mean to the actors and their environments” (Wolcott, 1994 quoted in Chang, 2008, p.126); it helpfully demarcates between analysis and interpretation. He describes analysis as showing how things work whereas interpretation involves making sense of the data; if you like, why it works the way it does. The interpretation often involves non-scientific factors and Creswell suggests: insight, intuition and impression cited in (Creswell, 1998 cited in Chang, 2008, p.130). Certainly in my own memo writing (early reflective thoughts on field notes) I found these ideas particularly helpful.

Chang’s strategies for analysis

Chang suggests ten strategies or approaches to data analysis and interpretation, neither prescribing use of all, or in any particular order, but together these provided me with different techniques to probe and meaning-make.

1. Search for recurring topics

When a topic appears frequently in the data, it is likely to signify its importance in your life. Therefore looking for repeating terminology and phrases is a useful place to begin the analysis. These topics can provide categorical approaches to dig deeper and organise the data. Chang (2008, p.132) suggests that this analysis can help “to discover foundational elements of your life.”

2. Look for cultural themes

Autoethnography is significantly a cultural exercise and therefore examining the data for cultural themes can help position other findings in a broader context. For example, my own Christian faith provides a cultural backdrop that significantly

influences many other aspects of my life.

3. Identify exceptional occurrences

In contrast to the recurring topics and underlying themes, it is important to highlight exceptional occurrences and in particular first time experiences, which can change values, assumptions and prejudices significantly. The failure of the merger discussed in chapter 6 is one example of this as it challenged my assumptions around good intention being enough to guarantee success.

4. Analyse inclusion and omission

Much data analysis naturally focuses on the data that is present and ignores the data that is not. This unusual and slightly counterintuitive approach suggested by Chang, had particular resonance for this research as phase 2 included looking specifically at what was happening when nothing appeared to be happening.

5. Connect the present with the past

Chang cautions about attempts to establish correlation between past and present in a scientific way but suggests the use of logical reasoning, imagination, and intuition to explain connections between present and past. This had particular applicability where I focused on longitudinal experiences of limited knowledge.

6. Analyse relationships between self and others

There are two types of ‘others’ that Chang (2008, p.134) suggests we relate to: others of similarity and others of difference. Examining the contrast of how you relate to each can “help you see yourself more clearly”

7. Compare cases

Comparison can be somewhat difficult in autoethnography when it is the same writer writing about both but as Foster, McAllister and O'Brien (2005 quoted in Chang, 2008, p.135) say, "what matters is the difference and commonality are consciously addressed, rather than dismissed or minimised throughout the meaning making process."

8. Contextualise broadly

This process of contextualising encourages us to attempt "to explain and interpret certain behaviours and events in connection with the sociocultural, political, economic or, religious, historical, ideological, and geographical environment in which they took place" (Chang, 2008, p.136). Understanding the context does not come by only paying attention to the autoethnography but should include literature from the broader context, for example in chapter 6, meeting minutes and foundational documents are used in this way.

9. Compare with social science constructs

This approach, Chang describes as bringing literature to the narrative and cites (Creswell, 1998) as developing this possibility. The dominant social science construct that both the theoretical framework of a complex responsive processing relating, and the research approach are based on, is a constructivist perspective. This makes certain assumptions as I explored earlier in this chapter and was a useful aspect of analysis as it allowed me to question the assumptions people were making when they behaved in certain ways.

10. Frame with theories

Chang highlights that the term 'theory' in this framework does not imply a "hard-core tested hypothesis in a scientific sense" (Chang, 2008, p.137) but rather refers

to a conjecture or postulate that explains a social phenomenon. She calls these theories 'explaining tools'. I am using Stacey's theory of a complex responsive process of relating and postulating its relevance for leaders who are leading with limited knowledge. Chang (2008, p.137) says that with this strategy these theories can "guide the process of data organisation, analysis, and interpretation, and the structure of writing".

Ethical issues

(Chang, 2008, p.229) and others (Humphreys, 2005; Jackman, 2009; McIlveen, 2008; Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang, 2010; Reda, 2007) recognise that ethical issues in autoethnography are neither obvious nor simple to resolve. When combined with the implications of Stacey's work, the traditional considerations of ethics are challenged by concepts of emergence (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.28), unpredictable causality (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.17) and concerns of subject-object distinctions (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.9). These challenges, rather than being avoided, should be subjected to significant scrutiny and creative response. Therefore the standard framework for a submission to the ethics committee of the university¹⁶ was adopted and adequate responses sought.

The framework suggested consideration of ethical issues across the following aspects:

- Informed consent (Do participants have full knowledge of what is involved?)
- Harm and risk (Can the study hurt participants?)
- Honesty and trust (Is the researcher being truthful in presenting data?)
- Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (Will the study intrude too much into group behaviours?)

16 <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/researchethics.aspx> [Accessed 11/11/2012]

- Intervention and advocacy (What should researchers do if participants display harmful or illegal behaviour?)

Established ethics need nuancing

There is limited work on the ethical implications of a complex responsive process approach for research, at least in the way research ethics is usually approached. This may be in part a symptom of the newness of the theory but is also linked to the view of ethics Stacey and his colleagues have adopted which does not view ethics in the reified¹⁷ sense that has shaped common ethical research practice; as something that can be examined, defined and managed. They see it instead as a continually negotiated concept. Mead said “ethics are being negotiated *in* the interaction [my emphasis]” (Griffin, 2002, p.19).

This thinking is shaped by the key idea that participation in anything is simply an interaction of individuals with each other, not participation in a greater whole (Stacey, 2007, p.351). The logical consequence they draw, is that ethics is something that cannot be ‘pre-explored’ or ‘pre-defined’ ahead of researching but must be continually negotiated. Griffin (2005, p.28) draws heavily on Mead who argues that “the ethical interpretation of action is to be found in the interaction itself, in the ongoing recognition of the meanings of actions that could not have been known in advance”.

This does not differ greatly from an orthodox view of autoethnography, expressed by Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang as, “the researcher is at the center of the investigation as a ‘subject’ (the researcher who performs the investigation) and an ‘object’ (a participant who is investigated)” (2010, p.3). This suggests that autoethnography, even without the implications of Stacey’s work, presents difficult challenges to a traditional ethics approach.

¹⁷ Reify is defined by Stacey as “thinking of an organisation and a system as a thing” (Stacey, 2007, p.70)

The predominant use of an autoethnographic approach requires the question to be posed “Who is interacting?” Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang, suggest that it can appear in autoethnography that the subject of study is also the writer of the study, and one might ask where is the problem, but upon closer inspection, ethical issues for autoethnography break down into two main areas; the ethical issues confronted by writing about others and the ethical issues for the writer at the heart of the autoethnography (Chang, 2008, p.68).

Writing about myself

Writing about myself, my reflections and my reactions to issues I encounter, people I live, love and work with, as well as those I lead or am accountable to, gave rise to a set of issues that are not well documented. There are some reflections on the ethical issues that autoethnographers have encountered and I drew on these. Especially useful were:

1. Coffey’s work on using different sources to create a multi-layered narrative (1999, p.36) which suggests normal life is captured in multiple perspectives and voices and the ethnographers task is to construct those into a coherent whole, and that the autoethnographers task is more difficult because the task is to assemble a fragmented sense of self into a constructed identity.
2. Ellis’ commitment to autoethnography being evocative which she describes as causing the reader to say “You feel for and with her” (2004, p.140) was particularly challenging to work with in a ‘live’ leadership role. Most of the examples of autoethnography in leadership that I cite are published after the writer has moved on from the leadership role they are writing about. I was writing about a role I plan to continue to occupy after I have published the thesis and put myself, in the form of the autoethnography, ‘out there’ but I was committed to speaking with an authentic voice and navigating this ethical vulnerability is something I explore further below .

3. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) ideas around the ownership of a narrative where they consider who owns the stories that are told - the teller or those told about, was challenging and shaped the way that I wrote about my fellow participants in the narrative, always attempting to be clear that I was telling my perspective .
4. The opportunity to present a paper to the postgraduate symposium "making sense of the unknown...by talking to myself" (Hay, 2012) provided an opportunity to gain peer review and interaction on the construction of a research approach involving a theory of complex responsive process and autoethnography, that took ethical implications seriously.

These helped me to consider and begin to understand, the implications of autoethnography and the consequences of bringing self into focus as evocatively illustrated in the very personal experience of Chatham-Carpenter, writing about her 'recovery from anorexia':

It's like my anorexia and research are having an affair with each other, right under my nose, and are not even concerned about me. I'll just kick the research out of my life, and hopefully anorexia will move out as well, and my nice controlled life will be back. No one will ever have to know how much I have struggled. (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010)

In a similar fashion, scrutinising my own leadership surfaced doubts that I had not faced in years. The natural reaction in the light of this was to draw back and yet I realised, reading many autoethnographies, that the ones that engaged and convinced were those that drew me in through brutal reality, pain, suffering or honesty. If my autoethnography was worthwhile it had to be a process that confronted, that frightened and that took all of me to do it and not just some cerebral part that curated for best effect. Chatham-Carpenter continues "but if I

explore my pain and really open up, who knows what will happen?” (2010) and, even as I researched the unknown in my leadership, I ventured into the unknown in my autoethnography, and will live with the consequences¹⁸ that will emerge over time.

Writing about others

Writing my own reflections on a context, situation or relationship as well as writing about other people in the situations I describe in my narrative, people who have little if any chance to defend themselves, to clarify motives or misunderstandings, was a serious concern. As Chatham-Carpenter powerfully puts it “I faced the dilemma of how to represent others who were implicated in my story” (2010). If I examine the considerations imposed by the university framework I see a number of significant challenges an autoethnographic method and the approach of a complex responsive process, together raise.

(1) Informed consent

I concluded that the recognition of a leader is not bound by office hours or organisational boundaries and therefore I could not choose who I would have a leadership encounter with. I could not predict the people I needed to include in my writing; some were entirely unknown to me and there were certainly too many to brief about the research and gain explicit consent. Short of wearing a t-shirt saying “Warning! autoethnographer present - you may be a subject of study!” and pre-empting all phone calls with a “this call may be monitored for training purposes” type announcement, it was not practical to do anything explicit around informed consent for the majority of individuals.

My leadership team, key staff and board members had a fuller explanation and

¹⁸ Clandinin and Connelly describe the researcher as “always speaking partially naked...” (2000, p.147).

discussion about my need to write of them, reflect on my interaction with them and potentially to publish such reflections either in anonymised form or in named form.

Griffin says:

In a more conventional approach involving interviews, the ethical approach is usually to inform those whom one is writing about what one is doing and show them what one has written, concealing identities as appropriate. However a researcher writing about his or her own personal experience of his everyday work activities can hardly keep informing people that he may possibly write about what they are doing together. The best that can be done is to inform colleagues in general about what one is doing and then write about the experience in a way that does not reveal their identities but still presents a “reliable” account of what is going on. (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.223)

Highlighting the challenge of bringing traditional ethical research considerations and his own work together, he concludes the paragraph: “other than this, there are no general ethical rules to guide the researcher in the traditional sense of thought before action” (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.223). This simplistic approach suggested by Griffin may portray reality but the dismissive attitude feels out of touch with the regular dilemma of researchers considering ethical implications; namely that often there are no easy answers, no black and white areas, no clearly defined lines. Ethical considerations in research are always, when done well, a negotiated compromise that can, at the very least, ask the questions and have to live with the discomfort of not being able to give an entirely satisfactory answer.

Clandinin and Connelly quoted in Chang, highlight a good example of living with the questions, and a common problem with autoethnography, when (as I discuss on

page 125) they “challenge all narrative writers with a poignant question: ‘Do they own the story because they tell it?’” (Chang, 2008, p.69).

The area of leadership autoethnography is limited and the documentation of ethical considerations in this work is even scarcer; therefore production of a robust and meaningful autoethnography that can function in a complex responsive process of relating, offers a significant contribution to the field.

(2) Harm and risk

One key challenge in the study was that it is linked to and partially aimed at dysfunction in leader-follower relations. Whilst this was primarily an examination of my own dysfunction, it often arose in a situation where I was reacting to someone else who I may have felt was exhibiting dysfunction. These reactions and my reflections on them can be seen as critical and judgemental of the individual (and the judgement may be entirely inaccurate as it is only my subjective perception). Therefore the individual may be hurt by my reaction to their, possibly quite innocent, action.

Even with this often carefully scrutinised of research ethics considerations, Stacey refuses any externally imposed, pre-defined ethical approach, privileging emergence as a factor that makes this impossible:

Consistent with a complex responsive processes approach, the ethics of what one does as a researcher, as with what one does in all other situations, is contingent upon the situation and the emerging and ongoing negotiation with those with whom one is interacting. (Stacey, 2010, p.224).

Whilst recognising that Stacey’s position is the logical consequence of accepting emergence, this does not negate responsibility for doing harm. This is particularly

important as a 'leader-researcher' with direct responsibility for the care of the participants. Given the negotiated approach and the likelihood that the individuals at greatest risk were the closest to me and with whom I spent most time, I sought to approach this by keeping it in regular discussion with those most at risk. This did not negate the risk but, by making it something that was talked about, it made it easier for participants to challenge me about any concerns they had or felt were arising.

(3) Honesty and trust

What is honesty in reflective writing? Even if I was able to write an honest account of an experience, it was an honest account only from my perspective. This aspect is explored in greater detail with the wider challenges a constructivist epistemology presents to the research approach earlier in this chapter. McIlveen (2008) suggests that the quality of an autoethnography should be judged both by the quality of the writing and the accuracy of the account as perceived by the others involved and this is echoed by Stacey:

However it is not any arbitrary account in that it must make sense to others, resonate with the experience of others and be persuasive to them. Furthermore it must be justifiable in terms of a wider tradition of thought that the community being addressed finds persuasive or at least plausible. (Stacey and Griffin, 2005, p.27)

This traditional route to robust research, of sharing the account with participants, was often challenged by a need to allow space for emergence (and other expressions of Stacey's work that I was considering) as well as the simple constraints of confidentiality often inherent in senior leadership roles. Many autoethnographies ameliorate this by the passing of time before publication e.g.

Jackman's account of becoming an elementary school assistant principal (Jackman, 2009, p.446), where the events have been consigned to a non-threatening history. For this autoethnography many of the events and people are still an ongoing part of the current leadership landscape.

I found the question of personal disclosure very challenging. It is not always simply about being honest but about the degree of disclosure; how much to reveal. Wrestling with this dilemma I was encouraged to see Chatham-Carpenter's conclusion from Petronio's work: "I had to make choices of what to include and not to include, what privacy boundaries to keep and which ones to cross" (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010). This is the approach I used. The relationships I have with those I write about are of great value to me and in each and every shared account, the final narrative was a negotiated compromise between 'Rob the researcher' and 'Rob the leader/friend/colleague'.

(4) Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity

I made an early commitment to the use of pseudonyms but I could not at the outset say if the thesis would be immediately published or kept confidential for an initial period. I did talk through with some individuals the approach of reconstructing a fictional equivalent of a real situation and have done this in several places. These issues inevitably intruded on group behaviour, and there were valid questions that I sought to handle sensitively, but a consequential question in the light of awareness and discussion with a number of the participants was whether it would intrude too much?

The intrusion of an explicitly stated research agenda was going to have an effect, the difficulty was understanding what constituted 'too much'. Griffin and Stacey are clear that to imagine not intruding is naive, and they see the desire for a lack of intrusion as false, unreal and actually unhelpful (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.2). Too much intrusion can also be viewed from the perspective of the participants,

many of whom are friends, colleagues and family. Each relationship I honoured either as a leader, friend, lover or colleague. Balancing what was too intrusive was partly about the balancing of identity and purpose; balancing the need to research with the need to honour and protect as leader, friend, lover or colleague and so subjective lines were drawn in each and every autoethnography “Those are private boundaries that I did not want to cross” (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010, p.8).

Griffin and Stacey, in their brief treatment of research, acknowledge that research methodologies are increasingly recognising that the detachment may not be as real as traditionally portrayed and say “the fact that the observer has an impact on what is being observed is now rarely seriously questioned” (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.2). However, they do not believe this goes far enough to acknowledge the effect of iterative interaction at the heart of the theory, and indeed they would argue all research. “Clearly there can be no objective validity for the obvious reason that the research is an interpretation, a subjective reflection on personal experience” (Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.27). The problem with this approach is that in rejecting any kind of abstraction, they render all research approaches inadequate as they are all in one way or another, whether through partial accounts or a sample population, an abstraction.

(5) Intervention and advocacy

It was tempting to assume this issue wouldn’t be problematic, after all I was observing and reflecting on my ‘normal leadership life’, and yet it was an area where my researcher role and my leader role in the organisation could conflict very significantly. The researcher role may want to let a situation play out to study the full effects of, for instance, insecurity on an individual, the team or myself, but to do so may be detrimental to the organisation, the team or my own performance. In such situations my responsibility morally to the individuals concerned, my accountability to the board, my sense of responsibility to my leadership team and

my legal responsibility as a CEO of a charity operating under English law, was recognised as being likely to strongly conflict but also to help mitigate harmful or illegal behaviour on my part as researcher.

Summary of ethical issues

I wrote about other individuals in the situations I describe in my autoethnography. I wrote my own reflections on contexts, situations and relationships. The people I wrote of often had no chance to defend themselves, or to clarify motives or misunderstandings and my writing needed to reflect the tentative nature of conclusions drawn from a limited perspective. However, the key focus of the research was a critical study of my own experience of leading, and not a critical study of the practice of others. When combined with anonymised reporting of events, this meant that the ethical challenges of writing about others could be managed sensitively and effectively.

I am left with questions about writing of myself that will only be answered through the passage of time. Will writing an autoethnography of my leadership harm me? I don't know. As Chatham-Carpenter concluded, "can I do this [her own personal autoethnography] and still protect myself as a researcher? Is there such a thing as being too vulnerable for one's own good, when doing autoethnography?" (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010, p.6). She explored the personal and painful area of eating disorders and asks the very telling question I have noted in several autoethnographies, "was it worth it?" and she concludes, "I am still not sure." The cost of autoethnography is high. Done well, the cost is always highest to the autoethnographer, and the demands of baring flesh (to use the analogy of body image) to unknown viewers who may have little if any sympathy with the person inside the body, is exposure of the most daring kind.

Ethical implications and the iterative process

The value of iterative actions in research, discovery and learning, in the light of an understanding of a theory of CRPR and in particular emergence (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.258), has already been established (Avison, et al., 1999, p.2). In the light of an iterative research approach, viewing the ethics process as a static overlay or pre-conceived consideration was inadequate and an ongoing attentiveness was articulated in the following process.

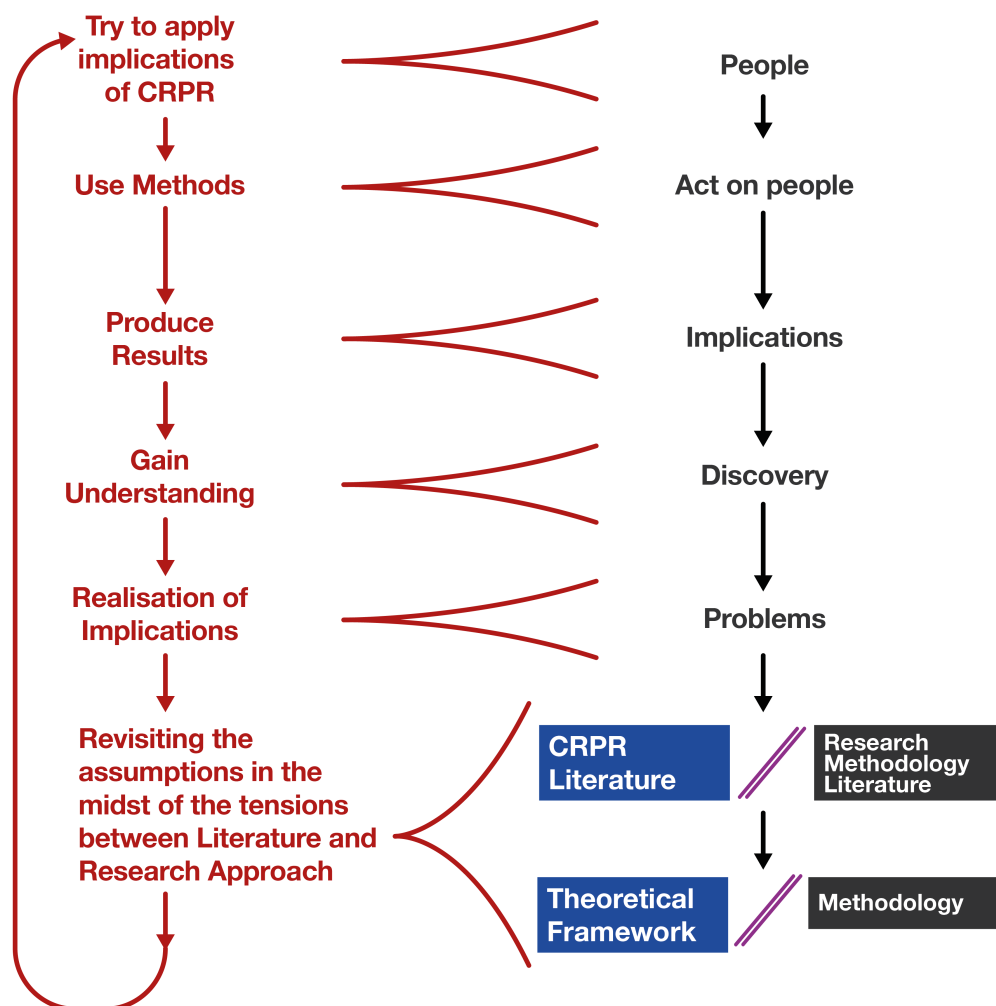


Figure 8: Iterative Ethical Process

The overall research approach relies on maintaining a tension between the implications of CRPR articulated in the literature and the Research Methodology applied to discover the implications for the lived experience of leadership. Therefore, the discovery in the midst of the research process included an ongoing discovery of the ethical implications of that evolving research. The unresolved sense of tension discussed under (1) Informed consent, was lived with by maintaining an attentiveness to the ethical implications developing, not only in the midst of the research gathering, but also in the writing process when discovery continued. Therefore the ethical implications were constantly revealing themselves and the ethical agreement described in (3) Honesty and trust, was being renegotiated in the moment and attention had to be paid to ensure it remained an ethical process.

This constant renegotiation is shown as a cyclical process in Figure 8 on page 128 but in reality was a fully integrated part of the research approach as can be seen by Figure 12: The Complex Responsive Processes of Relating Learning Cycles on page 137.

Limitations to the process

The limited autoethnographies of leaders mean issues of process and implications have had limited exploration. Some issues requiring further exploration are:

Autoethnography demands of a leader, a commitment to balancing an accurate account of events with the issues of confidentiality for the unwitting participants in a leaders world. As they seek that balance Chatham-Carpenter's question "Do all autoethnographies center on issues of control in the writing and choice-making process?" (2010, p.10) causes me to ask if a leaders skill and proficiency in decision-making, and have been often trained to be pragmatic, in seeking the most widely accepted definition of a 'best outcome', will mean they struggle to reach beyond the control that Chatham-Carpenter's reviewers criticised her early drafts

for.

Conclusion

Given the critique offered of Stacey's approach to research, the development of a comprehensive framework offers a key contribution to the work on CRPR in raising the credibility of the theory with peers and aiding researchers wanting to scrutinise and develop it further. It offers exciting possibilities for a research methodology approach that can move beyond systems orientation and individualism, to a co-constructed research approach that takes seriously the social context of this research.

Chapter 5: Research Process

This construction relies on an iterative action that in Crotty's diagram (shown on page 72) is not obvious, but which is articulated more fully in the CRPR Learning Cycles diagram (see Figure 12 on page 137), illustrating the way that the theoretical framework in the literature, the research process and the application as leadership practice are interlinked. This iterative process is not just a simple feedback loop as in traditional research methods (Lewin and Maccoby, 1958, p.201) but founded on a belief that an iterative process reveals deeper understanding (Wilson, n.d.). It allows a nuancing of approach and is based on the recognition that each iteration will be different (Suchman, 2002, p.8) because of the people involved, the emergent nature of co-created understanding and the role and effect of the researcher, who is both constantly changing and being constantly changed by his place and actions in the research process. Rather than, naively in Stacey and Griffin's view, seeking to eradicate the effect of the researcher, the iterative process will allow for an understanding of it (2005, p.32).

The cycles that follow emerged out of the research as the research approach. In seeking to construct a research approach that was consistent and coherent the reality of being a leader-researcher, a practicing researcher, drove the research approach relentlessly upon what would actually work in the midst of a busy life in leadership. The questions being asked were practical not just theoretical questions and they evolved daily in my leadership practice and so were not static or even linear in their development. Likewise, the grounded theory approach meant that the data was guiding the research and therefore the research approach needed to go where the data led exploring new types of data (leadership autoethnography) and new means of collecting it. Because it was examining my leadership practice and figuring out how to lead in the face of significant challenges through a very tumultuous period was essential, any discoveries were applied and utilised in the moment by moment experience of leading. As this pattern emerged I began to

relate each part and seek to understand the process I was evolving. The desire to delve deeper into the literature when something did or didn't work, to attempt to apply new learning and evaluate it shaped the development of the cycles and the integration into the Complex Responsive Processes of Relating Learning Cycles diagram.

The literature cycle

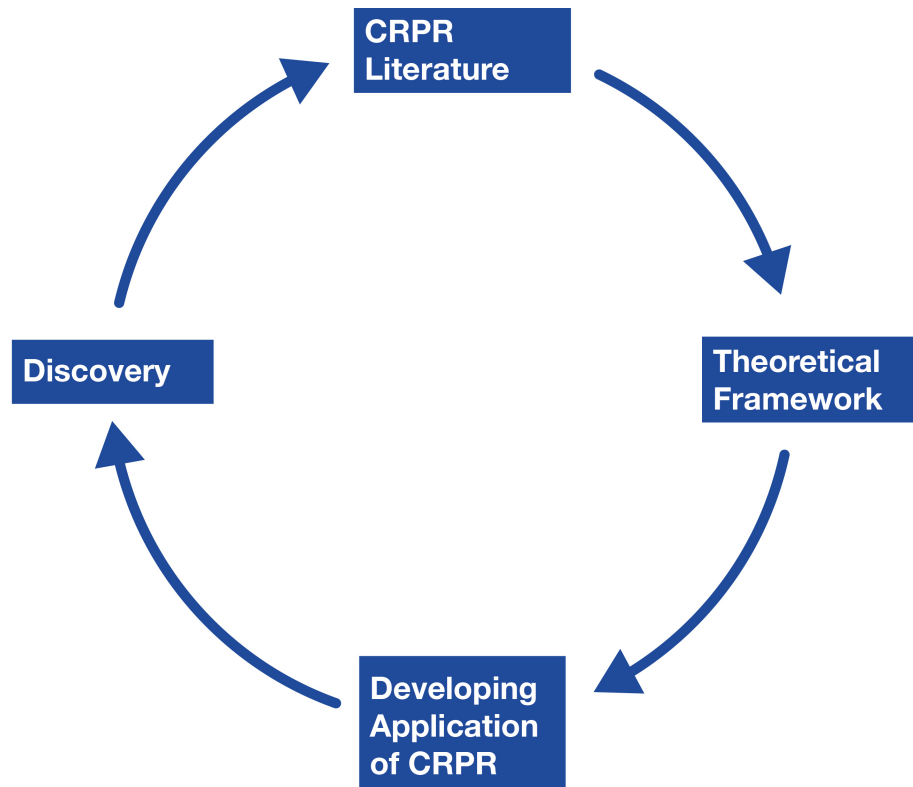


Figure 9: Literature Cycle

The CRPR literature is recent and evolving, with several significant writers and limited application to leadership practice. There was a need to draw out the implications for leadership practice from the emergent theory. This was not just a theoretical exercise but had a focus on how to live and lead with a CRPR perspective; therefore repeated engagement with the literature, alongside attempts to apply its implications, were made throughout the research. As discoveries were made, not in a positivist sense but rather a pragmatic ‘what worked’ way (see the development of ‘good enough’ as a useful concept in this process as summarised in chapter 9), the learning could become part of practice and my focus could move on to see further implications in the literature, adding to the overall research and playing a part in the research cycle.

The research cycle

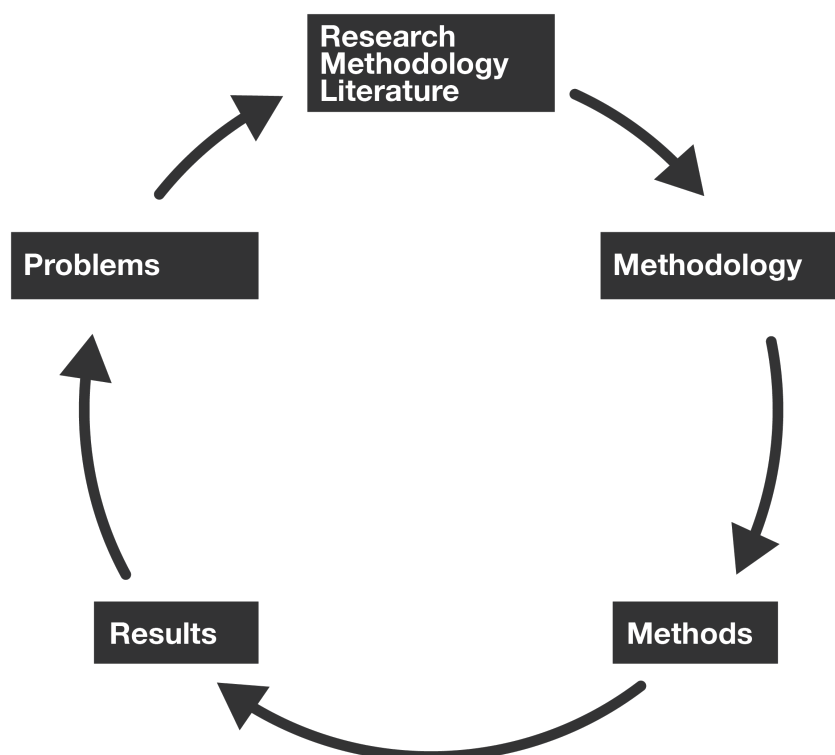


Figure 10: Research Cycle

The research process is a construction (Crotty, 1998) built to suit the needs of the research question. Holloway and Todres (2003) suggest it should have consistency and coherence (p.346) and is often an iterative process in development (p.352). Using those values and responding to the shortfalls in Stacey's approach (see chapter 4) this study sought to take the **Research Methodology Literature** in relevant areas and develop a working **Methodology**, to allow exploration of the key research questions, the development of and use of **Methods** to conduct the research, production of **Results** and identification of inherent **Problems**, and then an inevitable revisiting of the **Research Methodology Literature** to attempt to address those problems and improve the methodology, methods and results. This process was an ongoing cycle of research in the midst of practice: discovery whilst leading. This action research approach evolved both the approach to research, my leadership practice and my own thinking as illustrated in the application cycle.

