

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

Who am I as a Leader?

Shaping a Hermeneutic Perspective

Gregory Morgan

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Doctor of Philosophy

of

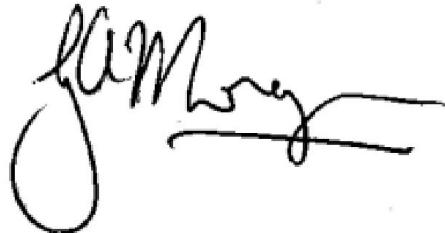
Curtin University

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Murray".

Date: February 25, 2015

Abstract

This thesis is an unfolding narrative of a participative inquiry into who I am as a leader and represents an autoethnographic account of an inquirer's personal and gradual transformation from presuming an empirical methodology, being frustrated by perceived limitations of a positivist line of inquiry and then, through several spirals of learning and insight, slowly reorienting an inquiring perspective to consider my question, 'Who am I as a leader?' hermeneutically, with a previously unimagined impact on not just how I came to address my question but also on how I since come to shape meaning from encounters with experience.

The narrative begins by considering some hermeneutical challenges of 'beginning' and the frustrations encountered when trying to consider leadership empirically. Joseph Rost's research into leadership being essentially an influence relationship stimulates a deep, hermeneutic considering of 'influence' which culminates in a concept I come to name fidelity of influence. The inquiry then opens more widely into what it might mean to view an organisation phenomenologically, with reference to Daniel Kim's Levels of Perspective, and the research of Chris Argyris and others, and thus gain insight into various types of flawed assumptions leaders typically make.

While evolving a non-empirical view of relations between people in organisations I find parallels from contemporary research into features of complex adaptive systems, including a lack of predictability of emergent qualities, the role of feedback, context, and the development of patterns of interaction.

With a developing, hermeneutic sense of leadership relationships, the inquiry explores how I might seek a virtuous path in my leading, especially in a post-Axial, postmodern world of diminishing universal 'truths', and a simultaneous resurgence in subjective relativism and instrumental reason, especially when it comes to what might be 'good' and 'right'.

Inquiring into 'authenticity' brings me to Hubert Dreyfus who helps me clarify that it may be his concept of deeply intuitive, contextual and embodied skill that leaders bring to an influence relationship and that, when leaning towards his concept of *meta-poiesis*, a more reliable sense of 'good' may become apparent. I find Charles Taylor's concept of horizons of significance discloses further guidance for shaping ethically desirable directions for leading participatively in organisations.

I arrive at an understanding that the temporal and physical space of the ever-unfolding present does not involve a linear, empirical progression of events, but rather a series of stories we create to explain our lived experiences, and that this occurs within our ‘storied spaces’, that are characterised by constantly, consciously and reflexively shaping in-the-moment hermeneutical meaning of experience.

Drawing on Aristotle’s concept of practical wisdom, and aspiring to follow the rigour of Hans Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics of being with other, I identify ontological values for practising virtuous practical wisdom which might help our understanding of how one might be guided as a leader who is called upon daily to practise virtue skilfully and wisely in lifeworlds, in which we are ‘being with one another’.

Dedication

To Lucy, my muse – my inspiration, nourisher of my spirit and breather of divine air into my imagination. I thank you for your amazing insight, intellectual challenge and wisdom.

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Introduction

The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made. And the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination. (John Schaar, 1989, 321)

Starting after I finish

He who travels far will often see things

Far removed from what he believed was Truth. (Hermann Hesse, 1972, p. 3)

I pen this introduction after completing all the subsequent chapters. Had I written it at the start of my inquiry it would have been extraordinarily different to what I now write. I have travelled far and have seen things far removed from what I imagined. I composed my research question, ‘Who am I as a leader?’ as a response to my sense that leadership might be critically important to the success of human endeavours, from my confusion about the essence of leadership, and from my hunch that more knowledge about the essence of leadership might assist me to improve my practice of leadership. I recall now that I had an intentionality – before I had even encountered the concept of intentionality – of what it is to lead effectively and wisely.

The quotation under the chapter heading above, from political theorist John Schaar, captures the striking wonder I feel of the experience of my inquiring into who I am as a leader. It took me into realms of learning and knowing and being, utterly alien to me. I had limited experience of scholarly research and began my inquiry assuming that academic rigour would entail it being drawn from quantitative data.

While my professional experience of leadership has been as a school principal, I consciously chose to inquire into leadership generically as I had encountered numerous references in my work to educational leadership, political leadership, and other ‘types’ of leadership. I was curious to inquire into the heart of leadership itself without reference to any

particular, vocational context. I had nothing more than a hunch that there might be an essence of leadership common to any experience of leading; and that, if anything, the vocational context is *leadership*. This has me feeling the need to be explicit then, that this inquiry is not into *educational* leadership.

When I began I assumed my methodology might comprise a combination of data sourced from a survey of colleagues, with rigour built in by guidance from the current leadership literature, all of which I would synthesise into an aggregated response; what I imagined would amount to a conventional academic study.

I began by immersing myself in current leadership literature to ensure a sound platform of knowledge from which to proceed. I anticipated needing time and effort to distil threads of meaning, and felt confident that new knowledge would gradually crystallise. I soon learned though that looking closely at leadership could be a little like trying to learn about the sun by looking at it directly which, of course, is a blinding experience. I was blinded by my encounter with a vast and incompatible diversity of models, theories and perspectives of leadership, and an apparent lack of any core of commonality between them, leaving me despairing if ‘leadership studies’ could even be a discipline. I found that very few researchers attempt a definition, apparently from a tacit assumption that everyone knows what it is we are talking about.

I persisted, but found myself slipping further into a quicksand of confusion. Just as I sensed leadership might be essentially about behaviour, I read about it being about character, skills or styles. It seemed the more I grasped at leadership the more it eluded me. The further I inquired, the more disparate and incompatible the various ‘schools’ of leadership seemed to be.

This early point of serious consternation in my inquiry triggered a crisis of methodology. My secret goal had been to construct a universal concept of leadership. Given what I recognised as a fundamental incompatibility between the disparate leadership theories I encountered, I surmised that I could only proceed by inquiring in depth into one of them, which I felt would compromise my secret goal because whatever I might come to would fall short of being universal. I despaired at feeling I had to either pursue a narrower inquiry or abandon it.

In response to my anguish around methodology, I recalled encountering a suggestion to keep inquiring and wait for an appropriate methodology to emerge. I had no idea what

shape that methodology might take but it was somewhat comforting to believe that as I continued inquiring into the nature of leadership itself and my practice of it, I would orient my thinking around my research question more methodically, with a research methodology coming to reveal itself.

In trying to resolve my initial frustrations from my review of the leadership literature, I explored more widely the margins of what I was reading and became more exposed to the concept of qualitative research, which Denzin and Lincoln suggest (2003b, p. 13) features the social construction of reality, an intimacy between researcher and what is researched and the value-laden nature of such inquiries.

The coming to a methodology was one of the most challenging elements of my whole inquiry, and it involved becoming conscious of my inherited, positivism-shaped lifeworld, and reshaping it from a hermeneutic perspective. Phenomenologist Max van Manen suggests that, “methodology means ‘pursuit of knowledge’. And a certain mode of inquiry is implied in the notion ‘method’” (1990, p. 28).

While I was aware that I was pursuing knowledge about who I am as a leader, and initially imagined reaching for an empirically-sourced ‘answer’, I came to understand that the object of my research was to question myself phenomenologically around what leadership might be essentially about, and hermeneutically around questioning myself about how I live the experience of it. The research also entailed an unanticipated, unfolding, autoethnographic phenomenon of personal transformation; more than simply achieving a capacity to see the world hermeneutically and phenomenologically, the process of coming to this triggered a fundamental ontological shift about how I frame myself in the world.

As my understanding of van Manen’s perspective on the nature of phenomenological research grew, I shaped an understanding that my research methodology would be the exploratory writing of my hermeneutical inquiry, in keeping with van Manen’s reflection that, “hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 8). And further, “Research is writing in that it places consciousness in the position of the possibility of confronting itself, in a self-reflective relation” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 128).

As I gradually came to also appreciate that coming to an understanding of how I lead involves considerations beyond me, primarily me with others in context, I began to recognise elements of autoethnography in my research.

In writing this introduction after finishing the rest of this narrative I sense an awareness of being able to step back with reflexivity to see the inquiry for what it is: a telling of a story with an historical consciousness directed towards bringing appearances to the surface of my thinking, and shaping meaning from them. While the narrative follows a chronological sequencing, elements of it become embedded diachronologically as they assume shape in my consciousness.

Chapter One outlines my coming to an understanding that I had brought many unchallenged assumptions to my inquiry, especially around methodology. I come to realise that I had begun with a positivist view of leadership and had set out on an empirical path, which I begin to imagine might account for the ‘dead-ends’ I kept encountering. While inquiring more about the decline of modernism and positivism and the emergence of postmodern perspectives on the world, I was developing a sense that phenomenology and hermeneutics offer perspectives for rigorously pursuing a non-positivist type of understanding. Before I knew it I was embarking on what seemed to me an epic philosophical quest blazing new ontological and epistemological trails in the wilderness of my consciousness towards what sits before me and how I make meaning from it. This takes me deeply into Gadamer’s hermeneutics and his concept of the unique perspective each of us has of the horizon immediately before us.

Chapter Two explores how I take my emerging understanding of phenomenology and hermeneutics to consider what else I might see and understand in the wholeness of a phenomenon beyond its discrete elements. My curiosity about this lies in ways to consider a wholeness of leadership beyond any discrete elements which might comprise it. I find a helpful way forward with this in Joseph Rost’s research into leadership which seems to me, with its focus on influence relationships, quite distinct from other leadership researchers. Simultaneously with this, beyond technical leadership ‘expertise’, I am curious about how I might come to recognise ‘good’ leadership. This was of particular concern as I was coming to appreciate that in our postmodern, contemporary times, the notion of universal truths seems to me more suited to a positivist worldview, which was leaving me to wonder how I might recognise ‘goodness’ in leading today.

In this chapter I find myself beginning to develop a richer capacity to see the world phenomenologically, especially as I understand more about the limitations of language for

capturing meaning. As I apprehend more about mental models I begin considering a real impact they seem to have on what I see of the world, as filters of perception, and also hermeneutically on the meaning I make of what I experience. I also begin grasping my way towards a concept of ‘fidelity of influence’ which I am hoping will assist in my quest for ‘good’ leadership.

Chapter Three considers Daniel Kim’s ‘Levels of Perspective’ and how I might incorporate that into how I make sense of my leading. I consider how changing the level of the perspective I take seems to influence the phenomenological facet I see of my leadership of others in context. If, as Rost suggests, leadership is partly about actions intended to achieve change, then I explore what researchers into organisational change might offer for aligning actions of all parties to an influence relationship, and coming to appreciate that leadership ‘efforts’ can sometimes be based on mental models other than the ones a leader espouses. This has me wondering about how rigorous phenomenology might assist me to see things as they really are, rather than how I believe them to be.

Chapter Four describes how my coming to see the world more phenomenologically is bringing me to a belief that there is more to what exists than what I see and more to understand about my experiences than of what I am consciously aware. It is at this point of my inquiry that I begin feeling tentative confidence to begin considering implications of this for leadership, and I also explore what complex adaptive thinking theory may offer my emerging, non-positivist view of leadership, despite what I note is a pervasive, unstated assumption in the leadership literature that leadership in organisations can be helpfully characterised as a linear process, with tight structures and predictable outcomes ensuing from interventions leaders make. I begin considering also how my deep, personal values are shaped and tested in ‘crucibles’ of leadership which has me reflecting that my values are perhaps the ‘emergent qualities’ of my leadership.

Chapter Five has me inquiring into ‘context’ and the meaning I shape of what context might mean for my leadership. I draw deeply on Hubert Dreyfus’s concept of embodied skill, in context, which casts further shape to my emerging view of leadership influence relationships. I take heart as I see connections with how integral context seems to shaping hermeneutic understanding, and I inquire further into ‘embodied knowledge’. I finish with growing confidence about what hermeneutics might offer my influence relationships.

Chapter Six explores how I might develop expertise for reflective practice in the moment of leading, alluding to Donald Schon's knowing-in-action. I see this as offering something further to Dreyfus's concept of embodied, practical knowledge, and I revisit my unresolved concern about how I might be a 'good' leader. This takes me to Aristotle and his writing on virtues and practical wisdom, and has me wondering about how to find wisdom as a leader. I begin to wonder about the role of 'authenticity' and learn from Charles Taylor the importance of being rigorous about my understanding of it. I find his concept of 'horizons of significance' very helpful – linking it to Gadamer's 'historicity' – to give me heart in shaping personal, virtuous truths which are neither subjective nor objective. I incorporate Dreyfus's view of an expert's capacity to make 'fine distinctions of worth' and sense an emerging understanding of virtuous practical wisdom for my leading.

Chapter Seven highlights lingering traces of positivism pervasive in my thinking, still frustrating my full embrace of phenomenology and hermeneutics. I become aware of an arc in the direction of my inquiring: still seeking understanding of the essence of leadership, but now more of a seeking of a virtuous path of a *phronesis*-derived, practical wisdom in my leading. I am sensing an increasing humility as I come to appreciate my vast ignorance, compared to which my former-positivist self was aware. I sense a richer appreciation of actively being in the world, and adopt the concept of 'storied spaces', and its premise of life being comprised of the stories we create to explain our experiences, to explain the temporal and spatial context in which I shape meaning of my experiences. I reflect on how I might recognise and practise virtuous practical wisdom in the unfolding antenarratives of my storied spaces for distinguishing between wisdom and 'noise' in my leading. I finish my narrative, excited by the directions towards truth and truthfulness for my leading, and for my living, opened up by my research.