The application cycle

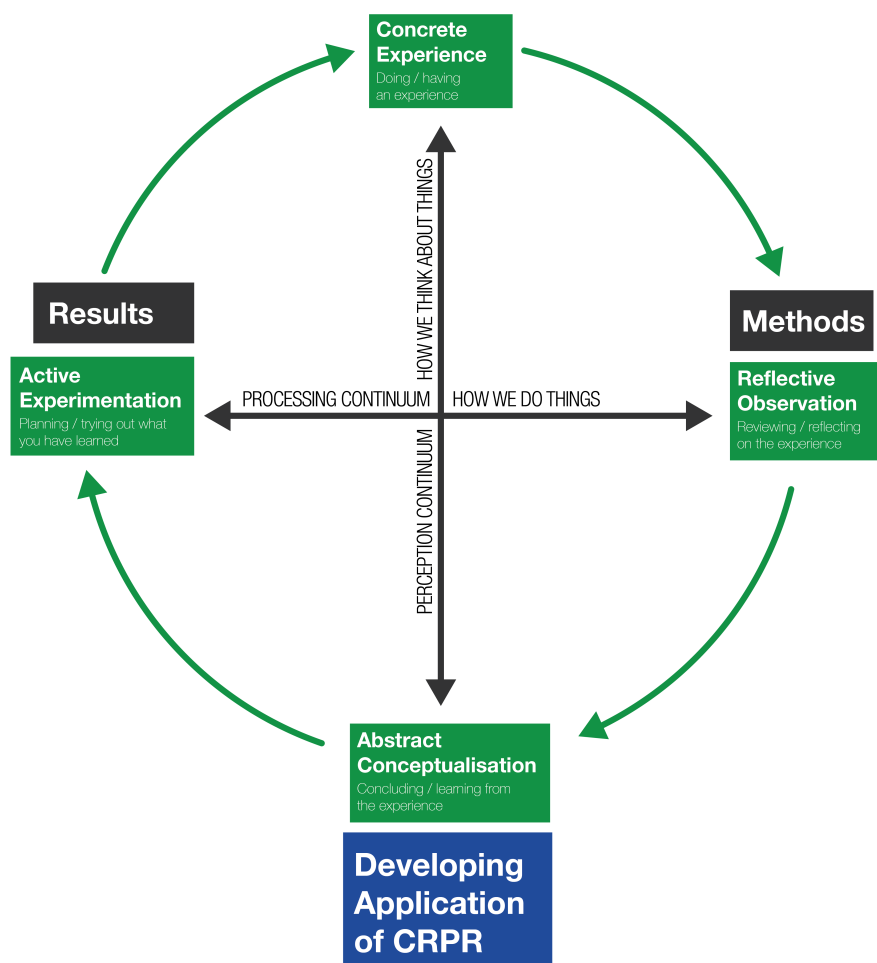


Figure 11: Application Cycle (influenced by Kolb, 1984, p.51)

In addition to the process of the first two cycles, is a third that intersects both of the previous cycles and links the **Developing Application of CRPR**, with the **Methods** of research being adopted and the **Results** being observed. How successful these results are is determined in the **Discovery** section of the 'CRPR Literature Cycle' and the **Results** and **Problems** section of the 'Research Cycle'. This application cycle is based on Kolb's learning cycle (Kolb, 1984, p.51), adopted because it offered an established cycle of action learning with similar values to CRPR as outlined in chapter 3. The continuums of thinking and action (included here but excluded for purposes of clarity, from the main diagram) were strongly influential in the eventual development of the Circles of Leadership Practice in a Complex

Responsive Process of Relating Perspective diagram - Figure 24 on page 261 which articulates a constructed CRPR leadership practice that includes action, thinking and assumptions. Each of these three processes were followed simultaneously to develop this research and although discrete disciplines, they interrelated in a complex lived-out autoethnography in the midst of a busy leadership role. This complex inter-relational dependency is illustrated by bringing them all together in the CRPR learning cycles.

The Complex Responsive Processes of Relating Learning Cycles

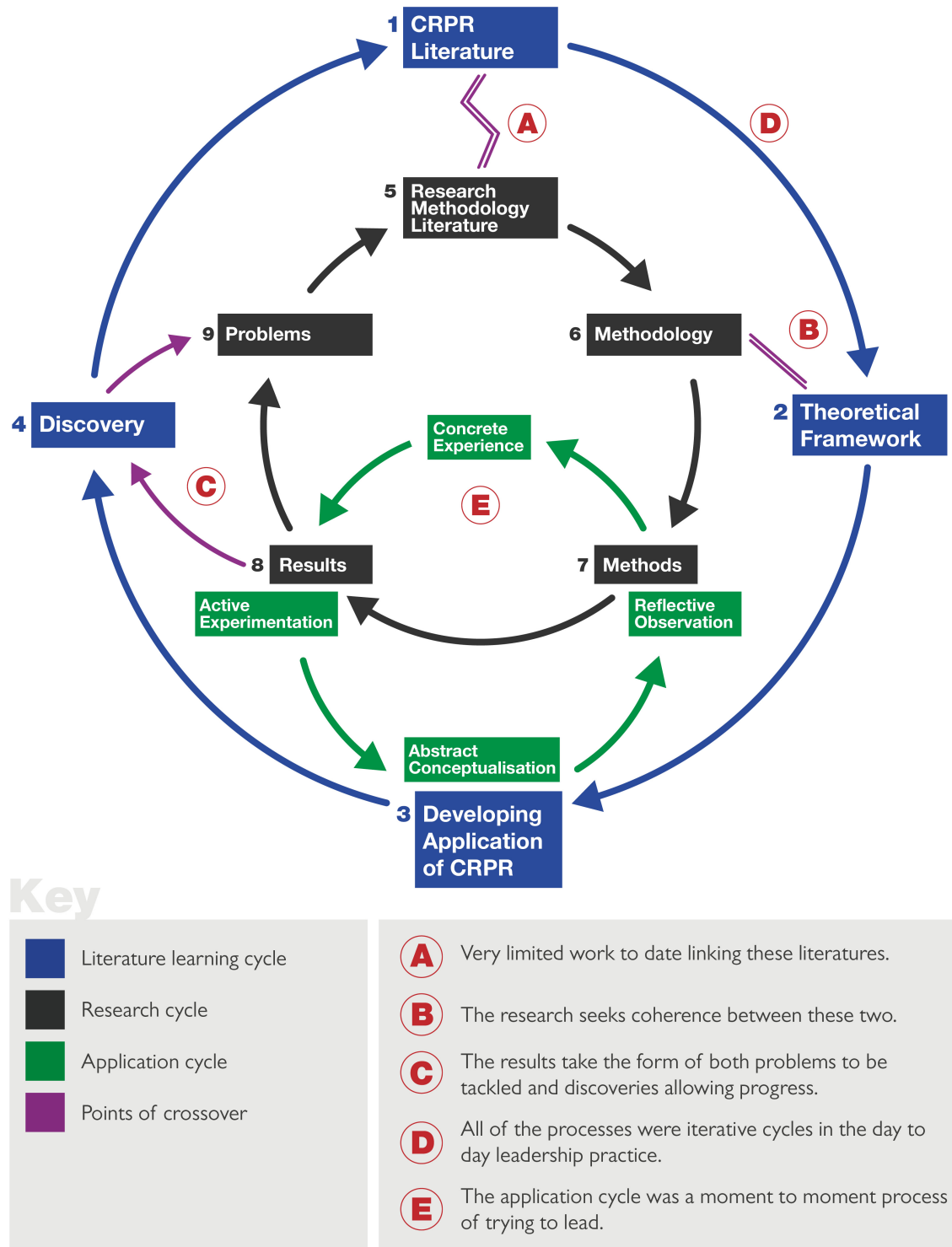


Figure 12: The Complex Responsive Processes of Relating Learning Cycles

From the **CRPR Literature** (1) a **Theoretical Framework** (2) was developed pertaining specifically to leadership practice that recognised the limits of a leader's knowledge. Tools to aid the leader's recognition and understanding of limited knowledge were developed - **Developing Application of CRPR** (3), and through an iterative process - **The Application Cycle** (E) were tested and refined. In this process of testing and discovery, the theory was placed under constant scrutiny and the original literature repeatedly revisited, with the expectation that each iteration will yield a greater degree of understanding (Stacey, 2007, p.266). Although I recognise that there are weaknesses in the research approach developed by Stacey and his colleagues that I discuss in chapter 4, the value of iteration as a process of discovery (not in an empirical sense but rather a 'making sense of experience') and learning, is emphasised in the student research experience of the DMan Programme at Hertfordshire (Stacey and Griffin, 2005).

The research process

Five sets of empirical data were developed across three phases of research:

Phase 1 – Becoming aware – discovering the extent of (my) limited knowledge

Chapter 6 – A leader confronts his limited knowledge

Phase 2 - Exploring limited knowledge in leadership the light of a theory of CRPR

Chapter 7 – A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

Chapter 8 – Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

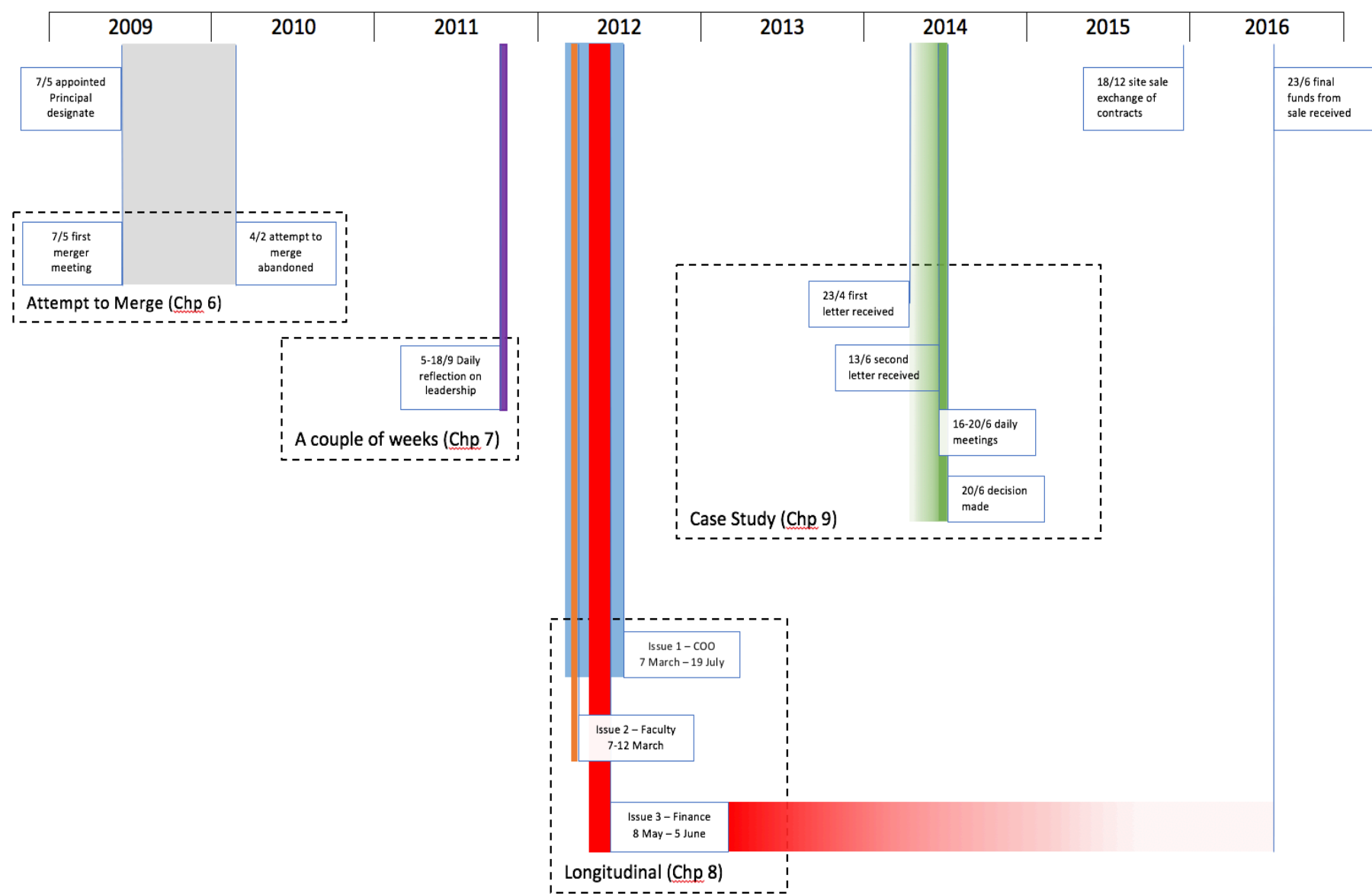
Phase 3 - Changing my leadership practice - living the learning in my leading

Chapter 9 – Observing my emerging leadership practice

The first phase explored the extent and nature of my limited knowledge, the second explored the implications of the theory of CRPR for leadership practice and the third explored my emerging practice, as well as observing it in a specific but originally unplanned case study. The first chapter was event based reflection on my

leadership and the second was a daily reflective practice study, particularly reflecting on leading when nothing substantive appears to be happening. The third was a journal-based reflective practice on three leadership issues studied longitudinally. The fourth was action learning orientated reflections on my changed leadership practice, living, teaching and leading, and included a case study on group experience with CRPR.

Timeline of research phases correlated with chapters



Methodology of phases and chapters

Phase 1 – Becoming aware – discovering the extent of (my) limited knowledge

This first phase of research was observational, seeking to observe my leadership practice, and discern where the unknown was encountered. Through doing this I was able to examine both the extent and nature of my limited knowledge as well as reflecting on the effect it had.

Chapter 6 - A leader confronts his limited knowledge

Data gathering

The planned approach was to undertake a reflective study of my own experiences of leadership, having recently taken up a top level leadership post and leading the organisation through some major changes.

I did this by keeping a reflective journal on my own experiences of leading. This was an occasional journal, rather than a daily or weekly one, that particularly allowed me to reflect on leading through periods of change. It was kept by means of dictated audio files which were then subsequently transcribed by my PA. I also collected together documents that were relevant to the leadership experience in those time periods. The journal sought to be a free writing reflection, but within the overall process I recognised that I was interested in the following:

- What leadership issues did I face?
- Where did the ‘unknowability’ factor play into the challenge of leading?
- How did the unknown make me feel?
- How did the unknown make me behave?

The time period of this approach was September 2009 - December 2010 and includes reflection over the key phase of merger exploration between announcing

the intention publicly to merge, through the decision not to merge and the process of communicating that non-merger.

The data is drawn from about 40 reflections over the time period and 100 supporting documents including emails, meeting minutes, job descriptions etc.

Data analysis

The data for phase 1, focusing on the merger, was the most extensive of all the phases, with hundreds of pages of journal reflections, minutes of meetings, identity documents and emails. Early on, whilst still collecting data for this phase, after attending an Nvivo training course, I began to enter the documents onto the database and practice using the system. Whilst I eventually found an alternative system which I used for the final analysis, this helped me to discern some of the key themes running through that data and allowed me, whilst in the iterative process of data collection, analysis and findings, to be more aware of the areas I should be reflecting on in my autoethnographic writing.

However, in 2014 when I undertook the bulk of the data analysis, I still had such a large volume of data, and so much time had passed, that beginning to get started on the data was difficult. I loaded the whole dataset, into Devonthink (a smaller and more flexible equivalent of Nvivo) and utilised its artificial intelligence function to categorise and perform frequency analysis. This allowed me to search for 'recurring themes' (Chang, 2008, p.132), particularly across the minutes and documents related to the merger. These were examined both for frequency and strength and linked to my own reflections on the 'degree of unknown' (later termed 'limited knowledge' but at this point of writing the autoethnography I was using the term 'unknown') and the 'consequences of not knowing' (later termed "consequences of limited knowledge" but again, at this point of writing the autoethnography I was using the term 'consequences of not knowing').

Chang's analysis strategy (2008, pp.131-137) also assisted in other respects with this dataset; 'connect with the past' allowed me to unearth and imagine the effect of historic events in the preceding twenty years, on the psyche of those involved in negotiations in 2009/10. The role I played as CEO of one of the two organisations trying to merge was an area of significant reflection and to 'analyse relationships between self and others', can be quite revealing about me as a leader, and the primary author, and subject of the autoethnography. Finally, the constructionist perspective, 'compare to social science constructs', allowed examination of the perceived realities by the different parties involved in the merger.

Phase 2 - Exploring limited knowledge in leadership the light of a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating

This phase was the heart of the research with simultaneously interaction between the literature on CRPR, methodological considerations for research, and my leadership practice, primarily through a continuing narrative autoethnography. The autoethnography focused on a period of time when my leadership practice was challenged and began to change as I engaged with a theory of CRPR and sought to practice my leadership in the light of it.

In particular, in my reflections I examined:

- What leadership issues did I face?
- Where did limited knowledge play into the challenge of leading?
- How did the limited knowledge make me feel?
- How did the limited knowledge make me behave?
- How did a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating inform the experience of leading with limited knowledge?
- How did my engagement with a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating change the way I reacted to situations characterised by limited knowledge?

Chapter 7 - A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

Data gathering

This was a daily reflection on general leadership through a short period of 2 weeks. It was specifically designed to avoid being single-event focused or indeed to be event focused at all. Rather it attempted to capture the mundane, routine activities and to explore what was happening and how I was leading, when no event was dominating my attention; effectively, examining what was happening when nothing obvious was happening. This used the template (Appendix 5) as a framework to give a focus and consistency, whilst still leaving room for emergence and the unexpected.

Data analysis

With 14 daily reflections, written from the field-notes, completed each day utilising the template which had headings to guide the reflection, it was reasonably simple to carry out a straightforward, manual combining of data from the 14 days. This resulted in an 'experience narrative' (sample data included in Appendix 4). As the writer of the experience I sought to follow a memo writing process (Charmaz, 2014, p.72) to summarise 14 days reflection under the particular headings to give an overall document that narrates the conscious process of engaging with the unknown (discerning the points and extents of limited knowledge). This was then subject to a second stage of thematic textual analysis shown in Appendix 3.

Chapter 8 - Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

Data gathering

Leadership is a long-term thing! This is obvious in theory, but in the heat of the day it can often get lost in the midst of practice. Attempting to reflect on my leadership

experience, primarily using a daily journal, made me realise that particular events, issues or encounters, even ones that caused quite significant reactions in me at a particular time, were soon past and easily forgotten. Once I realised this, I decided I needed a way of being able to flag up a particular issue very quickly and then be mindful of it. I utilised a small, purpose-built database where I identified an issue and started a thread where I described the issue, rated the level of unknown and rated the likely consequences of the lack of knowledge. I also noted general reflections in a free text field. I repeated this rating process several times over the 'life' of the issue to explore how the 'feel', effect and degree of unknowability varied and examine the effect it had on me as leader. Although it was a crude and simple database, it had the advantage that it was available on my laptop, iPad and iPhone and therefore was almost always instantly accessible to me, allowing the ability to capture an instant reaction. This was important because much of the impact of limited knowledge on leadership is about how it makes the leader feel in the moment. This approach enabled me to capture my reaction to a situation or circumstance, explore what feelings it aroused, and the fear it gave rise to. These feelings, especially fearfulness, could subside quickly, and therefore capturing in the heat of the moment was vital to provide data that accurately represented experience.

The database simply captured five fields:

1. the date on which the entry was made,
2. what the issue was,
3. a rating of the consequence I felt the issue had (a simple 1 to 5 rating),
4. some free-form notes for me to write an autoethnography entry, and finally
5. a rating of the degree of unknown (again, 1 to 5).

Screenshots of the iPhone version where I captured most of the data are shown below:

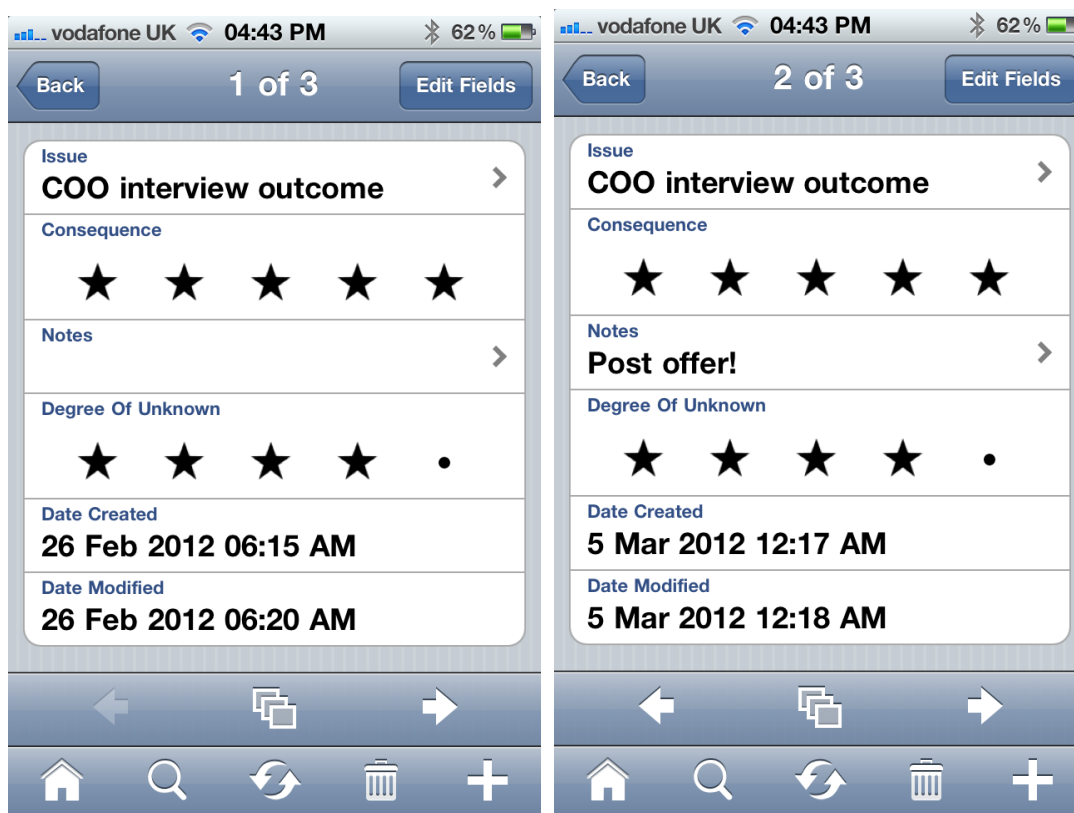


Figure 13: Examples of iOS database for longitudinal study.

Simplicity was an important consideration in this process. In line with my participant observation researcher status (Chang, 2008, p.89), I wanted to be able to blend in, and so rather than suddenly pulling out my research file, I could simply enter a few brief details into my iPhone. My team were used to seeing me do this for anything from notes for minutes, to diary entries and reminders.

Once developed, I used this database to track a number of issues that arose during the research phase (and I continue to use this in my ongoing leadership practice). Consistent with the Research Approach (chapter 4), iterative cycles of development, application and discovery were utilised to both refine the tool and provide research data. The three key issues that I focus on in this chapter are diverse: one being the recruitment and appointment of a key role, the second a

conflict issue between staff, and the third, the discovery of a serious shortfall in financial income. Tracking a cross-section of issues was important to develop a useful approach that could be used with confidence in diverse contexts.

The 'level of unknown' was a subjective measure about the limitations of knowledge around the issue, whereas the 'consequence' was the possible effects of the limited knowledge i.e. a key member of staff taken critically ill might rate highly with the degree of unknown, perhaps because their life is at risk, but if their role is easily covered, then for the focus of the study, the consequence would rate lower. In contrast, we could be quite confident and well prepared for an imminent quality assurance review process and therefore the degree of unknown would be low, but the slim possibility of getting a poor rating would give a high consequence rating.

Data analysis

Data from the iOS database was downloaded onto a desktop and initial analysis conducted in two ways. Firstly the consequence and degree of unknown ratings were extracted and entered into a spreadsheet, so that change over time could be plotted as a visual image to be kept in focus during the second stage of analysis. The second stage involved entering the free text field notes into Devonthink and conducting analysis on theme, both frequency and strength. Additionally, key relevant documents including minutes, emails and plans were added to the Devonthink analysis to give an integrated narrative account.

In late 2014, as part of a second stage analysis, the field notes, related documents and frequency analysis data was reviewed, and a 'rewriting' of the field notes, a technique for autoethnography recommended by Bolton (2010, p.9) was undertaken.

Phase 3 - Changing my Leadership Practice - living the learning in my leading

Key themes had emerged in my leadership practice during the research discussed in chapters 6-8. As I had sought to lead in a way consistent with a CRPR perspective I had experimented, reflected and analysed. In this phase I sought to articulate those emergent themes and practices in teaching, lecturing and explicitly, in my own leadership. This phase allowed me to reflect and refine the research findings before seeking to draw conclusions in chapter 10.

Chapter 9 - Observing my emerging leadership practice

Data gathering

Over a 12 week period I had the opportunity to teach and lecture on key themes developed in this research. Articulating them in presentations, engaging students and fellow leaders in these ideas and in doing so further refining the themes, proved extremely helpful. I sought resonance with the ideas I was sharing as a means of testing the research findings. The data takes the form of ethnographic notes outlining key points of the presentation and autoethnographic field notes highlighting and outlining discussion of points of interaction, difficulty and reaction.

Additionally, an unexpected and unplanned opportunity arose to use a leadership situation as a case study, this time involving my leadership team. This enabled me to exercise my changed leadership practice, examine it through my own autoethnography, and then undertake a group debrief two months after the event, to conduct a group reflective practice session.

Data analysis

I viewed the status of my changed leadership practice at this point as “‘living the questions’ differently and living different questions” (Ladkin, 2011, p.14) and

therefore, was observing my own behaviour and the behaviour of others that I was sharing my findings with. I continued to include Chang's analysis approach but I also found Muncey particularly helpful for this phase, where reflecting on connections she examines vulnerability, discovery and embodiment (Muncey, 2010, pp.139-144).

In the case study context, I utilised Bolton's reflective writing process (Bolton, 2010; 2014), and in particular the insights from her work on reflective writing and team development (Bolton, 2014, pp.186-195) shaped the process I used. The leadership team members produced a free-writing reflection on the experience, focusing on how they felt, as well as what we were doing as a team whilst facing a serious problem. These personal narratives were then shared in a group meeting and discussion on our experience as a group led to the discovery of new insights and, through extensive note taking by my PA, an observational and reflective narrative of the group experience was produced. This enabled me to reflect further on how my changed leadership practice was changing the leadership practice of the whole leadership team. This process is an applied version of what Stacey describes himself:

Another 'technique' which can be used in discursive, narrative forms of coaching is that of writing. It is very helpful for leaders and managers to write short narratives of troubling events they are currently experiencing and then inquiring into these narratives in the group. (Stacey, 2012, p.109)

Chapter 6: A leader confronts his limited knowledge

Research Overview

Phase 1 – Becoming Aware – Discovering the extent of (my) limited knowledge

Chapter 6 – A leader confronts his limited knowledge

Phase 2 - Exploring limited knowledge in leadership the light of a theory of CRPR

Chapter 7 – A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

Chapter 8 – Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

Phase 3 - Changing my Leadership Practice - living the learning in my leading

Chapter 9 – Observing my emerging leadership practice

This chapter focuses on the first phase of research, that was observational and drawn from ethnographic and autoethnographic field notes¹⁹. It analyses a key event which made me aware of the role of limited knowledge in decision making and in particular highlighted the consequences that 'not knowing' can have on events.

It is structured to allow the experience to be portrayed in an evocative narrative (Bochner and Ellis, 2002, p.113), with the experience being reconstructed from field notes that capture chronology, a lived experience of leadership, feelings, reactions and responses. This has parallels to Stacey's 'Reflective Management Narrative' (for example Stacey, 2007, pp.326-338). What follows are two sections that provide analysis. The first, examines where the unknown was encountered, what the nature of that limited knowledge was and the effects of the encounter with the unknown. The second analysis section draws out the implications of this phase. In subsequent chapters, an additional section considers how a growing

19. In this chapter and throughout the empirical data, pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. For more detail please see the discussion on privacy, confidentiality and anonymity in chapter 4 on page [125](#).

understanding of a CRPR and a methodological approach to engaging that theory with the researchers leadership practice, altered the experience of engaging with the unknown and the ability to work with the limited knowledge to achieve a better outcome from the leadership.

Narrative: Merger/Non-Merger

This is a narrative covering a twelve-month period from the end of February 2009 when I became principal and inherited a merger proposal that was just getting underway, through to February 2010 when it was called off. It seeks, in the words of Bochner and Ellis, verisimilitude, “evok[ing] in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (2004, p124 cited in Stow, 2005 p.27), and so is told as an extended narrative with analysis and interpretation following in the subsequent two sections.

Inheriting a merger

I was working part-time as a lecturer and was a member of the leadership team when in September 2008, my predecessor stepped down. A colleague (Charles) became acting principal for the academic year 2008/9. He was very clear from the beginning that he did not want to be principal on a permanent basis. Only a few weeks into the year, he asked to see me and sat me down in his office and very bluntly told me that he felt I should be the next Principal of Redcliffe. Being in a non-line-management role after a very demanding line-management role previously, I was in no hurry to accept his suggestion.

Six months later (February 2009) after an external recruitment process had failed to recruit someone to the role, Charles sat me down and repeated his assertion. Still content with my current role but taken aback by his certainty, I said I would consider it if other members of the leadership team felt the same. They did; the team of five were unanimous. Still I resisted. "We must do it properly. Go through

a full interview and take up references," I said. Was I hoping for a change of heart on my part or theirs? I was not sure, but this at very least was due process!

On the 7 May 2009 I was interviewed...by the whole staff team (approximately 30), because choosing a selection of staff when they all worked with me day by day seemed incredibly false and artificial. I was interviewed by two trustees, the two that had most reservations about an internal appointment (or perhaps about me being appointed - I am not sure). Having insisted on following that formal process it was only fitting that they didn't tell me the outcome until the next morning on the 8 May 2009 at 9:10. I remember the time quite vividly because it was 20 minutes before the acting principal and I were due to go into a pre-arranged meeting with representatives from another college to begin a process to merge the two colleges. Had I just landed the shortest principalship in history? Was I simply appointed to figure out how to hand over the college I had just been appointed to, and was that a relief or a disappointment? I had no idea! How did I feel? I had no idea about that either - it was all happening so fast.

I remember the surreal start to the meeting. I had met the principal of the other college before and visited the college, but the flow of the meeting was either unexpected, or at least surprised me. The acting principal opened the meeting and welcomed the visitors. He then went straight on to announce my appointment, the one that had happened 30 minutes before, and then effectively handed over the running of the meeting to me as the principal designate. This was not unreasonable behaviour but talk about 'flying by the seat of the pants'. What was more troubling as I look back on it is the realisation that I had not had time to come to terms with either development, becoming principal or seeking to merge. I didn't know what the challenges were for me, for the college and certainly not for the merger!

How it all got started

Pinning down exactly how and where it got started was one of the most difficult and I suspect problematic aspects of the merger attempt in 2009. A minute from the Redcliffe board of 23 September 2009 (30/09) gives an account:

A meeting had taken place between Steve Wright and Charles Johnson, followed by another attended by Steve, Charles and the chairs of the two governing bodies. Out of that it had come to both boards that a working group should be set up to begin to explore whether it was worth looking at merger. There had been two meetings. David James had represented the Redcliffe Board and there had been two members of the Newlands College Council (Edward Stockwell and George Jones) plus the Execs. The first meeting had got nowhere, but at the second meeting the question had been asked "In five years time, what could we imagine the future of mission training to be and do we share it?" That had taken us to a different place. The working group recommended that there was mileage in pursuing merger. It had been proposed to both boards to undertake the process of discovery, due diligence, discussions about logistics of merger and, if all that was okay, how we could go from where we are now to merger.

Minute 30/09

However, in undertaking this research, I found several earlier aborted conversations. In 2003 there was an informal meeting between the colleges, the notes of which mention an approach by Newlands College 18 months before. There was a further meeting in 2004 which included one of three scenarios being merger (to include discussion of the possibility of a new, joint location). This

meeting had seven representatives from Newlands College and five from Redcliffe. It is interesting to note that even at this stage the role of the board was much more prominent at Newlands College than Redcliffe, with four of the seven Newlands College representatives being board members in contrast to only one (excluding the principal) of the five Redcliffe representatives.

It's also interesting to note that compliance costs were beginning to have an effect back in 2004.

A further problem facing both colleges has been increased expenses due to Health and Safety and employment legislation.

Minutes of meeting 7 July 2004

There was a tension, spoken of only a few times - were we exploring merger because of financial imperatives or shared vision? This tension that emerged in the 2009 merger attempt was present in the discussions in 2004 and was around the relationship of faith and finance.

Rodney Fritz pointed out that there is a creative tension between the financial people who want to get things viable and safe, and the call to be reliant upon God. He emphasised that this was not an argument for financial imprudence.

Peter Attingham suggested that we should be looking at the matter through the eyes of the accountant, whilst also retaining Rod's 'tension', so that we were realistic but not lacking in faith. Above all, we needed to search to know what God wanted for mission training in the coming years. Was it that we merge, or go our separate ways, or what?

There is a tension between realism and trust, a lot of retrenchment is taking place in God's work. We should consider that perhaps God is saying "Get realistic, see what is happening." God did provide and we must trust him but we were now in an age when the economics in the country are having a great impact on the Kingdom. We need to bear this in mind.

Minutes of meeting 7 July 2004

What was the driving force for the merger?

Clearly this had been unclear over the years and the different attempts.

If we based a movement forward on the problems we have, this would be understandable, but there would be no vision in this. If we decided that the way we train people has changed and requires a combination of ourselves and maybe others, this would be a better reason for merger.

Minutes of meeting 7 July 2004

How should we approach the decision?

Stuart asked the question as to whether we should first get all the facts together and then make a decision, or did we feel sufficiently strongly that this was the right thing and so make a commitment now and then make enquiries for the proposed merger?

Minutes of meeting 7 July 2004

As I read the notes from the meeting of 7 July 2004 for the first time, I was struck by the sense that while both parties felt they ought to be talking, neither side appeared to really want to. The costs that were outlined, the issues foreseen and the complexities involved, from the perspective of the participants, all suggested a 'can't do' attitude. One got the impression that both parties were talking but each desperately working and praying that their fortunes would improve and they wouldn't have to venture down the route they were talking about.

The outcome of these early discussions was not obvious and was eventually found detailed in a joint meeting that took place in 2007 with the very simple line:

Nothing substantial had come from those meetings and both colleges decided that they needed to press on with their own visions, whilst keeping open the lines of communication. The possibilities of combined working, or even merger, had been raised, but had not gone anywhere.

Minutes of joint Newlands - Redcliffe meeting 17 February 2007

I am struck now how much this echoes the press release we eventually put out after the failure of the 2009/10 discussions.

The notes go on to say:

It was pointed out that, at that stage, the Redcliffe Governors had been more interested than the Newlands Council. This had coincided with an upsurge in numbers at Newlands and the discussions had lost their urgency from Newlands' perspective.

Minutes of joint Newlands - Redcliffe meeting 17 February 2007

At a personal level I don't know what to feel. If I had read the notes of this meeting ahead of the discussions we embarked on in 2009 I don't think I would have gone there. In fact it feels as though, had I known then what I know now, I would have

started with a really hard set of questions to ask both organisations at the very first step. I suspect that the answers I would have received would have caused me to turn around and say to the Board of Redcliffe, "If you want to investigate merger seriously, I am not prepared to lead it, not because I don't believe in it but because I don't think there is much chance of success."

I find these words really difficult to write because partnership is what I have spent so much of my life working for and I passionately believed in the merger, and yet as I read these previous attempts I'm left with a sense of hopelessness and little surprise that the merger failed.

How much the conflagration of events compounded issues remains difficult to assess but certainly there was little time to reflect, and the ability to be mindful (even if I had understood the concept well at the time) was limited, with several new and unknown situations simultaneously presenting themselves, all of which inhibited awareness and the ability to probe the unknown. Linked with this, being in a newly-appointed leadership role, I was unlikely to have been openly expressing doubts, and followers with a new leader would be unlikely to challenge and engage in the way they may have done with an established leader that they knew well.

The issue of location was, and in many respects remains for me, the largest unknown in the attempt to merge. The locations were much more than simply places to function and work from, they were part of the identities of the colleges and provided security and 'knowns', amongst many unknowns. For Newlands the location issue was understandably harder than Redcliffe, which had made the move to Gloucester from its historic site in London in 1995. The place of the current site was incredibly important for Newlands, not just to staff but each individual student. This was highlighted by a Redcliffe Board member who had been a student at Newlands. She related to the board the story of Aunt Ellen and the remarkable gift of the site. We joked that she glazed over as she told the story, but it highlighted that the site was part of each student experience and an example to

them about learning to walk by faith and God's ability to provide.

Certainly it is clear now that in earlier attempts changing site was not feasible for the Board:

Merger was not an option, since Newlands were committed to remain at their present location, but one idea was the possibility of one organisation which ran two campuses, whilst sharing things like finance, marketing and administration.

Minutes of joint Newlands - Redcliffe meeting 17 February 2007

The concerns about site on both sides were an area of suspicion and speculation. Were Redcliffe (or Newlands) really willing to move? Was merger really a possibility or was the other party only interested in taking over?

Steve had changed his earlier stance that the only merger that would be considered would involve a move to their site, although it was felt that it was doubtful if the Board had changed their view on this.

Report from Charles Johnson who had met with Steve Wright
circa January 2009

The tensions over location remained an unresolved issue through the process:

While talks regarding issues such as name and location are still in the early stages, it is envisaged that the merged college will operate from the current Redcliffe and Newlands College campuses in Gloucester and Lancashire from August 2010, and on one site from September 2011.

Draft Press Release v3 - 23 November 2009

Criteria were used to attempt to provide an answer to the site question. Which site was more affordable? What site would allow for growth in the years ahead? As I review these now I see a comparison with Stacey's case study (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.444) where he spends time with an investment bank board considering an acquisition and concludes that they were trying to find data to support a decision they had already made. I also conclude that the criteria being used for future needs was entirely wrong. We did not need somewhere to allow us to grow in a traditional manner; we needed to be able to contract for reduced residential student numbers, to become more agile and cope with massive shifts in the market. Potentially envisaging a placeless existence in the future may ironically have been more prescient!

How committed to the process were we?

Hesitation can be heard in reading the refinements to drafts of the press release announcing the merger.

The UK's two leading mission training colleges, Newlands College and Redcliffe College, have announced plans to merge in August 2010

Draft Press Release v1 - 17 November 2009

The UK's two leading mission training colleges, Newlands College and Redcliffe College, have announced that they have agreed to the principle of merger.

Draft Press Release v3 - 23 November 2009

I recall at the time some Redcliffe Board members voicing concern to me that the tone of the announcement was not more excited and did not convey the scope of the vision they had seen. Were the Newlands members' hesitations wise and

prudent because the merger did fail, or did they speak into existence the doubts?
Did these doubts outweigh the 'faith' spoken of about the role of the new board:

A new governing body has been appointed, which will act as a 'shadow' board until August 2010, and take the strategic decisions regarding the future. Lee Moxon, Director of Mission UK, is a member of the new board.

Draft Press Release v3 - 23 November 2009

It is clear that as late as November, the hope that the existing Boards could hold the unknowns long enough to allow a new board to take the bold and courageous decisions for a bold and courageous new college, was still alive.

Power, identity and control

These two versions of the press release, talking about each college, consciously or unconsciously show a power play going on about the standing of each of the colleges coming into the merger.

Redcliffe College is the oldest non-denominational mission training college in the UK. Newlands College came into being in 1972, as a merger between Newlands Missionary College, Heathfield College and Gove College. Following this merger, Newlands College rapidly became a world leader in cross-cultural mission training, according to George Jones, former National Director of FMZ and currently deputy chair of their governing body.

Draft Press Release v1 - 17 November 2009

Newlands College came into being in 1972, as the result of a merger between three other colleges and became the leading centre for mission training in the mid-eighties. Redcliffe

College is the oldest non-denominational mission training college in the UK and has grown steadily since it relocated from London in 1995.

Draft Press Release v3 - 23 November 2009

Why, if we were creating something genuinely new and exciting, did we need to prioritise the existing? I find this a deeply challenging question to this day. As someone who is strongly and vocally averse to the obsession with leaving a legacy, I question my own transparency and integrity in this issue and strive to deal ruthlessly with insecurities I carry that can contribute to this, because it is clear that it can hinder so much that is good.

Where on earth do we go from here?

The 4 February 2010 is a date that will always be etched in my memory. This is the date that I made the most significant decision of my leadership career to that point. This is the date I was part of saying 'No' to one future scenario that I had just spent the last 12 months and thousands of hours working towards, imagining and casting before others as a plausible and exciting future.

The decision was effectively made in a Tesco supermarket cafe. We (the trustees of the college) sat in a corner of a nondescript but convenient supermarket café to discuss our approach to the meeting ahead. We talked about the process of the last year, the progress that had been made, the expectations of the many interested parties and the developments of the last 6 weeks. How much can happen in 6 weeks! There had been a growing sense of unease about the candidness of the Council of Newlands. It had reached a point where we were sitting talking and felt that if that lack of candidness and transparency remained, especially over the location issue, we would have to walk away. A concern that had emerged over the last 6 weeks that the initial agreement for merger had been based on the agreement to proceed with merger open to moving site, either RC to NC, NC to RC,

or both to a third new location. It had been agreed that the new board we were forming as a joint entity to take over and supersede both boards, with more new people than existing ones, was the right place to make that decision.

Arriving at the meeting there was an air of tension. Lee was chairing, his second meeting as an external chair. He started the meeting by suggesting we needed to review where we were at and what we felt at present.

Several hours later, we left the meeting knowing the merger would not go ahead. It felt right, but I was utterly devastated. If it was wrong, why had I allowed Redcliffe to spend so much time on it? If it was right, why hadn't we managed to do it...and was walking away a terrible mistake? Certainly I had no Plan B (something I realised was unusual for me) and what actually happened was that we spent the next month 'not merging': doing interviews, responding to questions, talking with peers, staff and students. It was only after that, that I drew breath and realised I needed to grieve. We had a review at Redcliffe, more of a wake than a postmortem, where we looked less at what went wrong but more on what we had lost, the unrealised hopes and dreams, and also vocalising the fears we had felt during the process. "Where on earth do we go from here?" was not just my private question but one I voiced to staff in this process, and one that after a significant period of reflection, we began to try to answer.

Now as I look back on that process, that was so very helpful to all of us, I wonder if space for reflection and discernment at the beginning, when I became principal and began the merger process, all on the same day, might have given a different result or at least a better process?

Analysis: Where was the unknown and what were its effects?

I used field notes, memos and minutes as source documents, collating and coding these using keywords that expressed a sense of lacking information or a limitation on knowledge which was often expressed as uncertainty or confusion. From this I

was able to identify those areas where I perceived limited knowledge. Several key themes emerged and for each I sought to explore the limitations of knowledge and examine the effect of the leader having limited knowledge. Additionally, primarily to examine my own leadership practice in context, I then speculated on how limited knowledge could have affected the process and the other parties engaged in it. It particularly required that I engage with the feelings it aroused and their impact on me, not just because I was a leading actor in the story, but because the story being told was my story, from my perspective. In this endeavour to look at feelings I was significantly aided by Tobin's chapter **The paradox of detached involvement** in (Griffin and Stacey, 2005) as this focuses specifically on the place of feelings in the life and the functioning of the leader.

“My predecessor stepped down....” - The departure of the leader

The narrative opens with a change, the departure of my line manager in the form of the previous principal. This immediately cast a shadow of uncertainty and unknown over the college and its staff. He'd been a source of continuity, leading the college for ten years and the void he left was palpable. The empty office, being an immediate and powerful reminder, though quickly and symbolically filled with the acting principal, continued to feel different and unfamiliar. His absence now made his presence previously even more powerful as a source of certainty and reassurance; his leadership was made more explicit in his absence.

Losing the leader caused a feeling of limbo. For all the discussion in the literature about concepts of shared leadership (Pearce and Conger, 2002) and my own studies in post-heroic leadership (Dutton, 1996) since, I am struck that in this and other experiences, the felt presence of the leader and therefore subsequently in this instance, the felt absence of the leader, was significant. It felt as if the certainties that were there had largely disappeared. This created a sense of paralysis, a 'not knowing' how to act without the leader present and was particularly acute in the

time between when Chris announced he was leaving and Charles being appointed as the acting leader.

Ladkin's leadership moment (2011, p.28) (see Figure 4 page 28) provides a framework for understanding leadership as more than an individual, and offered insight as to why this phase may have been so disorientating as well as revealing that what was being called into question at this time was more than simply who the leader is or was. The 'moment' illustrates that leaders relate to followers but they do so in a particular place and time that is influenced by both a purpose and a context. Which of these is dominant can vary and I will examine the role of each in this event.

Redcliffe still had a **Purpose** after Chris resigned. It was clearly set out in the business strategy, something that the team had worked on and which due to Chris' dislike of business planning, had been very much a leadership team effort. In addition, the board of trustees, the holders of the vision and values of the organisation, were still in place and yet the sense of uncertainty over pushing forward with purpose-orientated activities was evident; each time we discussed an aspect of the implementation of strategy after Chris' departure, there was a hesitancy. Was this because we expected a new incoming leader to change the purpose?

The **Context**, in Ladkin's terminology, was a particular place and time, in this instance dominated by the departure of the leader. In the dominant leadership discourses, the leader is generally seen as providing the means to navigate a context of uncertainty (Stacey, 2010). In this situation the uncertainty was increased by the departure of the very person who it was suggested was necessary to navigate the uncertainty safely. Ladkin, in her work on aesthetics of leadership supports this conclusion suggesting that "absent presences....exert forces and influence." (2011, p.38).

The **Leader** can also create leadership in the moment and in this situation, where the purpose and context felt uncertain, we can see why it is common to talk solely of the leader when we talk of leadership. The leader appears to lead followers through turbulent environments even if what s/he is doing in reality is facilitating the followers to navigate together (Ladkin, 2011, p.150).

The absence of leadership is not fully addressed with a temporary replacement and so the lack of a leader remains the dominant context throughout the year and in this particular period of time the context appears to exert the primary leadership in the moment. In the absence of a leader, other individuals within the interaction do not need a leader to facilitate that process (Ladkin, 2011, p.150), and yet it felt as though someone had to give us, the individuals, permission to act in the situation. When the leader is absent, who has the authority and power to step in and lead the process of dealing with something especially if it entails dealing with peers? It would appear from this process that the facilitating role of the leader is important; followers need to feel enabled, legitimised and empowered. We clearly did manage to navigate the situation with limited leadership because the organisation continued to function, but I would suggest it was a struggle as is highlighted by the fourth element of the moment, the followers.

This situation left the **Followers** offering limited leadership into the ‘moment’ because the context dominated. Certainly they could not answer Ladkin’s call that “all of those involved in its [the moment’s] enactment need to attend to its systemic and dynamic nature, not just the ‘leader’.” (Ladkin, 2011, p.180) In other words, followers can step up and offer leadership into the moment (Ladkin, 2011, p.177) but they are only one of the four forces at work and in the particular place and time of this leadership moment, were overpowered by the context.

A personal insight

The departure of the leader in this instance also had a significant personal effect on me which was not fully evident at the time. Later in this chapter I acknowledge

and discuss the confusion I felt around the concurrent appointment as principal and the progression of the merger, and in the next chapter begin to see the role of the context of the leader affecting their ability to engage with limited knowledge. The ‘backdrop’ to the narrative of the merger was my own sense of loss. Chris was the man my wife had helped to recruit when she chaired the student interview panel back in 1998; he had recruited me to return to the college and then he persuaded me to join the staff team. I had failed to see or acknowledge this loss and need for me to “attend[ing] to the immediate, visceral response one has to a particular individual or situation.” (Ladkin, 2011, p.184). This realisation of my own emotional reaction only came into clear focus as I reflected further on this whole phase in 2014, five years later.

“Had I just landed the shortest Principalship in history?” - What had I signed up to?

Being appointed to a role, and then almost immediately contemplating that role ceasing, or at the very least radically changing, opened me up to significant areas of unknown. The two things together, the potential of the new role and the potential of the merger were interlinked, and each made the possibility of exploring the other more difficult. The near simultaneous events made it particularly hard to reflect, process and find understanding. Not knowing whether I had signed up to be principal of one college, principal of a new combined college, or a redundant principal not needed in a new combined college, made the first year in the position a strange one. I was disorientated by both and yet did not pause sufficiently to consider either fully and so the two issues causing disorientation became a compound confusion. The individual unknowns were merged into a complex mass of identity, emotion and motives, which even now I fail to fully and confidently make sense of.

If I’d had the time, when they both happened, I may have been able to separate the two, make sense of them individually, combine them back together and develop an

understanding of how and where I fitted in this context. Being unable to figure out confidently where I fitted into the context meant that I was constantly doubting my own motives, and I'm left with questions about how our motives shape what we do and whether our motives are ever really pure and selfless, and how do we know? As I look back now, I can see that the effects caused me to be 'thrown'. It was only later that I discovered Heidegger's concept of 'attunement' (Stolorow, 2013). It is the state in which we come to something and seek to understand it. In particular he used the word 'thrownness' which was the language I had used in my field notes, to describe when we don't react well to an existential reality. He suggests we resist acknowledging being thrown because it makes us feel out of control and highlights our lack of power to choose. This can cause us to ignore feelings even though we are, at some level, aware of being thrown.

The discovery during the research, of several other earlier attempts to merge, was a significant shock. Knowing how something has emerged, where it is rooted and what causes it, orientates how you approach it (Deal, 2003, chp.5). Steve and I, thought we knew where the merger idea had originated and we functioned and responded in the light of that. It became the datum point around which we operated and yet it was wrong. This mistake, this clear expression of very limited knowledge, made it less likely that we would reach our intended destination because we continued to make decisions that built on this initial incorrect assumption and therefore the limited knowledge we had unwittingly begun with was multiplied.

Once those previous attempts were unearthed and the relevant documents included, I was able to look back on the ethnographic trail, viewing meeting notes over two decades. I was powerfully struck by these questions: Why did we keep on failing and even more puzzling, why if we kept on failing, did we keep trying to merge? What drove us to try again? Was it the push of feeling weak and threatened, or the pull of sharing a sense of common call? It is difficult to discern the answer to these questions in the previous attempts and clear answers eluded

me in this merger endeavour. It seems that asking the right questions was difficult in this process: “Sometimes the things about which we most need to ask are those that we most readily take for granted” (Ladkin, 2011, p.166).

Another historic unknown seen in the minutes of several attempts and evident in this one, is a sense that unless the trustees knew all that they felt they needed to know, the process could not move forward. So not only was there a need to ask the right questions, there was also a need to accept that some questions could not be fully answered. The failure to recognise and act upon the limited knowledge held back both the process of asking the right questions and finding ways to live with the limited knowledge. In addition, because the previous attempts had not concluded well, the questions they had left unanswered regarding failure, disappointment and suspicion, hung in the air as unanswered questions. They remained unanswered because the majority remained unasked and for the individuals involved in those previous attempts, these questions played into their own mix of intention and confidence. Sadly, rather than being potential sources of learning what might make a merger successful, they were doubts and fears that inhibited the discussions, eroded trust and prevented exploration of the as yet known potential expressed powerfully in the image of ‘newco’ – the working name for the new combined college.

Out of these historic unknowns came a very personal question; if I had known then of the previous attempts and the related information I know now, would I have been prepared to embark on this attempt? I like to believe that I would not have willingly accepted either the role of principal or the task of merging, without asking significantly more fundamental questions at the very beginning, and possibly would have declined both the role and the task.

“What if?” - The unknown that still remains

There were so many unknowns, and many remain to this day. What would have happened if I had behaved differently, if I had declined the role, if I had known the history, if I had known the key people? All of these ‘ifs’ were unanswered questions that I carried at the time and some that I continue to carry. Would any of them have made any difference? That is the question that I was left with immediately afterwards, and the one I have revisited many times since. I saw very quickly, perhaps even before that fateful day when it all came screeching to a halt, how much little things, small gaps in knowledge and lingering unknowns could ripple and multiply to have course-changing effects. This was something I later understood when reading Stacey’s work on how everything that happens, has its root and takes place in a local interaction (Stacey, 2007, pp.304-305). It was this experience that drove me on, not only to discern the unknowns, acknowledge them and live with them, but actually to embrace the unknowns and in so doing, discover that they are either not as scary as they seem from a distance or that over time, by holding them in close proximity, they offer a knowledge and cease to be unknown.

The long-term and perhaps permanent unknowns are the ones that have the greatest effect. They are the ones that we carry as scars or limps perhaps for life or certainly until a crisis comes that causes us to confront them and bare our soul open to ourselves. The ‘what if’ of the merger is something that I have thought about most days in the 6 years (2190 days) since the 4 February 2010. It is the challenge of possibilities and consequences that have emerged as ripples ever since. It is partly because of the interlinked and compound nature of these different events that writing an organisational autoethnography, even now, felt like walking naked through the corridors of your own organisation and those of your peers. Because in doing so I reveal those areas of persistent nakedness and that will inevitably affect how people will view me now and in the future.

Implications

The implications drawn from this phase of research arose out of the focus on where the limited knowledge (often at this stage simply identified as the unknown) was discerned as well as the extent of that limited knowledge. This was the specific focus of this first phase. They are identified here not as findings to draw conclusions from, but rather implications of this initial research phase to guide the focus of the subsequent phases described in chapters 6-9.

The 'unknown' is always there

This research brought an early realisation that the unknown was all around me, all of the time whether I knew it and acknowledged it, or not. When I was tempted to act quickly and decisively it was often because I was encountering the unknown, felt that I should know, or felt that I would be safer if I did know. By acting (in ignorance when I lacked knowledge), I caused things to change, the focus to shift and therefore suddenly felt that I did know more...because I had caused it. In reality I only knew more of the resultant situation not the original situation preceding my action. I also did not know the range of other possible realities that could have emerged from the preceding situation, if I had not acted as I did, when I did. I had pre-empted emergence and 'speed birthed' something that was still germinating, growing and maturing and could have emerged in quite different form if left longer, allowed to emerge naturally, delayed in coming forth, or a whole range of other possibilities. I had effectively shifted my focus rather than dwell on the view until it became clearer.

Limited knowledge limits action

Where limited knowledge is felt, action is required to ask the questions and challenge the limitations of knowledge, but this requires an acknowledgment which can take courage. Asking questions instead of taking action sometimes seems the

more difficult option, perhaps because “expressing ‘not knowing’ can be difficult for those leading, who may equate leading with knowing.” (Ladkin, 2011, p.168). I saw in the merger a reticence to discuss the purpose in seeking to merge, perhaps because it was felt to be a question that was assumed to have an obvious answer and often as Ladkin observes (2011, p.166), those are the most difficult questions to ask.

It is a paradox that the reticence to ask questions perpetuates the discomfort of not knowing. This discomfort made pursuing the merger hard and difficult to maintain. In contrast, in other areas of discussion we saw a refusal to progress because of limited knowledge but in these areas it was not possible to increase knowledge at that particular point - we could not reduce some aspects of the unknown. A lack of knowledge was not what was inhibiting progress, rather it was the unwillingness to make the act of progressing, an act into the unknown, accepting that this was the only way to push back the boundaries of the unknown because it was new territory and therefore unexplored and as yet unknowable.

Having time to pay attention is important

Examining the unknown (limited knowledge) is important and begins by having the courage to ask questions, but it also requires time, space and capacity (something I later define to include well-being) to ask questions and in so doing to sense-make. The merger process was inhibited in this important area by geographical distance, the availability of trustees and in one particular instance, the weather, each of which limited the time to engage in key areas and ask the questions that needed asking. My appointment to the role of principal became confused because of several different things happening simultaneously. I was too busy taking up the roles and not paying attention to “one’s own reactions and responses to situations [which] should not be ignored in deference to the viewpoint and perspective of the other but instead should be held in balance with that of the other” (Ladkin, 2011, p.162). I was busy paying attention to the staff I was

suddenly leading, the new context in which I was leading, the merger discussions and many other new things, but I was not paying attention to myself. I needed to be able to make sense of my feelings about the role, my understanding of it, what my identity was as leader, the implications of the merger and the interplay of these. Exploring effective ways of paying attention in my leadership practice amidst a busy and demanding role would be vital if I was to effectively engage with my limited knowledge.

Context is vital

The context of the leader's absence dominated in the narrative of the departure of the leader, the context of me being affected by the leader's departure inhibited my functioning, and the context of the merger discussions on the back of a trail of previous failed attempts constrained exploration of limited knowledge in the current merger attempt. The context here, in the way Ladkin uses it (2011, p.27), is the backdrop to the current scene, the backstory to the current narrative or what is going on that is not in direct focus. Recognising that context deeply affects the ability to do many of the other things discussed in these implications, finding ways of understanding the context and its effect on me as the leader in a particular situation at a particular time is essential. Understanding how the context might limit my ability to pay attention, make time and space to reflect, and be able to explore and understand motives as well as sense and acknowledge emotions (Fineman, 2003, p.114; Griffin and Stacey, 2005, p.77), will aid me in my engagement with limited knowledge. Intentional exploration of Heidegger's concepts of 'thrownness' as a means of discerning discomfort and the use of 'attunement' as a suitable response to it could be useful aspects of leadership practice.

Leadership was perceived as being synonymous with the leader

It was clear that a simple understanding of leadership as being entirely or at least very substantially synonymous with the leader as an individual, was dominating peoples thinking in the departure of the leader situation. We observe that leadership gets lost without a leader, giving rise to the feelings of being in a vacuum and feeling in limbo. In this environment followers feel they need permission to act. This is far from Stacey's view of leadership (2012, p.3), from Ladkin's articulation of the leadership moment (2011, p.28) and other emerging theories such a distributed (Spillane, 2006) and shared (Pearce and Conger, 2002) leadership. It is also evident in the merger that Steve and I, functioning as peers rather than leaders, struggled to act into a number of issues because we did not feel that we had the permission to do so. Therefore, examining further the role the leader plays in an encounter with limited knowledge is important and in particular, the effect a leaders' absence has needs to be examined more closely.

Limited knowledge applies to past and present, as well as future

Much of my concern to this point had been about the unknowns the future held, but this phase helped me see that limited knowledge about the past or the present, had and continues to have, significant effects on assumptions we make about understanding the current context. Knowing where we start from and what effects history and previous experience is having on each of the individuals involved in an interaction, is vital as are hopes, expectations and dreams for the future.

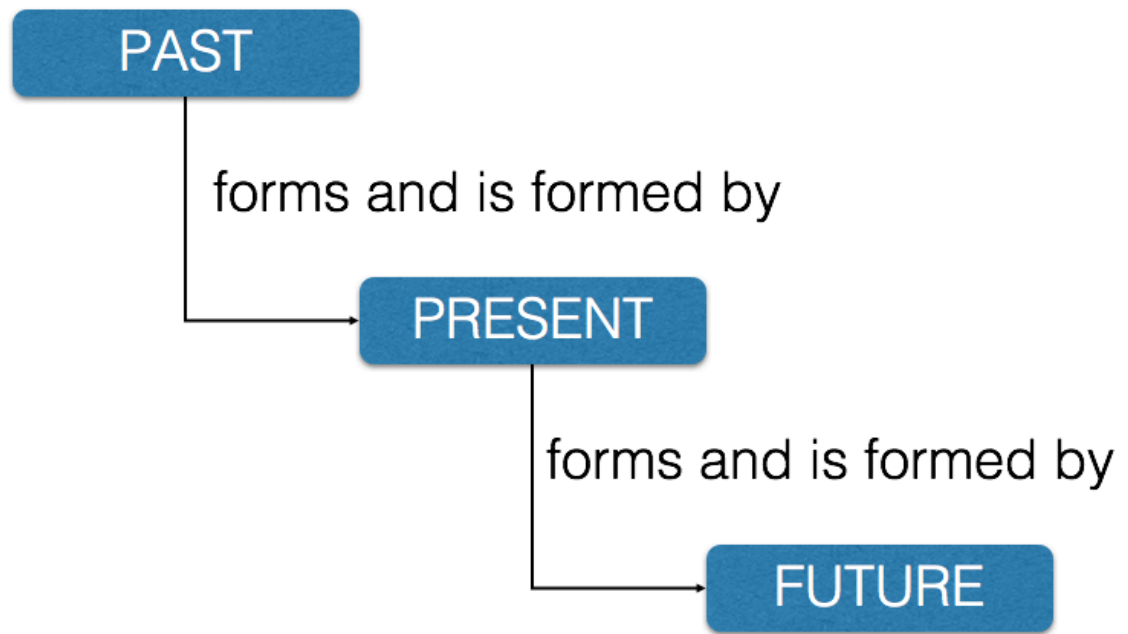


Figure 14: Limited knowledge in past, present and future

Suchman, in his application of CRPR to health care recognises this when he talks about “the ‘historically contingent’ nature of ‘beliefs about the world and self’” (McNamee and Gergen, 1999, p.20 cited in Suchman, 2002) affecting actions in the present.

I see this in my own ongoing questions of ‘what if’. Those questions from a past experience continue to affect me: haunting like ghosts that both challenge me not to make the same mistakes again, question my own abilities, highlight my weaknesses and pose the constant question of whether I could do any better next time. I need to further examine how I can be aware in my present leadership practice of the influence of the past and the expectations of the future.

Conclusion

This chapter covers a crucial stage in my own leadership journey because it was where I began to recognise the degree of unknown within both my own leadership role and the organisational endeavours I led. It was from this experience that I first began to engage with Stacey’s theory of CRPR and began to conceive of the

research question that was to evolve. For this reason, there is limited engagement with Stacey's theory in this chapter, but the implications that I took away from this first phase provided the starting point for the more intentional reflections in phase 2 and the iterative process outlined in chapter 4 shows how the implications from one phase revise and shape the research in the next phase.

Chapter 7: A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

Research Overview

Phase 1 – Becoming Aware – Discovering the extent of (my) limited knowledge

Chapter 6 – A leader confronts his limited knowledge

Phase 2 - Exploring limited knowledge in leadership the light of a theory of CRPR

Chapter 7 – A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

Chapter 8 – Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

Phase 3 - Changing my Leadership Practice - living the learning in my leading

Chapter 9 – Observing my emerging leadership practice

From chapter 6 I understood the need to look more closely at several themes. Firstly, how I could discern limited knowledge in my leadership practice. I saw in the merger how large events can draw my focus and yet important and significant issues that affect my ability to lead can be less than obvious to spot amidst the busyness of leadership. Therefore, in the research for this chapter I consciously focused on examination of my leadership practice in a time period where there were no big events happening and the day to day business of leading the college was the main event. This attention to the more mundane (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003) and how leadership actually gets done (Stacey, 2010, p.92) is very limited in the literature. When you have a big decision, a big challenge or a crisis, it is usually quite obvious where your knowledge is limited in what you are facing as a leader. This is seen in the previous chapter, where an event dominated my thinking over a whole year. However, day to day there are often many areas of limited knowledge, which I concluded we tend not to consciously notice. Whether this is through self-preservation as a coping mechanism; what Stacey calls ‘a good enough holding of anxiety’ (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.367), or simply through

limited awareness, is not clear. Looking across these findings and the themes that emerged, gave me insight into how I dealt with the day to day unknown, the limited knowledge with which I lived on a daily basis, that I was often unaware of previously.

Conscious of the busyness of leadership, I felt an urgent need to focus attention on me and my capacity to notice and engage. It was already becoming clear that my own ability to focus affected my perception of an event and therefore my ability to make sense of it and act into it. Therefore, "...the way any perceived phenomenon is known is entirely interwoven with the viewpoint of the perceiver" (Ladkin, 2011, p.17) and consequently my own sense of wellbeing, 'how I felt', constrained me and was an important area to explore.