The narrative also traces threads of learning that span across several chapters. I did not consciously intend any of them; they each emerged at different points as my inquiry unfolded. I might more appropriately refer to them as 'spirals' of learning, because my understanding of each of them grows at fluctuating rates: I sense a breakthrough of insight which draws forward my understanding and almost plateaus till stimulated by new thinking at which point it then grows further till it plateaus, and so on.

The first spiral of learning involved my troubled relationship with positivism. Once I became aware of positivism and rejected it, I assumed I had left it behind intellectually. To my continuing bewilderment, it keeps resurfacing in my thinking and language like a stowaway

I thought I had long since removed, so much so that I no longer feel confident about having excised it and maintain a continuing alertness for it. I almost miss it when I sense I have finally purged it from my consciousness only to be ironically reassured when I discover it still lurks in the shadows of my thinking.

A second spiral of learning concerns my coming to phenomenology and hermeneutics, towards both of which I am gradually reconfiguring my basic dispositions, and about both of which I am very much aware of what I have to learn.

My inquiry felt shored up by a third spiral of learning as I recognised that the directions I was gradually heading in this study were convergent with the thinking of researchers on organisational improvement I had been studying for my ‘practice’ of leadership at work; researchers such as David Bohm, Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Daniel Kim, Chris Argyris, Donald Schon, Ed Schein and Robert Fritz – they seemed to all be speaking to me from a similar post-modern, non-positivist, intellectual tradition to the one I was coming to independently. Several of these researchers took me further from the domain of positivism and into the terrain of complex adaptive systems, to which some of them liken human organisations. This had me considering that learning about leadership might be enhanced by drawing on learning about complex adaptive systems.

While I gleaned helpful thinking from many of the leadership researchers, Rost stood out for me far above all the others, by characterising leadership essentially as an influence relationship. Irrespective of what Rost may have intended I saw a strong link between his perspective on leadership and characteristics of complex adaptive systems. The impact of Rost’s work on my inquiry amounts to a fourth spiral of learning.

A fifth spiral of learning involved my learnings from Dreyfus’s work on embodied skill, how that might sit within Western traditions of virtue, especially in a post-modern era, and also what it might suggest for leadership. Critical to this spiral too was a deep inquiry into and extension of the concept of ‘influence’ from Rost’s work which culminated in my shaping of a concept of ‘fidelity of influence’. Central to it too were Taylor’s cautions about authenticity and his concept of ‘horizons of significance’. This spiral drew on Aristotle’s work on practical wisdom, and moral dimensions which I saw of direct relevance to leading, and culminated in my shaping a concept of ‘virtuous practical wisdom’.

A sixth spiral of learning emerged from my reflecting on hermeneutics around the concept of ‘storied spaces’. This accommodated some of what I had learned about the limitations of

language as well as providing a metaphor for shaping meaning of and in experiences which seems to sit very consistently with the work of Gadamer, Dreyfus and other scholars of hermeneutics.

Sitting under these simultaneous spirals of learning was a seventh which emerged from my study of Bohm and particularly Gadamer, leading me to insight about the limitations and role of language, including syntax, irony, metaphor and rhetoric, in reaching understanding.

Characterising key turnings or insights or learnings from my inquiry as ‘spirals of learning’ is itself a reductionist process and artificially separates them. My experience of learning was that they were all taking shape simultaneously and each influencing the shape of the others as that occurred. They serve as a device to support a narrative account of my inquiry.

Perhaps the most important learning for me from this inquiry concerns unanticipated transformations which were occurring along the way. A major transformation was a reorienting of my research stance from positivism to phenomenology, from believing the object of my inquiry was a grand, unifying empirical ‘model’ of leadership, and then abandoning that to explore whether it was more about a seeking of a phenomenological, universal essence of leadership. As that transition began, the object broadened towards also shaping hermeneutic meaning of my lived experience of leadership. The further my research was progressing, the more I was becoming aware that although my phenomenological and hermeneutic goals remained, besides shaping more explicit clarity about the meaning I was shaping of leadership and my experience of it, I was also growing more and more vividly aware of how that research was changing my deep ontological sense of who I see myself being in the world, way beyond the bounds of this study; and accounts for the autoethnographic elements of my narrative.

I would suggest that any original contribution my inquiry makes to knowledge concerns the nature of the unfolding narrative of the reflexivity of a leader with an historical consciousness seeking insight into reaching practical wisdom in leadership. My inquiry relates the nature of an unfolding narrative of the personal historical consciousness and reflexivity of a leader who seeks practical wisdom for leading. Whilst I have lived my life through passages of years and events that one might describe chronologically, my conscious awareness of purpose and meaning in my life occurs diachronically, across, over and against, and beyond time.

The inquiry develops an understanding that the temporal and physical space of the ever-unfolding present does not involve a linear, empirical progression of events, but rather a complex web of stories we create to explain our lived experiences, and that this occurs within our ‘storied spaces’ that are characterised by acts of constantly, consciously and reflexively shaping in-the-moment hermeneutical meaning of experience, acts that are autoethnographically expanded. Importantly, I identify ontological values for practising virtuous practical wisdom which might help in understanding how one might be guided as a leader who is called upon daily to practise virtue skilfully and wisely in lifeworlds, in which we are ‘being with another’.

Chapter 1 – Crafting my Inquiry

Beginnings ...

... how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included. It is a problem that faces every creature with the impulse and the capacity to transcend its particular point of view and to conceive of the world as a whole. (Thomas Nagel, 1986, p. 3)

How do I write the first sentence of a doctoral study on leadership? I have made many false starts, with each one foundering as I recognise the voice is not mine and the story it is telling is not truly mine. I am not sure why, but I feel like an imposter, and the more I try, the more distance seems to open up between my story and what I write. I sense the reason for this is that I cannot seem to get as close to it as I would like; the words I use and the concepts I draw on do not reflect back what I want to express.

Philosopher, Simon Glendinning captures the maze of confusion in starting that I experienced. He suggests that where and how to start is itself a philosophical question, as is even the style of writing. He describes, “exasperation to be a characteristic expression of someone ‘in the grip of a picture’ of what it is for philosophical writing ‘to be well shaped and disciplined’” (Glendinning, 2007, p. 12), and that the contemporary philosopher, “is on one’s own” (2007, p. 13). I understood this to reinforce my thinking that I need to find a personal intimacy in starting my story.

As passion for my quest for insight into leadership continued undiminished, despite a despondency over how to progress it, I realised I had been looking for ‘entry points’ into this study outside of myself – outwards towards settling on an attribute of ‘leadership’ I might leverage as an entry point. I persisted with this for some years, experiencing frustration upon frustration, aware that no matter where I looked, it did not feel right. I was looking everywhere but the place I eventually turned to: myself. A delicious irony, considering the question I embarked upon answering: Who am I as a leader! I felt some tentative confidence that starting within might reveal a whole different path.

I am not sure when my inquiry began shifting from an empirical study to a philosophical one, but I think it was shepherded in that direction out of desperation from those empirical directions I considered, all ending in cul-de-sacs. Philosopher Robert Sokolowski provides a helpful distinction between two kinds of truth (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 158-159). The first is the truth of correctness, which concerns a proposition which can be tested and verified; if results confirm the assertion (e.g., ‘the roof leaks when it rains’ which is tested by observing what happens next time it rains) then it is a correct statement, and is true. The second is a more elementary truth of disclosure, which is a state of affairs which reveals itself; I get wet from water dripping through the leaky roof. I do not have to have formed a proposition or tested it, it simply discloses itself and is experienced.

In reflecting on these two forms of truth I sensed that I had been seeking a truth of correctness about leadership: I had anticipated forming a hypothesis and testing it empirically with data. I now switched my gaze towards what leadership might have been disclosing of itself to me, but which I had not been seeing. A first step in this was unlearning a lifetime of assumptions accumulated from a positivist perspective, of which I was not aware.

When I stare in awe at the distant stars on a clear, dark night I see my lofty aspirations shimmering back at me, a network of dreams glinting possibilities of opportunity that swirl before me. Each star is an asterisk, a presence of shrouded meaning that I cannot see through to any truth beyond. The vastness of the heavens is both intimate and terrifyingly remote. Some stars glow, others flicker. I try to follow the path they illuminate. Sometimes it is hard to see my feet as they tread tentatively in the pale starlight. So who is this person gazing with awe at the night sky? What do I know of him? What is he really seeing as he scans above? And what is being disclosed to him?

There had been a comfort in anonymously and empirically studying leadership before me in a petri dish. I was not sure I was ready to confront the realms of my deepest human privacy. And yet, I now sensed that if I did not, I would eventually admit defeat, turn my gaze from the night sky, walk inside, close the curtains and switch on the television.

In Glendinning’s words, I at last opened a text that had remained closed, thereby providing myself with, “an intro-duction (literally a leading inside) to texts that ... enable newcomers to get beyond the bit they often find genuinely and frustratingly hard to get beyond: the

start" (Glendinning, 2007, p. 3), to finally provide me with a starting point. As I reflected on this, I recalled these lines from the T S Eliot poem 'Little Gidding':

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (Eliot, 1943)

As Eliot seems to be intimating, I had been searching outwards, far and wide, yet arriving at nothing but the place I started from and then seeing it anew, considering what was already there, waiting to disclose itself. And this realisation reminded me of the E E Cummings poem, 'Seeker of Truth':

seeker of truth

follow no path
all paths lead where

truth is here (Cummings, 1991, p. 775)

The first line seems to be addressing anyone seeking truth, the next two seem to advise that seeking truth by following a predetermined path away from where we currently are will lead to nowhere fruitful. 'Where' on the third line reads as a question, with the 'message' of the poem being to look for truth - for what is disclosing itself – here, nowhere else. This is the sense I belatedly came to about this inquiry into leadership: I had to look here.

I am reminded of Gadamer's description of the dialectic of considering the concept of 'beginning': it connotes a start, but also suggests something prior which also led to the start.

The riddle of the beginning has many speculative aspects ... the moment we posit as the very first inevitably causes us to think of yet another, earlier moment. There is no escape from this dialectic of the beginning. (Gadamer, 2000a, p. 13)

Gadamer goes on to suggest that ‘beginning’ is also about incipience, “[which means] something that is not yet determined in this or that sense...This means that many eventualities ... are still possible” (Gadamer, 2000a, pp. 17-18).

I am challenged enormously by ‘beginning’. It seems to suggest an unhampered open-endedness towards what Gadamer describes (2000a, p. 18) as, “concrete experience”. It seems to suggest also that there is no starting point to a beginning; that what led to the beginning was instrumental in shaping it. This generates my wondering about the trajectory of my life that saw me arrive at the ‘beginning’ of this inquiry and, indeed, the continuing trajectory beyond this beginning.

I pause to reflect that the process of becoming more aware of ‘me’ in my leading and also of the complexities of beginning an inquiry such as this, leaves me conceding that this sequenced narrative fails miserably in its remoteness from the complexity of having lived it. Although each word follows neatly from the one before it and points neatly towards the next, the reality of my story is one of zig-zagging curiosity, anticipation, confusion, false starts, back-stepping, chaos, hope, dead-ends, despair, excitement – all rolling over each other in real time as I go forward, get stuck, go back, lurch forward, skid sideways and try to keep going.

Philosopher, Donald Polkinghorne alludes to this, “Collecting past ‘facts’ and placing them in correct chronological order, although necessary for a narrative explanation, is not sufficient” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 175). This describes a vital dimension of my story lost: of my thinking to-ing and fro-ing; a tentativeness of ideas teased out, tested, reframed, abandoned or stepped over or rolled into new ideas. My lived experience is of spirals of thinking and learning that swirl and sweep upwards, held aloft on great currents of fragmentary insight that lose lift and flutter downwards, back towards something firmer where, once again, some new connection takes hold and my thinking soars upwards again, higher than before. And so it continues, and with each resurgent gust, I am swept along in a curving arc of new thinking, excited by the possibilities of where it is taking me.

Polkinghorne discusses at length the concept of narrative discourse – that the meaning in a narrative contains more than is contained within each word or each sentence. He says that,

... narrative meaning consists of more than the events alone; it consists also of the significance of these events We live immersed in narrative, recounting

and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 160).

This captures the sense I feel of how short of the contextualised and richly lived experience my narrative discourse is of ‘capturing’ it in words. As I considered these philosophical challenges of ‘beginnings’, I sensed a new openness in my thinking, an openness that seemed necessary for new learning perspectives it seemed to entail.

A philosophical orienting – awareness of positivism, and trying to abandon it

It was only when scientists were able to accept their confusion instead of fleeing from it and only when they changed the questions they were asking, only then could they discover the insights and formulations that gave them great new capacity. (Margaret Wheatley, 2006, p. xii)

When I framed my research question - “Who am I as a leader?” - I did so because I wanted a specific focus while also remaining sufficiently open-ended for entering terrain I may have not anticipated. Theoretical physicist and philosopher David Bohm advises that the framing of the research question is crucial because of the implicit presuppositions it contains, because if they, “are wrong or confused, then the question itself is wrong ... one has to inquire into the appropriateness of the question” (Bohm, 1980, p. 36). I suspected that the more words I introduced into the question, the more risk there might be of limiting my inquiry.