In chapter 6 I had also seen the consequences of not asking questions, contrasted with the value of asking questions as a way to discern existing limits of knowledge and as a way engaging with the limited knowledge to learn and to know. I developed and used the template (Appendix 5) to aid my reflection, by helping me ask the right questions and to ask them consistently and therefore reflectively help me make sense of what was going on (Stacey, 2012, p.98).

Finally, having observed that leadership was often regarded as synonymous with the leader, I wanted to examine the gap between Stacey's articulation of leadership (Stacey, 2012, p.3) and my own experience, in particular by looking at what happened when nothing appeared to be happening, and what happened when the leader resisted the impulse or demands to act?

This chapter signalled the beginning of my engagement with my main theoretical framework, Stacey's Complex Responsive Processes of Relating, for analysing what is happening and beginning to understand better how leadership happens in my own practice.

The findings

In this section I analyse the amalgamated field notes into an experience narrative (Appendix 3) using Chang's strategies for analysis of an autoethnography (Chang, 2008, p.132) (also outlined in chapter 4, page 114) and identify themes that dominated my thinking. The analysis references the relevant section in the field notes using line numbers in brackets but includes key excerpts to aid the reader. Narratives such as I am using here are time consuming and it is worth a reminder from Stacey on why I used them extensively; whilst "underplayed in the dominant discourse, narrative articulations of experience are of enormous importance and constitute major forms of knowledge" (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.435). They were the means by which I could learn in a way that did not disconnect from my leadership practice but allowed me to learn and engage with CRPR in the midst of it.

From the unknown to admission of limited knowledge

I started this phase with a dawning realisation that a more nuanced understanding of the unknown was revealing it to be limited knowledge. This meant that during this two week period what had been an amorphous, oppressive and frightening mass (the unknown) was becoming something that required attention but could reveal possibilities. Stacey says "...how they [leaders] think powerfully affects what they pay attention to, and so what they do." (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.xvi) and I began to see that if I lingered long enough I could begin to discern specific shapes within the unknown. Viewed this way, it already began to resemble an exciting playground to explore that held unlimited possibilities.

When I asked myself where I saw the unknown affecting the challenge of leading in this phase, I noted that "I see this everywhere..." (103²⁰) and soon decided that the

20. The numbers in brackets throughout this section refer to the line numbers in Appendix 3 - the textual analysis undertaken on the rewriting of the fourteen daily journals. A sample of the original journal data on which the rewriting is based is included in Appendix 4.

challenge was “...having the courage to recognise it and admit it!” (103) to oneself and to others. This admission was still a difficult thing for me to do in two key respects: it made me feel less like a leader was supposed to feel, and it caused my team to feel uneasy and anxious.

The most significant effect of the unknown was undoubtedly in causing self-doubt for me, and challenging my sense of self. In my notes I talk of the very challenging feeling that “‘not knowing’ invalidates my leadership” (106), predominantly because I felt the expectation that as a leader I should know, firstly because I have been influenced by the literature that equates leading with knowing (Ladkin, 2011, p.168) and secondly, because not knowing “...hinders me being what I think people want me to be.” (107) Stacey and Mowles say that this “...highlights how we have come to understand professionalism in management as being about knowing, rather than the daily experience of most managers of both knowing and not knowing at the same time.” (2015, p.502). The realisation that I exist in what Stacey calls “a state of knowing and not knowing at the same time.” (2015, p.504) is an area I need to explore further but would seem to require me to pay attention and be able to discern the boundary between known and unknown more clearly as a leadership activity.

Admitting to limited knowledge was also difficult for my followers because they clearly expected me to know, particularly to know things that they did not, and especially at times of uncertainty (64-68). Stacey notes this tendency with incredulity in the opening of his book dealing with the financial crash of 2009:

“Despite what is so obvious, a great many people simply refuse to seriously consider the consequence of not knowing what is happening, which is that there is a major contradiction between the organizational reality of uncertainty and the beliefs that we have about the capacity of executives to know what is going on and be in control.” (Stacey, 2010, p.1)

This caused me to question whether I have unwittingly fostered an environment which makes staff less likely to think differently and provide impetus for change. Do they see that simply as my role? Stacey and Mowles say this is commonplace now in contemporary organisations (2015, p.498). In small limited areas I see that when “...I have held back and intentionally sought to draw out ideas from them...” (66), and not offered knowledge, but admitted a lack or limitation to my knowledge, this has drawn-out ideas from them and the results, when this happened, have sometimes been significantly better than I would have achieved on my own. Holding back can be difficult for both leader and followers, but Stacey and Mowles warn that if we do not “...the opportunity to explore what it means to operate as a participant in a setting in which the future is unknowable is lost.” (2015, p.309). This process requires that anxiety is acknowledged and dealt with by both the leader and the group, something I discuss below.

Context and well-being

When we discuss the ‘context’ in leadership research, we are usually paying attention to the context of the situation, issue or decision to be made, but Ladkin broadens the term further to simply mean the backdrop to the main focus (2011, p.27). In the previous chapter I broaden it further to include the well-being of the leader. From this phase of my research it is clear that I was right to do this – the context of me as the leader, was very important for my ability to constructively encounter limited knowledge. I observed that the context “...has dramatically affected how I receive and handle the unknown” (5), including where I am relative to my key relationships and whether I am estranged, either relationally (7) or geographically (7).

The confidence I had in myself as a leader, correlated with the confidence I was able to bring to engage with the unknowns of the day (77) and had an effect on my behaviour. The reflective question about how the ‘unknowns’ made me behave, evoked strong feelings and in my journal I noted I felt “Defensive, not able to be

aware, sensitive and open.” (111). This in turn affected my sense of self, and therefore confidence to engage with the unknown and act in the face of it, effectively creating a vicious circle.

The feeling of being isolated can reinforce a sense of aloneness (8), a danger for leaders generally that is discussed in the literature (Tait, 1996, p.29). This can prevent collective engagement and cause the leader to internalise consideration of the issue, which in turn can contribute to the feeling that it is seemingly requiring an individual decision (9). To individualise misses the collective processes at the heart of CRPR (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.498).

If the unknown is only tacitly accepted at a subconscious level, its role in making sense, making decisions, and acting; is correspondingly limited, but my observation is that the energy required to function is less. However, once the unknown is explicitly named, the energy required to engage, hold and allow actions to be constrained by the limits of knowledge demands a level of energy of a whole different order of magnitude. Therefore, I am not surprised at the temptation to deal with things at a surface level, rather than to probe more deeply. Likewise, the longer the limited knowledge continues, the more energy it takes. It is as if we carry an uncertainty reserve, and whether the uncertainty was engaged with 10 minutes ago or 2 years ago, if it remains, it still continues to deplete the daily reserve. Each day something remains unknown is more energy being drained (22), and yet as I outline in chapter 8, where something is carried as unknown over a long period of time, some of the concern and the energy required to carry it appears to diminish²¹. I would propose this is because, whilst the degree of unknown may remain unchanged, the consequences of the lack of knowledge either diminish in the mind of the leader, or when you live with potential consequences, simply getting used to the idea of what might happen can reduce the stress.

21. This led to the inclusion of empirical data in the subsequent chapter (see Analysis - page [203](#)) to examine how the interaction with limited knowledge changes over time.

How do we legitimise sufficient attention to be given to the health and well-being of the leader? Particularly in times of great turbulence which are characterised by limited predictability, high levels of emergence and the need to carry the unknown (25)? Feeling under-par inhibits the ability to pay attention. This theme is evident before 2016 and was demonstrated in the initial compilation stage of analysis. And yet by mid-2015, confronted with evidence from my annual psychological evaluation, I realised that the cost to me, of leading the organisation through such significant change, in a time of fast changing assumptions, had been extensive and complex. This is why, I added a section in chapter 10 focusing on the cost of paying attention.

Sleep and good health, as well as feeling successful derived from having made a good decision recently (32), all affect my confidence as leader and correspondingly my confidence to engage unknowns. Conversely, tiredness, illness and various other things, inhibited my ability to pay attention (35) and took energy away from the primary need to be attentive. However, I found little in the CRPR literature beyond the suggestion that it will require courage (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506). My experience of attempting to practice leadership in a way that is consistent with a CRPR perspective, demonstrates there is a significant cost to the leader in making explicit and consciously engaging with limited knowledge. There is literature within the broader leadership category on this subject and as I sought to deal with my own struggles here, I was aided by Ladkin's referencing of the work of Heidegger on 'attunement'. Heidegger defines this as the "fundamental starting point for being in the world" and says it "influences our ability to understand others, particularly if others are telling us things we fundamentally do not want to hear." (Ladkin, 2011, p.107). Ladkin's conclusion is that this "has interesting implications for those who think of 'leaders' as people who maintain a sense of control and 'knowing' no matter what the circumstances." (2011, p.107) for Heidegger, as a broad term that encapsulates moods, emotions and feelings that disclose "our ways of Being-in-the-world," it is a helpful beginning but if I am to

root CRPR in my leadership practice, I will need to look further at the consequences of this for me as the leader.

Quality of conversation

The quality of conversation is a key focus at the heart of CRPR and in many respects is the means by which all the leader hopes to effect, is done (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500). How good was the conversation that I was able to have - to interrogate reality and to sense-make? In 'Context and well-being' above, I highlight that geographical estrangement hinders this process "if I am distant from the team..." (11), and existing work on virtual teams would support this (Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1998; Gilson, et al., 2015) but given the importance of the quality of conversation in CRPR, the absence of relevant writing in the CRPR literature again demonstrates the lack of work to date in developing a CRPR leadership practice. A question for further research, beyond the scope of this study, would be how the newer forms of communication and collaboration (e.g. Slack – slack.com, HipChat - hipchat.com, Asana – asana.com etc.) can enable this as it is obvious from my own notes that this was needed (12).

Uncertainty, usually the sign and symptom of limited knowledge, is best navigated through collective conversation (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.517) but I note my own reaction is typically one of two things, either an "exciting unpacking and exploration of possibilities" (70) or a reactionary push by me to "reduce the uncertainties and replace them with certainties" (71), something Stacey regards as abstracting (Stacey, 2012, p.3). I am intrigued by the term 'unpacking' (70) that I used and need to explore further what this means, because it does not feel like a deconstruction – I'm not taking something out of the system to analyse it, but rather holding it and dwelling with it, to derive greater understanding of it.

I realise that whilst the importance of conversation is alluded to in my own notes there is limited focus on conversation itself. In subsequent chapters, examining

more closely how I am a “...participant in an ongoing process of gesture and response....in the interplay of intentions.” through “...reflection and reflexivity...” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500) and how as leader my comportment (Ladkin, 2011, p.161) can either enable or constrain the conversation (Shaw, 2002, p.70) will be important.

Making sense

I was constantly needing to make sense (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.xvi), not just when something obvious was happening; in fact when nothing was happening it was easy to assume I did not need to think. That I do this thinking and sense-making most easily and naturally by “...sharing it [the situation/dilemma] over a coffee...” (9), with others (7) suggests that this might be a ‘natural’ process that happens “...amongst colleagues.” (10). Shaw, citing her work with two different organisations reflects that because coffee breaks allow for self-organising conversation, they are some of the most effective times of group work (2002, p.15). These are also social times and Ladkin reminds that “...sense-making does not occur solely through the insights of the ‘leader’ at the top of the organizational hierarchy declaring them as true for the rest of the organization.” (2011, p.150) but it is “...a key follower activity which contributes to effective leadership (2011, p.183).

I note that when confronted with doubts (42), a key to approaching them healthily and effectively, authentically to use Harter’s term (2002 quoted in Gardner, et al., 2011, p.1121), is to accept that they are permissible, and to begin to explore scenarios. As already discussed above in ‘From the unknown to admission of limited knowledge’, confronting doubts can be difficult for leaders because they are required to acknowledge that they are “...‘in control’ and ‘not in control’ at the same time...” and have to have courage “...to continue participating in the making of meaning in paradox” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506). One way of doing this is the use of scenarios. Scenarios offer a link between uncertainty, options and

actions – they can move us past the immobility and yet they are forever questionable in their accuracy and are always constructed realities, allowing followers to more easily engage in what Grint calls ‘constructive dissent’ (Grint, K., 2005, p.37), potentially aiding the leader to view the situation at hand differently.

The priority of thinking

It is clear from the brief two week, phase two data, that thinking was the single thing that most helped me make better decisions. The days where I had time to think, I made better decisions, which is backed up by Stacey and Mowles observation that “...how they [leaders] think powerfully affects what they pay attention to, and so what they do” (2015, p.xvi), but in my own practice I encountered a paradox. I discerned two contradictory tendencies, firstly that I felt I needed time, space and place to think and yet seemingly “I often deal with the unknown amidst a chaotic day more easily....than in a highly planned...day” (15). Therefore it would seem that structure and control are not necessarily the answer to creating time, space and a place to think. What I refer to as ‘space’ would seem to be more of a state of mind, than a geographical place and highlights a problem with the terminology. It can be easy to regard thinking as rationalising, but this does not help us in the process of holding and exploring. Holding is a helpful metaphor because there is a very real sense in which something is being touched and examined closely and it is out of engagement with the object, that understanding and discernment about what is needed and how to act comes (44). See below for a discussion of ‘Holding’.

Despite a growing understanding that thinking was vitally important, my reflections highlight a perceived (felt) shortage of time and space for this (90). There is a need in subsequent phases of research to define what thinking and reflection mean, and to explore how as the leader, I can more intentionally engage in these activities. Reflecting on why thinking is “...the one thing I traditionally never put in diary time for...” (92), I sense that this is because this is not usually

viewed as ‘acting’ and is seen as a passive activity, it is not a way of spending (investing) my time. Also, there is a “...tendency to want to be doing *something* rather than *nothing*...” (93) that I observed both in my own practice and in the literature (Shaw, 2002, p.70). The only alternative seemed to feel like doing nothing, and thinking is often seen as doing nothing! Why is this the case? Perhaps because doing *something* is tangible or observable (and the popular literature such as Kouzes and Posner (1990) emphasise this as important for followers to see, whereas in contrast thinking is not visible. I also began to wonder in my reflection whether, contrary to expectation, doing *something*, *anything*, “... takes less energy than thinking, than ‘holding’ the unknown?” (93) The phrase from French and Simpson about being able to find a “thought in search of a thinker” (2006, p.252), is one that I have pondered on in this phase and will consciously investigate further in a subsequent research phase with a longitudinal element (chapter 8).

Making decisions

I see from field notes, that making decisions was a key activity during this period, even when the decisions I was faced with did not appear particularly significant in themselves. I had specifically identified a two week time span in the diary when little of significance was planned. In the descriptions of decision-making I talk both about ‘making decisions’ and also ‘getting decisions made’ and wonder whether, upon further reflection, these might prove to be significant differences in approach? I also clearly recognise from CRPR, that the healthiest decision-making is a group process (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.413), but leaders can individualise the process. In my own reflection (54-56), I recognise that I individualise the process primarily for two reasons: a sense of urgency that does not give time for a collective process, or a lack of energy to engage in a more demanding process with multiple individuals. Additionally, I recognise that particularly in individualising something, but even in a group process, the scope for manipulation in decision-

making is very significant. This is seen in research demonstrating that tired leaders are more vulnerable to toxic behaviour (Barnes, et al., 2015). One way in which that manipulation can happen in a group process, is by means of inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals (Tchelebi, 2012), either to reduce the stress on the leader or alter the group dynamic and potentially reduce debate and opposition.

The dark-side

My personal doubts about my own self-identity contributed to many of the struggles I had to deal with the unknown. It can be hard to resist the impulse to act and to continue to hold anxiety successfully. Knowing whether I am being true to myself when I choose to act or not act, or whether I am engaging in subtle manipulation remains a concern. It can be a fine line between creating the environment for followers to cope with (hold) anxiety and manipulating them. Stacey and Mowles observe that “in contemporary organisations it is taken for granted that leaders and their senior colleagues are the ones who design the futures of their organisations by appealing to vision and values and setting strategy.” (2015, p.498) and that leaders may be regarded as having “...unique insight into the human condition and to have powers of prescience and foresight because they stand outside the organisation understood as system.” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.498). Both of these popular views can make manipulation seem acceptable.

If, as I saw, tiredness limits my ability to be attentive, there was also the realisation that ‘energised’ (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.348) does not necessarily help me to make good decisions. Feeling energised can cause me to rush ahead and not give time for attention, caution and reflection (37). The feeling of being energised often emerged from a sense of passion and feeling engaged, yet attention is different from passion; I have to be able to respond to the as yet unknowns and passion can add focus but can also cause blindspots and reduce attention.

A sense of self (both self-understanding and self-confidence) is vital to healthy leadership (42), because in each decision, there is a risk to take – and whilst I recognise that I don't need to be without doubts (42) (doubts are okay), they do cause anxiety and therefore require energy. What happens when I don't have the energy, is that I don't feel I have the time and space to reflect and I view exploring scenarios (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.453) as demanding extra energy from me and therefore, I am tempted to grasp at the first passing possibility and make it acceptable. 'Making it acceptable', I realise, is both a natural human tendency and a profoundly worrying phrase, demonstrating a deeply ethical issue. I see power very much at play here, potentially in quite a frightening way, realising once again the very real capacity for leaders to manipulate and control (43). In these situations I can see that I am tempted to "reduce the uncertainties" and "replace them with certainties" (71). Whilst I do things simply for 'survival' reasons, motivated by a desire to 'cope' and with a focus on the energy I have available to deal with the myriad of inputs, rather than setting out to control the outcomes for personal gain, I still perceive manipulation to be a risk (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.432).

Pay attention

Stacey suggests that the key task of a leader is to pay attention (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500), not to direct, not to control, but simply to constantly see what is going on. From this phase of research I note this is especially difficult when nothing seems to be going on.

As a key to quality conversation, Stacey suggests that alongside paying attention is also a need for a detachment; (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.348) to observe impartially because my attention is "often linked to my own passions..." (38) and this may give insights into how to pay attention when very little is happening but requires more work in subsequent research phases.

In the battle to pay attention, I sense the times when the unknown was resisted in particular situations because it was seen as an impostor to what otherwise appeared to be an organised context (16). Paying attention felt less like gazing fixedly on one spot, but rather keeping eyes open and mind alert and being conscious that you have glimpsed a deer between the trees when you are looking in a different direction; these were “...glimpses of insight rather than constant awareness.” (36)

I described my primary activity of being the leader during this phase as “... watching the team...” (80), but as I reflect on this, it is not clear *how* I as the leader went about this. I clearly feel that I have done this and that, “...I have become more aware.” (81), but exactly what I have done, continues to puzzle me and warrants further work. What I am conscious of is that I observe both emergence and the responsive process at work, even in the midst of fast paced interaction which I liken to a “...professional tennis match in the back and forth...” (82-83). Reading back over my notes, it would appear that ‘paying attention’ has been a largely intuitive process and I ponder again whether many of the themes Stacey highlights are ones that emerge naturally when the constraints of a systematised approach are relaxed? Stacey himself admits that “the perspective [CRPR] is concerned with making more evident what the managers are already doing, rather than offering prescriptions for what they should be doing...” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.497). If this research will prove helpful I will need to be able to define, describe and examine how paying attention happens and how as leaders we can learn to do this better. An area Stacey prioritises that will have greater focus in subsequent chapters is the link between paying attention and practical judgement, recognising that it requires “...ongoing inquiry, one that takes narrative, reflexive forms” (Stacey, 2012, p.110). One interesting observation to follow up, is the term ‘blank canvas’ (84) that I used to describe the space in which something can emerge out of a group process, characterised by responding to one another. As leader, do I initiate or give permission for the creation of a blank canvas? This

needs further research in subsequent phases, perhaps particularly around the term 'common ground' and 'respect for one another' (85), that I observe seem to be key values enabling this process. Likewise the concept of a commitment to one another and the commitment to the conversation, appear to be key. This process is enabled by the leader facilitating discussion (opening up), making a decision (opening or closing) or reaching consensus (closing down) and each of these effects needs to be probed further along with aspects of power and ideology in the work of the leader, what Stacey and Mowles call "...the evolving pattern of power relations" (2015, p.500). However, focusing on how to take up the themes of CRPR in my leadership practice, I found Heidegger's work quoted in Ladkin was helpful in allowing me to begin to conceptualise and articulate what I felt. A key aspect was dwelling as a "...lingering way of engaging with the world..." (Ladkin, 2011, p.160).

Holding

I see a dawning realisation of the leader's role to legitimise anxiety, "helping individuals and a group to understand the acceptability (and indeed desirability) of anxiety." (76), giving permission for people to admit that they are anxious and to seek help in managing that anxiety at a workable level rather than turning to the leader to eradicate it. "A manager's ability to pay attention to and ask what it is that provokes the anxiety, what is at stake for the group, may have a profound effect in enabling people to tolerate anxiety for longer and thus continue to struggle to achieve new meaning" (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.501).

Additionally, I recognise that there is a group activity of collectively coping with not deciding "...help each other cope with not deciding for long enough to decide well..." (77). In the midst of this anxiety management exercise is the temptation to reduce the number of variables to make the process work, and yet this brings with it the danger of abstracting (Stacey, 2012. p.3), fixing some of the variables to allow the group to explore other variables. Feeling a complete lack of any fixed points disorientates most people to a point of not functioning, and therefore fixing

some variables as assumptions helps this process but can lead to abstracting, where the simplification can easily be misunderstood as being real. I see in my own notes around the challenges of ‘not deciding’, a dawning realisation that perhaps this option requires the most energy, for it prolongs the experience of ‘not knowing’.

Confidence is important for leading (Northouse, 2009, p.19), but it is evident here that it can also be counter-productive or at least in tension to acknowledging and discovering the unknown: “The ability to deal with the unknown diminishes when I think I know what needs to be done and become too fixed on it, too early on.” (18). ‘Holding’ an unknown, an area of limited knowledge, when I want to ‘deal with it’ and resolve the unknown, limit the unexpected and fix, usually by acting, is difficult. If I acted without holding it, I often made a poor, limited or incorrect and problematic decision. Holding it was an ill-defined term largely absent from the leadership literature but used by Stacey who draws on original work in the psychoanalytical field by Shapiro and Carr (1991 cited in Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.139). My own first use of the term ‘holding’ was intuitive, in my journal, attempting to describe what I was doing when I was trying not to ‘act’ in my leadership role, when I was trying to avoid deciding because I felt my knowledge was too limited. How do I ‘hold’ something particularly when I often don’t even know the shape of the thing I’m trying to hold, because at that moment in time I am holding it to discover what it is, what it might mean and how I should respond to it? I found a deeper resonance with the description Heidegger uses: ‘dwelling’. “Heidegger suggests that a first step in knowing something or someone’s identity more fully is to ‘stay with them’ with a deep quality of attentiveness” (Ladkin, 2011, p.64). Stacey uses the phrase “...a good enough holding of anxiety” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.357) as well as a shorter phrase “...a good enough holding...” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.357), to encapsulate the broader environment of relating in an environment of trust.

Holding for me at this stage had the aim of not becoming fixed on something too early “...when I think I know what needs to be done...” (18) because that closes

down, not just the possibilities for an alternative, but also a better understanding of the situation with limited knowledge, that requires ongoing sense-making. This tension of having sufficient knowledge, confidence and certainty to allow the leader to continue to pay attention, hold a manageable level of anxiety, and eventually to 'act', gave rise to the term 'tentative certainty', and the process to begin to explore what this might mean and look like as an activity, a focus in my leadership practice.

The key theme running throughout this research phase is the need to "do thinking" (42), something we consider is natural and needs little effort, and yet I'm aware from my notes on my own personal struggle, that "...finding the time and space to do thinking." (42) is difficult and feeling that "...people think that thinking is not leadership..." (99). I quickly conclude that thinking is vital to leadership, and possibly "...the most important job..." (99), concluding that when I have prioritized thinking "...I have acted better" (100) as a leader. Why, if thinking is key and the leader's main unique role, is it the least prioritised, recognised and legitimised?

'Holding' is a key part of thinking, where I need to carry, ponder, wrestle and indeed expose others to the issue facing me as the leader and in doing so, find the thoughts and make time to be the thinker (96).

The certainty to act (and not act)

Acting', is the term I used to describe the behaviour of a leader which gives leadership to followers (Walker, 2007). It is not necessarily the opposite of inaction because leaders can provide the best leadership by not acting. As Stacey and Mowles put it "...in a highly uncertain world a quality action may be one which keeps options open for as long as possible (2015, p.503). In short, 'acting' is the broad term I use to describe how leaders know how to be, and what to do even when the thing being done, may be doing nothing.

How did I know when and how to act? Partly perhaps when I sensed I should be acting, but this proved very unreliable: the sense of obligation to act was often about me not being left in a position where I was doing nothing! As already alluded to earlier in this chapter, doing nothing made me feel like I wasn't a leader and doing nothing was difficult for the staff team because in their mind, undoubtedly influenced by the images of leadership in the literature, they had been taught that leaders do stuff, leaders act and leaders respond to situations. Yet here I was discovering that sometimes the most 'leaderly' thing was not to act at all but simply to continue to ask questions (Ladkin, 2011, p.166).

'Not acting' or at least, not responding as expected, what I describe in my notes as "holding back" (66), appears to give others permission, freedom and room to act. Is this 'acting' an occupation of the space that I specifically can choose to occupy as the leader (do I create the spaces?) or perhaps the space is by default the leader's, but one which I as leader can choose to vacate as a gesture, in a collective conversation into which others have the space to step. In the subsequent phases of the research I explore how doing something and doing nothing are both activities a leader can do and both require "...acting with courage into the unknown and hav[ing] to accept responsibility for whatever ensues" (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p. 517).

Getting things done

Leadership is primarily about 'getting things done' (Stacey, 2012, p.4) and yet I note in a description of my struggle to get things done during this period (48–52), that implementation is far from straightforward. I saw situations where we had agreed action to be taken but with hindsight, examining my notes and reliving the experience I wonder who had agreed, what was the action agreed, and was the action agreed mutual or were there differences in understanding and perception on what was agreed. So another question to take forward is, how do we agree action? Additionally, I note that I felt I had not spent long enough with people for them to

understand what my expectations of implementation were and, upon review saw this as a place where conversation needed to be exercised. From a CRPR perspective, getting things done is not about controlling but about engagement in the interactions that are taking place, about using the role of leader to interact and gesture with the intention of getting things done but realising that “...they [leaders] cannot predict the long-term consequences of their actions, and since they cannot control the interplay of intentions, they cannot choose the future of their organizations, no matter how much planning and envisioning they do.” (Stacey, 2012, Preface). They must have the “courage to carry on creatively despite not knowing and not being in control” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506), but despite the lack of control they insist that “there is no mystery or chance in emergence; it is precisely the product of many, many local interactions” (Stacey, 2012, p.15). The reflections at this stage on how to actually get things done reflect puzzlement on my part more than clarity. Getting things done is where all that I am attempting to see in my leadership practice is seen most obviously when it ‘works’. At this stage in the research I felt far from reaching that point but I was beginning to be intrigued by practical judgement (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500), in particular how it “...can only be developed through experience and reflection on experience...” (Stacey, 2012, p.106) and also questioning how the thinking taught in the dominant leadership discourses might inhibit better, natural responses in leadership practice. In later stages of the research I considered this further and also discovered Stacey and Mowles had added a section on the work of Gadamer, that had not been referenced in previous editions. Gadamer’s work supports my suspicion at this stage that the systematising of leadership “...undermine[s] people’s practical judgement” (1993 cited in Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.440).

Implications

The engagement with a theory of CRPR is aimed at the development of a leadership practice that copes better with the experience of limited knowledge. The following areas summarise from the research analysis key, tentative conclusions to carry forward into the subsequent research stages:

It has changed the way that I approach decisions, almost immediately legitimising a pause or hesitation and prompting me to engage in consideration and not be rushed (114).

It legitimised tension and anxiety as normal, and helped me to see that the natural human response is a provocation to react. As a result of this reflection and in the light of a growing understanding of a theory of CRPR, I have been caused to commit to a cycle of interrogation, sense-making, tentative certainty, action and review, rather than a decision and an immediate moving on from the decision-making process (115).

Sense-making is a collective process where ideally, diverse individuals are co-constructing an interpreted reality (116) and therefore there is value in engaging those around me to overcome what I see as my own limited perception (118) and that perception is something that we engage with rather than simply accept or react to. What is the difference between a response and a reaction? This needs further exploration, but the reaction I noted felt like knee-jerk, defensive action, whereas a responsive process approach implied the decision-making was much longer than a moment. However, there is a need for further research to understand within that process, when a decision is actually made. This is an important area to probe because instantaneous decision-making is often regarded by the dominant discourses as a strength and key quality of good and successful leaders (Rogers and Blenko, 2006, p.13) (120–121).

I note that understanding what is happening can help me hold off on controlling or shutting something down. This is something Stacey discusses theoretically, but it is not sufficiently well articulated and is where my own thoughts on tentative

certainty as a practical response are emerging from. The idea of “making sure we don’t make decisions for long enough to be able to make better decisions” (125) is very counterintuitive.

Conclusion

As I begin to attempt to combine these themes into my own leadership practice, I see at the heart a discovery process. Unknowns are discerned, this gives rise to anxiety, which in turn must be held and maintained, until it gives an awareness, and from an awareness an understanding develops, giving rise to further discovery. Yet that discovery must be held with a degree of tentative certainty sufficient to allow for action, but with a commitment to continue to pay attention, to then begin the process of discerning further unknowns, again. This cyclical process was emerging in my efforts to focus on my leadership practice in the light of engaging with a theory of CRPR.

What is happening, when nothing appears to be happening? The focus in this phase highlighted to me in the midst of my autoethnography, that paying attention to nothing was much harder than paying attention to something (98). The capacity to notice and to pay attention needs to be the first priority of the leader, for it begins a discovery process that is rooted in attentiveness and focused on the areas of limited knowledge (101).

These are early and tentative conclusions drawn as I sought to look deeper into both the theory of CRPR and my practice as a leader. Various themes were identified for further examination in the subsequent stages but a key reflection at this stage was the importance of the reflective process to be able to enact much of what Stacey was suggesting. The following excerpt from Ladkin influenced how I moved forward from here:

Being aware of the aesthetic dimension of leadership entails attending to the immediate, visceral response one has to a

particular individual or situation. It involves letting yourself become aware of the 'yuck' reaction a particular individual evokes when they invoke declarative power in certain way or the raising of the hairs on the back of your neck when a different individual takes the stage. Attending to this dimension requires noticing the quality of a group's activity; is it buzzing or is it sluggish? What is the pace at which collective action is being undertaken, what is its rhythm and flow? What does its 'feel' tell us about the way leadership is being enacted? What kind of intervention might alter the aesthetic in a helpful way or how might collective action which is clicking along be sustained? (Ladkin, 2011, p.184)

Chapter 8: Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

Research Overview

Phase 1 – Becoming Aware – Discovering the extent of (my) limited knowledge

Chapter 6 – A leader confronts his limited knowledge

Phase 2 - Exploring limited knowledge in leadership the light of a theory of CRPR

Chapter 7 – A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

Chapter 8 – Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

Phase 3 - Changing my Leadership Practice - living the learning in my leading

Chapter 9 – Observing my emerging leadership practice

This chapter examines several issues that arose in leading the college in 2012 and 2013. The research of these issues was designed specifically to follow each issue longitudinally, tracking it from it first being recognised, through to a point of resolution. The findings demonstrate that resolution, in the sense of simply solving the presenting problem, did not have to be reached for the leader's focus to shift away from it. The sense of 'stepping away' from it could be for a variety of reasons which have produced a feeling of resolution: that the required knowledge is now known (Issue 3), that the unknowability remains, but it has ceased to draw my focus and energy (Issue 2), or the value of 'knowing' has reduced, perhaps because of the passing of time (Issue 1).