It is largely for this reason I resisted inquiring into ‘Who am I as an educational leader?’ And though I had encountered numerous examples of context-specific leadership – such as, thought leadership, team leadership, organisational leadership, pastoral leadership, curriculum leadership, pedagogical leadership, literacy leadership - I had a deep hunch that there may be a fundamental essence of leadership irrespective of context, and was also concerned that any adjective in my question may inadvertently complicate or artificially qualify the scope of my inquiry.

While I had no real sense of where the inquiry might take me, I had an inkling that I would identify a range of my leadership attributes which I would assemble together to constitute my leadership wholeness in a definitive answer.

As I began inquiring into my research question I was advised to explore the scholarly traditions of my work. This felt challenging as I was not mindful of my thinking being contextualised within a ‘tradition’.

As I pored over resources on leadership research, research methodologies, qualitative research and empirical research over several months, I gradually developed an understanding of positivism and my deeply held, inherited and unchallenged assumptions about it. Some of the numerous references I encountered are:

Positivism can be defined as a research approach that is based on the ontological doctrine that reality is independent of the observer. (Stahl, 2007, p. 4)

There is a reality “out there” in the world that exists irrespective of people ... people can accurately describe or explain this objective reality by conducting value-free research ... [which] will be free of subjective bias and objectivity will be achieved. (Mei Seung, 2010, p. 2)

It is rational, analytical and empirical in its procedures, materialistic and quantitative in its object, and utilitarian in application. (Oldmeadow, 2007, p. 4)

Perhaps the central plank ... is the assumption that modern science contains within itself the necessary and sufficient means for any inquiry into the material world and that it can and should be an autonomous and self-validating pursuit answerable to nothing outside itself. (Oldmeadow, 2007, p. 4)

[Positivists emphasise] an objective external physical world, clear separation of unreal theory terms and real observation terms, axiomatic/syntactic language, formal logic, empirical verification, theory terms defined by reference to observation terms, and reductionism down to basic physical entities.
(McKelvey, 2003, p. 113)

There is nothing included in the concept of body that belongs to the mind; and nothing in that of mind that belongs to the body. (Descartes, in Capra, 1983, p. 59)

Physics has become almost totally committed to the notion that the order of the universe is basically mechanistic. (Bohm, 1980, p. 219)

Modern philosophy regarded correct method as a route to absolute certainty. Armed with a rational procedure, human thought becomes equal to natural science in replacing the dark forces of tradition with objective truth. (Lawn, 2006, p. 1)

Modernist thought is focused on totalizing theory: the search for over-encompassing theories of society and social development... Thus metanarratives are still replete with assumptions of homogeneity, desirability of consensus, order, etc. (Milovanovic, 1997, pp. 3-4)

I came to recognise from such statements the scholarly tradition of my own perspective: a world of observer disconnected from observed, a mechanistic world of wholes which can be disaggregated into parts, a world of grand, unifying metanarratives and fundamental truths.

Thomas Kuhn's inquiry (1970) into the historical evolving of scientific paradigms to explain reality helped me step back from my positivist assumptions as I came to understand that most scientific 'truths' throughout history are only sets of theory that are the best that science can come up with to explain a phenomenon, with many of them superseded by new scientific 'truths' as new learning takes understanding further.

From considering Kuhn's work I began to see a folly in seeking an objective, unifying theory of leadership and that my original goal was based on an almost 'hard-wired' presupposition that there is "an" objective answer out there, waiting to be revealed. Kuhn's thinking liberated me from my positivist fixation on universal, objective truths.

I became aware that throughout the Twentieth Century many disciplines, such as chemistry, mathematics, visual art, literature and architecture, looked anew at nature as a matrix of complex relationships rather than as an unfolding of objective reality based on fundamental laws. Age-old conventions were replaced by new forms of doubt and challenge to the certainty of what they were seeing and experiencing. According to historian Gennady Shkliarevsky, by the closing decades of the twentieth Century,

Philosophical perspectives such as post-modernism, shaped new approaches in the study of history and innovations in literary criticism, and inspired, more recently, feminist and post-colonial critiques. (Shkliarevsky, 2008, p. 2)

As I began opening my mind to non-positivist perspectives, I encountered thinking which was, for me, exciting and new. As I came to do so many times throughout this inquiry, I consulted Gadamer who makes this emphatic statement on the folly of positivist perspectives,

According to the natural sciences... it is fitting that the science of the moral and the spiritual domain also belong with the natural sciences. This is completely wrong... Human beings cannot be observed from the secure viewpoint of a researcher. (Gadamer, 2000a, p. 29)

Bohm describes a type of myopic, bias-confirming perspective in which we delude ourselves from an assumption embedded in positivism that has us assuming that we see the world as it truly is, utterly overlooking the fact that it is, “[man] himself, acting according to his mode of thought, who has brought about the fragmentation that now seems to have an autonomous existence, independent of his will and of his desire” (Bohm, 1980, p. 3). I recognised the myopia Bohm describes, in myself.

Management consultant Margaret Wheatley suggests this myopia extends to common perspectives on leadership and events in organisations,

Each of us lives and works in organizations designed from Newtonian images of the universe. We manage by separating things into parts... we engage in complex planning for a world that we keep expecting to be predictable.
(Wheatley, 2006, p. 7)

In wondering how I might pursue leadership non-positivistically, I sought guidance by inquiring into how scientists adapted to their own changing paradigm.

While wondering about where my thinking might be taking me, I realised the positivist undertones in the allusion I made earlier to looking to the stars for meaning. I now see that I was perceiving ‘me’ as being separate to the night sky I stared at; that I was a detached observer! I now sense a richer metaphor of me being in the night sky, rather than staring detachedly at it. So, the mystery and marvel I alluded to is more about my connection with

the night sky, rather than the gulf between me and it. This has a palpable impact as I appreciate I am a part of that vastness rather than an observer of it.

Reconfiguring leadership conceptually as a very human process, removed from mechanistic systems and positivist order became an enticing new frontier to explore, though the nature of the methodology I might adopt remained elusive.

A philosophical methodology starts revealing itself

The ability to perceive or think differently is more important than the knowledge gained. (David Bohm, in Horgan, 1993, p. 42)

I continued my inquiry curious about how my inherited positivism might be blinding me from considering my experience of the world from alternative perspectives. Reading more from Bohm suggested that the very structure of our language reinforces the pervasiveness of positivism. I had assumed that language basically conveys meaning objectively, directly and accurately. However, Bohm illustrates that language channels our thinking into seeing the world as static and fragmented (1980, pp. 34-60). He explains that our grammar and syntax are centred on nouns as distinct, separate entities, reflecting deep-seated positivist assumptions about the fragmentary nature of the world.

Had I been considering that we may have subjugated our very language to positivism? It seems important to my inquiry to explain what I understand from Bohm about peeling back positivist restrictions I might encounter unknowingly embedded in language.

Bohm (1980) suggested that whereas we tend to see many physical objects as inert objects in a mechanistic universe, most of them are in a state of dynamic movement, with 'glacier' being a simple example: the word implies a thing in the world that seems fixed and unmoving, but which is anything but. Less obvious, the paper that a 'hard copy' of this text appears on seems static or fixed. However, we know it is constantly changing its form until it eventually becomes dust. Bohm suggests that language could be reconfigured to better reflect this reality. To emphasise the dynamic properties of all things, he invented the linguistic device of the rheomode (Bohm, 1980, p. 39). Bohm's basic proposition was that whereas nouns are fixed and unmoveable, verbs depict movement. A glacier might be

described then as ‘glaciering’ or paper as ‘papering’ to connote the inevitable, dynamic process of constant change. Inherent in this sense is not just that things change, but in being dynamic and changing, they are also constantly interacting and influencing each other.

I imagine Bohm might even suggest that nouns do not exist as concepts distinct from verbs at all and are really nothing more than ‘slow verbs’, that is, that nouns refer to processes in the world that are so slow and apparently non-dynamic as to appear static.

From Bohm’s writing I encountered philosopher, Michael Polanyi (1998) and a related suggestion he made concerning how our use of language inadvertently confers an assumed objective reality on the meanings words convey. He describes how confidently using a word implies a shared understanding of the word’s meaning by both speaker and listener. Underlying the communication is a tacit confidence that the word will be understood. Polanyi said it is not, “words that have meaning, but the speaker or listener who means something by them” (1998, p. 265). He suggests that our use of words in communication is predicated on assumptions. This had me thinking about why precision around the meaning of ‘leadership’ seems so elusive and slippery.

A significant insight that Bohm and Polanyi led me to about leadership is that, as a noun, ‘leadership’ more naturally seems like a fixed, objective entity in the world, existing independently of me. However, if I reconfigure ‘leadership’ into its rheomode of ‘leading’ it transforms the meaning from being less of a remote, impersonal, cultural artefact that ‘leadership’ seems to connote, and into more of an active, living experience of leading that involves me.

I became aware that my thinking about my methodology for this inquiry was drifting towards something qualitative, which I came to understand from Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, researchers in the field of qualitative research, as being more about illumination and understanding.

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, [and] the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, p. 13)

Philosopher Mark Johnson describes what I came to understand as a deeply experiential dimension to qualitative research,

The problem with qualities is that they are about how something shows itself to us, about how something feels to us, and they seem to involve more than can be structurally discriminated by concepts ... Meaning depends on our experiencing and assessing the qualities of situations. (M. Johnson, 2008, p. 70).

While I found the prospect of a qualitative inquiry exciting for the new frontiers of learning it beckoned me towards, the very uncertainty of it terrified me because I was not at all sure how to undertake a disciplined, qualitative inquiry or whether I had the courage and capacity to do so.

I found reassurance and guidance from Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba, researchers in the field of qualitative research, for the apparently inherent risk of self-referential, overly subjective interpretation. They suggest that qualitative research offers rigour, not in a positivist sense, but in a naturalistic sense infused with an experiential, context-bound perspective, requiring that,

... inquirers abandon the assumption that enduring, context-free truth statements – generalizations - can and should be sought. Rather, it asserts that all human behavior is time- and context-bound... [and] rejects the notion that an inquirer can maintain an objective distance from the phenomena (including human behavior) being studied, suggesting instead that the relationship is one of mutual and simultaneous influence. (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 17)

Lincoln and Guba outline a premise for ‘trustworthiness’ of qualitative data, with ‘trustworthiness’ intended as a ‘metaphoric counterpart’ to positivist rigour. To be trustworthy, the research needs to be *credible* (involving prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, analysing negative cases, and regular stakeholder sampling of interpretations); *transferable* (based on extensive, descriptive data); and *dependable* (seeking external auditing of the process and the results). They propose also criteria to satisfy the *authenticity* of naturalistic inquiry: *fairness* (acknowledging that inquiry is value-bound and requires the articulation of multiple value structures); *ontological authenticity* (acknowledging stakeholders’ realities are constructed uniquely and a richer interpretation may be reached by engaging them together); *educative*

authenticity (stakeholders appreciating that others' constructions are rooted in their values); *catalytic authenticity* (this is taking new constructions and understandings as a stimulus to action) and *tactical authenticity* (the action taken achieves a desired change). (2007, pp. 18-24).

Lincoln and Guba reassured me that a non-positivist inquiry can offer robust scholarly insight and I recognised that my inquiry was shifting imperceptibly towards considering what my lived experience of leading discloses to me. The dialogue I found myself engaging in brought me to the door of phenomenology, about which I knew literally nothing but about which my curiosity was stirring.

Shaping my phenomenological methodology

If I were to tell you where my greatest feeling, my universal feeling, the bliss of my earthly existence has been, I would have to confess: It has always, here and there, been in this kind of in-seeing, in the indescribably swift, deep, timeless moments of this divine seeing into the heart of things. (Rainer Maria Rilke, 1987, p. 77)

In my reading about phenomenology, I appreciated that my inquiry was now assuming a different shape of reflective dimensions. I was thinking more about questions like: what do I actually perceive and experience as I live through a phenomenon? What is 'real' to me in an experience? What learning might flow from a phenomenological understanding to guide my future practice of leading?

Such thinking led me to the work of Edmund Husserl. In pursuing a "science of pure phenomena" (Husserl, 1995, p. 36), Husserl's work around the connections between experience and knowledge sees him regarded as a founder of phenomenology (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). Sokolowski defines phenomenology as, "the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience" (2000, p. 2). Sokolowski suggests that phenomenology is significant "because it deals so well with the problem of appearances" (2000, p. 3).

I sensed I needed to delve deeper into phenomenology for what it might offer me as I considered my questions around leading. And so the pursuit of a deeper understanding of phenomenology occupied my thinking for many months...

The German philosopher, and Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, believed that phenomenology is the study or inquiry into the essence of things, rather than how they appear, because sometimes things appear other than how they truly are. He explains the meaning of the word,

The term "phenomenology" expresses a maxim that can be formulated: "To the things themselves!" ... The expression has two components, 'phenomenon' and 'logos'. Both go back to the Greek terms *phainomenon* and *logos*... The Greek expression *phairwmenon*, from which the term "phenomenon" derives, comes from the verb *phainesthai*, meaning "to show itself"... *logos* as speech really means *deloun*, to make manifest "what is being talked about" in speech.
(Heidegger, 1996, pp. 24-25)

Heidegger's student, Hans Georg Gadamer expressed this perspective as, "The word 'phenomenology' does not only mean, then, "the description of that which is given," but rather includes the unconcealing of a concealment" (Gadamer, 2000b, p. 279). I was sensing that unconcealing a concealment is a primary goal of phenomenology!

Sokolowski suggests that the meaning conveyed in communication in a knowledge-and-technology-rich world is more extensive than can be understood from understanding the words alone: "How is an e-mail message different from a telephone call and a letter?" Indeed, how is it different from a hand-written note, face-to-face conversation, phone call, skype, video-conference, blog, tweet or posting on a social networking site? In my daily work as a school Principal I often ponder the best medium for communicating a key question or 'message' because it seems that none of these media encompasses the whole context and full set of nuances of a 'message'. It seems that a thought in my consciousness is complete or whole – I sense its wholeness; however, when it is conveyed, something less than that wholeness is conveyed, and the receiver receives a facet of it. When I consider this further, it occurs too, that another element in such communication is the act of receiving it, and the meanings ascribed to the message, whether consciously intended by either party or not.

Sokolowski captures this dilemma well. He describes,

... three themes of parts and wholes, identity in manifolds, and presence and absence: it seems that we are now flooded by fragments without any wholes, by manifolds bereft of identities, and by multiple absences without any enduring real presence. (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 3-4)

Sokolowski stretched my thinking away from a rigidity I felt about positivist-derived thinking: our conscious experience is experience of fragments, of parts, and yet we delude ourselves that we are experiencing typically ‘objective’ wholes waiting to be revealed to us. Whatever this may mean for many aspects of our lives, when it involves leadership and interaction with other people it seems that confusion or tensions may arise from people holding their separate, subjectively-assumed, ‘wholes’.

I came to appreciate that phenomenology is about coming to know one’s own experience, in depth and with rigour such that its essential qualities are revealed, and I suspected it might hold great potential for legitimately loosening the knot of confusion rife about leadership.

As I read more about Husserl’s ‘science of pure phenomena’ I came to understand his concern about how we imperfectly attempt to bridge the gap between our consciousness and its objects, which are external to it. Husserl articulated two particular problems with this. The first is the problem of “transcendence”: how can consciousness reach out beyond itself and connect with an object wholly external to it? (Husserl, 1995, p. 20). The second involves the problem of “correspondence”: given the gulf between our consciousness and the things of which we are conscious, how can we be assured of fidelity or congruence between the act of knowing and the object known?

Husserl could easily have been implying the vagueness I have described around leadership. Husserl’s thinking lines up very well with my assumption that I must start by considering my own thinking and the sense I make of how that might apply outwards in the world. It suggests to me also that I might need to be wary about what I assume I ‘know’ about leadership.

Husserl devised strategies for addressing each of the two problems he identified. For the problem of transcendence, he suggested the concept of intentionality which Sokolowski explains: “every act of consciousness is directed towards an object of some kind” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 9). In the introduction to one of Husserl’s famous works, George Nakhnikian describes how intentionality is not confined to actual objects,

The idea of a mermaid is, being an idea, existentially mind dependent. But the mermaid which is the intention of the idea is neither a physical thing nor is it existentially mind-dependent. In contrast to this, no physical action requiring an object can be performed upon an intentionally nonexistent entity. (Husserl, 1995, p. xiv)

Central to Husserl's thinking, is that phenomenological consciousness is always consciousness *of something*. A phenomenological viewing of a phenomenon involves radically transforming how we usually look at something and putting aside presuppositions and unconscious assumptions beyond the limits of taken-for-granted understanding. The aim is to connect directly with the world.

For the concept of correspondence, phenomenology offers a reconfiguration of intending that which is perceived. Sokolowski outlines this in depth (2000, 97-102). Instead of objects of perception being considered as separately existing 'out there' beyond the mind of the observer, and therefore subject to all sorts of confused interpretation, the phenomenological view is that a description of an object is always the describer's view or judgement of it, not an objective, 'true' depiction. Where two people hold differing views, even of something quite concrete, one or other of them may investigate their assumptions, suppositions etc. and refine their views further. Their distinct views are separate representations of what they both perceive, neither being more legitimate than the other.

I imagine that a phenomenological view of leading might suggest that when I think about leadership - the object of my thinking - it is a phenomenon which, while perhaps existing beyond me in the world, is nevertheless connected intimately to me by my intentionality of it. My consciousness of leadership corresponds with its external existence by my holding a position, not on some objective reality of leadership, but on a qualitative sense of leadership as manifested in my consciousness, through my experience. So, I think that phenomenology suggests our knowledge is of our experience of something, which may lead also to deeper levels of understanding of ourselves revealed in the world.

Husserl pushes this thinking further. He says that the essence of a phenomenon can be grasped in a way that makes doubt senseless.

I have a particular intuition of redness... No longer is it the particular as such which is referred to, not this or that red thing, but redness in general... We truly "see" it; there it is, the very object of our intent, this species of redness.

Could a deity, an infinite intellect, do more to lay hold of the essence of redness than to "see" it as a universal? (Husserl, 1995, pp. 44-45)

Husserl is helping me see that reflective consciousness of a phenomenon affords much more than a record of private mental thoughts, or a subjective opinion. When it is characterised by acts of abstracting the general from the specific, it can yield insights into the very essence of the general. Whereas I see this for something like redness, I can only wonder how I might start with a phenomenon such as leading which seems, almost hopelessly compromised by anomalies, complexities and contradictions.

Husserl describes how in reflecting on the experiential content of my consciousness,

... instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out – the values, goals and instrumentalities – we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they 'appear'... and their most general essential character is to exist as the 'consciousness-of' or 'appearance-of' the specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes and so forth.

(Husserl, in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2010, pp. 12-13)

From this, I am thinking that phenomenologically reflecting on my experience of leading may start divining an essence of leadership itself, not as an empirical object existing in the universe waiting to be discovered, but transcending the limits of my subjective experience to disclose itself as a fundamental and shared sense of leading, in much the same sense as Husserl's example of 'redness'.

Van Manen (1990, p. 39), offers reassurance to me about 'essences' when he suggests an essence is nothing more than a linguistic construction which opens up hitherto inaccessible ways of grasping the nature and significance of an experience. He says that an essence is a creative attempt to capture an experience linguistically, which is,

... both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 39)

I kept wondering if something of the essence of leadership may be about style or behaviour or personality traits or some combination of these and perhaps other factors. I sensed also that these attributes exist so as to enable a leader to exercise practices, and that perhaps it is these practices that leadership is ultimately about. At the same time, I wondered why, if

leadership is essentially about practices, I sensed that many leaders I admire most are those who also demonstrate a certain nobility of spirit: compassionate, respectful, humble, empathetic, selfless and seeking to lead in the service of others. If the most admirable leaders do indeed share such a nobility of spirit, then this is something more than a set of practices; it is a more ontological perspective; more to do with who they are and how they are as people.

I think what I have just described may be a faltering first step towards Husserl's phenomenological strategy of bracketing. Just like the role of brackets in Mathematics, Husserl advised putting to one side anything that we take for granted in the familiar, everyday world, so as to be able to focus without distractions, assumptions, inferences, and biases on our perception of that everyday world.

Putting it in brackets shuts out from the phenomenological field the world as it exists for the subject in simple absoluteness; its place, however, is taken by the world as given in consciousness (perceived, remembered, judged, thought, valued, etc.). (Husserl, in Smith et al., 2010, p. 13)

Husserl suggests that bracketing involves 'reductions' which reveal deeper levels of understanding about the phenomenon being considered. In moving from experience to understanding then back and forth from one to the other, this process sharpens both the acts of intentionality as well as the picture one has of relating in the world to those objects. One moves from being unconsciously disconnected from the objects of intentionality to being consciously connected, to then consciously considering them as disconnectedly as possible so as to reveal what remains in common, so as to then make deeper connections with the wider context, and that this is at the heart of what it means to phenomenologically 'know'.

Husserl outlines two main types of reduction, the first being a phenomenological reduction (2001, p. 208) which Nakhnikian describes in the introduction to a recent edition of one of Husserl's works, "phenomenological reduction... means suspending all beliefs characteristic of the "natural attitude," the attitude of common sense and science" (in Husserl, 1995, p. xvii). I interpret this as meaning that when we perceive an object of our thinking, we consider it as a 'raw', experienced phenomenon, setting aside assumptions and prejudices I may have about it.

Husserl's second type of reduction is eidetic reduction (Husserl, 2001, pp. 363-364), which I understand aims to reveal the essence of a phenomenon by increasing my awareness of the distinctly different facets of anything I observe. Nakhnikian describes this stage of eidetic reduction as being when,

... we bring ourselves to grasp perception as a universal... The universals that become objects of phenomenological investigation cannot be had except through actual experience. A blind man, for instance, could never "get at" the essence of seeing because he cannot see. (In Husserl, 1995, p. xvii)

In other words, to Husserl, this vital stage involves identifying and casting aside the non-essential characteristics of the phenomenon as experienced in the specific, and to then generalise from that specific experience to the universal; to the essence of the phenomenon.

Husserl seemed to believe the eidetic reduction especially, held the most potential for revealing the essence of a phenomenon from personal experience of it. Whereas for a phenomenological reduction of an experience of a chair, for example, one may reach a clearer understanding of that experience than what might be achieved in the natural state, going further into an eidetic reduction one may reduce down further reflections on the experience to reach a fundamental appreciation of 'chairness' (as opposed to a stool, bench, couch, etc.). "This eidetic seeing is what Husserl calls 'seeing essence' (Wesensschau) or 'essential seeing'" (Husserl, in Moran, 2000, p. 134). Phenomenologist Dermott Moran emphasises that Husserl the care we must take to ensure our subconscious assumptions do not seep into our viewing. "The important step in the eidetic reduction is to realise that what is given in seeing a red patch as red, is not an individual datum, but a grasp of the essence itself" (Moran, 2000, p. 135). As I gather some understanding about perceiving phenomenologically, I wonder about what it is I actually know about leadership, and how I might conceive of eidetically reducing it.

Sokolowski outlines (2000, p. 178) three stages for progressively advancing towards grasping an essence. The first is a "rather weak kind of identity that is called typicality". He describes how we notice similarities between multiple examples of something, for example, pieces of wood that float, without making an explicit judgement that all examples of that object share that property. The next stage is when the common property observed is more than similar: it is identical. "When we do take the word to mean the very same

feature, we reach an empirical universal”, because all the instances experienced share that property. While this is a stronger form of identity than typicality, it might still be disproved by further experience. The third stage moves from empirical to eidetic universals, where it is inconceivable for an object to be without the common property. This stage is reached through imaginative variation, in which we imagine the object and its universal elements, and then imagine it without various features. Jonathan Smith and Paul Flowers, researchers in interpretive phenomenological analysis, suggest that when we encounter features that cannot be removed without destroying the thing, then those features are eidetically necessary, and what is left is, “the essence – the invariant properties lying underneath the subjective perception of individual manifestations of that type of object” (Smith et al., 2010, p. 14).

The capacity offered by phenomenology to arrive at a universal essence beyond what is empirically verifiable had Husserl ranking phenomenological knowledge higher than empirical knowledge, almost accusing conventional science of epistemological chauvinism. He describes his concept of the lifeworld,

In whatever way we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each “I-the-man” and all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this 'living together. (Husserl, 1970, p. 108)

Leadership scholar and philosopher, Donna Ladkin describes the lifeworld as, “the everyday world of practical, lived experience” (Ladkin, 2005, p. 112). Husserl argues that eidetic insights offer deeper insights than the world of empirical science,

It is of course itself a highly important task... to bring to recognition the primal validity of these self-evidences... compared to that of the objective logical self-evidences ... From objective-logical self-evidence (mathematical ‘insight’, natural-scientific, positive-scientific ‘insight’..., etc.), the path leads back, here, to the primal self-evidence in which the life-world is ever pre-given. (Husserl, in Smith et al., 2010, p. 15)

Ladkin illustrates this through her phenomenological account of ‘collaboration’. She cites a dictionary definition as, ‘the action of working with someone to produce or create something.’ Her key point is that while this serves as a useful starting point there is far

more to understanding ‘collaboration’ than this dictionary definition reveals, particularly, “its connotation of a way of working together as well as the fact of doing so” (Ladkin, 2005, p. 114). She goes on to suggest that, “this way of working can only be known through actively engaging with, or trying to create, collaborative processes” (2005, p. 114). She describes how a sort of generative energy emerges during collaboration, a sense of ideas building on each other, and a confidence in the work even amidst uncertainty about endpoints and where it might all lead. Such elements can only be known by being experienced, and although everyone’s experience may be different, these experiential elements are common, and are commonly understood as being part of the essence of collaboration. Ladkin seems to be suggesting that personal experience of collaboration yields personal, qualitative data which is very different from and additional to the type of data yielded by an objective, positivist inquiry. At the same time, this data is replicable by others who experience genuine collaboration, providing them with eidetic insight.

From all of this, I was beginning to grasp a working sense of phenomenology which I hoped would assist me in my quest to better understand leading. Given that ‘eidetic’ is derived from the Greek *‘eidos’* meaning ‘form’ or ‘shape’ or essence (Harper, 2014c), a phenomenological perspective would seem to be one which shifts from consciousness of disparate concrete experiences as they manifest themselves, to a domain of the essential attributes and form of that which is experienced – its essence - thereby revealing a knowledge very different from empirical knowledge.

The contribution of phenomenology I am beginning to appreciate is that knowledge of a phenomenon gleaned from the natural sciences may never be sufficient for a full knowledge of the phenomenon. The whiskey glass and indeed, the water of life within it, both have chemical compositions, measurable temperature, colour, weight and volume or mass, and other attributes readily measurable within the natural sciences. But there is more to know about them - my knowledge of the glass is additionally shaped by how it feels in my hand and as it touches my lips; my knowledge of the whiskey is additionally shaped by my anticipation of it and the sensations aroused as I taste it; and my knowledge is also conditioned by the many subconscious associations I attach to it: memories of relaxed, happy, convivial times. Husserl’s view of phenomenology would suggest that knowing the glass and its contents in this way is to experience a fullness of knowledge which the natural sciences can never come close to.