The issues

Issue 1 - Recruiting a key role

The board had agreed to the recruitment of a Chief Operating Officer (COO), recognising that the role of traditional college bursar had been superseded by events. No longer were we operating a college where students arrived for one type of course in September, remained for three years and then graduated. We had multiple programmes, several different delivery modes and numerous start points during the year, which when combined meant the management of several hundred different scenarios. In addition, we had committed to rethinking the model of what Redcliffe was and how it operated, which brought with it commercial assumptions that needed a commercially minded manager to oversee it.

Data

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Issue: | Chief Operating Officer Recruitment |
| 2 | Entry date: | Wednesday 7 th of March 2012 7:14 AM (0 hours) |
| 3 | Consequence: | ★★★ |
| 4 | Notes: | |
| 5 | | <i>Interviewing Phil today. After a number of applications, he is the only candidate being</i> |
| 6 | | <i>interviewed. I'm aware that I don't like interviewing when I have only one candidate but</i> |
| 7 | | <i>will this matter? Not if he is suitable and takes the job! Looking forward to the interview</i> |
| 8 | | <i>because I don't feel that I really know Phil at all. His involvement in Redcliffe was prior to</i> |
| 9 | | <i>my own. I am conscious with the role (effectively a Finance Director) that I am likely to be</i> |
| 10 | | <i>recruiting somebody who is, personality-wise very different to me. But I am also aware</i> |
| 11 | | <i>that on a day-to-day basis, because of the nature of the work, they are likely to be the</i> |
| 12 | | <i>person I work most closely with after my PA. It is therefore important that the chemistry</i> |
| 13 | | <i>between us works and also that there is a good degree of trust. I'm conscious I need</i> |
| 14 | | <i>someone who can challenge me to root the ideas I have in reality, including financial</i> |
| 15 | | <i>reality; but I also need that to be done in a way that respects my ability to generate ideas.</i> |
| 16 | | <i>This means that this appointment is incredibly important.</i> |

17 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★

18

19

20 **Issue:** Chief Operating Officer Recruitment

21 **Entry date:** Wednesday 7 March 2012 5:26 PM (10 hours)

22 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

23 **Notes:**

24 *Offered the role to Phil by telephone. It was a short phone call because he has asked for a*
25 *week to consider before responding. I was quite thrown by this and can't help asking why?*
26 *I know it is a big decision, to leave a very significant role, effectively CEO in his current*
27 *context, take a significant salary cut and join a Christian ministry. However, I'd have*
28 *thought you'd have considered that before applying. Is he not serious about this?*
29 *Beginning to get a bad feeling. Hope I'm wrong.*

30 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

31

32

33 **Issue:** Chief Operating Officer Recruitment

34 **Entry date:** Monday 25th of June 2012 9:58 AM (2,643 hours/110 days)

35 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

36 **Notes:**

37 *Phil was due to join us this week but postponed for three weeks until things have eased up*
38 *a bit with his successor in Romania.*

39 *My unease with Phil's appointment continues. The way in which the series of events came*
40 *about seemed quite remarkable and bordering on miraculous: a conversation between Phil*
41 *and Brian about Phil's future and his desire to leave his current company, and indeed the*
42 *commercial environment in which he was operating, and move to something more*
43 *meaningful. Is he having second thoughts? Or is this just a case of feeling he needs to*
44 *hand over well?*

45 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

46

47

48 **Issue:** Chief Operating Officer Recruitment

49 **Entry date:** Monday 16 July 2012 9:28 AM (3,146 hours/131 days)

50 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

51 **Notes:**

52 *Phil cancelled coming up for an initial two days in the role, at the last minute and is now*
53 *saying he won't be able to join us until 1 October. I was really quite annoyed to get this*
54 *news. It didn't come to me, it came to Brian and leaves me feeling as though the priority*
55 *of finishing well and helping his successor now far outweighs the consequences to Redcliffe*
56 *and makes me question the priority of Phil going forward? We had put a lot of time and*
57 *effort into planning these two days with the idea that they would allow Phil a good*
58 *foundation on which to get started on the role, and a manageable way of beginning the*
59 *shift from a commercial context into a ministry context. Feels as though we are the ones*
60 *putting in all the effort at the moment.*

61 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

62

63

64 **Issue:** Chief Operating Officer Recruitment

65 **Entry date:** Thursday 19th of July 2012 10:10 AM (3,219 hours/134 days)

66 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

67 **Notes:**

68 *Phil has just phoned to say that he won't be taking the post! I am completely thrown.*

69 *Torn between feeling very cross with Phil and feeling very cross with myself. I should have*

70 *seen this coming and done something about it!*

71 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★

72 **Rewriting²² the data**

73 As I look back now in 2014 on the events of 2012, with 2 years of hindsight, this
74 situation continues to vex me. Subsequent to this series of events, I very quickly
75 appointed Richard to the COO role, and this was without doubt, one of the best
76 decisions I have made in my time at Redcliffe. I also recognise that had we not
77 gone through the failure to appoint Phil, I would have been very unlikely to
78 appoint Richard. I still remember the first time of meeting Richard: he had been in
79 doing a day of review work as a consultant and was with Roy. Roy introduced

22. This rewriting or re-narration, is a term and tool that Bolton (2010b and 2014) uses as a reflexive process to explore a situation more deeply. See chapter 4 for more detail. It was undertaken in October 2014.

80 Richard to me at the end of the day and I recall the conversation as brief and
81 uninspiring (as I am sure do both of us). I do remember reflecting subsequently
82 that he was someone I could never work with closely!

83 It is with irony, that now and repeatedly through the last 2 years, as I look at the
84 challenges Redcliffe has faced and the decisions that I have made, when I ask what
85 I would have done differently, the most recurring conclusion is that I would have
86 appointed a COO earlier (see Issue 3) and that Richard was exactly the right person
87 for the job.

88 This sense that Richard was the right person for the role was tested by the Board:

89 With the blessing of the Finance & General Purposes
90 Committee (F&GP) and the Chair, Rob had talked with Richard
91 Morris about the possibility of Richard taking on the full-time
92 role of COO. Rob had felt little hesitation in doing so, as he
93 had already been pondering what the college would lose once
94 Richard was not around (had Phil Jones come). He felt that
95 God was doing a lot through Richard being here. Richard's
96 situation was complicated at present by an accident that had
97 occurred involving his elderly mother. He was due to go on
98 holiday for ten days from Wednesday (3rd) and wanted to use
99 that time to think and pray before giving his answer. The worst
100 case scenario would be that Richard would commit to doing
101 three days a week for the next six months, whilst we sorted
102 something out. Hopefully, he would say yes to the full-time
103 role. Even if he did, there would certainly be a period when
104 Richard would be winding up other work he has with other
105 organisations (up to a day a week). Another possibility would
106 be that Richard would keep a couple of those other clients and
107 come to Redcliffe four days a week.

108 Helen asked whether Richard would take up the things Rob
109 had been hoping Phil would do to enable Rob to have more
110 time. Rob felt that Richard could step into that. He stated that
111 there would have to be a managed and well-communicated
112 transition. Richard is well liked and trusted by the staff team
113 and Kyle's new role would also help.

114 Once Richard gave a definite answer, assuming it was a yes,
115 they would be working towards a start date of 1st November.

116 2 October 2012 - Board Minute

Time as an important factor in the engagement with the unknown emerged in the previous chapters whilst the research is primarily autoethnographic with some ethnography, the ability to examine the effect of time using the app provided useful if crude data to include this aspect in the research.

Analysis

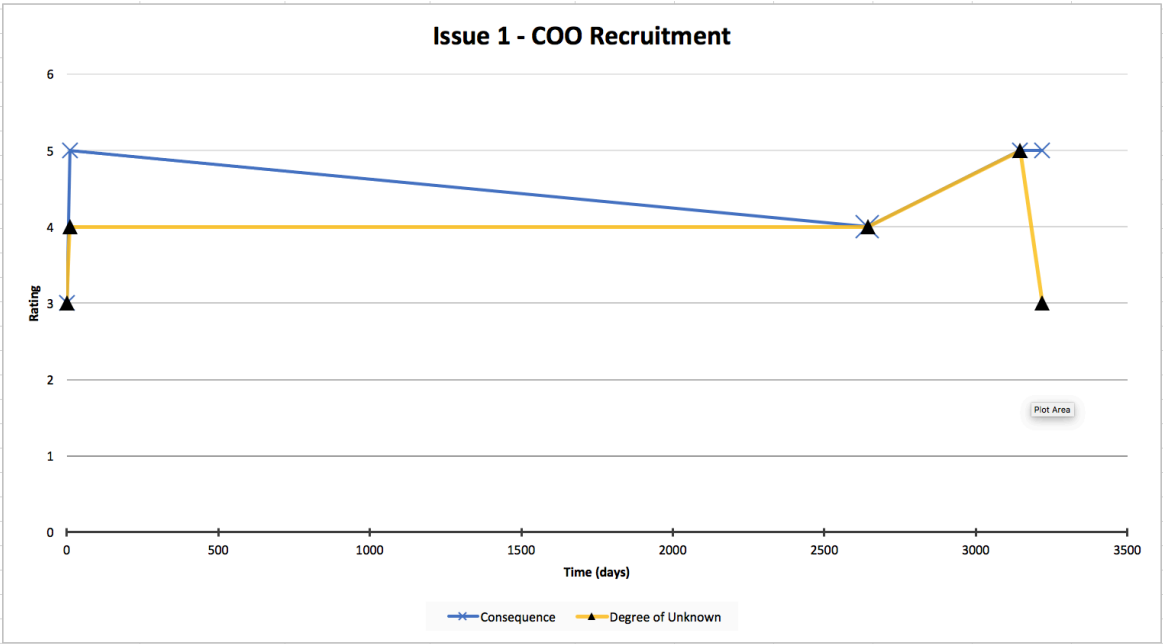


Figure 15: Issue 1 - Longitudinal Data

This issue was tracked for almost 5 months and the graph shows that the ‘level of unknown’, discerned primarily by feelings, was moderately high at the beginning with a high sense of consequence tied to the importance of the post and the proximity to my own role. The consequence diminished as I thought we have appointed the right person and the level of consequence remained consistent. Once Phil notified us that he was not taking up the position, both lines peaked, with high levels of anxiety experienced about the continued consequence of having such a key post vacant, and the discomfort and embarrassment of the situation we were now left in.

It is clear that not knowing the person involved both contributed to the uncertainty “*I don’t feel that I really know Phil at all*” (1:8), and then hindered the ability to tackle it in a way that could reduce the uncertainty and resolve the issues causing it. I recognised the need for a workable “*chemistry*” (1:12) and the development of “*a good degree of trust*” (1:13), which both suggest from the emphasis of the writing that I felt this was lacking at the time. Not having chemistry and trust caused me to question his commitment and motives “*I can’t help asking why?*” (1:25) “*Is he not serious about this?*” (1:28), effectively adding to the sense of limited knowledge; not only did I not know what Phil would do, but I also felt his commitment and motives were not clear to me. I also saw that I didn’t trust my early intuition of “*beginning to get a bad feeling*” (1:29). This continued as a sense of “*unease*” (1:39) and yet I still didn’t feel that I had the ability to act upon it, or even to interrogate it further at that stage. The lack of trust and relationship seemed to render me unable to engage with another individual and stopped me from acting individually on my own intuition. With the postponement of the start days, when “*Phil cancelled coming up*” (1:52), a sense of annoyance added to the questioning of Phil’s motives and I found my knowledge limited by my own fears; asking the question, could result in the answer I did not want to hear. Expectations had been built around Phil’s arrival and within the narrative of his own journey from commercial world to Redcliffe (through the conversations with Brian).

Many of the themes that I eventually developed would have aided this situation: the ability to explore a tentative certainty that he must have held to apply for the job, and the realisation that the people involved in the situation never had the chance to sit in the same room together and make sense of what was happening, are two obvious ones.

Group sense-making

A CRPR perspective made evident that we operate with limited perspective (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.434) and therefore the ability to collectively sense-make would have helped this situation and potentially have avoided much of the tension, uncertainty and negative effect. All of the key people involved: Brian, Phil, Richard and myself, were all experienced leaders in our own right. Why did we not sit down and discuss the situation? Eventually, after the withdrawal, Phil suggested that it would be better to look at Richard and eventually contributed to the initial employment costs; a group sense-making process could have facilitated that suggestion much earlier. The traditional procedures, expectations and practices of the leadership appear to have mitigated against this approach (this theme of traditional structures inhibiting natural problem-solving based approaches is explored further in chapter 3, observed in the theme ‘Good Enough’ outlined in chapter 9 and recommended for further research in chapter 10). It is clear to me, even at this stage, that the individual themes emerging are so counter-cultural to any of the dominant discourses (see chapter 2 for a discussion of Western’s discourses) that on their own, they are hard to exercise and require a number of changed values. What would a ‘third space’ look like, where we can engage in behaviour uninhibited by the dominant discourse, which encourages common sense and does not impose systemic assumptions on thoughts and actions? This consideration of a different working environment for leadership practice is not extensively considered in the literature, although the call for it is seen with others in what I have termed the emerging leadership literature (see chapter 2), for

example Weick's call to "bring organizations back in on human terms" (2009, p.27) and Wheatley's lament about supposed progress giving such poor results (2006, p.3).

I can see that my own limitations, insecurities and unfamiliarity affect my encounter, with my limited knowledge of various aspects of the recruitment of this role. Just as a third space would make this process easier, better attention to my own sense of wellbeing would have helped me to participate better; "the changed understanding of participation also carries with it an additional requirement to notice how one is participating, which involves reflection and reflexivity, and encouraging others to do the same" (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500).

There is a collective process of group sense-making that allows a far more reliable interpretation of reality than a hero-leader model (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.128) would provide, and yet there is a very clear sense that as the leader I feel responsible for the outcome: "*not sure I have the energy for...*" (3-23) "*...the role of running an increasingly complicated college...*" (3-38). How do I reconcile these two, seemingly paradoxical views? It seems clear that I was not in the best place wellbeing-wise to do this at the time because it demanded a difficult balance from the leader which leads me to the second area:

Tentative certainty

Given the discovery in the previous phase highlighting the importance of the context of the leader rather than just the context of the leadership challenge, the decision faced or the situation unfolding, this research highlights the role of feelings in handling limited knowledge over a long time period. To occupy the third space I speak of requires me to be in a good context, and then that I can act responsibly, providing a sense of security and ongoing narrative for the individuals to engage with the limited knowledge in the situation they are confronting. I notice in my narrative that I was "*quite thrown*" (1:25) by Phil's delayed response.

Heidegger's 'thrownness' continues to have relevance here as it did in chapter 6. I was firstly disorientated when the predicted did not happen, more than if I had had no idea what would happen, and then further surprised when the appointment of Richard, contrary to my expectation, worked so well. Being more explicit about the tentative nature of the certainties we were working with, Brian's discussions with Phil, my acceptance of Brian's knowledge of Phil and many other aspects of this situation, could have helped deal with the limited knowledge present in this situation. Ladkin suggests that "Finding the right question often starts with willingness to ask the wrong question or, at least, to acknowledge there is something unknown about the situation" (Ladkin, 2011, p.168). I did not do this? I certainly had what Ladkin calls "feelings of vague unease or discomfort" To do so was not complicated; it is basic, it is human, it is talking together and yet as she warns "sometimes the things about which we most need to ask are those that we most readily take for granted" (Ladkin, 2011, p.166). I need to learn to better "attend to unformed feelings of disquiet and the questions they prompt[ed]" (Ladkin, 2011, p.166). Looking back, I can see that I assumed a level of certainty based on someone else's judgement (Brian's), and then persisted with that level of certainty despite circumstances that should have caused me to question it. Ladkin continues with a warning: "One's own reactions and responses to situations should not be ignored in deference to the viewpoint and perspective of the other but instead should be held in balance with that of the other" (Ladkin, 2011, p.162). It is clear that 'tentative certainty' is a state I am unfamiliar occupying and therefore, better understanding of it and what it requires will be important, as is the relationship between the process of sense-making and the leader's ability to be tentatively certain as a state that is under perpetual review (Stacey, 2012, p.4).

Issue 2 - Managing staff conflict

Management of staff and conflict are two common, if not constant activities that leaders engage in. This issue occurred when I was not expecting it, and it felt very acute but then dissipated quickly (see Figure 19 on page 210). It involved several different personalities and reflected conflict amongst individuals and with me as the leader. It also emerged from significant areas of limited knowledge in the lives of the individuals involved. In some respects, it did not get resolved but ceased to hold my attention and I also suggest, ceased to hold the attention of others involved.

Data

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Issue: | Faculty Issue |
| 2 | Entry date: | Wednesday 7 th of March 2012 4:49 PM (0 hours) |
| 3 | Consequence: | ★★★ |
| 4 | Notes: | |
- 5 *Really pissed off. Discovered tonight, that the faculty meeting that I very nearly went to,*
6 *but didn't because Charles thought it would be reasonably straight forward, ended up with*
7 *Kyle in particular, but backed up by Guy Richardson, refusing to support Charles, refusing*
8 *to free him up to focus on QAA and getting incredibly self-centred about protecting*
9 *individual rights. This left Charles and Claire both feeling quite frustrated, isolated and*
10 *beaten down. Currently I cannot believe that, Kyle, in particular, is behaving in this way,*
11 *moaning about the salary he is on when he knew ahead of taking the job what the salary*
12 *would be. A number have raised the issue and I have said that I will look at it. To be*
13 *honest his constant focusing on him as number one and stuff everybody else, I find very*
14 *difficult to accept. Conscious in the midst of this that Charles finds Kyle difficult and*
15 *therefore some of what Charles and Roy relayed, may have been Charles' reaction to him,*
16 *but it reinforces a number of experiences with Kyle of late and, at the moment, I am torn*
17 *between meeting with him and speaking my mind very strongly and then doing the same*
18 *thing separately with Guy Richardson, or actually meeting with the faculty as a whole.*
19 *My current inclination is to meet with them separately.*

20 *I am going to sleep on it and see where we get to tomorrow.*

21 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★

22

23 **Issue:** Faculty Issue

24 **Entry date:** Sunday 12th of March 2012 11:50 AM (115 hours)

25 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

26 **Notes:**

27 *Not sure why Guy is in a strop. He apparently says we have acted ungraciously. How can*

28 *I best deal with this? How do I detach this issue from a personal complaint against me?*

29 *Not sure if it is possible and not sure if desirable? After all, it could be a personal*

30 *complaint against me. When I'm unsure of whether something is personal I'm aware that I*

31 *struggle very much with this. I identify with the line from Pride and Prejudice "I can't bear*

32 *to think of someone in this world thinking ill of me"!*

33 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

34

35 **Issue:** Faculty Issue

36 **Entry date:** Sunday 12th of March 2012 12:42 AM (116 hours)

37 **Consequence:** ★★

38 **Notes:**

39 *Saw Guy today. I was quite apprehensive before the meeting, partly I realise because Guy*

40 *is someone not only who I count as a friend and someone I looked up to, but also because I*

41 *recognise he is someone who has shaped me very significantly. He was quite emotional.*

42 *He feels that the approach and discussions about his future had been ad hoc not strategic!*

43 *I still don't fully understand what he means as we have (Charles Johnson and I) sought to*

44 *give him as much freedom for his final year as possible to try to ensure that he can finish*

45 *well. I am very disappointed in myself that I started with the negative reaction to this*

46 *situation with so much unknown when I should have been aware (and was at a number of*

47 *levels) that this would be a difficult year for Guy and I did not keep that foremost in my*

48 *mind. Not trying to make excuses for myself, but more trying to learn how I might*

49 *approach a similar situation in the future better, I think the busyness of my diary, in*

50 *particular trying to multitask different roles, hinders my level of mindfulness significantly*

51 *and this is something I must address.*

52 **Degree of unknown:** ★★

Rewriting the data

Looking back on this issue with the benefit of time and hindsight and rewriting it in 2014 (Reed-Danahay, 1997), I can see very powerfully how the quality of conversation, both leading up to this incident, during it and subsequently, recognising that I perhaps hadn't discussed the eventual outcome and ramifications with Guy as I should have done, can either hinder the situation or can transform it.

Analysis

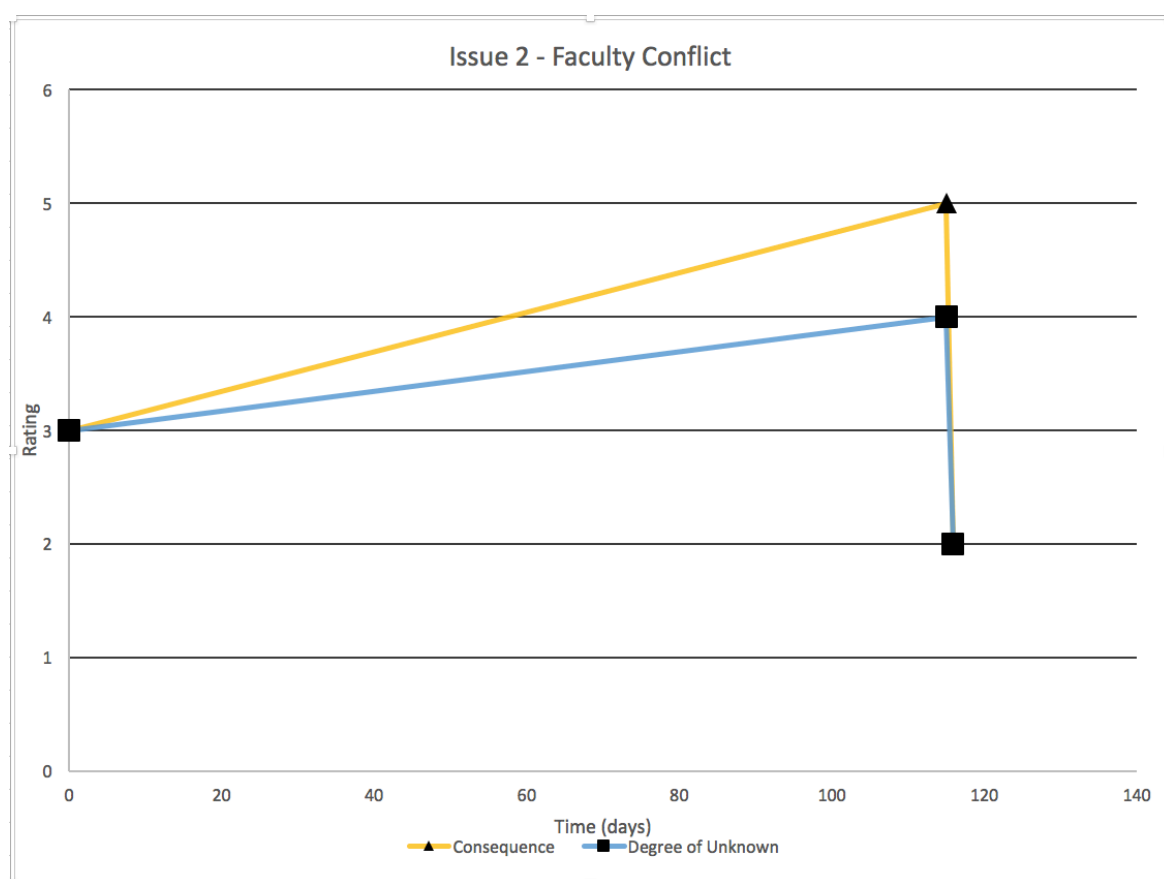


Figure 16: Issue 2 - Longitudinal Data

There are so many things of consequence here to unpack, firstly, the limited ability of any of the individuals to 'pay attention'. Given my previous observation that the context I was in drastically affected how able I was to engage in a quality of conversation, I am conscious that Kyle was struggling with culture shock, Guy was

struggling with imminent retirement and Charles with the scary task of an initial QAA review, the successful outcome of which would determine the future viability of the college. This clearly affected their ability to engage with one another in a helpful way and seems to have created a perfect storm, rendering individuals who at other times are generally collegial, supportive and able to empathise with one another as wholly otherwise.

Amongst the many general reflections I specifically see two themes here that offered new knowledge:

Need to act

When I look back now, I recognise that Guy's concern was taken up and to some extent addressed, but I don't think the other issues of Kyle's culture shock, or the lack of support for Charles were resolved in an intentional way, but the importance (a combination of the perceived consequence and degree of limited knowledge) diminished over a relatively short space of time. I have observed this with other people-orientated conflict issues; they feel very acute, and yet diminish quickly whether addressed directly by the leader or not. Could it be that people are more able to self-organise than the prevailing discourses give them credit for, something that Griffin suggests (2002, p.213) and, because interpersonal conflict is an area more directly in the control of the individuals concerned, it is where we see the self-organising more often than in other areas. This conclusion may be supported by Mead's assertion that emergence is a 'social process' centred around an "I-me dialectic" and impinges on the identity of the individual (Griffin, 2002, p.214). Therefore people regard this as personal territory they can act into rather than something they need permission to do. The issue of permission is pertinent here because the assumptions of followers around the leader being in control (Grint, K., 2005, p.28), and suggesting the requirement for permission to be granted before self-organising can take place (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.450), is another

example of where the systemic processes of organisations inhibit natural inclination.

One of the patterns I saw repeatedly across the personnel issues highlighted in this longitudinal study, was that interpersonal tensions often gave rise to an issue that felt as though it would have very significant consequences. It also carried a very high level of unknown, and yet, despite registering highly on both scales, was often resolved quite quickly. The high level of unknown, is understandable because of the unpredictability of people, but the high degree of consequence felt, reflected firstly my own dislike of conflict (so this will be very personality dependent) but secondly, the awareness that when people struggle there are often significant knock-on effects and an incident affecting an individual can quickly affect a whole team (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.501). The narrative opens with an expectation that I should have 'acted' on Guy's retirement; I thought I had but he thought I had not. In view of this it is interesting to note that other than talking to Guy one to one, I did not at this point really act in this situation other than to listen, and even then not to everyone involved due to lack of time, and yet there was still a sense of resolution, or at least the feeling that the perceived crisis had passed. For a situation that seemingly arose because I was perceived as not acting to get resolved without me acting, demonstrates the subtlety and complexity of this area.

Experience of such issues, linked with a growing awareness that resolution of an issue can happen quite quickly, ought to give leaders confidence in handling these situations better and help them understand that, whilst they can have very significant consequences, they can also be resolved very quickly and simply, often by quality conversation as a transforming force (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.517). However, work to aid leaders to recognise the ability of individuals to self-organise would boost their confidence, something I have observed in my own leadership practice through this research. The leadership literature is limited in recognising power of conversation and self-organisation to transform situations and therefore, not only is it counter-cultural and an area for development but also means that

leaders are not equipped to facilitate the task, recognising that self-organising followers can make leaders feel uncomfortable and highlight the sense of being both in control and not in control simultaneously (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506). This understanding should limit how much the consequence of the unknown weighs on the leader and absorbs his or her thoughts, helping ensure it is proportionate and not disproportionate. When it is disproportionate it can be debilitating and result in limited capacity for the leader to function and this is counterproductive for the leaders wellbeing, a value that is beginning to emerge as important at this stage.

Holding

Unusually, in this situation I reacted by venting my feelings on paper, and resisted reacting in any other way, allowing myself to “*sleep on it*” (2:20). As a consequence of doing these two things simultaneously, the next day I found myself more able to examine the situation without seeing it as otherwise beyond me; “*how do I detach this issue from a personal complaint against me?*” (2:28). I had allowed myself to ‘dwell’ with the situation giving me both an “openness to the ‘other’ but also openness to one’s own self” (Ladkin, 2011, p.162). I recognised that I was not just in the situation, but may have been a significant (if unwitting) cause of the problem; “*after all, it could be personal.*” (2:29). This did not remove the anxiety I had felt “*I was quite apprehensive...*” (2:39) before the meeting with Guy, but it enabled me to examine the interplay of feelings I had around my role as leader, recognising that he was someone who had been a significant shaper of me and my thinking (2:40). This small incident illustrated Figure 18 (see page 231), where my past experience of Guy, as mentor and tutor, perhaps felt most keenly as someone who had marked my essays, was evidently, from my notes, strongly influencing me in this situation. When we met, I was struck that the emotion he felt was unusual (2:41) and I realised that, though I had sought to approach his retirement carefully but flexibly, he had interpreted the flexibility as a careless

informality. As I considered how this difference of intended meaning and interpreted meaning had arisen, I saw once again the appropriateness of the image of gesture that Stacey, drawing on Mead, used to describe the process at work between individuals in organisations (Stacey, 2012, Chp.3).

I noted also, that my expectation of my own self-awareness was rising by this point. I had read widely on the implications of a theory of a CRPR and was consciously trying to pay attention, and yet see this as an example of not just falling short of my expectation of paying attention to the quality of conversation, but am particularly disappointed by my reaction to the presenting situation (2:48). I see the problem of busyness, and in particular that multitasking, seriously inhibited my ability to pay attention. This appeared to add nuance to the finding in the previous chapter that the ability to pay attention seemed to demand space and place, and yet a theory of CRPR challenged the idea of either withdrawing from a situation or of objectively observing, and therefore needing to continue to be in the midst of the interaction (Stacey, 2012, p.102). This experience seemed to suggest the possibility of a single-minded engagement, allowing me to be fully present (Stacey, 2012, p.35) and allowing for a level of attentiveness that a shallower multi-tasked engagement did not.

Issue 3 - Discovering a black hole in the finances

In the ninth month of the financial year 2012/13, it was discovered that the budgeted income would not be achieved. This was an unexpected and very significant issue that had serious consequences, including potential and actual loss of jobs, as well as challenging the viability of the college more generally. It provided an opportunity to explore the context of the leader further and specifically to examine the confidence of the leader and holding of anxiety by the leader, engaging with and acknowledging limited knowledge. Eventually the investigation yielded a level of understanding of the cause of the issue but never a completely clear picture of cause and effect. Whilst this frustrates me it is an acknowledged

reality in a CRPR perspective: “These interconnected local processes generate collective emergent outcomes which cannot be traced back to specific actions” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.507).