Husserl (2001, p. 90) offers helpful advice about the dissonance that often erupts between people when they discover they are not talking about quite the same thing, by making a crucial distinction between reflection and introspection, with Husserl rejecting introspection as a means of reaching understanding because it lacks the vital ingredient of intentionality. I am coming to appreciate Husserl's phenomenological view that consciousness links us to and is a part of our lifeworld. A consequence of this is that the phenomena of which we are conscious, when subjected to rigorous reflection through eidetic reduction, exist both within us and also beyond us. It seems to me that 'leadership' might be a concept of something 'in the world', as something that perhaps sits within people but also somehow interactively between people, within the unique dynamics that exist between them.

In trying to grasp this more confidently, it seems that in our everyday discourse about phenomena, we typically have very different understandings of them because of the reinforcing layers of perspective and bias added by our life-experience. It seems that bracketing, shutting aside all the layers of assumption, interpretation and inference that build up as a life is lived, may lead to the essence of the phenomenon being revealed. I wondered if some of the confusion I described around 'leadership' may be explained by such 'taken-for-grantedness' leading to an assumption that one's own subjective, introspective grasp of a concept must be 'right'. If so, this seems almost the opposite of a phenomenological approach as it seems to typically use the accumulated assumptions, biases and inferences built up over a lifetime to justify the validity of a view, rather than pursuing a phenomenological practice of seeking out those accumulated assumptions, biases and inferences, bracketing them, and then describing and reflecting on the essence of the phenomenon that remains.

In striving to understand 'leadership' more deeply then, I now appreciate that a phenomenological approach would not countenance free-ranging, relativistic, introspection-derived versions of 'leadership'. Husserl might no doubt suggest that a rigorous, clinical eidetic reduction will reveal an essence, a type of universal truth, as in his allusion to geometric shapes. To Husserl, this sense of essence seems to be almost a logical construct, as I can imagine him explaining the essence of "line": the shortest distance between two points. Whether or not we have ever literally experienced a line, conceptually, that is what it is.

Considering phenomenology provided me with a new perspective of language and concepts from which to consider leadership as the objective of my experience, rather than as an objective entity. Phenomenology is helping me appreciate that in my ‘natural attitude’ I may hold many untested assumptions, which may be preventing me from seeing any essence of leadership.

At the same time, the further I moved from positivism the more I sensed that deeply understanding a phenomenon might not be achieved sufficiently by coming to see its essence; that there may experiential and contextual considerations that add vital meaning. My continuing dialogue and reading took me to hermeneutics which opened up a pathway for how I might make meaning and derive understanding from my lived experience of leading. Smith and Flowers characterise hermeneutics as, “the theory of interpretation” (Smith et al., 2010, p. 21).

Coming to see what hermeneutics might offer

It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition. (Hans Georg Gadamer, 2004, p. 4)

I came to understand that hermeneutics began as a discipline for interpreting biblical texts and was extended by Heidegger and Gadamer and others, “to the self-interpretation of human existence” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 224). Educational philosophy researcher, Patrick Slattery says, “Hermeneutics, in its broadest formulation, is the theory of interpreting oral traditions, verbal communications, and aesthetic products” (2006, p. 130). Friedrich Schleiermacher, one of the first contemporary hermeneutical scholars, describes hermeneutics as, “the art of understanding ... and that in any interchange of meaning, it should be assumed that ‘misunderstanding results as a matter of course’” (in Ladkin, 2010, p. 105).

Considering the etymology of ‘hermeneutics’ reveals further meaning,

The Greek *hermeneuein* (“to interpret”) referred to Hermes, the winged messenger of the Greek gods... Hermes, in addition to explaining and

interpreting the messages of the gods, was also a trickster! (Slattery, 2006, p. 130)

Slattery suggests here also an ironic juxtaposition of Hermes' deceptive nature and the potential deception of layers of meaning and prejudice surrounding hermeneutic interpretation.

I am coming to understand that a hermeneutic perspective seeks to shape and deepen a person's understanding of a phenomenon through interpretation. I was firstly challenged and, then after reflecting further on it, excited by Gadamer's suggestion that, "understanding is always interpretation" (Gadamer, 2006 -b, p. 306). It seems that Gadamer suggests that even the most rigorous attempts at pure description can only ever be interpretations. So, it seems to me that hermeneutics is fundamentally about interpretations and that interpretations are about making meaning through the medium of language. I explored Gadamer's hermeneutics further to see what it might offer my coming to make meaning of leadership.

Gadamer believes that whatever thoughts we construct are themselves products of our prejudices. By 'prejudice' he suggests that our very grasp of language depends on the nuances of meaning of every word as having been steeped in our contextual, cultural traditions.

Long before we understand ourselves through self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in our family, society and state. ... that is why prejudices, more than judgements, constitute the historical reality of one's being. (Gadamer, in Ladkin, 2010, p. 110)

According to Gadamer, our prejudices take shape within a linguistic-historical tradition from which we can never fully extricate ourselves, and they shape our interactions with the world.

Gadamer addresses this through his dialectic of question and answer, with dialogic processes, particularly asking questions, helping to clarify meaning between people. "Every question points in the direction of what is asked, and places what is asked about in a particular perspective" (2004, p. 361). A key step for Gadamer in putting aside prejudices, is to open up awareness of where the differences lie between the perspective of the self and that of the other. He suggests that being open to the thinking being exchanged in dialogue helps reveal one's own prejudices.

The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings. (Gadamer, 2006 -b, pp. 271-272)

Sokolowski alludes to this when he suggests,

The 'internal experiences' of another person are always irreducibly absent to us; no matter how well you may know me, my actual flow of internal feelings and experiences could never become truly blended with yours in a way that would allow, for example, my memories or fantasies to suddenly start surfacing within your consciousness. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 34)

It seems that this irreducible absence, this unbridgeable chasm between us, may partly account for differences in people's consciousness of a phenomenon. So, even while each observer of a phenomenon may agree on common elements they 'see', their lifeworld may serve as a subconscious filter of their consciousness, to construct quite distinct nuances of perception.

The concept of intersubjectivity, of, "how we experience the world and things in it as being also experienced by other minds and other selves" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 152), offers me some assistance here. By using the example of a cube Sokolowski describes how at any one time we can only see part of the whole and others viewing from other angles will see other parts of the whole. No one will see all the parts, the whole, at once. All are seeing different parts simultaneously. So, even when all may share an apodictic [“apodictic statements express necessary truths”(2000, p. 57)] view of “cube” each person’s view is a combination of the actual and the potential. So, even when two people are standing alongside each other and see as close to an identical view as possible (or even if they are viewing the same photographic image) it seems that the lifeworld of each sees their consciousness ‘connecting’ to it quite differently, and hence their perception of it differs. For example, shades of colour may stand out differently for adjacent observers: darker parts may stand out for one while lighter parts may stand out for another.

When I consider what this might mean for thinking about leadership, it assists me in appreciating that it goes some way to suggesting why different people hold different perspectives on the “same” experience of leadership: one may look admiringly and appreciatively on a leader’s decisiveness, while another may decry that same behaviour as a leader’s insensitive, dogmatic unilateralism.

Gadamer describes a dynamism of understanding which develops via his concept of the hermeneutic circle as an interplay of the parts and whole of language, with understanding oscillating between what is already known, and the object of inquiry,

... the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole... The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 1)

It is this dialectical movement between part and whole, text and context - each shedding light on the other and neither fully existing without the other - that is the hermeneutical circle. When I recall Sir Humphrey Appleby responding to a decision he disagrees with, made by the Minister in the television series *Yes Minister*, by saying, 'very courageous decision, Minister...!' there is an ironic nuance of meaning conveyed which immediately sows doubt in the Minister's mind about the wisdom of the decision, which triggers in him a change of mind. There is a to-ing and fro-ing between the Minister's intentions and initial understanding and his broadening comprehension of the wider context.

I am intrigued by this resonance between parts and whole, each needing the other to be understood, and I wonder what it might mean for any growing understanding of leadership I might attain. The philosopher of science, Henri Bortoft, suggests the act of reading a novel is a good illustration of this concept: the reader is constantly weaving a whole meaning together, the whole story, by assembling together each word and sentence. The words in the text are not understood in isolation; their meaning is depending on their context within the whole. The process is a dynamic transaction between parts and whole.

We do not have the totality of the text when we read it, but only one bit after another. But we do not have to store up what is read until it is all collected together, whereupon we suddenly see the meaning all at once in an instant. On the contrary, the meaning of the text is discerned and disclosed with progressive immanence throughout the reading of the text. (Bortoft, 1996, p. 7)

This interdependence of word and sentence suggests that meaning is created each time we engage in language. Ladkin infers from this that, "meaning is iterative and emergent" (2010, p. 112). This suggests the interplay and reciprocity between words and their sentences offer up disparate and complex possibilities; the meaning constructed by each

party to a conversation can be vastly different, depending on the weighting each person apportions to the significance of each word and its interplay with others within the whole of the sentence. And all of that seems dependent on each person's unique lifeworld.

In hermeneutics the circle stretches wider, beyond the text itself to the cultural and historical context, back and forth between them again and again, each time deepening engagement with and understanding of 'texts'. As alluded to, Gadamer emphasises that, "Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting" (2004, p. 390).

As I reflect on occasions in my work of leading of being faced with a range of views on a matter, I sense enormous scope for a conscious Gadamerian hermeneutical dialectic process of dialogue for clarifying each party's understanding of others' views, being reflective and engaging the thinking of all involved in a genuine attempt to expose one's own prejudices, and genuinely searching for new meaning.

Gadamer describes the sort of new meaning such dialogue can shape through his hermeneutic concept of the fusion of horizons (2004). The view each of us has of the horizon is the direct view that unfolds directly from our eyes. This view gives each of us a unique perspective on the same horizon: we are looking at the same thing yet seeing it differently, though possibly assuming we are seeing the same thing. When we allow what we see to be open to what others see, we each benefit from the other's insights and our understandings fuse together on a newly shaped horizon. This seems a very rich and fitting metaphor to me because it suggests on the one hand, that the 'reality' we experience is not 'out there' waiting to be empirically revealed, nor is it a totally subjectively or introspectively generated 'reality'. Rather, just as a 'real' horizon constantly shifts back as we approach it, the present horizon of understanding is continually being formed as we test what we encounter against our, "historically effected consciousness" (Gadamer, 2006 - b, p. xxx).

Gadamer explains that,

... understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves ... Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by

attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out.
(Gadamer, 2004, p. 305)

This suggests to me that the horizon of the text or of the partner in a dialogue is always connected with its own stream of past horizons and there is a confluence of new understanding when such horizons meet to create a new horizon altogether, an altogether new meaning which displaces each of the previous separate horizons, and which immediately points to other new horizons. Inherent in this process is a fidelity around an ongoing and rigorous challenging of one's own horizon in seeking deeper understanding. Gadamer describes how, "our effective-historical consciousness contains a truth claim ... toward which we all strive, even if we will never reach it" (2006, p. 49).

Gadamer's view of understanding extends beyond any 'everyday' sense of understanding: commonly, I suspect a person has an 'understanding' of something and describes it to someone else; the 'receiver' can check their understanding of what was said by saying it back. What Gadamer suggests transcends this transactional transmission of understanding because each party sheds prejudices and seeks new meaning, so the outcome of an exchange of views is utterly unpredictable in advance; the act of sharing views is an act of fusion, of creation: each party mediates the thinking of the other to create new meaning for each. "The hermeneutic conversation ... involves equality and active reciprocity – both parties are concerned 'about something'" (Gadamer, in Linge, 1977, p. xx).

Van Manen describes the concept of 'friend' to add another layer of complexity to Gadamer's thinking when he describes the gulf between the wholeness of the set of idiosyncratic elements for the relationship we might have with a particular friend, compared with what comes to mind when we see the word 'friend' in print. In recalling a particular friend we invoke "a certain relational quality of friendship that pertains to between this person and myself" (Van Manen, 2005, p. 239). It is the thinking about that person that evokes the feelings of friendship. He goes on to explain a strange thing that happens when we consider the word 'friend' by itself: "The word 'friend' now gazes back at me, reminding me that it is only a word. As soon as I wrote or pronounced this word the meaning that I aimed to bring into presence has already dropped away, absented itself" (2005, p. 239).

This reminds me of Ladkin's description above of how it is the lived experience of collaboration which might disclose an essence of collaboration, in a way that might seem

forever elusive if pursued via some positivistic definition. In a similar way, Van Manen suggests that a decontextualized, analytical considering of the word ‘friend’ remains barren of any essence of ‘friendship’ without considering its lived experience. I imagine Van Manen may suggest that the experiencing of a friend offers a richness of meaning for interpreting it, within historical, cultural and linguistic contexts.

I pause to reflect that any emerging understanding I might have about ‘leadership’ is likely to be very limited if sought via understanding of the word alone. It suggests to me that my understanding of ‘leadership’ will be richer by reflecting on and interpreting my lived experience of it.