Data

- 1 **Issue:** Financial Problem
2 **Entry date:** Wednesday 8th of May 2013 9:30 PM (0 hours)
3 **Consequence:** ★★★★★
4 **Notes:**
- 5 *Discovered huge hole in finances. Had a budget review meeting with Richard this*
6 *afternoon and we have a very significant problem with finance. It seems the issue over*
7 *finances is to do with student numbers. We have a great deal of students, but they don't*
8 *seem to be doing all the activity or paying for as much of the activity as we thought. Many*
9 *questions still around this, and Richard doing further work.*
- 10 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★
11
- 12 **Issue:** Financial Problem
13 **Entry date:** Thursday 9th May 2013 06:29 PM (21 hours)
14 **Consequence:** ★★★★★
15 **Notes:**
- 16 *As I sit and ponder yesterday and all that happened: the review of the budget, the*
17 *realisation that we have a significant gap in the finances and the realisation that I have a*
18 *significant gap in knowledge as to how the financial problem arose and what responsibility*
19 *I have for it, I did realise that short of some miracle or a complete misunderstanding,*
20 *resolving this will require that I make further redundancies. I had hoped, perhaps naïvely,*
21 *that I had done the last of the required redundancies at Redcliffe, and now would be in a*
22 *phase of building up. I feel as though I have had to undertake one round after another of*
23 *difficult decisions and redundancy processes. Not sure I have the energy for yet another*
24 *round!*
- 25 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★
26
27
- 28 **Issue:** Financial Problem
29 **Entry date:** Thursday 16th of May 2013 9:30 AM (180 hours/7.5 days)

30 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

31 **Notes:**

32 *(Partway through the MA summer school, and therefore I am very busy.) At today's F&GP*
33 *Richard shared with me and the other members of the committee, that we appear to have*
34 *a significant gap in financing income for the year-to-date and he is looking into it. This*
35 *kind of issue always makes my stomach churn. It looked as though, a few months ago, we*
36 *were on track and this seems very unexpected. Hoping this turns out better than it*
37 *currently looks, but I am aware that we have found a number of holes where Roy had not*
38 *been coping with the role of running an increasingly complex financial side of college.*

39 *At the meeting with Henry and Roger, having talked about the problem we were facing, I*
40 *offered my resignation. I said that I recognised this unexpected black hole so late in the*
41 *year caused significant problems for both the board and the college and as Chief Executive,*
42 *this was my responsibility. I was slightly emotional, which for me is unusual in that*
43 *context. The board are used to seeing my emotion when I'm passionate, but I usually keep*
44 *my own struggles to myself. They were and are unhesitating in rejecting my suggestion*
45 *that I should resign and emphasised the need for me to respond to the challenge and lead*
46 *the college through it. They felt that I had already begun to do that by coming to the*
47 *meeting, with an action plan and not just with the problem, and a difficult one at that,*
48 *involving redundancy. This plan would require a great deal of the college leadership to see*
49 *it enacted.*

50 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

51

52

53 **Issue:** Financial Problem

54 **Entry date:** Monday 3 June 2013 5:29 PM (620 hours/26 days)

55 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

56 **Notes:**

57 *Need to explain to the board tomorrow why we have a black hole in the finances.*
58 *Currently only F&GP members are properly aware of the problem. Having only been made*
59 *aware of the problem on 16 May, Richard and I have been working flat out to try to get an*
60 *explanation of what has happened. I'm aware now of the root cause of the issue: namely*
61 *budgets being set on incorrect data and assumptions; and the activities that we are doing*

62 *being more complex than we have traditionally counted (for instance an MA student*
63 *usually being counted as a half fee actually only attending and doing a quarter fees worth*
64 *of study). But how to explain this to the board? How to take responsibility appropriately?*

65 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

66

67

68 **Issue:** Financial Problem

69 **Entry date:** Monday 3 June 2013 06:29 PM (621 hours/26 days)

70 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

71 **Notes:**

72 *Confidence takes a knock when something has happened on your watch. I recognise what*
73 *Henry said, that the easy option is to resign and walk away, the harder thing is to face the*
74 *issue, take responsibility for the situation (even if cause is questioned and blame not given*
75 *by the board) as is the case here. I have to face my own demons here - admitting I feel*
76 *that I missed something, needing to move forward with a confidence knock. Not sure I*
77 *could do this if the board were not so supportive. In fact I am certain I couldn't and*
78 *wouldn't.*

79 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

80

81

82 **Issue:** Financial Problem

83 **Entry date:** Tuesday 4 June 2013 20:45 PM (647 hours/27 days)

84 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

85 **Notes:**

86 *Board meeting today. Amazed at the support from the board today in the light of the hole*
87 *in the finances! As expected they asked very tough questions, but recognised that the*
88 *answers we gave chimed with many of the issues we've been discussing in the last two*
89 *years, in particular the increasing complexity of fees and student study patterns. I think*
90 *they also recognised and shared sense of responsibility for the time it took to recruit a*
91 *COO, despite all of us having identified the urgent need to do so. I leave feeling a sense of*
92 *responsibility to sort it out, but also confidence that the board is behind what we are*
93 *proposing to do.*

94 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★★★

95 Looking back on the board meeting and examining the minutes, the repeating
96 theme that comes through is how much we don't know. Below are some extracts
97 from that particular item in the minutes. I have highlighted in bold where the
98 unknown was made explicit.
99

100 **Extracts from Board Meeting Minutes - Meeting 4 June 2013**

101 "She spoke to a passage in Proverbs 8 which speaks of
102 knowledge, discernment, counselling and sound judgement."

103 [Summary of devotional message from Chair of Board]

104 "Before handing over to Richard [for the Management
105 Accounts Item on the Agenda], Rob apologised for the fact that
106 the accounts had not been sent out further in advance. He
107 understood that coming to a meeting without having papers in
108 advance was always difficult. Two things had contributed to
109 this, one was the realisation that we had a significant problem
110 with **income not matching what we had forecast** and the
111 other that he and Richard had been engaging to ensure they
112 had some actions in front of them to deal with that. Rob said
113 that he **did not think** they had 'taken their eye off the ball' but
114 simply that they '**did not have enough eyes** on all of the balls'.
115 The hole in the finance was **something that they had not**
116 **foreseen** earlier in the year."

117 "Richard commented that the figures are very disappointing
118 and alarming and that the question was **what had gone wrong**
119 between the budget and the actual delivery to create these
120 accounts."

121 **"We had thought** in January that any discrepancy would be
122 corrected with the inflow of students in the summer school, but
123 **we now know** that the income we have from the summer
124 school is much lower than expected, giving a dramatic shift.
125 Richard has been doing a lot of investigation since the F&GP
126 meeting. He had highlighted some **known** and some
127 **suspected** areas where things were awry and **now know** in
128 more detail."

129
130 [On the issue of a primary cause being a change in price budgeted for new students
131 and a commitment to ongoing students that their fees would remain unchanged.]

132 "Rob commented that the only people we had made such an
133 offer to, were those on the MA in Member Care. However a
134 communication went out to other students which had gone
135 **beyond anything that Rob was expecting.** It was part of the
136 standard issue letter that went out. It is an administration
137 function which looks at students who are coming back and
138 writes to confirm these things. There was no information
139 before which said that we needed to budget for different rates
140 for different students. **Richard had known nothing and Rob**
141 **was not aware either** that the letters had gone out. It was all
142 done completely aside from finance. There would be an
143 understandable expectation that a returning student would not
144 pay the full increase, but Rob **would have expected** to have
145 been able to impose a 'more than inflation' increase."

146 **"Was the budget wrong, or did we commit to something we**
147 **should never have committed to? Did we budget not taking**
148 **account** of people coming who did not have to pay fees? Or

149 should they have been paying more and we have not
150 charged enough? Rob stated that we should have spotted
151 that we would have a transition problem and secondly, the
152 communication should not have gone out to returning
153 students, because we would have put a higher-than-inflation
154 increase on the figure.”

155 [Extracts from item Management Accounts]

157	Issue:	Financial Problem
158	Entry date:	Wednesday 5 June 2013 06:40 AM (657 hours/27.4 days)
159	Consequence:	★★★★★
160	Notes:	

161 *Wigmore*²³ meeting today.

162 Have been told to be transparent and honest with Wigmore when we meet with them
163 today but I'm conscious that they are investors in Redcliffe, and have invested because they
164 had confidence in the college, but particularly, as they said on a number of occasions,
165 because they had confidence in me as the CEO. What will my admission of **not having**
166 **known** convey to them, and in particular I find it a cause of significant apprehension to go
167 into the meeting **still not knowing** all of the reasons why we're in this situation. I **know**
168 **roughly** now, why the situation has arisen but I can't quantify and pinpoint all of the
169 detail. Part of me is aware that being able to pinpoint all of the detail would add little to
170 the leadership ability of resolving the current situation: **we know what we need to**
171 **change** going forward and **we know what we need to do** as a consequence – everything
172 else is probably in reality, a luxurious waste of time.

173 Degree of unknown: ★★★★★

175 The board minute regarding the impending visit from the investors reads:

176 “Wigmore will be visiting the College tomorrow (5th June) and
177 they will be asking the same questions then. Roger cautioned

23. Wigmore were an investor in the college and advised on development issues.

178 that it was important to be truthful and say that we are doing
179 reconciliation and don't want to give you answers until we
180 have them. The budget next year will have to stand up.”

181

182

183 **Issue:** Financial Problem

184 **Entry date:** Wednesday 5 June 2013 20:34 AM (671 hours/28 days)

185 **Consequence:** ★★★★★

186 **Notes:**

187 *Meeting with Investors*

188 *They respected our openness and transparency! In fact they said on repeated occasions that*
189 *they appreciated the honesty. I don't know why this surprises me, I recognise that they are*
190 *both wanting to be supportive, but I guess I'm also aware that as investors they have*
191 *money at risk in the organisation and perhaps more importantly a reputation that they*
192 *have invested in Redcliffe and in me.*

193 **Degree of unknown:** ★★★

194 **Rewriting the data**

195 This financial issue was perhaps one of the biggest challenges for my own
196 leadership, for the Executive Team²⁴, and for the Board. It had ramifications for the
197 staff team, for the students (especially in that year) and in particular for the
198 individuals whose posts were made redundant. What are my reflections? What
199 lessons did I learn? What would I do differently as I look back? So many lessons!
200 Perhaps the strongest one would be to trust my own intuition more and trust my
201 knowledge less! What I mean by this is that I recognise that my intuition was to
202 appoint a Chief Operating Officer as an urgent need back as far as early 2010. For
203 a host of very valid reasons the process of appointing didn't actually begin until
204 early 2012, did not complete until late 2012 and was a contributing factor to a

24 The name and size of the executive leadership in the college changed over the course of the study. It was the Leadership Team before 2009 (approximately 6 people), the Executive Team from 2009 to 2012 (3 people), and the Leadership Team again from 2013 (7 people).

205 number of very significant challenges that we then faced. Knowing how hard to
206 push something when it's based on intuition and you lack hard facts, is something
207 that I still wrestle with on a daily basis. Trusting my knowledge less, has to do with
208 recognising the limitations of knowledge. Knowledge is tentative, constructed and
209 so very much influenced by the perspective from which we view it, whether this is
210 the Chair's use of a passage of Scripture that deals with trust and discernment at a
211 time of unknown, or how my own experience and baggage²⁵ affects my
212 interpretation of a situation.

213 As I engaged in this longitudinal study, I was aware, not just of the difficulty in
214 tracking these issues that I have focused on, but also recognised that the more
215 senior the leadership role the more strategic and long term the issues being dealt
216 with. This means that with an average leadership role being filled for 5 years, a
217 significant proportion of what the leader does, not only has a significant effect for
218 his or her successor, but many of the issues themselves that the leader is dealing
219 with, will only be concluded by a successor at some point in the future.

25 Whilst conscious that 'baggage' is a slang term, it captures my meaning most accurately as it reflects both things I carry into the situation and which weigh me down, influencing my response in the moment.

Analysis

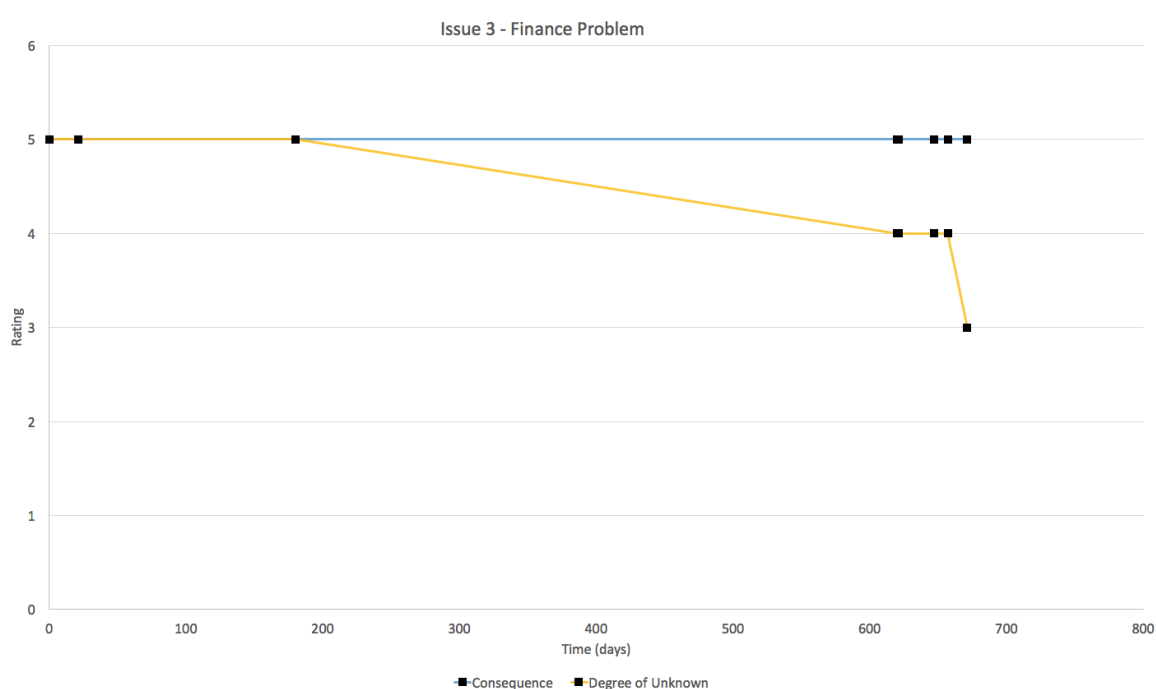


Figure 17: Issue 3 - Longitudinal Data

The graph showed that there was a brief period where the cause of the shortfall was entirely unknown, then as the information was shared and some understanding of the issue was gained, the degree of unknown was reduced. Because of the ongoing nature of the effects (in some respects the ripples of this situation were still being seen, three years on, in 2014, when I did the main analysis) the consequence never reduced and probably did not in my mind until Friday 23 June 2016, when we received all the proceeds from the sale of the site and knew we had bought ourselves 3-5 years as an organisation to prove the new model could work. From this issue I highlight three of the emerging themes:

Space for mistakes

The reaction of the board and the F&GP to Issue 3, highlights the essential requirement of the leader to be able to have space to make mistakes. When mistakes are considered fatal, the ability of the leader to not only learn from them and act upon them, but also to take responsibility for mistakes and address them, is significantly inhibited. The knowledge that the Board had not only understood the issue (error/mistake) but had verbalised their acceptance of shared responsibility meant that as CEO I felt their ongoing support; the dominant understanding of emergence at the heart of a CRPR perspective makes mistakes inevitable (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.499). This allowed me to focus on addressing the consequences of the mistake as well as giving me the renewed confidence (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.502) I needed to engage afresh with the unknown, my own limited knowledge, in what I felt was a supported safe space. This concept of safe space is something little explored but of key value to leaders if they are to do more than perpetuate the status quo, in the hope that mistakes will not be made or mistakes already made will not have consequences.

Need to act/and to not act

There is the need for the leader to act, even when the leader does not know how to act, or to be more specific, is aware of limited knowledge and yet needs to act into the unknown. This is seen in (3-46) where I attended the F&GP meeting presenting both limited knowledge, what the cause was, was still somewhat unknown, and yet also presenting a draft action plan, which proposed actions in the light both of what was known and what was not yet known, but was expected or reasonably likely i.e. the shortfall in income, whilst not fully and accurately determined, would require cuts in jobs to meet it. The concept of presenting what is acknowledged as unknown seems an oxymoron in the dominant discourse. Yet Stacey is clear firstly that “the use of particular tools and techniques...enabl[ing]

leaders and managers to choose and control future direction simply cannot be sustained in any rational argument” (2012, p.53), and also that it is “not necessary to understand the ‘whole’ in order to act; it is simply necessary to act on the basis of one’s local understanding” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.503). This gave insight into how I approached this situation.

There was a very real sense of needing to ‘act in the grey’, the grey being the likely direction, without full certainty, clarity and confidence. I had felt that the assumptions made were ‘good enough’, in that they were reasonably certain and with an acceptable boundary of unknown which could be refined and fully determined subsequently, without invalidating the initial actions based on the limited knowledge.

Causality is uncertain

One of the reasons the Board was able to navigate governance-wise, and support leadership-wise, the situation that evolved, was the repeated ‘naming’ of the unknown, of the limited knowledge in the life of the college over the previous two years (3-89). Since my early engagement with CRPR, I had been challenged to name the realities and so had gone out of my way to articulate and name unknowns within decisions, and issues we were facing. I had recognised that a theory of CRPR “calls into question any simplistic account of strategy where senior executives can predict and control organisational futures (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.517) because “leaders and managers cannot choose the future of their organizations, no matter how much planning and envisioning they do” (Stacey, 2012, p.121).

This familiarity with the unknown, with the presence of limited knowledge, undoubtedly helped the board in facing a more acute situation, with a greater potential consequence arising out of the limited knowledge I had openly acknowledged. It has the effect of “plac[ing] value on not knowing and

uncertainty.... call[ing] into question orthodox evaluations about what constitutes an action of quality” traditionally seen as “produc[ing] what was desired” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.503).

This issue reinforced the need for a third space, where different behaviour, not inhibited by the expectations and norms of the dominant discourse, could be exhibited. This would acknowledge “the paradoxical dynamic of being ‘in control’ and ‘not in control’ at the same time...the apparently messy processes of communicative interaction” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506), and a placing of “unpredictability and uncertainty at the heart of all organisational activity” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.517). This space would allow for unpacking difference, naming concerns and collective sense-making across systemic divides. Done well, this could allow for a rediscovery of natural, common-sense responses that follow instinct rather than expectation (see recommendations for further research in chapter 10).

Exactly what the place of Christian faith in the space of limited knowledge (3:102), or not knowing, might play is not clear, but the impact of the reading and reflection (3:102-104) appears to have an effect on the board’s response to limited knowledge and this must be a key area for future research.

Lines 3:130-155 are disappointing to read. I can see that with the unknown, the limited knowledge, I anthropomorphise the organisation as a way of passing responsibility for the situation away from me (3:135 - “...more than Rob was expecting.”), (3:136 - “...an administrative function...”), (3:140 - “...Rob was not aware either...”), (3:141 - “It was all done completely aside...”). Stacey says that this is a common tendency (2015, p.379) but one which I had, by this time, thought I had understood, and yet I see I quickly default to it as a means of side-stepping responsibility. The consolation is that by 3:167, I have decided to own the decisions, both the good and the bad, and the reflection from that point becomes significantly an exploration of limited knowledge, the potential of tentative certainty to begin to navigate the limited knowledge, and a good enough holding of

the anxiety to allow engagement in the messy interaction at that moment. After all Stacey and Mowles conclude that the “distinguishing feature of management is not control but courage to carry on creatively despite not knowing and not being in control, with all the anxiety that this brings” (2015, p.506).

The implications

Highlighted above in the issue-specific analysis we see six emerging aspects of leadership practice: engage in group sense-making; develop tentative certainty; understand the need to act or not act; be able to hold issues, problems or situations over a period of time; understand that causality is uncertain and the implications this has; and finally a need to develop a safe space for mistakes.

In addition, we see two further significant areas for consideration; firstly, the significant challenge of paying attention, something I will specifically explore in a later chapter. Secondly, we see the centrality of conversation to CRPR and therefore I will examine what the issues have revealed about the focus on a quality of conversation and then the specific understanding in a theory of CRPR of gesture and the added difficulties experienced in leadership practice in this area.

As already highlighted in chapter 6, the context of me as leader has an effect on my leadership, but we also see that the context of all those involved in acts of leadership are influenced and affected by the context in which they find themselves situated. Rob’s impending retirement, Kyle’s culture shock and Charles’ pre-occupation with the impending QAA inspection all impacted the leadership moment (Ladkin, 2011, p.28). How do we make decisions in the midst of the day to day realities of life when knowledge is limited? It is not as simple as concluding that leaders need time and space to think and focus, because these issues have revealed a more nuanced understanding of the issue raised earlier in chapter 7 of the tension between a need to engage in the midst of the ongoing interaction, and yet the sense of needing time and space to reflect. It highlights a tendency to

multitask (attempt to be doing several things at the same time) that makes this focus hard for the leader to achieve. It inhibits the ability of the leader to fully engage in the moment and pay attention to what is going on in the midst of the interaction and particularly to the quality of conversation. Exploring the ability to 'single-task' would seem to be important to enable the leader to operate in a way that is consistent with a theory of CRPR.

Revisiting conversation

Whilst these three issues have highlighted different themes, the common area in each is the need for quality conversation – the need to talk, and talk better than I had been able to do – what Stacey calls quality of participation in conversation. Whilst talking is a simple, straightforward human activity, quality participation in conversation is clearly harder. CRPR places a focus on everyday conversation (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500) and as already highlighted in Issue 1, the formal structures and expectations of how we do things inhibit this process. Stacey calls for much greater attention to be paid to this area (Stacey, 2010, p.82), which outside of limited, specialised areas such as group dynamics, has limited literature. Whilst conversation involves everyone in the organisation Stacey and Mowles see “refocusing attention on the conversational life of organisations” as primarily and initially being the responsibility of the leader and they also highlight the need for researchers to focus on this: to “pay attention to what is being talked about in local interaction and how, and what this may say about the evolving pattern of power relations” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500). They also emphasise that this needs to be an area of constant attention for the leader because it is not “a one-off event as it is an ongoing process of negotiation” (Stacey, 2012, p.24). Good conversation is focused on knowledge which is not a property to acquire but “active relational processes between human persons and a reflection of human identity, [and so it] cannot be captured, stored or owned” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.477), because it is not “located in individual minds, nor is it stored in any straightforward sense.

Instead, knowledge is continuously replicated and potentially transformed in the communicative interaction between people” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.477). Given my awareness from the research to this point, it is worth noting that this key focus on conversation at the heart of a CRPR perspective makes significant demands on the leader. Not least because “confidence is also required to cope with the anxiety which often accompanies the challenging of existing themes of conversation” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500) and if I am to be successful in developing a CRPR leadership practice this area would require further attention.

Quality

A quality conversation is measured in a CRPR perspective by emergence; do new things, knowledge, perspectives, understanding emerge? Suchman, who has sought to develop leadership practice in a CRPR perspective more than anyone else, says there is a balance between “diversity and responsiveness” (2002) in a good conversation. “The wider the variety of themes that can be introduced into the conversation, the greater is the opportunity that exists for new associations to form and propagate into new patterns of meaning” (Suchman, 2002), but the more diverse the themes and participants the “harder it may be for them to hear or understand one another” (Suchman, 2002). Therefore as Stacey and Mowles put it, “emergence turns on both similarity and difference” (2015, p.501). Difference often leads to conflict but CRPR offers a view of conflict as a potentially helpful force so “rather than assuming that the exploration of difference needs to be set aside for the good of the organisation, or that diversity needs to be ‘respected’, the perspective of complex responsive processes argues that novelty arises precisely and only because of diverse responses and points of view” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.517). This is very countercultural as it sees differences as things to be explored and understood, and this holding and exploration of difference can be threatening and requires a “holding of the anxiety” at an acceptable level. Stacey recognises this is particularly difficult for the leader as “confidence is also required

to cope with the anxiety which often accompanies the challenging of existing themes of conversation” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.500), but also for all of the participants who are “are continuously negotiating good enough trust, and the good enough holding of anxiety” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.501).

Gesture

How the conversation actually happens is by means of what Stacey, using the terms of Mead and Elias, calls ‘gesture’. Whether leader or follower, in a CRPR perspective both can only gesture. This “implies leaving aside the idea of the objective observer, and thinking of oneself as a participant in an ongoing process of gesture and response” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.499), and therefore “leadership has been conceptualized as essentially a participative endeavour and one in which the relational element creates something anew” (Ladkin, 2011, p.159). This highlights how a leader, viewed from a CRPR perspective, is paradoxically both in control and not in control at the same time (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506), because as Suchman warns “although a gesture originates in a particular meaning and intention on the part of the gesturer, the way it is perceived and interpreted depends upon much more than the nature of the gesture itself” (2002). The “response will also influence the meaning of all subsequent gestures and responses, and, potentially, of the whole conversation” (Suchman, 2002). This understanding is reinforced by Plowman’s work on leadership and communication outside of a CRPR perspective, where he concludes that leaders would more accurately see themselves “manag[ing] words rather than manag[ing] people” (Plowman, et al., 2007, p.354). Gestures understood like this are complex as Figure 21 below illustrates:

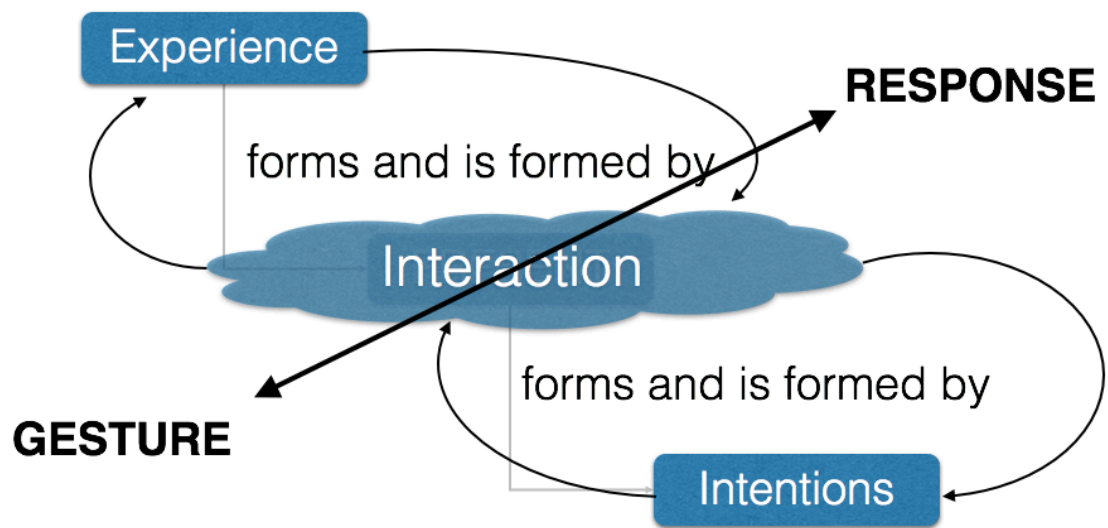


Figure 18: Gesture - Response in Time (adapted from Cooper, B. and Gibbons, T. (2009) Complex responsive process: Challenging systems thinking. Organizational Development Network Conference, 1-9)

They are formed in and by the interaction, not a privileged external leadership position, and are influenced by past experience and events, as well as hoped-for future intentions. They are also not limited to words; gestures can take almost any form: speaking - not speaking, acting - not acting, verbal and physical, and, as Richardson (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.971) recognised exploring gestures in a non-CRPR research-based context, gestures can be made in writing. We saw many examples in chapter 6 of the different ways that historical events, future hopes, written documents and the actions of individuals were all powerful gestures with far-reaching consequences.

Conclusion

This research phase helped me examine several leadership issues that required my attention. It brought into clearer focus the observation from chapter 6 that the context of the leader was important in enabling or constraining the ability to discern, make explicit and work with limited knowledge. But it also revealed how an issue can exist in the awareness of a leader and require energy, demonstrating

that the act of paying attention is active, demands energy and draws on a limited resource in a leader.

Ladkin's comment that "longitudinally-based studies ... bring new insight to [the leadership moment's] emergent and highly particularized nature" (2011, p.186) has encouraged me to conduct this longitudinal research and, whilst it has been demanding in an already busy leadership context, it was possible and raised very useful data including around the issue of leadership well-being. Continuing research in this area could continue to yield further areas of significance but has, as hoped, allowed me to look at how the context generally, but also more specifically of me as the leader, significantly affects my encounters with limited knowledge. Many of these themes that I discerned needed further exploration to both understand them better and work with them as a leader seeking to lead with limited knowledge. I discuss how I did this through teaching and speaking opportunities, as well as by ongoing examination of my own leadership, in chapter 9.

Chapter 9: Observing my emerging leadership practice

Research Overview

Phase 1 – Becoming Aware – Discovering the extent of (my) limited knowledge

Chapter 6 – A leader confronts his limited knowledge

Phase 2 - Exploring limited knowledge in leadership the light of a theory of CRPR

Chapter 7 – A couple of weeks in the life of a busy leader

Chapter 8 – Attending to the microprocesses of leadership

Phase 3 - Changing my Leadership Practice - living the learning in my leading

Chapter 9 – Observing my emerging leadership practice

In this chapter I outline how, having concluded several research phases, I was now in a writing up phase, but being a practicing researcher was continuing to teach, speak and lead. Whilst challenging from a practical level, this did provide the opportunity to continue to ‘test’ and refine the ideas, even as I sought to lead the college. The requirement that I speak and teach on these subjects in my public speaking and consulting, as well as with my students on the MA in Global Leadership in Intercultural Contexts, ensured that I continued to wrestle with these evolving themes, both theoretically and in my leadership practice. The repeated articulation of both a theory of CRPR and my struggles to apply it, gave me insights that a purely theoretical study never could have done.

My emerging themes

These are the key themes that have emerged in my examination of limited knowledge as a leader over the last few years. As I have encountered limited knowledge, examined its nature and effects, and reflected on the implications for my own leadership practice, I have sought to move from simply exploring these to defining ways of working with limited knowledge, and making those ways accessible as applied aspects of my leadership practice, that I can articulate to others. In the second half of this chapter they do undergo a further testing and review process which was unplanned and unexpected and this is described in Key revisions.

Tentative certainty

"There is no such thing as absolute certainty, but there is assurance sufficient for the purposes of human life" (John Stuart Mill).

This is the ability to be able to lead in spite of the acknowledgement of only possessing limited knowledge in the area you are acting into; the ability to 'act' as leader whilst not being completely certain and being aware of the limited knowledge. The 'acting' could be to decide or decide not to decide (see case study later in this chapter). I am no longer feeling the need to be absolutely certain before being able to lead, but rather just needing to be certain enough to take the next step, whilst remaining aware and vigilant to change direction and respond to the unexpected as I move forward. This is the ability to continue to pay attention even after tentative certainty has been arrived at and acting begins, what Stacey calls "mindful action" (Stacey, 2012, p.8), in which the actors need to continue to think reflexively together, effectively a requirement for ongoing sense-making with an expectation that course corrections will be needed in the action already taken.

Good enough

In the light of an acknowledgment of limited knowledge and the need only for tentative certainty to be able to act, what knowledge is adequate for the intended action? What constitutes good enough? Certainly perfection is rarely required. Testing the adequacy of knowledge is primarily a decision made on experience, what Stacey calls practical judgement. Practical judgement is an ongoing constant action not a single point of decision-making. It demands ongoing judgements on the original judgements made and the consequences they have produced and continue to produce, an ongoing enquiry (Stacey, 2012, p.8), and the attention is within the ongoing participation (Stacey, 2012, p.8), in the conversation that constitutes organisational life. Stacey sees two types of knowledge in use: experts making practical judgements and merely competent people who will rely on generalised rules in circumstances that are always particularised (Stacey, 2012, p.53). Practical judgement does not diminish the need for other forms of knowing (Stacey, 2012, p.56), but it does recognise that without phronetic knowledge, action cannot be effectively contextualised (Stacey, 2012, p.56).

Likewise it does not diminish the need for hard work; Berliner (1994, p.494 quoted in Weick, 1998, p.552) likens the exercising of practical judgement to a jazz player who appears to produce an effortless, spontaneous and masterful performance, and yet it follows the “major investment in practice, listening and study”. It is an experience based ability to pay attention carefully, intuit the most important aspects of a situation and act into it, coping with anxiety and uncertainty (Stacey, 2012, p.108).

Good enough holding of anxiety

To teach how to live with uncertainty, yet without being paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy can do.

Bertrand Russell
History of Western Philosophy
(quoted in Ladkin, 2011, p.177)

Every acknowledgment of limited knowledge is a doorway for anxiety to enter, and every intentional engagement with it is a choice to wrestle with anxiety and its effects, simply because uncertainty provokes anxiety (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p. 501). The anxiety is what helps us to see and accept new ideas and possibilities and is central to innovation (Sheffield, 2012).

People cope with anxiety better than we as leaders often expect, and acting collectively in a permanent supportive fashion, as can be modelled by a leader, can enhance this ability “to tolerate anxiety for longer and thus continue to struggle to achieve new meaning” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.501). By holding anxiety, you acknowledge it and work with it, rather than deny and ignore it, and this acknowledgement and holding unlocks possibility and creativity in problem-solving. This area more than any other, has implications for consideration of the well-being of the leader. If as Stacey suggests (2015, p.357) CRPR’s prerequisite is that leaders pay attention then how well anxiety can be ‘held’ dictates how well they can pay attention and, in turn how well they can help followers to do the same.

Sense-making

Unlocking the ability of individuals to contribute discernment as part of a group actively engaged in a situation, results in a much more comprehensive understanding of what is happening. The ability to simultaneously review the same situation from multiple perspectives and bring to life a three-dimensional image, rather than the two-dimensional perspective we see as individuals. This in turn allows the other themes of ‘tentative certainty’ to be sought, something that is ‘good enough’ to allow me to ‘act’ as I engage in a ‘good enough holding of anxiety’. The interdependent relationship first noted in chapter 7 is clear here.

Sense-making is an activity that happens in the midst of participation in the ongoing life of the organisation, and contrary to much of the leadership literature is not an activity limited to leaders (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.499), although they have a key part to play in enabling it. It happens primarily by conversation that is focused on exploration of difference (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.502). When we don't know what to do, when we see our knowledge limits leadership, a constructive response is to ask a question. This is both an admission of limited knowledge and a way of finding out what we need to know. Ladkin (2011, p.168) sees it as an ethical engagement because it helps us to know how to be in the world, and I would add that it helps us to remain authentic.

Act in the grey

No one knows what's next, but everybody does it.

George Carlin

Legitimising leaders to act with imperfect and incomplete information is important. It recognises that any leadership act, is an act into the grey of partial knowledge, with only a good enough means to act, and a tentative rather than complete certainty. However, it does require an admission that leadership is scary and involves living with unknown in the day-to-day practice of leadership. Therefore the explicit understanding of the basis of the acting, is vital to legitimate and enable leadership.

Practical judgement, the process by which leaders act into a CRPR perspective, is primarily about answering the question, 'what should I do?', but as Ladkin (2011, p.174) acknowledges there is a big difference between knowing and being able to do it. "Enacting leadership is about knowing what do you, when you don't know what to do" (Ladkin, 2011, p.168). Therefore acting in the grey, into the uncertain, unclear and unpredictable, is an expression of confidence, not in the self but in collective sense-making, that has given tentative certainty good enough to try, but

knowing they will have to “carry responding to what emerges” (Stacey, 2012, p.106).

Sometimes the correct action to take, particularly in a highly unpredictable situation, is no action, recognising that keeping options open to the process of sense-making is the best action at the time. Doing something and doing nothing are both leadership actions and powerful gestures (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.300) that followers observe and react to. CRPR helps avoid a feeling of impotence in the face of such situations as it values practical judgement, which is practice and experience-based learning that helps us get better at answering the question, ‘what should I do?’. Rarely did I have the knowledge to act; limited knowledge, once discerned in chapter 6, was my constant companion. Closely linked to the tentative certainty, acting in the grey takes a nuanced level of confidence sufficient to act, but not over confidence that allows an action that is disproportionate to the tentative certainty. Recognising the unpredictable causality and the consequences that the leader is always both in control and not in control at the same time, it also requires that mistakes can be made without fatal consequences.

Plan differently

Planning in a CRPR perspective is not primarily about controlling actions into the future, but rather allowing the identification of events that have disrupted the path that has previously been taken, and the understanding of the implications of a change of course. This felt experience of plans having limited influence on future outcomes was illustrated beautifully in a workshop I ran on living with the unknown when participants showed me a drawing (Figure 22 below) drawn in a previous session in response to the question ‘Where do you feel you are going in the organisation?’ This understanding allows the change of course to be done with awareness and intentionality, and allow adjustment and redirection of resources. This reverses many aspects of the traditional approach to planning, and questions

the understanding of control (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.505), whereby we plan for capacity rather than action, and optimisation, because it will inevitably not work out as planned.



Figure 19: The Ski Jump

Despite the challenge to predictability that CRPR offers (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.517; Stacey, 2012, p.1), it does not render planning relevant or pointless (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.502; Stacey, 2012, p.13), but Stacey et al offer little guidance what it might be (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.504; Stacey, 2012, p.3). Through my own commitment to applying a CRPR perspective to my leadership practice, I have come to see an increased importance for the planning process but it does serve a very different purpose. The level of control (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.505; Stacey, 2012, p.5) a plan requires, viewed as a means of determining an outcome is just not present (Stacey, 2012, p.5) in an uncertain world with individual human actors who exercise forms of resistance (Stacey, 2012, p.12; p.106). However, the role of ongoing sense-making, and the ability a of leader to act with tentative certainty into the grey, requires continuing inquiry and attention.

Therefore planning offers a means of heightened awareness to deviations from previous attempts; as demonstrated in the longitudinal research in chapter 8, we quickly move on from strong feelings amidst the busyness of leadership. Plans can be very helpful in allowing us to review constantly, making course corrections (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.504), not so much to enable us to arrive at a predefined destination but rather to be able to continue to navigate wisely and safely. It encourages the use of scenarios in sense-making and the work of Weick and Sutcliffe helped me in approaching planning in the way I am suggesting (2001).

Causality is uncertain

Causality is uncertain and so in our leadership and decision-making it is important that we explore scenarios and understand the possible consequences, because we cannot presume the degree of specificity and accuracy in outcome that we have historically done. It is also important to begin to make this explicit, and challenge the assumption that leaders are in control, whilst making clear such a perspective does not leave leaders impotent bystanders (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.504).

The causality leaders can exert is, in terms of “power relations, ideology and socialised self-control ... express[ed] through negotiation” (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.504). In other words, in daily life, in the form of gestures (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506), through words, actions, plans, documents and statements, the normal business of leadership in the dominant discourses are the means by which the leader exerts cause. Yet a CRPR perspective cautions seeing a linear, logical predictability of outcome. Stacey and Mowles suggest that the control leaders can exercise might be more accurately described as constraint (2015, p.504). The actions of a leader can have significant influence but not the absolute control (Stacey, 2012, p.4) many voices in the dominant discourses would suggest.

Space for mistakes

In a world where we do not have time to fully test every idea before implementation, causality is uncertain and knowledge is limited, and yet we are required to be nimble, responsive and agile, making space for mistakes and creating an environment in which those mistakes are no longer fatal. This is vital for our ongoing development and survival. A responsive process perspective on complexity rejects impotence, seeing power in gestures, particularly 'leaderful' gestures (Ladkin, 2011, p.52), and yet fully acknowledging the unpredictable causality. This means that despite a leader's best intentions, the outcome may not be as predicted, planned or expected. Leadership cannot predict and control outcomes (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.502) and therefore leaders are not able to guarantee that mistakes won't happen (Stacey, 2012, p.10). They can only do their best through intention, and attention to careful gestures amidst the ongoing interaction that characterises organisational life, but this takes courage because it accepts the chance of failure. To do it well and to keep on doing it also requires an understanding of this state of being both in control and not in control at the same time (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.506) by those around the leader so that the inevitable mistakes (Stacey, 2012, p.10), or unexpected outcomes, are not inevitably (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.516) seen as a failure of the leader (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, p.502). If they are, this halts the process of continuing to pay attention and continuing to act that I have outlined in sense making and acting in the grey, and prevents the opportunity to learn from the experiences and to achieve better outcomes in future interactions and actions (Stacey, 2012, p.57). In an environment that fails to recognise this and considers mistakes a fatal failure of leadership, the feeling of impotence can return, not because the leader is powerless but because an intentioned act can still have an unpredictable outcome.

Observing my emerging leadership practice in an unexpected story

In the Summer of 2014, I had an event, and a resulting experience with my leadership team, that brought together all that I had engaged with and developed over the course of my PhD studies. It allowed me to reflect on my learning, explore how my leadership team responded to my changed leadership practice, and consolidate my thinking in a very helpful way.

The occurrence

The 23rd of April found me sitting in an interview for new teaching members of faculty. I was completing a process that I felt had begun 5 years earlier. I was recruiting for two FTE faculty positions, one of which was to replace CJ, the only remaining member of the original faculty team I inherited when I became principal in 2009. After the second interview concluded, Maria, my PA, brought in a printout of a letter and said, “I think you should see this.” It was a letter from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), addressed to me as the principal and with the bold title “Minded to Refuse” (see Appendix 4). It set out, in two pages, that the department was inclined to refuse our course re-designation and thereby end our entitlement to Student Loan Company (SLC) funding, for students undertaking our undergraduate course.

Significantly, the posts we were interviewing for were to teach on this programme, and the programme had been redesigned and was just being submitted for a validation event with the University of Gloucestershire, our validating body. It had taken 9 months to rethink and redesign it. Alex had just spent an inordinate amount of time leading this process.

I asked myself the following questions: how do I go on with this interview process, with this uncertainty? Is this the end of the undergraduate programme at RC? Surely it can’t survive without SLC funding?

Of course I went on with the interviews, but as I sat there asking questions of these applicants, some of whom lived overseas and were considering moving to England to take up the role if they were successful, I felt physically sick.

During the lunch break we were able to phone the writer of the letter in BIS and surprisingly he was very reassuring, implying that we need only to write a good defence for the questions they had raised, for the 'minded to refuse' status to be revoked rather than confirmed.

Richard did a great job of responding to the letter, and we expected a positive response by the officer in BIS. After that deadline date came and went, and we had heard nothing, I initially felt that this was just bureaucratic delay. However as time went on, and particularly after two frustrating communiqués with the writer of the letter that raised alarm bells, I decided to seek the help of the local MP, Owen Jones. On the afternoon of Friday 13 June, I met with Owen, along with James, one of my new trustees. Owen was quick to offer his help and suggested getting the decision postponed to allow a full response and discussion. He agreed to action this immediately and we began talking about more general diocese-related issues. Just as we were concluding the meeting, I received an email with an attached letter from BIS, saying that we had had our designation refused and would no longer be eligible for student loan funding. It said that this was effective immediately for all new students, and the decision was full and final with no appeal.

Owen agreed to advocate on our behalf, but highlighted that getting a decision overturned was much more difficult than getting a decision postponed as we had previously planned.

Personal coming to terms

I decided not to tell anyone else that evening but rather to sleep on the news.

Why is everything seemingly against us? It seems to be one thing after the other recently First QAA had to be navigated at

great cost; then HTS, which we lost; and now SLC. We are attacked by abbreviations on every side. It feels so bloody unfair. Feel as though I'm beset by questions...Won't this mean the end of Redcliffe? Does this spell the end of the undergraduate programme? Alex has just finished redesigning the undergraduate programme. How will he cope? What will the University say – they've just finished validating it? What does this mean staff? Could I have done something more to prevent this?

Journal 17:45 13 June 2014

James and Liz came to dinner this evening. We arranged it some weeks ago. We didn't really talk work, we just wanted to spend some time getting to know one another. Although in one way it was strange not to talk about such a pressing issue, I think if we had done, we would have been jumping to conclusions. Instead the evening just allowed it to percolate in the back of my mind.

Up early this morning. Not because of a bad night's sleep worrying, but the certain knowledge that once I was awake I needed to think. I realise this morning, sitting reflecting, that despite the potentially tragic consequences for the undergraduate programme at Redcliffe, and even potentially for the college; I'm most concerned about my team. There are a brilliant team; arguably the team I've been working towards for 5 years. We've been working really well together, but we haven't had a big test. I realise there's a part of me that fears what they will do, how they will react, and what they will say. They might be really upset and there's a huge part of me just

wants to be able to fix it for them. I acknowledge the bit of me that wants to fix things is still alive and well, not banished, perhaps just held in check. I realise too that I face a decision: do I risk the new team, by exposing them the full reality we face, or do I seek to water it down, go with my solution, and be the leader so many people expect me to be?

Reminded of my journal entry of 25 April 2014 where I quoted Marcia Whicker from my MA dissertation “The style of leadership does shape the organisation and once an organisation is in decline and a toxic culture has been created, pressures build up for leaders to slip into leadership types that are more negative in their long-run impact on followers’ well-being and organisational productivity.” (Whicker, 1996) I don’t believe Redcliffe is in any way a toxic organisation and in fact think that it is functioning more healthily now than it has done before during my leadership, but I’m aware that in challenging circumstances, stronger, confident and some would say simple leadership, can be offered and accepted when at other times it would be viewed as toxic. This is a real test. Can I really hold to this leadership practice when it really matters, when the very existence of the organisation that I lead depends on it?

Journal 06:05 14 June 2014

The following day I emailed the board members but decided not to ruin the weekend for the leadership team members.

From: Rob Hay [<mailto:rhay@redcliffe.org>]

Sent: 14 June 2014 17:51

To: redcliffeboard@redcliffe.org

Subject: IMPORTANT: Student Loan Funding Rejection

Dear All,

Apologies for hitting you with this over the weekend but last night we received a letter from BIS notifying us that they had rejected our redesignation application and we would lose the ability for any new students to get student loans. The letter says quite clearly this is a Final Decision with No Appeal. You can see below in the email of 17:51 that we were able to discuss it with Owen Jones (OJ), the MP, and I had already emailed him subsequent to James and myself meeting with him. I have numbered the following points so that you can refer to them easily in any responses.

From the phone call this afternoon with Helen and after 24hrs to ponder this, my thoughts and I think Helen's thoughts are as follows:

1. Our best hope at this point is to get a postponement of the decision that would allow us to take students on a SLC basis for the coming year and then undergo further scrutiny with BIS/HEFCE for a decision beyond the next year.
2. OJ offers our best hope of achieving that in a workable timescale - therefore I will phone OJ's secretary on Monday afternoon and check progress to keep pressure on.
3. Helen has suggested that we contact the lawyers dealing with the applicant complaint and seek their advice around challenging the lack of process (as you will read below, this is the bit that I feel is most unfair)

4. There are various other people we could lobby to challenge / intervene on our behalf, the problem is that most of these would seem likely to be too slow to save the undergraduate programme (see 5. below)

5. Back to the moral issue we discussed at the Board meeting - it feels as though if we do not see OJ make some significant progress that would give us hope it could be reversed THIS WEEK, we would need to be telling new students by at the latest 24 June and this will also effectively include 2 existing students who want to shift to longer courses and stay an extra year (both of these would not be possible!)

6. As soon as we notify students and potential students the confidence in the undergraduate programme and to some extent the college as a whole (particularly if we are seen to be dithering on the future of the UG programme) would be very unhelpful.

In the midst of feeling a sense of injustice and an understandable desire to challenge the decision and process, we need to also discern whether God is guiding us through circumstance. Having considered the future of the UG programme several times, is He now challenging us to get on with it and stop holding on to something that has given us security in the past? I know I would prefer to try to reshape in a more managed and what feels like a more responsible way BUT He doesn't promise to give us what we want but what we need! I am not sure what the next step is and continue to think and pray but I am aware I wish we had a couple more days to digest this before the partnership meeting that Helen

and I have on Tuesday morning - therefore any PRAYERFUL REFLECTIONS FROM OTHER BOARD MEMBERS WOULD BE APPRECIATED and if they can be on a reply all basis we can think, ponder and pray together.

Pondering Isaiah 55 as I pray.

Blessings

Rob

I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things.

Pondering and praying today!

Didn't take much in, in church today. My mind is full of questions. There are different options we could explore, different reactions that we could have. I realise I'm a little anxious even about the team's reaction to my decision not to tell them until Monday. But this time feels helpful. As I sit and ponder, I recall that the Redcliffe I came to as a student in 1997, was largely still at that point an organisation that controlled its own destiny. They were only beginning to explore validation, there was no QAA, SLC, or HTS. Yes there were visa challenges; and some students occasionally got delayed in their application, but largely whether the college survived was determined by the college, its staff and leadership. How creative the staff developing and teaching the programs were, how welcoming all the staff were in ensuring that the student experience was excellent, and how effective the marketing and promotion of the college was, all combined to attract students. I know at the time this felt challenging, but now as I look back, they seem golden days. Now with the young innovative and creative teaching team, a

passionate and professional support team and social media supported international links, we could still be wiped out, it seemed, by the capricious decision of the civil servant.

Journal 14:59 15 June 2014

Now as I look back on this, it's clear in my writing that part of this process, the 'percolation process', was grieving. It was coming to terms with the shock, exploring the options and accepting all of the possible consequences, and beginning to grieve, hope and plan for each and every possible scenario.

Sharing the occurrence

On Monday morning I asked to see all the leadership team members at 11 AM and shared the news with them. I was nervous to do this, not least because many people, and in particular AJ, had put so much work into getting the new program validated and that would seemingly be completely wasted now.

The team members were shocked, but it was interesting to see how each of them reacted. I kept the meeting short, encouraged questions of clarity, and in reality many of the questions that people had we were not in a position to answer. I encouraged people to go away, reflect on the news and then suggested that we would meet again the following day.

This began a pattern of daily meetings. My main role in these meetings throughout the rest of the week seemed to comprise of convening the meeting, recapping the previous day's discussion, and metaphorically stepping back to allow the different leadership team members to speak. What I repeatedly found myself doing was ensuring that we did not take any decisions. It was apparent that each time we met, two things in particular were happening. Firstly, people were coming to terms with the news themselves. Secondly, an understanding was developing collectively

by talking about the situation we faced, and options were developing in discussion in the group.

Looking back

This was a very useful case study to review as it was well defined, dealing with a specific problem over a limited timeframe (characteristics of a good case study according to (Yin, 2013)). My own reflection was a daily process, captured in journal entries as demonstrated by the journal entry below:

As I look back on this week, and the process that we went through, I perceive that I was subconsciously applying all of the key ideas I had been 'playing with' during this Ph.D. Research.

Journal 17:46 20 June 2014

A full review was then undertaken in a group reflective practice process (as outlined by Bolton (2014, pp.186-195), to examine what the Leadership Team could learn from the experience we had gone through two months prior. The sense of 'play' that had been so useful in the earlier phases, now felt difficult; how can you play when the survival of the organisation, the employment of staff, and the well-being of students, rides on the outcome? How can you 'play', when the stakes are so high? Surely this is a time to be serious!

It was certainly a time when the temptation to revert to previous leadership practices was strong. Could this responsive process leadership really stand up to such a rigorous test, or was it in reality just an 'academic exercise'?

It could and did stand up to a serious leadership challenge, and it also required that I kept an element of playfulness as I outline below.

1. Tentative certainty

From the outset, possibly helped by taking the weekend to consider the situation for myself, I realised that there was a lot we did not know. There was a vague hope that OJ could overturn the decision, and progressively we reached a point of tentative certainty about the future of the program, regardless of the funding decision outcome.

It had been helpful that Rob had asked the question “What if we don’t get SLC?” Even though at that point it seemed unlikely we would be refused, we were still starting to get our heads around it. (PY)

2. Good enough

There was the temptation from soon after receiving the decision, to immediately begin calculating in detail the consequences of losing this funding, of looking at the effect on student intake and many other potential areas. In reality what happened was that through discussion and a whiteboard-based exercise (see below) we did a rough calculation on what the net effect would be both for income and student numbers. The advantage of this being broadly right, but without an excessive level of detail, was that it limited how distracted people could get by the information.

		T 13/14	T 13/14	T 14/15	13/14	4/15
<u>UG</u>	- 3YR - 2YR (DIP) - 1YR (COST)	X	0	30		
<u>NON-VAL</u>	- PIM (VAL) - PQM (NON-VAL) - LEAD ON.	1/2 Sem. X	10 (15)		£45K	
<u>PG</u>	- NUMBER CASE - LEADERSTUD - GLOBAL ISSUES - EURO - JUSTICE - R.M. - A.I.	MA Proj. 12 (ss) 12 (ss) 6 (ss)	12 24	12 (ss) 12 (ss) 18 (ss)	£12K £90K £20K	£20K
	£1300 £1300 £1300	MODULAR MA10 JAR MA11 JAR MA11 JAR MA11 JAR MA11 JAR	8 12 8		£10K £15K £10K	
<u>LTA</u>	- PG CERT - PG DIP (SANDHART)		20	30	-	
<u>NEW INTS</u>	£50K - MOODY - OFF SITE INTENSE		25			

Figure 20: Whiteboard calculation of likely effect of loss of SLC funding

3. Good enough holding of anxiety

There was a tension in the discussions during the first few days and the only way I could find to relieve it was to make very clear, that on that particular day we would not make any firm decisions. This certainly didn't remove anxiety from the picture, but it did seem to remove the inhibitor that limited discussion, helping people see options, and allowing for the group to hear one another.

Rob presented it as an open process and it only started to close when the dates became important. It was not a prescribed end point, enabling all options to be explored. (AJ)

4. Sense-making

I insisted on the discussion and decisions ideally being group-based ones that could be owned by the entire leadership team. Stating this early on placed a responsibility on everyone in the leadership team, to be part of the process that sense-made and discerned what was going on.

Meeting every day in the first week helped everyone to process things, each person processes things at different times and in different ways. Some processed things quickly and needed the meetings to help get their position sorted, others processed more slowly but the meetings were still useful. This led to a consensus. (PY)

It was helpful that Rob gave the LT the weekend before telling them. (AR)

5. Acting in the grey

Eventually, after one week, we had reached a point where, in talking, we drew out the collective mind to a point where we were prepared to act. AJ was actually the one who said, “If the decision now gets reversed it feels as though that would be inconvenient.” This seemed to reflect that we felt we had reached a point where we could act in the light of the uncertainty, and that potentially having a greater degree of certainty in a day or two’s time may inhibit our ability to act, and potentially even our ability to do the right thing.

The good thing was the honesty between the LT members. There were lots of different perspectives shared honestly, we were able to disagree honestly but remain in fellowship. There was honest debate at a good level. (BT)

6. Plan differently

From the very beginning of the discussions, perhaps because of the situation we were faced with, the team talked in terms of scenarios and scenario planning, rather than developing the ultimate solution.

When he told the latest news, Rob also gave a paper with some ideas about the implications and possible ways forward. This was more helpful than a blank page, but was billed as “this is subject to change” (AR).

7. Causality is uncertain

If we had set out to discuss the future of Redcliffe, specifically the future of the undergraduate programme and residential base, it would have been a big discussion, highly structured, with lots of information and data. As it was, the discussion was with sparse data, sat around drinking coffee, and it emerged as an unexpected side in the main conversation initially. This directly illustrated the observation made in chapter 7 on page 184.

Whilst the leadership team has the overall responsibility for the future of the college, as Christians we believe that the leadership responsibility is not exercised entirely independently if we are doing it right. We believe that God has promised to guide and lead us in the decisions we take and actions we make. Therefore, we have an added dilemma here about causality; was this God guiding us to close the undergraduate programme and consider moving off the current site, or did we believe that it was spiritual opposition? Whichever it was required two very different and opposing actions: we stand against the opposition, fight hard and keep the college where it is and the undergraduate programme open, or we close the program and consider relocation and we do that confidently because we believe that's what God is telling us to do.

It was interesting the way that different people interpreted the same things differently, as either opposition or clear guidance. Good how LT managed those different interpretations and based decisions on it. If we accepted it as God's guidance it was easier to accept, as opposition is something that needs to be fought. LT held the two tensions together well. (AR)

This was an area that I have wrestled with over the years and one I had pondered in my journal on the first day, when I shared the news with the leadership team. Maria had shared the Taize reading of the day with me: "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" Jeremiah 29:11

So much of leadership is about discernment. As Christian leaders we add into that mix the ever present question, "What is the mind of God" ...in this particular situation? How do we know this? And what are its implications? Understanding those three questions helps us engage in the process of discernment. If, as I personally believe, in many situations the mind of God is simply that we do what is right, not in the sense of the rightness of the decision but in the righteousness of the decision - how does this help us? In other words God is more interested in how we go about making the decision than he is in the final decision we arrive at. Micah 6:8 captures this well: "But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously"

Journal 12:00pm 16 June 2014

Clearly my own leadership practice is influenced by my Christian faith and various aspects of CRPR, such as the role of emergence, feel intuitively complimentary to faith, but this area has not been examined closely in this study or in the wider literature and is certainly an area for further research as I outline in chapter 10.

8. Space for mistakes

I am not sure how we achieved this, but we appeared to feel we could explore anything, that nothing was off the agenda. This allowed us to begin to think the unthinkable things; Redcliffe without an undergraduate programme was difficult to imagine and yet Redcliffe without a large residential based building was almost impossible to conceive, it challenged the heart of what we were and are and could be!

Going through the SLC experience would help LT, support staff to cope with the changes that would have to happen in the coming months. The boundary we had set there was that we see our future being in Gloucester. This should give people sufficient certainty to engage with the other uncertainties.

(Notes on from LT debrief 2 months later)

Reflections on the experience - October 2014

I reflect here on what the process enabled. I have often jokingly described my leadership team members over the last seven years as “my lab rats”...and yet whilst this has some truth in it, the reality is much more complex. What came into sharp focus during this experience and was reinforced with the subsequent reflection, was that whilst they were part of an experiment in this case study, that only became obvious later as I reflected on it; at the time I was just leading them in a difficult time, in the best way I knew. That it was using the leadership practices I

had developed to allow me to more explicitly acknowledge the significance of limited knowledge, was me doing my best to lead, not a calculated approach; it had become my natural and subconscious reaction. In the days afterwards, as we explored the future for Redcliffe further and contemplated acting upon some of the ‘unthinkables’ we engaged with, the ability to maintain a loose hold as a leader, to seek to enable leadership rather than retain a pseudo-control by exercising control and constraint for my own sense of comfort, was both a challenge and also essential.

Key revisions

These are not so much revisions but reaffirmations through this process that it could work, that it did help achieve better outcomes and most fundamentally, I could trust it. The main additional development at this point was seeing more clearly, with the benefit of group sense-making after the event, the interconnected nature of the themes that I had seen at various stages of the research. Work on an integrated articulation of the eight individual themes began and eventually resulted in the model in Figure 24 (see page 261). Even as I did this, I was conscious of the limitations of models and so it is constructed as an iterative process, both between the layers and between the two themes in each layer.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the process I went through in articulating the themes that had emerged. They had been refined by the process of teaching on them in regular classes, whilst attempting to live them out in my leadership practice through a period of leadership that was characterised by significant change and uncertainty. Having summarised each of the themes, the SLC funding issue arose and the way I led through that period was discerned as being different by my leadership team. Recognising the way in which I had been enacting a changed leadership practice, we engaged in a group review process and analysed the experience. These insights

gave me confidence that they could genuinely enable me to not just cope, but with limited knowledge in a situation, to arrive at a better outcome and, from the leadership team feedback, through a better process. It also gave me the opportunity to view how the themes interacted with one another and led to the articulation of the Circles of Leadership Practice in a Complex Responsive Process of Relating Perspective (Figure 24 on page 261), both as a means of reflecting their interdependence, as well as answering key foundational questions posed by the traditional discourses of how leadership gets done.

Chapter 10: Concluding...and yet a continuing journey

Introduction

In this chapter I reflect on this research process and the learning over the last 7 years. I revisit the eight themes developed, examining how this has changed my own leadership practice. Defining the contributions made across four main areas, I examine the journey of discovery recognising that these are tentative conclusions that I will continue to research in my own leadership practice in the years ahead. Tentative, because the nature of knowledge, as demonstrated by this engagement with the theory of CRPR, is always limited, emerging and changing in the act of participating in life and leading.

I conclude by reviewing the research question and the underlying objectives and then highlight some key areas for further research, the most urgent of which is a very personal need to examine the sustainability of my changed leadership practice.

Revisiting the 8 themes

The gap between my leadership experience and the theory implicit in the dominant discourses had caused me to engage with a theory of CRPR, as I sought a way of acknowledging limited knowledge in my own leadership practice. This engagement had cast doubt on assumptions that my leadership practice had been based on and so I felt the need to reconstruct my own leadership practice in the light of my research. As a practicing researcher, combining the roles of leading, researching and teaching required that I articulate my emerging leadership practice to students, as well as test it in my research and utilise it daily in my leadership of the college. This need helped move my thinking beyond the eight loosely connected themes that had emerged in my leadership activity. Together they became a coherent way of thinking that answered the questions of traditional leadership theories: what do leaders do, how do they do it, and how do they plan and exercise control?

My changed leadership practice

Key terms in the description are highlighted and link to the terms used in Figure 24 below and should be read in conjunction with it.

How I **Act** has changed significantly. As a leader I needed to act but limited knowledge meant I was not sure how to act. This tension of needing to act and not knowing exactly how to, is what I had termed being able to **Act in the grey**. To begin to do this I needed to be able to make sense of what was going on; to sense-make. The activity of **Sense-making** needs to be a group process if it is to be accurate. It combines limited individual perspectives on a situation to gain a more complete and more accurate understanding. Importantly for me as a leader was the additional recognition that whilst it is improved knowledge, it is still limited.

This way of acting profoundly challenged my **Thinking**. So even when I have benefitted from the group process of sense-making, my thinking needed to be focused on gaining a **Good enough** perspective rather than holding out for a perfect, and ultimately unobtainable, perspective. I simply needed it to be sufficient to allow me to act with **Tentative certainty**. This view of enough certainty to act but with a degree of caution, both constrained the strength with which I could act and held open my ability to review and change action.

This thinking was based on some fundamental **Assumptions**. Firstly, that **Causality is uncertain** and consequently I had limited control over any outcomes. This admission in the role of a leader has far reaching implications for control and planning approaches, but it immediately requires a second assumption; to be able to act in the grey requires **Space for mistakes**. Only with that do I feel able to act when only possessing tentative certainty.

How **Control** was exercised was then altered and I needed to **Plan differently**. The plan was no longer primarily about measuring conformity to predefined intentions, but rather being able to quantify variance from the plan, and the level of adjustment required in the light of the plan's distance from reality. This view of

control, constrained by limited knowledge, tentative certainty, uncertain causality and inevitability of failure (requiring space for mistakes) all made significant demands on me as the leader to cope with anxiety. Therefore a key focus for me was to ensure a **Good enough holding of anxiety** that allowed me to continue to function.

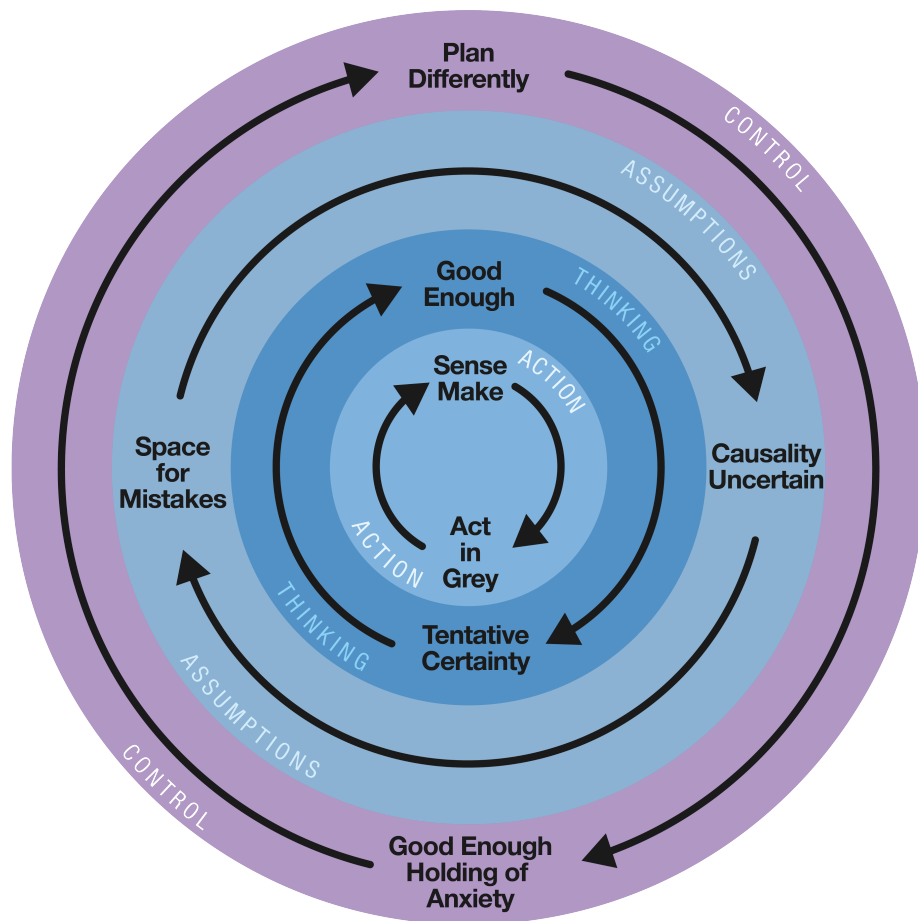


Figure 21: Circles of Leadership Practice in a Complex Responsive Process of Relating Perspective

These circles of leadership practice also illustrate the iterative nature of practising leadership in the midst of the microprocesses that constitute organisations. The need to act whilst observing the action and responding in mid-action to the emerging situation that the action contributes to, is now a vital part of my leadership practice. The problem I found, as the leadership practice was embedded

and became normal for me, was the human cost; I conclude the research with key questions about its sustainability.