My inquiry is beginning to feel like a sort of dialectical dance: rather than a sequential line of empirical inquiry, I am on a dance floor unsure of my steps, of rhythm or tempo, not sure of much at all in the dim light with its pulsing strobe; I keep trying to connect with the music, jiving and bopping, trying to move with its rhythm. And rather than the more predictable steps of a waltz or repetition of contemporary hip-hop, I come to realise it is a fast-paced tango: stopping, stepping out, striding forward then back; all shaped by a tension between bracketing my ‘prejudices’ as I seek to interpret and understand the experience, and striving to rise above naïve introspection to a level of phenomenological reflection.

As I reflect on what my current understanding of hermeneutics may mean for my inquiry into leading, I wonder if my goal is now no more than entering into deep dialogue with my experience of leading. I appreciate Gadamer’s sense that meaning is never complete. The final horizon is never reached; new horizons are constantly entering the field of view, constantly fusing and reshaping understanding and layers of meaning. And yet, I sense a confounding, internal struggle as I acknowledge it is one thing to cognitively understand a phenomenological or hermeneutic perspective, and quite another to reorient my lifeworld to embed it into how I live and think. I sense I am arriving at a threshold of living a new perspective, and yet every time I take a stride to traverse it, I stumble and discover it still stands before me. I have more work to do to deepen my understanding of hermeneutics and how to embed it deeper into how I live.

And yet, I do not feel adequately prepared for a deep hermeneutic inquiry into my leading. I suspect that what I see when I look at the world is still distorted somewhat through a

positivist lens. I want to learn to see and live the world genuinely hermeneutically, beyond an intellectual understanding of hermeneutics.

Clarifying my methodology and the focus of my research

... have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves... Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.
(Rainer Maria Rilke, 2014)

Glendinning adds his voice to the chorus of phenomenologists who suggest that a hermeneutical perspective offers a level of insight into a phenomenon utterly unattainable through empirical argument. He suggests that if we focus on developing arguments alone,

... what we do will have foregone the kind of thinking that can actually touch us or turn us round... of bringing about the kind of lucid seeing ... of bringing a person to see something they had ... hitherto failed to see. (Glendinning, 2007, p. 22)

In striving to show how phenomenological writing can provide deeper and richer insight, Glendinning suggests that,

... in writings of phenomenology the achievement of clarity is not conceived as the upshot of becoming convinced by an argument for an unambiguous statement or thesis but a matter of having come reflectively to terms with something pre-reflectively 'before one's eyes'. It is not at all obvious that this transformation of oneself with respect to matters for thinking in philosophy can be brought about by narrow argument alone. (2007, pp. 23-24)

I find this a remarkable revealing of what it may mean to know something in the world – it emanates deeply from what the self has experienced to be formed into a shape with unique, personal resonance.

I particularly identified with Glendinning's reference to the 'transformation of oneself' because I acknowledge that this inquiry is changing me; I initially envisaged having a

'sideways perspective' on it, it was a task to satisfy an intellectual curiosity, and somewhat detached from my mainstream, everyday life. I was over here and I was looking at leadership over there. However, the more immersed I become in hermeneutics the more I see new frontiers of understanding and insight beckoning me, not just intellectually, but engaging me deeply across my whole consciousness.

I sense I am shifting towards a different type of understanding about leading – and even of myself. In trying to make sense of what is happening I needed assistance and came to a radically different kind of research: autoethnography, which I conceptualised as an autobiographical inquiring into how emerging directions in my understanding are triggering personal transformations about how I see myself in the world and ultimately about how I shape meaning of my lived and unfolding experiences. I sense this is changing the tide of my inquiry and of how I am coming to view leadership. It seemed important to find out more about autoethnography.

According to ethnographers Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, autoethnography is an:

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. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739)

Ethnographer Tony Adams, and colleagues, describes a seeking of meaning through a type of dialectical inquiry which looks both reflectively inward and outward from the self,

The term autoethnography invokes the self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy). When we do autoethnography, we study and write culture from the perspective of the self. When we do autoethnography, we look inward—into our identities, thoughts, feelings and experiences—and outward—into our relationships, communities, and cultures. (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 46)

Autoethnographic counselling researcher Tom Strong and his colleagues suggest autoethnographers are people who,

... are natural meaning-makers engaged in a personal research project of contextually making sense of themselves and life. This involves drawing meaningful connections between personal and cultural experiences. (Strong, Pyle, de Vries, Johnston, & Foskett, 2008, p. 124)

Adams and his colleagues describe the key role of reflexivity in autoethnographic inquiry,

Autoethnographers use reflexivity to trouble the “relationship between researchers’ ‘selves’ and ‘others,’”; being reflexive means “taking seriously the self’s location(s) in culture and scholarship.” Reflexivity consists of turning back on our experiences, identities, and relationships in order to consider how they influence our present work. (Adams et al., 2015)

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln describe how sometimes,

... in reflexive ethnographies, the researcher’s personal experience... of doing the study becomes the focus of the investigation. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a, p. 211)

This change of focus that Denzin and Lincoln describe seems to capture the emerging transformation in both the focus of my inquiry and the methodology I am utilising. Beyond achieving a capacity to see the world hermeneutically and phenomenologically, the process of coming to this triggered a fundamental ontological shift about how I frame myself in the world, so that I more mindfully live in the world hermeneutically and phenomenologically.

Perhaps it is something of such a transformation to which Van Manen refers – in an apparent echo of Rilke - in saying, “phenomenological research projects require that we not simply raise a question and possibly soon drop it again, but rather that we "live" this question, that we "become" this question” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 43).

In ‘becoming the question’ I am shaping understanding that, inherent in phenomenological research, is a releasing from protocols of research typically associated with empirical research, without compromising on rigour. Van Manen describes this as phenomenological methodology being “presuppositionless”,

... in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 29)

I reflect now that this narrative is becoming an inquiry into how I come to ward off my ‘predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts’ in my seeking of a faithful path to a phenomenological and hermeneutical ‘knowing’. I am beginning to see the very narrative itself as my research. And while the inquiry may remain focused on the meaning I am shaping about who I am as leader, it is also an inquiry into the impact of this research on who I am becoming.

As my understanding of van Manen’s rendering of the nature of phenomenological research grows, I am appreciating his thinking that, “hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. Research and writing are aspects of one process” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 8). From Van Manen’s suggestion that, “Creating a phenomenological text is the object of the research process” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 111), I am coming to understand that my methodology is shaping up as the writing of this narrative. Van Manen describes how,

... writing is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself...

writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible... Writing is the method. And to ask what method is in human science is to ask for the nature of writing. (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 125-126)

And further,

... the writing of the text is the research ... Research is writing in that it places consciousness in the position of the possibility of confronting itself, in a self-reflective relation. To write is to exercise self-consciousness. Writing plays the inner against the outer, the subjective self against the objective self, the ideal against the real. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 128)

I am thinking that a phenomenological inquiry seems to be an ongoing pursuit of revealing deeper and deeper meaning about a phenomenon, and that knowing something hermeneutically involves me shaping meaning in the context of what my effective historical consciousness has taught me. Ethnographer Faith Ngunjiri helps further clarify my understanding of autoethnography by describing the importance of context in autoethnographic inquiry,

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context. This research method is distinctive from others in three ways: it is qualitative, self-focused, and context-conscious.

(Ngunjiri, 2010, p. 2)

I felt excited that a legitimate methodology, that feels matched to what I am seeking, was disclosing itself to me. At the same time I remain troubled by how rigorous and scholarly an autoethnographic inquiry can be. Adams describes some leading criticisms of autoethnography,

... critics base their refusal on the narrow view that personal, autobiographic, and aesthetic work cannot be assessed for its explanatory power, scholarly insight, or ability to cultivate social change. Indeed, some critics have worried that including storytelling and first-person narration in research sacrifices the analytic purpose of scholarship. (2015, p. 99)

As I am learning about so much in this unfolding inquiry though, I am coming to recognise that non-positivist, qualitative evaluation is not separate from what is being evaluated. Adams suggests that, "autoethnographic evaluation and criticism present 'another personal story' about the experience of an experience" (2015, p. 101). Adams goes on to quote fellow autoethnography researcher Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, "To evaluate autoethnography in a genuinely useful way, you have to open yourself up to being changed by it, to heeding its call to surrender your entitlement" (2015, p. 101).

Where an observer of autoethnographic inquiry might criticise it for being overly introspective or self-indulgent, other observers might suggest that despite those misgivings, the voice of an 'insider' is necessarily more authentic than any 'outsider' can be. I suspect that a key criticism of autoethnography is a perceived lack of systematicity and methodological rigour, but to this Adams and his colleagues suggest a construct of criteria altogether different from conventional scientific criteria.

Adams puts a case that autoethnography can indeed be robustly evaluated, and outlines four goals he and his colleagues have created to assess the value and success of autoethnographic research: making contributions to knowledge; valuing the personal and experiential; demonstrating the power, craft, and responsibilities of stories and storytelling;

and taking a relationally responsible approach to research practice and representation (2015, p. 104).

I am sensing a nexus of robust qualitative research unfolding in my inquiry around a seeking of disciplined phenomenological insight into leadership, a seeking of hermeneutic understanding from inquiring into my lived experience of leadership and also an exploration into any deeper influence the research is having on how I come to live in the world.

Chapter 2 - My emerging view of leadership

Seeking wholeness of leadership – what might there be beyond the parts?

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. (Aristotle, in Goodreads, 2014)

In wishing to perceive and contemplate leadership phenomenologically and hermeneutically, I wanted to rise to what seemed a great intellectual challenge posed by German poet, scientist and writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe whose investigations into perception seemed to resonate with the type of understanding at which I am grasping. He is quoted by the ‘non-logical’ mathematician, William Byers, in seeming to allude to a lucidity of seeing in this description of perception: “Every new object well contemplated, opens up a new organ of perception in us” (Goethe, in Byers, 2011, p. 20). In considering this statement of Goethe’s, the physicist, Arthur Zajonc, who specialises in researching science, mind and spirit, responded with a message about personal transformation reminiscent of Glendinning’s,

You have to live in that world of phenomena. You have to attend carefully every object well contemplated. Not just casually contemplated but well contemplated, attended to, over time, repeatedly. [This] changes who you are, changes who you are to the point that you begin to see things that you didn’t see originally and perhaps that no one before you has seen. (Zajonc, in Byers, 2011, p. 20)

Thinking about this stimulates wonder in me about what else Goethe may have meant about what ‘well contemplated’ might mean, so I went back to the source of that quote. Immediately before that sentence is this: “The human being knows himself only insofar as he knows the world; he perceives the world only in himself, and himself only in the world” (Goethe, 1988a, p. 39). This seems to describe a very hermeneutic-circle-like process of coming to know oneself only through one’s embeddedness in the world and of knowing the world only through one’s experience of it.

I sense a converging of thinking around a dialectic of meaning when coming to a hermeneutic understanding: past on present, self and other, part and whole. I wonder about such dialectic relationships within which horizons fuse, and what they may offer for any understanding I might come to about leadership and my experience of it.

I understand that since ancient Greek times there has been a strong sense of there being something more to a whole, beyond the sum of its parts. In his great work on metaphysics Aristotle mused,

What is the cause of there being one? For of all such things as have many parts, and of which the whole is not, as it were, a heap, but is something else, namely an entirety, beside the parts, there is a certain cause, since also in bodies – in some indeed – contact is the cause of their being one, and in others viscosity or some other such passive quality. (Aristotle, 2008, p. 184)

In a mirroring of the hermeneutic circle, Bortoft describes how understanding a phenomenon involves an interplay between parts and the whole, and that one cannot be understood without the other; that there is a back-and-forthness between them which feeds an understanding of one through the other. In describing this process he says that,

... the act of understanding is not a logical act of reasoning ... The paradox arises from the tacit assumption of linearity... which supposes that we must go either from part to whole or from whole to part... We understand meaning in the moment of coalescence when the whole is reflected in the parts so that together they disclose the whole. (Bortoft, 1996, pp. 8-9)

Goethe himself describes a reciprocity in this paradox of the relationship between parts and wholes as,

The things we call the parts in every living being are so inseparable from the whole that they may be understood only in and with the whole. (Goethe, 1988b, p. 8)

David Bohm echoes a similar, mutual embeddedness of parts and wholes in his view of parts and wholes belonging to an ‘implicate order’,

Implicate means to enfold... in the implicate order, everything is folded into everything else... each part is in a fundamental sense internally related in its basic activities to the whole and to all the other parts. (Bohm, 1994, pp. 12-13)

Bohm's mentor, the physicist Albert Einstein describes a deep sense of wholeness on a whole-of-universe scale:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness (in Calaprice, 2005, p. 206).

In what seems an early precursor to Husserl's concept of imaginative variation as a way of divining the essence of a phenomenon, Goethe suggests that beyond what can be observed empirically of a phenomenon, there is a 'primal phenomenon' (Goethe, in Bortoft, 1996, p. 22). He suggests that understanding it requires, "an exact sensory imagination" (Goethe, 1988b, p. 46), which is common in the arts but is largely lost in science. He sees this as a highly disciplined methodology for direct experience of a whole, and which reveals a reciprocity between the whole and parts.

In his study of plants (Goethe, 1988b, pp. 73-107), Goethe brings a type of poetic sensibility to his observing of a plant, over time and in its various stages and varieties. To Goethe, appreciating a sense of wholeness emerges over time as the plant is observed in its different manifestations.

Bortoft explains his understanding of this,

... if you want to do this, you have to slow down. You do this with one leaf, with another leaf, and so on, and suddenly there is a movement, a dynamic movement, as you begin to see not the individual leaf but the dynamic movement. The plant is the dynamic movement. (In Scharmer, 2007, p. 159)

Goethe seems to suggest that the primal plant is never revealed to us because at any given time, we only ever witness a 'part', one stage of growth. In this sense, it is never complete, the plant, like any phenomenon experienced, is a constant process of becoming,

When something has acquired a form it metamorphoses immediately to a new one. (Goethe, 1988b, p. 64)

Bohm's implicate order (1980) echoes this sense of constant movement. Bohm uses the analogy of a flowing stream to illustrate how the wholeness of the stream is dependent on the parts within it, and that the whole and parts are enfolded inextricably within each other. He suggests all reality is constantly moving – the whole may appear essentially

unchanged, yet it is constantly subtly changing. When the stream is analysed at a finer level of detail, its parts are constantly in flux. “Any describable event, object, entity, etc., is an abstraction from an unknown and undefinable totality of flowing movement” (Bohm, 1980, p. 62).

Goethe suggests it is in our imagination that this movement and fullness over time can be appreciated. He says, “all is leaf” (In Bortoft, 1996, p. 333), by which he means that,

... in a moment of intuitive perception, the universal is seen within the particular, so that the particular instance is seen as a living manifestation of the universal. (Goethe, in Bortoft, 1996, p. 22)

There seems to potentially be some very significant thinking in Goethe’s concept of a pure phenomenon for how I consider leadership. I am gathering a sense that, as it seems with any phenomenon, I may miss some significant dimensions to it if I focus on the concept of leadership as a unitary whole, and similarly if I focus on its component. At the same time, I may miss significant dimensions to the ‘whole’ if I am focused on only what I can directly observe.

This reinforces in my thinking that there may be more to a phenomenon than can be readily discerned by considering its discrete parts. Aristotle illustrates this by suggesting that a syllable is more than the sum of the letters that make it up. (2008, p. 117) When I consider any word, for example ‘cup’, there does indeed seem to be more to its ‘beingness’ than ‘c-u-p’. In considering how perspectives on parts and wholes may guide my inquiring into leadership, I wondered if Gestalt theory might offer any insights. I understand Gestalt theory emerged from the curiosity of early psychology researchers into perception, who wondered about a sense of something important still missing when a whole is deconstructed into its component parts. They pointed to phenomena like a musical concert which seemed more than the aggregate of the musical notes played by each musician. Gestalt theorists claim that there is more to a whole than its component parts. While there is no English-equivalent to ‘Gestalt’, translated from German, Gestalt psychologist Maria Kirchner says it incorporates concepts including: shape, pattern, whole form, and configuration (2000, p. 1). Kurt Koffka described this in his seminal 1922 work on gestalt,

When one hears a melody, one hears the notes plus something in addition to them which binds them together into a tune - the Gestalt-*qualität*... which allows a tune to be transposed to a new key, using completely different notes,

but still retain its identity, [as the same recognisable ‘whole’]. (Koffka, in Green, 2000)

Another founding researcher of gestalt theory, Max Wertheimer, offers an additional perspective,

... what is given me by the melody does not arise ... as a secondary process from the sum of the pieces as such. Instead, what takes place in each single part already depends upon what the whole is. (In Green, 2000)

I am gleaning from this considering of parts and wholes a reinforcing that I will not be seeking an understanding of ‘leadership’ as some fixed, uni-dimensional concept. I suspect I will seek to characterise it as an interplay between parts and a whole. I think this reflection on parts and wholes is also helping me to appreciate a perspective on a gestalt quality of leadership beyond what any analysis of its parts may reveal.

Polanyi’s perspective perhaps also offers me advice on what I might expect while seeking to learn about any essence of leadership. He argues that, “we can know more than we can tell” (2009, p. 4). He claims we all have a store of tacit knowledge of which we are not consciously aware. He describes how we can instantaneously distinguish a single face amongst thousands without consciously being aware of how we do it. He describes how when we are engaged in something that has become routine (eg, like riding a bike, swimming or a blind person using a cane) we become unconsciously aware of the details or ‘parts’. I include the full text of this particular example so as not to lose any of his nuanced meaning:

When we use a hammer to drive in a nail, we attend to both nail and hammer, but in a different way. We watch the effect of our strokes on the nail and try to wield the hammer so as to hit the nail most effectively. When we bring down the hammer we do not feel that its handle has struck our palm but that its head has struck the nail. Yet in a sense we are certainly alert to the feelings in our palm and the fingers that hold the hammer. They guide us in handling it effectively, and the degree of attention that we give to the nail is given to the same extent but in a different way to these feelings. (Polanyi, 1998, p. 57)

I understand from what Polanyi suggests that we often assume we are aware of what we ‘know’ but that there is far more to knowing than what we are consciously aware of. He drew on Gestalt thinking (1998, p. iv) to challenge conventional thinking about scientific

knowledge. Polanyi argues that there is more to a phenomenon than “the integration of particulars” (2009, p. 44). For example (2009, p. 10), when riding a bike, one can concentrate on the ‘parts’ riding a bike like balance, steering, pedalling, etc. Even so, he suggests that the ‘whole’ of riding a bike is greater than the sum of these individual components. In a remarkable echo of Goethe, he said,

[This] brings home to us that it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning.... Scrutinize closely the particulars of a comprehensive entity and their meaning is effaced, our conception of the entity is destroyed. (2009, p. 18)

Polanyi seems to be suggesting that understanding the relationship between parts and wholes is not going to be reached by looking at them each in isolation or in turn, but by ‘dwelling in them’, which I take to mean holding a gestalt perspective of not either parts or whole, each in turn, but a dialectical holding of both enfolded in each other, simultaneously. Seeing Polanyi’s reference to ‘dwelling’ also calls to mind Heidegger’s use of that word (2001, pp. 141-160) which I understand suggests a sense of belonging and being part of, as in it seems that in the act of living in a house there is a reciprocity of relationship that makes the act of dwelling and place of dwelling assume new meaning which would be diminished if the dweller were absent. A house with no one living in it is not a dwelling and a homeless person is not dwelling anywhere.

It seems to me that this perspective of Polanyi’s is particularly helpful to me in my current quest because he appreciates deeply that there are going to be many ‘parts’ which we may not be explicitly aware of, even if we consciously attempt to draw them from our tacit zone of knowing. By ‘dwelling’ in the combination of parts and wholes, I suspect that both he and Goethe are suggesting a sense of dialectic oscillation or enfoldment that develops, drawing both on the perspective offered by the other parts and/or whole, while simultaneously contributing to their perspectives; all of this contributing to an ongoing, deeper insight into the phenomenon, without ever managing to strip it back bare in a positivist sense.

As I drifted from positivism I struck a dilemma I had not anticipated. It seems that a positivist perspective on leadership might make it relatively straightforward to recognise ‘good’ leadership. It would require identifying suitable metrics, collecting empirical data

and literally weighing the data. I now found myself beginning to ponder what ‘good leadership,’ might look like from a hermeneutic perspective.

How might ‘good’ leading disclose itself to me in a non-positivist world?

Today we live in a blizzard of... economic injustice, ecological ruin, physical and spiritual violence, and their inevitable outcome, war. It swirls within us as fear and frenzy, greed and deceit, and indifference to the suffering of others. (Parker J. Palmer, 2004, p. 1)

Hermeneutic scholar Hubert Dreyfus and his colleague phenomenologist Sean Kelly describe (2011) a world increasingly bereft of virtue and goodness, and also describe a means for attaining an otherwise lost soaring of the human spirit. An early reference in their text particularly resonated about how a hermeneutic perspective might pragmatically guide how one lives. Dreyfus and Kelly are quoting here author David Foster Wallace, who they describes as the greatest writer of his generation.

Learning how to think really means how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience. Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed. (Wallace in Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 38)

This visceral statement by Wallace reminds me that the meaning one shapes from an experience is not inevitable. It involves choice and has consequences for how I live in the world. In keeping with what I have been learning from my inquiry, I wanted to understand what it might mean to lead from a hermeneutic perspective. I wondered where I might turn to as I make meaning to get a sense if my leading is ‘good’.

Dreyfus and Kelly (2011) confirm that the ‘good’ was pretty clear in earlier eras: before the modern era the answer to most philosophical inquiry was to be found in reference to God and then during the modern era the answer was to be found in reason and science. And

our postmodern era is characterised by wide-ranging perspectives, none of which seem to seek universal truths.

After several millennia of living in the comfort of universal truths of one type or another, Dreyfus and Kelly wondered what is left in an age devoid of universal truths? Nihilism? Subjective preference? They describe a deep-seated malaise which they feel is crippling Western culture, at the heart of which is a failure in contemporary times to find meaning in our lives. They again quote David Foster Wallace, who says this malaise is,

... something that doesn't have very much to do with physical circumstances, or the economy, or any of the stuff that gets talked about in the news. It's more like a stomach-level sadness. I see it in myself and my friends in different ways. It manifests itself as a kind of lostness. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 24)

Dreyfus and Kelly describe the banality and meaningless routines that they feel have seeped into contemporary living. "It's everywhere in life: in traffic jams and crowded supermarket aisles, in soul-killing muzak and corporate pop ... even in 'have a nice day' from the checkout girl" (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 39).

Charles Taylor echoes a similar sense of deep-seated, contemporary, cultural malaise, "There is a generalized sense in our culture that with the eclipse of the transcendent, something may have been lost" (2007, p. 307). He elaborates,

Some people sense a terrible flatness in the everyday... They feel emptiness of the repeated, accelerating cycle of desire and fulfillment in consumer culture; the cardboard quality of bright supermarkets, or neat row housing in a clean suburb; the ugliness of slag heaps, or an aging industrial townscape. (C. Taylor, 2007, p. 309)

Positive psychology researcher, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, contributes (2008, p. 162) with his description of our "vicarious participation" - as spectators of mass sporting events, listening to "platinum records cut by millionaire musicians", bidding at art auctions instead of making art – all of which masks, "the underlying emptiness of wasted time."

As I read about this malaise, I found a resonance with my disappointment in the apparent superficiality I find through much of the leadership literature. I typically feel a frustration as I read an eagerly-anticipated, newly-arrived leadership book, due to what often seems a technical, rational, even positivist approach taken. Much of it seems to promote

commercial success. I have read very little that attempts to explore a deeper, ‘connected’, human nature of leading, where it resides or even what it aims to do, except for claims made about maximising profitability and/or shareholder satisfaction.

Dreyfus and Kelly suggest that at the heart of the malaise they describe, is the loss of a sense of sacred in our secular age, and that restoring a sense of the sacred will restore a sense of meaning in our lives. Again they quote Wallace, echoing Einstein’s remark about the wholeness of the universe, suggesting that a starting point is to consciously choose to find meaningfulness in the everyday,

It will actually be within your power to experience a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell type situation as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the same force that made the stars: love, fellowship, the mystical oneness of all things deep down. (Wallace, in Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 47)

Dreyfus and Kelly’s perspective on reclaiming the sacred builds on Karl Jasper’s perspective from the 1949 book ‘The Origin and Goal of History’ which describes the Axial Revolution of the first millennium BC.

This revolution introduced the idea – through Plato’s metaphysical philosophy, the Buddha’s conception of Nirvana, and various religious notions of Eternal Life – that there is a good beyond what we can find in the everyday conception of human flourishing. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, pp. 163-164)

Dreyfus and Kelly outline how this led to the supremacy of monotheism and the utter subservience of humans to an omnipotent divinity, and a belief in a transcendent good that is the nature of the divine. Jasper described how this was a time of roughly contemporaneous emergence of universal moral and/or religious concepts across many cultures. Dreyfus draws on Nietzsche to illustrate what was lost as a result of this transition from the pre-Axial Greece of Homer and the Axial Greece of Socrates and Plato,

Oh those [Homeric] Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial – out of profundity. (Nietzsche, in Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 164)

For Dreyfus and Kelly, what is profound about pre-Axial times is that people found true meaning in their communion with the everyday, without reference to a universal source of ‘good’ or ‘truth’. And while Homeric Greece worshipped a pantheon of often-erratic gods Dreyfus and Kelly also see it as profound that people lived comfortably with the paradoxes and contradictions that that presented; their spirit soared in the meaning and purpose they found in the everyday. In the Axial worldview, however, this became subservient to a greater good or goal or purpose, so that today, “... joy, however, is hidden from us because we’re trying to look past it, to find something deeper We have joy – real joy – all around us; we just need to be attentive” (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 168).