All of the themes and much of the underlying theory of CRPR rely on 'paying attention to the quality of ongoing participation' (Stacey, 2012, p.113). Stacey and others write extensively on this subject, but as I have sought to develop my leadership practice the cost of paying attention has become obvious. In summer 2015 my annual psychological assessment sounded a major alarm bell. The signs of limited capacity evident in 2014 had continued to reduce and the results gave the clearest indication to date that the conditions for development of toxic leadership behaviour were present (Allio, 2007; Hay, 2003; Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Whicker, 1996). Ironically the exploration of my leadership practice that had its roots in a concern about causes of toxic leadership, could potentially be making me more susceptible to it. The referral to a coach/counsellor and intensive work for the next twelve months helped me tackle this but I am left with a need to examine this aspect of sustainability more closely (see Further Research p.268).

Stacey is primarily an academic, Streatfield, Griffin and Shaw are primarily consultants and whilst seeking to apply the implications of a theory of CRPR in the organisations they work with, none of them have attempted to lead an organisation long term as I had done. I will continue to be a researcher-leader and observe my own leadership practice and I will continue to seek to lead authentically by acknowledging the limits of my knowledge. However, I am cautious about the personal cost and the urgent need is for further research to look at how leaders can keep on paying attention, the primary requirement for all that I have focused on.

Areas of Contribution

The research makes contributions in 4 distinct areas:

Theoretical contribution

This study provides original insight into the implications of Stacey's Theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating for leadership theory, research and practice. These insights have significant implications for common leadership practices providing a nuanced understanding of their role but also their limitations e.g. tools and techniques have a place but but can get in the way; lighter control does not mean no control; agenda-less conversations can be influential; coherent patterns are difficult to predict, but not entirely random.

The findings and insights are presented through a unique conceptual framework Figure 21: Circles of Leadership Practice (p.261) that takes the research beyond a collection of independent leadership practices and articulates their place in the life of a leader seeking to lead with explicit acknowledgement of their limited knowledge.

Empirical contribution

This study offers data derived in a leadership context, for other leaders and researchers to use. Specifically, it focused on strategic leadership in higher education in a faith-based college context, by a leader with a strong Christian faith that whilst not the centre of the study is acknowledged and forms part of the reflection. Data on the application of a theory of CRPR generally is very limited, and particularly so where foundational data generated has been shared explicitly; Sheffield, (2012); Suchman, (2006) and Suchman, (2002) would be three examples. Because this study tracked engagement with and effect of a theory of CRPR in the leader's thinking and practice over a seven-year period, the longitudinal data is extensive: from the unexpected engagement with CRPR,

through conscious exploration and then intentional discovery. The subsequent development a CRPR orientated leadership practice which was taught to students and used in a leadership team context and examined in a case study where the learning was seen and experienced by eight people dealing with a very challenging leadership situation, provides additional rare data on the application and operationalisation of insights.

This is an extensive reflexive analysis of complex narrative orientated data and because it crosses the different aspects of research, leadership and teaching, and locates the learning between those different elements, it offers a unique and substantial contribution of data that challenges existing paradigms and theories of leadership.

Methodological contribution

There is a significant divide between leadership and research which few individuals span on a day-to-day basis. The mixed methods approach developed to apply CRPR to a busy leaders' leadership practice, offers both a robust research methodology and an appropriate reflective practice for active leaders. It was relatively unobtrusive and caused as little inconvenience as possible - vital if research is to be encouraged amongst leaders holding busy and demanding full-time roles. The five different research approaches incorporated: reflective journalling, event-based reflection, longitudinal study, emerging practice observation and group reflective practice, and all offer significant contributions in the new and emerging field of CRPR orientated leadership research.

Additionally, alongside applying a theory of CRPR to leadership practice, this study has developed, articulated and considered the ethical implications of leadership research when operating with a CRPR perspective. This approach to ethics in a constructivist worldview, where meaning is constantly being negotiated, has much wider application than just leadership studies.

Practice contribution

The contributions are in both the areas of leadership practice and research approaches to leadership practice. In leadership practice the research builds a bridge between the theory of CRPR and the day to day practices of leaders making the theory accessible. The integrative framework that conceptualised the findings in the Circles of Leadership (p.261) as more than individual disparate ideas, offers leaders a way to approach leadership differently and explore the evidence and findings of the research in their own practice. Recognising the limitations and constraints imposed by models (see Stacey's concept of second order abstractions p. 63) the framework offered by the Circles of Leadership could provide leadership development practitioners a way to teach the foundations for a reflective leadership practice. It should also encourage other leaders to be researching practitioners seeking to take the valuable insights of a theory CRPR seriously in their own leadership practice without them simply becoming tools which a CRPR perspective views as problematic.

The insistence that neither evocative autoethnography nor analytical autoethnography was sufficient for the needs of research into leadership practice has demanded the articulation of an autoethnography that occupies the middle ground, keeping in tension the normally opposing fields of evocative and analytical autoethnography (p.102). Whilst further work is needed (see p.270) this study has demonstrated that robust analysis of evocative autoethnography is possible and has enabled new insights into the lived experience of leadership.

Continuing the journey

I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or

books written in a very foreign language . . . Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way to the answer.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Letters to a Young Poet

(Ladkin, 2011, p.14)

This research process, also a personal journey to examine my own leadership practice, began with questions and finishes with questions, the need to go on asking questions, and paying attention to how I participate. During the research, as I sought suitable research methods, I read Marshall's action research article "Living Life as Inquiry" (1999) and was intrigued by her level of commitment to her research task of examining her "life space", thinking how intense that must be. As I conclude this study, I am aware just how intense this research process has been, but I am also conscious that the research has been focused on trying to paying attention and my leadership practice has largely become dependent of keeping on, keeping on paying attention. As indicated in the previous chapter, the personal cost of this has been significant, but the personal transformation in my leadership practice has been irreversible. The excerpt below, written for an autoethnography workshop held at University of the West of England in 2015, describes the transformational nature of the initial engagement with CRPR back in 2009:

It was as if someone had told me that Einstein was wrong – gravity didn't exist. In one sense nothing had changed – everybody still walked along the earth ... but now I knew that really it was because they have Velcro on the soles of their feet. All of my underlying assumptions were wrong ... everything I'd ever learnt .. was wrong!

Autoethnography written for UWE Seminar - October 2015

See Appendix 2 for full text

So the research must continue for it does feel like a new way of living and leading, but the events of the last 18 months have painfully highlighted the cost of my emerging CRPR leadership practice. Therefore, tentative conclusions drawn and tested will continue to be practised, but with a significant focus on self-care for there is a cost to paying attention and the data has highlighted the importance of wellbeing on my ability to engage with limited knowledge.

Revisiting the research questions

The key effect on my leadership of having limited knowledge is that I can be inhibited to act. The limited knowledge can often be sensed before it can be understood and located, and until then is very difficult to address. Even acknowledging the lack of knowledge to self can be challenging because of the expectations on a leader to be in control, and the assumption that to be in control you must 'know'.

The primary research question:

- To explore the effect on my leadership practice of acknowledging limited knowledge.

Research objectives arising from the primary aim:

1. To explore and record in a systematic way the instances, nature and extent of limited knowledge experienced by the leader
2. To develop a research approach that facilitates the exploration of organisational situations characterised by limited knowledge
3. To enquire into the ways in which limited knowledge affects a leader
4. To articulate and operationalise a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of

Relating in ways that are accessible to busy leaders seeking to lead authentically in situations characterised by limited knowledge

5. To contribute to the limited literature on methodological approaches for using a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating in research studies

The research objectives have been achieved but the fourth one only to a limited degree. The limitation is at least in part a recognition that being able to articulate and operationalise CRPR may be inappropriate. The tension recognised in chapter 3 (p.55) of tools being both useful and inherently unhelpful speaks to this issue most obviously but also danger of abstractions oversimplifying (p.63). The desire for simplicity, definition and predictability, discussed in chapter 2 (p.17) appears antithetical to the continuous construction of meaning in a constantly changing context portrayed by Stacey in the responsive, gesture based relationships at the heart of a Complex Responsive Processes of Relating perspective.

Areas for further research

As expected in a new and emerging field of research this study of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating has highlighted many new areas requiring further work. The exploration of the following three areas will be pursued in my own post-doctoral research.

How can leaders keep on keeping on paying attention?

From my experience, it is difficult, if not seemingly impossible to sustain a CRPR perspective based leadership practice because of the demand on the leader to pay attention. How can this be sustained, what practices can be modified and will it become easier over time? A further longitudinal study using the database to examine the degree of felt unknown and consequences but correlating with a

coping capacity measure such as the Heimler scale (used in my annual psychological assessment, discussed on p.262) would provide data on the relationship between the wellbeing of the leader and the context they find themselves in. This could form the basis for evaluating approaches emerging in the new area of resilience as means to support healthy and sustainable leadership. This is likely to be an area I take forward myself as a matter of priority to enable the sustaining of my own leadership.

Being a researching practitioner and not a practicing researcher

I could not have made the discoveries I did if I had been an academic researcher. I have made them because I was juggling a busy, demanding, full-time leadership job, with a desire to research leadership experience. This cannot be underestimated and would ideally warrant further research, not least because we need more researching practitioners and understanding what helps in that difficult balancing act, would make it more accessible.

Developing an article that builds on this experience of being a researching practitioner and using the concept of 'Good Enough', this would include both an exploration of the techniques that allow practitioners to research 'on the fly'. But it would also seek to legitimise practitioners (and especially leaders) that time given to research is an important part of their role and their findings can stand scrutiny amongst professional academics.

Faith and a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating

There are many potential points of connection and crossover between a CRPR perspective and how the people of faith could/should behave. The understanding of having limited knowledge of God and truth, "for now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully..." (The Bible, 1 Cor 13:12) , is well established if practically often neglected. Therefore, tentative

certainty ought to be closely allied to the exercise of faith. Christians are challenged in Hebrews 11 verse 1 that, “now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”. Many interpret this verse as condemning doubt, but I believe a more accurate understanding is that our hope as Christians is in God and that realising that should allow us to walk by faith for all that we do not see and understand. Likewise, the concept of the hermeneutic of the community, interpretation of scripture’s meaning in a process akin to sense-making is another area of similarity. Acknowledging complexity highlights the need to walk by faith and not by sight.

Entering a new role shortly as Head of Learning and Ministry Development for the most culturally diverse diocese in the Church of England, provides a perfect opportunity to develop the concept of tentative certainty further. The orientation phase of the role will allow for six months ethnographic observation and examination of how difference is defined, shapes identity and is reflected in language. Twelve months of delivering a course to leaders across the diocese on *Tentative Certainty: Faith, belief and conviction in an age of complexity* will engage leaders with both tentative certainty and sense-making. A subsequent examination of changes in language, confidence and identity, drawing on the work of Manuel Castells (Castells, 2004), is planned to evaluate its effect.

Many areas of leadership practice warrant serious review in the light of the more recent work on complexity examined in chapter 2. The following four areas illustrate other key areas arising out of this study.

Data analysis for autoethnography

This young discipline in the social sciences research stable is already establishing its credentials and yet, as often happens with a new discipline, there are those that want to explore its boundaries and there are those who are seeking to limit it with

traditional frameworks. This leaves space in the middle for further development of an approach that combines consistent analysis (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008) with rich and situated stories (Bochner and Ellis, 2002). My own commitment to emotion, coherence and consistency, left me feeling uncomfortable with the evocative autoethnography of Bochner and Ellis and equally uncomfortable with Anderson's dry approach.

The ability of social media and technology to facilitate quality conversation

Given the findings about the geographical and social context of the leader affecting their ability to engage with limited knowledge, and the danger of isolation in that process, examining the potential of new technology to overcome this would be worthwhile. How can social media, Skype, affordable group video conference calling and other such technological advances aid leaders trying to facilitate quality conversation?

Group dynamics in the realm of unknowability

Given the very positive experience for the leadership team highlighted on page [256](#) of chapter 9, further work to look at how group dynamics interplay with limited knowledge would seem valuable and could build on work of Fonseca (2002) and Sheffield (2012), who have looked at a similar issue in the realm of creativity.

Do leaders consciously claim the unexpected as the expected?

Given the uncertainty about cause highlighted in that aphorism '80% of what happens would happen regardless of what the leader does', it would be fascinating, although challenging, to examine causality as a specific issue within leadership, and understand how much purpose and intentionality is assigned by leaders retrospectively to actions that caused an unintended consequence that was desirable in its result.

What's more, the after-action stories that leaders tell tend to paint responses to the unexpected as measured, deliberative, and rational, when the reality is that the players involved were experimenting ad hoc all over the place. (Barrett, 2012, p.162)

Conclusion

The research began with my own leadership and the disconnect experienced between theory and practice. It was developed over a seven year longitudinal study of my own leadership as I sought to bridge that gap. The conclusions, whilst tentative and continuing to evolve, have demonstrated that leadership does not need to be articulated as primarily knowledge-based. The limitations of knowledge can be expanded the acknowledgement of the limits, but more significantly, the insights of a Theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating, whilst challenging fundamental assumptions about current leadership practice, can be applied to a leaders practice enabling them to operate in the space of not knowing. These practices and the framework of the Circles of Leadership, while requiring further work on resilience and sustainability give glimpses of a radically different style of leadership with great relevance for the current times in which we live.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Leadership Roles Occupied

- Trainee Manager, Marks & Spencer's (M&S) Management training Scheme
- Nursing Auxiliary, South Birmingham NHS Trust
- Assistant Information Manager, Neath General Hospital
- Business Management (Surgery, Trauma & Orthopaedics, and Theatres), Neath General Hospital
- Fundholding Manager, Cassidy Medical Centre
- Chief Executive, the Fundholding Support Agency
- Freelance Management Consultant, Generating Change Ltd
- Co-founder and Director, The Physiotherapy Network
- Director of Health Services Partnership, International Nepal Fellowship
- Freelance Management Consultant, Generating Change Ltd
- Researcher, World Evangelical Alliance - Mission Commission
- Lecturer in Mission and Leadership, Redcliffe College
- Director of Research & Partnership Development, Redcliffe College
- Principal, Redcliffe College

Other volunteer leadership roles

- Trustee and Chair, Care for Mission
- Member of the Global Leadership Council, World Evangelical Alliance - Mission Commission
- Vice-Chair of Governors, Longlevens Junior School
- Commissioner, Commission for World Mission and Evangelism – World Council of Churches

Appendix 2

An Epiphany

It was a hot day. I was lying on the sand reading that bloody book for one last time. One last time because I just didn't get it. Either it was rubbish and therefore I'll give up and try a new supervisor who wouldn't insist I had to read this book before he agreed to take me on, or the book was beyond me. It was too advanced and I'm just not up to it and my academic journey would cease abruptly. Masters was the limit of my learning. I've done better, gone further than anyone else in my family but it obviously won't be to doctorate – an MA is the limit of my ability.

Probably if I hadn't been on holiday, I'd not even have bothered to pick it up again. But I'd come away with just that book and lying on the beach I'd picked it up again. The sand was coarse; I could feel my feet overhanging the towel and dug my toes in. Looking up the beach I could see families at play. The wind breaks and spades and children playing in the river as it ran across the beach and then turned to head down and meet the sea lapping gently behind me – a relaxing sound that tempted me to sleep.

And so I picked up the book, turned idly to the last page and read and tried once more to understand the unfashionable, the opaque and unintelligible. Sometime later, I can't tell you how long, the sun was really hot on my back, the sound of family life multiplied many times across the beach had blended to a white noise – not unpleasant and not distracting – when suddenly I stopped. It was if the world stopped – it suddenly all made sense. I still had limited understanding, but it made sense at a gut level! He was right. This, this man that I'd grown to hate over the last ten weeks, the writer of this book – my nemesis, the harbinger of doom for my PhD aspirations ... was bloody right.

It was as if someone had told me that Einstein was wrong – gravity didn't exist. In one sense nothing had changed – everybody still walked along the earth ... but now I knew that really it was because they have Velcro on the soles of their feet. All of my underlying assumptions were wrong ... everything I'd ever learnt .. was wrong!

R Hay - prepared for UWE Autoethnography Workshop - October 2015

Appendix 3

Chapter 7 - Textual analysis of experience narrative

The experience - 28/06/2016, 08:52 / 1

New knowledge

Unknown
 Affecting me as L
 Est. CRPR themes

The experience

1 The experience

1. Today's context: please give a brief description of the leadership context you are reflecting on in answering the questions below:

2. Context having an effect on the unknown and unknowability does not seem surprising, but I have become aware that the context of me as a leader, rather than just the context of the question, is very important. I outline below how my own wellbeing has dramatically affected how I receive and handle the unknown, but where I am geographically and socially affects me as well. If I am distant from the team at Redcliffe (due to an extensive overseas travelling schedule, or illness) the sense of isolation when an unknown hits, can reinforce this sense of aloneness, my tendency to internalise rather than externalise it. The ability to share it over a coffee begins a natural sense-making process that would almost inevitably happen if I was at Redcliffe working amongst colleagues. This reinforces Stacey's emphasis on the quality of conversation being key in leading and an interesting and overdue study on how social media and technology can help facilitate quality conversation could be of great value to leaders.

3. Degree of change: In my organisational context this is a generally routine or unknown context type of day?

4. I was surprised to note that I often deal with the unknown amidst a chaotic day more easily than the unknown in a highly planned and supposedly 'known' day. I am sure this must be partially personality dependent but I think it also highlights two things: unknown resisted when seen as an impediment to an organised context.

5. The ability to deal with the unknown diminishes when I think I know what needs to be done and become too fixed on it, too early on. is confidence counter productive to acknowledging/ discovering the unknown.

6. Dealing with the unknown takes energy and causes anxiety - the longer you deal with the unknown the more energy it takes, because it causes angst, thinking and pondering. Even if the level of energy it takes diminishes overtime (as seen in the longitudinal study), each day something remains unknown is more energy being drained. This suggests two very practical challenges for leaders. We need to recognise that when we are dealing with unknowns (and especially with unknowables) they take energy and we should track how many we are facing and the likely effects on us in our roles, in our health and in our families. Secondly it throws up an immense challenge because it is clear from Stacey's work XREF and my own experiences, that holding the unknown (within bounds of acceptable of a 'good enough holding of anxiety') can be a key part of making the best decision. what does it mean to make the best decision? Is it the particular not general? ... tentative certainty / space for mistakes

7. About your experiences today: (Please answer with 3-4 words or phrases you think are appropriate to describe your experience today. (Leave blank any statements that you do not apply to your experience today.)

8. What helped the ability to act as a leader today?

9. (Sleep, good health, time to review, process and gain understanding; space to think; success) - in the sense of feeling that if recently I have made a good decision as it gives confidence for further actions and decisions.

10. What hindered the ability to act as a leader today?

Health of L
Confidence of L ... confidence to engage unknowns. Unknowns = anxiety = hold and maintain = awareness = understanding = discovery = tentative certainty = action = attention ... & repeat.

Space is a state of mind.
Calm structure.
well being
what does holding look like
Stacey doesn't say.

structured control not necessarily the answer
it is not a discrete process
unknown resisted when seen as an impediment to an organised context.
is confidence counter productive to acknowledging/ discovering the unknown.
need for tentative certainty.
this seems contrary to chaotic day & lack of structure
... tentative certainty / space for mistakes

- 35 Tiredness, illness and anything that inhibits the ability to pay attention! It takes a lot of energy to be attentive.
- 36 It has to be very intentional. Awareness is often fleeting and I get glimpses of insight rather than a constant
- 37 awareness, unless I am very well rested. Energised, often what I have thought of as the opposite of tired, does
- 38 not necessarily help as that is often linked to my own passion/s and I now see something of the truth in the
- 39 detachment of the Buddha because you need times of not concentrating or being drawn to anything so that you
- 40 can remain aware of everything and able to respond to the as yet unknown. *Engaged attention different from passion*
- 41 What helped the implementation of leadership actions today?
- 42 Confidence that I have had time and space to do thinking Don't need to have no doubts but need to have had
- 43 time and space to explore scenarios rather than feel I have had to grasp at the first passing possibility and make
- 44 it acceptable both to me and theoretically to my team or others. I feel the need to rationalise the decision rather
- 45 than holding it whilst I explore whether it is the right decision. This has the effect that I expend energy *link between * scenarios*
- 46 developing arguments of justification; why it is the best decision, possibly because I am not convinced it is *or sound /*
- 47 What hindered the implementation of leadership actions today? *if "Good Enough" best at a moment in time*
- 48 Where we had agreed action to be taken and I had not spent enough time with people for them to understand
- 49 what my expectations of implementation were, the outcomes are not as we needed and I have to spend a
- 50 long time addressing this (or leave it unaddressed and we suffer the consequences of a poorly executed decision)
- 51 and this has the knock-on effect of being very demotivating for the individuals who feel they have not done a
- 52 great job where as they have often done exactly what they perceived was required of them.
- 53 What influenced who was invited to join any conversations about leadership actions today?
- 54 Whether I hear voices of difference or simply voices in support is often something a leader has significant
- 55 control over. There are often several ways of making decisions (or getting decisions made) and these can either
- 56 expose me and the unknowns we face to scrutiny or take them at face value. The best decisions usually come
- 57 through scrutiny, debate and questioning, but when those are at their most effective I am aware that I feel the
- 58 outcome could be entirely unexpected and I need to have energy to do this. Seeing here the space and scope for
- 59 manipulation of decision-making is frightening. I am conscious that most leaders do not set out to consciously
- 60 manipulate and the most they are likely to do is avoid unnecessary aggravation and opt for an easy life but this
- 61 inclusion and exclusion has massive potential for control and manipulation. *and for quality of conversation & therefore decision / outcome*
- 62 How far was the quality of conversation repetitive and habitual, and/or open to negotiation and
- 63 exploration of new possibilities? *is this the responsive process at work?*
- 64 I have observed that my team often expect the unexpected from me, in that I am likely to think differently. I do
- 65 not know whether this makes them less likely to think the unexpected simply because they see that as my role
- 66 or rely on me to do that, but when I have held back and intentionally sought to draw out ideas from them, this
- 67 has provided some of the times we have made innovative and exciting decisions that have often proved to be
- 68 good decisions. *what is this - not deliberated as still part of whole?*
- 69 How far did/did not any uncertainties associated with this context stifle action?
- 70 I note that uncertainties can either allow for an exciting unpacking and exploration of possibilities or push me
- 71 to reduce the uncertainties and replace them with certainties. The things that determine which way I will react
- * scenarios often link between uncertainty, options, actions - more past imobile accuracy of constructed reality

wellbeing. ^{sufficient from here for closing section on wellbeing.}

Healthy energy to pay attention

72 have very little to do with the needs of the decision and more to do with my ability to cope with the unknown.

73 This is a really frightening realisation.

74 How far were any anxieties provoked by the days context sufficiently contained (good enough holding of anxiety) or had a notable impact?

76 Helping individuals and a group to understand the acceptability (and indeed desirability) of anxiety whilst

77 solidifying or variable reducing to help each other cope with not deciding for long enough decide well, is

78 tremendously difficult and is a balancing act.

79 How far did you note any common ground between people as well as diversity of perspectives?

80 Watching the team build on one another's ideas as they spark ideas off one another has been one of the delights

81 of becoming more aware. The 'left-of-field' idea which one of them has, catches some unawares but then begins

82 a passionate discussion and train of idea development that can have the pace of a professional tennis match in

83 the back and forth of development and yet the emerging beauty of a group drawing exercise where each

84 participant adds a stroke or line in turn and an unplanned picture emerges from the blank canvas.

85 The strongest common ground needs to be respect for one another and as the process continues a developing

86 trust on which an idea, a decision and a consensus emerges

87 The impact of other leaders on the context today was ...

88 I did not have sufficient notes to explore this significantly.

89 My time and space for reflection was...

90 Too often this reflected a shortage of time and space for reflection rather than sufficient time. I have learnt

91 through this process that the most useful thing I can do as leader for the organisation is to think and reflect and

92 yet it is the one thing I traditionally never put in diary time for. Also when feeling under pressure with a key

93 unknown, the tendency to want to be doing something, rather than nothing is strong. Perhaps doing something

94 takes less energy than thinking than holding the unknown in a space where I can think on it, wrestle with it,

95 expose it to others to engage with and carry it for sufficient time to "find the thoughts in need of a

96 thinker" (Simpson and French, 2006, #1122)

97 What leadership issues have I faced?

98 The lack of obvious acting, focus and decision-making makes these times different. People don't think that

99 thinking is leadership and yet I am more convinced that the most important job for a leader is to think than

100 anything else coming from this research! When I have had time or made time to think I have acted better,

101 decided better and led better.

102 Where has the "unknowability" factor played into the challenge of leading?

103 In short I see this everywhere and it is just about having the courage to recognise it and admit it! Where it

104 seems to hit most is self doubt for me and challenges in people dynamics for those I am leading. Fundamentally

105 admitting to myself that I don't know, instantly raises the response 'but I'm a leader - I'm supposed to know!

106 If I don't know, then I can't be a leader. Not knowing invalidates my leadership. It hinders me being what I

107 think people want me to be.

108 How have they made me feel?

Sense of self p2. A

cf Emperors new clothes.

- 109 A fraud...that inbuilt sense that as leader I am supposed to know
- 110 How have they made me behave? *A link* *sense of self it will be playing in here*
- 111 Defensive, not able to be aware, sensitive and open.
- 112 What has a theory of a complex responsive process of relating to speak into this situation?
- 113 The general responses amidst the heat of the moment suggest:
- 114 It has usually made me pause and not rush a decision.
- 115 It has helped me see that the tension is normal...it is what makes it a responsive process. *processes response but committed to a cycle not decision & exit*
- 116 It has reminded me of the value of those around me in facing the unknown. *collective sense-making... coconstructing interpreted reality*
- 117 When I review what seems to have been happening in these situations I see that the reality, that we deal with
- 118 only through our own hindered perception, is complex, and that we need to respond to it rather than react to it. *unpack*
- 119 The difference is subtle but 'response' speaks of more measure and pace, react speaks of knee-jerk and defence *diffuse*
- 120 Process implies that decision-making is much longer than a moment and yet instantaneous decision-making is *attention*
- 121 often seen as the pinnacle of leadership. *a process - who is a decision made?*
- 122 How has engagement with a theory of a complex responsive process of relating changed the way I would
- 123 react to this or feel about it?
- 124 Understanding what is happening can help me hold off on controlling or shutting something down. I am *not sufficiently articulated by strategy of taking certainty*
- 125 increasingly convinced that leadership is about making sure we don't make decisions for long enough to be able *emerge*
- 126 to make better decisions, and yet even as I write that it feels so counter-cultural, almost ridiculous.

¹ Demarcating here between things it is possible to know given a discovery process and things that remain unknowable regardless of our actions.

Appendix 4

Tuesday 6 September 2011

General Journal Entry - Tuesday 6/9/2011

Jake's first day back at school and now in year 2. Prioritised taking him to school as i²⁶ am away later in the week and also on Saturday. This made me a little bit late and I was not sure what the atmosphere would be like given that the last time I saw many of them was whilst we were still in the immediate aftermath of the redundancy process. Also then very conscious that we had really challenging, and unsettling news to share about student recruitment. Only discovered yesterday that the whole morning had been turned over to folks from CCIL to give both spiritual input and an overview of mission today. How would this go down - spiritual input for academics is very tricky! Also what would an overview of mission today look like from people who specialise in the UK - would it be relevant for us?

Notes from Away Day

Theological challenge - sacred / secular divide

Methodological challenge - 10hrs-110hrs split between church and rest of waking life

Lack of phrase "missional" until end; then "missional people of God"

Tend to talk of missionary to churches and church leaders (implication is that this is a biblical term)

What resonates between CCIL and RC

Resilience is different to success

Private public divide

Lack of confidence in the church in UK

Who is on our heart? - (we may not serve this person directly)

That the mission movement [(what is this?) is this now everyone - if so it must be the typical church member], would be confident in their ID in God. The Western Church??

Things come in and out of focus in our lives.

Communities marginalised in power and status - see themselves central

Muslim communities - that they can join in the kingdom of God through Jesus

26. This is left unedited with typos and was often noted on phone or iPad whilst in meetings or on the move.

Structured Reflection

Gloucestershire - Faculty Away Day

What leadership issues have I faced?

Renewing relationships after making difficult, unpopular and unsettling decisions which have had actions happen and take effect.

Delivering bad news

Attempting to create an environment for re-imagining. Started to write that I had attempted to re-envision BUT I did not do that, in fact I consciously tried to avoid doing that. I shared the challenges with Mark giving a very clear summary of the numbers (we did not name a £200k deficit as I felt this may be too much 'reality' but we did layout lack of numbers and likely effect in short timescale (next year) if nothing was done. I added to seriousness of reality by explaining that I was postponing my study leave to go on the road and recruit for the short term and then sought to give some constraints and challenges that we are facing as well as trying to give a context to help people (perhaps the group) begin to sense-make.

Where has the "unknowability" factor played into the challenge of leading?

Where people would be at after the redundancy difficulties and whether they would 'accept my leadership'?

Added to this- how would they react to the bad news on recruitment - would that be seen as an additional failure on the part of my leadership? Whilst it did not seem to be (and I shared the suggestion that all the other traditional colleges were struggling with the same things as well as other broader organisations like WEA and Lausanne) it will be interesting if this position changes when they have time to reflect further.

How have they made me feel?

It genuinely felt as if I was giving as much reality as I felt they could bear, giving as much context and my understanding of it as I could without in anyway giving the impression that I had it figured out (very difficult to do when you have an indoctrinated sense that the leader is there to fix things and make things better for followers!)

How have they made me behave?

and then in the questions and initial discussions (which lasted about 45 mins) I consciously gave a potential idea or way forward (tightening in Stacey's terms) and then either challenged, contradicted or questioned that same direction when someone picked it up and tried to run with it (loosening in Stacey's terms). This

seemed to help the discussion initially get going, then continue and hopefully leave the team with a sense of ownership of the issues and ability to re-imagine solutions when they meet on Thursday without me being there.

What has CRP to speak into this situation?

This was a very different way to what I would have done a couple of years ago where I would have sought to give a viable alternative vision (albeit that it would have been with an openness to them challenging and changing it) but I would have felt duty-bound to provide something!

How has CRP changed the way I would react to this or feel about it?

How I would feel when I have spent a lot of the summer not feeling as though I want to come back, feeling as though I have nothing to offer, feeling as though I should be able to provide the solution and can't and therefore the first qualification for leadership is missing!

Appendix 5

Chapter 6 - Template for reflection

Date:

Location:

What leadership issues did I face?

Where did limited knowledge play into the challenge of leading?

How did the limited knowledge make me feel?

How did the limited knowledge make me behave?

How did a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating inform the experience of leading with limited knowledge?

How did my engagement with a theory of Complex Responsive Processes of Relating change the way I reacted to situations characterised by limited knowledge?

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