Dreyfus and Kelly explore (2011, pp. 259-263) what it might look like to somehow reconstitute a pre-axial sacred in our contemporary times which similarly seem to lack universal truths. They describe how in truly extraordinary, sacred moments, something overwhelming occurs (2011, p. 199), those exquisite moments of human experience which hold us in awe, as if they are not real; a dream almost. They are those moments which arouse humility, awe, wonder and admiration in those who experience them;

... whooshing is about as close as we get... the whooshing up of shining Achilles in the midst of battle or of an overwhelming eroticism in the presence of a radiant stranger like Paris... These were the shining moments of reality in Homer’s world.... When something whooshes up it focuses and organizes everything around it. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 238)

Dreyfus and Kelly draw a positive distinction between the world of Homeric Greece and our contemporary world: the Greeks worshipped human excelling in all its forms, even some we would shun today. Dreyfus and Kelly make the point that there is only a thin line between cheering at a baseball game and at a Nazi rally (2011, p. 202). However, they suggest that our culture can recognise where that line is in a way the Greeks could not,

... we have a ... sense of being able to cultivate the world, to develop the skills needed to bring it out at its shining best... Whether it is Jesus’ sense that the world is best revealed through the light of His mood of agape love, or Dante’s sense that we can teach ourselves the skill to be receptive to the love that moves the sun and the other stars; ... these *poietic* accounts of the sacred are gentle and nurturing in a way that was alien to Homer’s world. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 262)

Dreyfus and Kelly describe the skill we can aspire to as *meta-poiesis* (2011, p. 259). It is the capacity to reject sinister instances of outstanding human performance while also recognising those moments in which we ‘shine’. We will,

... understand immediately and without reflection that one moment calls for the microwave, while another moment calls for a grateful feast. He will have acquired the skill to let himself be overwhelmed by the ecstatic and wild gods of sport, but the discrimination to keep himself from being drawn in by the rhetoric of the fanatical and dangerous demagogue. He will live a life attuned to the shining things and so will have opened a place to which all the gods may return. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 260)

Dreyfus and Kelly suggest that one of the challenges we face in striving for *meta-poiesis* comes from our turning to an omnipotent divinity during Jasper’s Axial Era and then to individualism during the Enlightenment; both of which severed our connection with what we truly find sacred: those ‘moments of exaltation’ and replaced them with the pursuit of personal autonomy. But rather than lifting us to what is highest in us, Dreyfus and Kelly suggest that,

... individualist autonomy ... leads at least to wickedness or tragedy, and more likely to nihilism or even suicide. The Enlightenment embrace of this kind of metaphysical individualism ... was indeed a turning point in the West. But rather than standing as the final and most advanced stage in the history of our understanding of who we are, it seems instead to be the final step in the decline from Luther to Descartes to Kant to Nietzsche, a self-conception that destroys the possibility of a meaningful and worthwhile existence. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 204)

Of particular interest to me and my inquiring into leadership, is that Dreyfus and Kelly continually characterise *meta-poiesis* as a ‘skill’. I began wondering if ‘good leadership’ might amount to the type of whooshing that lifts us to what is highest in us, and what that might look like. It also had me wondering how something as seemingly value-laden as *meta-poiesis* could be described as a skill. Could that mean that good leadership is primarily a skill of a similar sort that can be crafted and learned?

In echoes of Goethe, Dreyfus and Kelly (2011) describe how learning a skill involves learning to see the world differently, and they are talking about more than athletic or sporting skills, and also more than proficiency at a technical skill. The type of skill to which they refer involves human capacity being continually developed, in context, to a point of being stretched to the frontiers of its limits, reaching moments of whooshing, human excellence. It involves a level of deep, extraordinary, human engagement in the world which brings people out at their best.

Dreyfus and Kelly describe a remarkable example of the type of *meta-poiesis* skill to which they refer: remarkable for its everydayness and also for its reaching a profound depth of human embodiment. Through the diary of a master wheelwright from several generations ago, Dreyfus and Kelly illustrate a near-contemporary example of a *meta-poiesis* type of skill. They describe how, with vast experience, the wheelwright can discern enormously subtle properties in a piece of wood – how it will respond to axe or saw or plane; its strength and load-bearing qualities. “This vision of skill is essentially practical and embodied” (2011, p. 208). Dreyfus and Kelly explain that such a master craftsman can discern the idiosyncratic characteristics inherent in every piece of wood, to recognise precisely how it needs to be worked to get the best out of it. This,

... involves intelligence and flexibility rather than rote and automatic response.

This does not mean the master is constantly planning out his actions; his ingenuity is practical, embodied, and in the moment. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 209)

The sacred dimension to such craftsmanship arises from the extraordinary sense of intimacy the craftsman feels with the wood which leads the craftsman to feel deep connection and respect for it, which in turn enables him to keep honing his skill.

But it is not just the wood alone The master becomes familiar with the local soil, the terrain, and the sources of water... the weather and the seasons, since they change the way the trees will respond to his saw. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 210)

Dreyfus and Kelly describe how this leads to a reverence for the land and the countryside which, “goes far beyond our notion of skill as automatic technical proficiency and begins to tie it to a sense of the sacred – and ultimately to bringing ourselves out at our best” (2011, p. 210). However, they lament that a consequence of contemporary reliance on technology

is a loss of need for *meta-poiesis* skills. “To cook a meal is to press a button, to travel across the country is to step on a plane” (2011, p. 212). Their concern is that when technology removes the need for a skill, it diminishes our capacity to know what counts or is worthwhile in that domain. “As we lose our knowledge of craft, the world looks increasingly devoid of distinctions of worth” (2011, p. 213).

As I have been reading, writing and thinking about the perspective on human excellence outlined by Dreyfus and Kelly and their sense of where to seek the sacred in these secular times, different meanings about aspects of leadership have been unfolding in my thinking. I wonder how technology may be contributing to the loss of that wheelwright-like, deep, contextual skill in people exercising leadership. Contemporary leadership seems to me quite remote from *meta-poiesis*, often mired in technology-fuelled meta-data, a predilection for collecting data, developing metrics to analyse them, and utilising computers to source, process and transmit information. A conversation becomes an email, a site visit becomes a Skype, and a character reference is superseded by the potential employee’s Facebook activity.

I am inspired by Dreyfus and Kelly’s notion of “discerning distinctions of worth” (2011, p. 246), the capacity for which, they suggest, develops with increasing development of higher skill. It seems a sad yet highly plausible proposition they make that with the loss of the *meta-poiesis* skill they describe, as a result of its being increasingly replaced by technology, comes also a loss of reverence, respect, and our capacity as cultivators of distinctions of worth in our lives. “As technology strips away the need for skill, it strips away too this noble understanding of ourselves as cultivators of meaning” (2011, p. 214).

I am now appreciating that the absence of a universal paradigm does not necessarily entail nihilism, or chaos or rank subjectivism. In a sense that I did not comprehend prior to reading Dreyfus and Kelly, I now appreciate that a contemporary type of *meta-poiesis* which draws us towards human excellence, may well be aspired to outside of a ‘universal’ truth as prescribed by an orthodox, or dominant paradigm.

In wondering how I might find a source of moral direction for leading in a post-Axial world with no universal, guiding principles, I often find myself reflecting on what guides me in my leading. How much am I guided by my intuition? By my ego? By my sense of what is expected? Dreyfus and Kelly are inspiring me to consider what *meta-poiesis* might suggest for a moral scope for leadership in our non-positivist, secular era.

I find myself now reconsidering a ‘distinction of worth’ that is flashing itself brilliantly at me – and it is to do with reviewing my sense of leadership ‘skill’. Most references to ‘leadership skill’ I encountered elsewhere in my reading seemed to refer to relatively technical skills. However, Dreyfus is helping me appreciate that there may be ‘leadership skills’ for a ‘master leadership craftsman’ that go far beyond an operational set of technical skills required to accomplish tasks.

I imagine such skill would involve deep appreciation of the broad context in which the leadership is functioning, including the passions, assumptions and vulnerabilities of personnel, modes of interacting between them, the resources available and how they are accessed and utilised, past ‘heroes’ and mythical stories of the organisation and myriad other cultural considerations, and extending out from the organisation to its broader context in its community. These skills would seem to involve a *meta-poietic* capacity to be guided by what is shining, by what is strongly ethical, by what will spark the most ‘sacred’ response - the most superlative moments of human performance or existence.

Clearly, from what Dreyfus and Kelly suggest, such capacity is learned and developed over time – accumulated and built upon through each ‘distinction of worth’ - until, like the wheelwright and his almost intuitive grasp of the qualities of the wood and how best to treat it to bring out its best, a leader might constantly be growing these skills based on the uniqueness of every interaction, of every conversation of every decision and choice, guided by what will lead to the most ‘sacred’ outcome.

This thinking seems to resonate also with the psychological concept of ‘flow’ which Csikszentmihalyi describes as people’s, “exceptional moments... of effortless action... that stand out as the best in their lives” (1997, p. 30). He describes ‘flow’ as optimal experience and that such, “moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (2008, p. 3).

I sense this is feeding some very significant thinking towards insight I am pursuing into leading, and now feel tentatively ready to explore some hermeneutical thinking about my understanding of leadership, and an emerging sense of who I am as I lead.

And so now a first look at leadership

Most leadership strategies are doomed to failure from the outset. As people have been noting for years, the majority of strategic initiatives that are driven from the top are marginally effective - at best. (Peter Senge, in Webber, 1999, p. 178)

I am struck by how far my conscious thinking has shifted about the quest I undertook when I began this inquiry. I now appreciate that a source of my frustration with the mainstream 'literature' was its apparent focus on technical skills, behaviours and/or techniques, in what soon seemed a most superficial manner, certainly not in the way Dreyfus and Kelly advocate. Here are some examples of approaches I now find superficial:

Leadership is a skill and a habit. Like most skills and habits, one that improves with practice. (D. Taylor, 2006, p. 47)

Typically, the best, most effective leaders act according to one or more of six distinct approaches to leadership and skilfully switch between the various styles depending on the situation. (Goleman, 2002, p. 53)

We uncovered five practices common to personal-best leadership experiences. (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 14)

[As] leaders today most of us need to intentionally transform our approach to managing ourselves, and we need to learn new behaviours. (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p. 9)

We can now construct a general idea or integrated concept of a leader as a person with certain qualities of personality and character, which are appropriate to the general situation and supported by a degree of relevant technical knowledge. (Adair, 2007, pp. 16-17)

Leading in all directions will require you to learn three different sets of leadership skills. (J. C. Maxwell, 2005, p. 3)

Our empirical factor analysis of huge amounts of data collected on leaders' competencies reveals that all vital and differentiating leadership competencies can be grouped into five clusters. (Zenger & Folkman, 2009, pp. 11-12)

In a recent survey conducted by Chief Learning Officer and the Human Capital Media (HCM) Advisory Group, 47% of executives ranked communication among the top targeted leadership skills. (Fierce, 2012, p. 3)

Having paused to delve more deeply into what I might learn from Dreyfus and Kelly, such statements about leadership skill appear typical of Sokolowski's concept of 'mundanese' in what he, like Husserl, describes as 'the natural attitude', as opposed to 'transcendentalese' which he characterises as the language of phenomenology, and which he suggests provides, "a good way of teasing out the differences between philosophy and natural experience" (2000, pp. 58-59).

As I reflect further on Dreyfus and Kelly I see links with four writers who engaged my interest as I started this study for what they offer an inexperienced leader: systems researcher Peter Senge (2006), (1994), (2005), leadership researcher Bill George (2003), management consultant Margaret Wheatley (2006) and leadership researcher Joseph Jaworski (1996). In different but reinforcing ways, each seems to suggest that at the heart of leadership lies who the leader is as a person. Rather than starting with skills or behaviours, Senge, George, Wheatley and Jaworski start with those almost *meta-poiesis* ways of being which seem to be almost universally admired in humans: humility, empathy, service, generosity of spirit and a sense of purpose beyond self, beyond profit and loss or improved standardised tests, towards the Dreyfus and Kelly realm of the sacred.

Jim Collins describes how being passionately engaged in a worthy pursuit beyond self, with a deep sense of purpose becomes a, "quest to be part of building something great" (2001, p. 209). I hear traces here of Dreyfus and Kelly in these words. When Collins asked a successful athletics coach why she left her promising financial career, she answered,

It's really hard to answer.... I guess ... it's because I really care about what we're doing. I believe in running and the impact it can have on these kids' lives. I want them to have a great experience, and to have the experience of being part of something absolutely first class. (2001, p. 208)

As I now embark on hermeneutically making meaning of my experience of leading, and autoethnographically reflecting on how this ongoing research is changing me, an early perspective I am shaping is that any essence of leading may be to do with engaging with others to seek something of Dreyfus and Kelly's *meta-poiesis* sense of the sacred in these

secular times; to seek those levels of shining human excellence that inspire wonder and awe as the extraordinary whooshes up.

As I shuffle together all the thinking I have been immersed in to this point, I do so with a new awareness of some of the lenses I look at it through. Much of what I have achieved in this inquiry so far has been to shake off some of the certainty, assumptions and clarity about leadership I would otherwise not have given much thought to. I recall reading a remark attributed to Robert Rubin, the US Secretary of the Treasury during the Clinton Administration, who said,

Some people I've encountered in various phases of my career seem more certain about everything than I am about anything. (Rubin, 2004 xii)

This observation strongly resonates with me because I have often assumed that what I believe, is 'right', is obviously so. Indeed, this type of confidence seems to be somewhat valued as a virtue in our society: it seems far preferable to be confident and sure than unsure or unclear. Early in my teaching career, a Principal reinforced this thinking in me by saying that uncertainty is the scourge of leadership and that it is vital to be decisive: once a leader takes a position, stand firm on it and do not back down or change course; to 'drive into the skid' as it were. It seems to me that all of this is a reflection of the continuing pervasiveness of positivism in our psyche: there is 'clearly' a right answer to most questions; if you do not know what it is you're either too slow or not smart enough.

My thinking about what may characterise the heart of leadership leapt forward when I encountered leadership scholar, Joseph Rost's research. I learned that all the frustration and confusion and embedded assumptions I experienced about leadership had also confounded him, so much so that he reviewed (1991) the Twentieth Century leadership literature, decade by decade to try to understand what key intellectual trends and findings lay therein.

I was also amazed to discover that Rost's goal was identical to my own original goal: he was aiming for a grand, unifying definition of leadership! He felt very challenged by the state of Twentieth Century scholarship into leadership because he felt it lacked even any fundamental agreements on what leadership means. He expected to find some general agreement on what is being discussed for any meaningful dialogue or inquiry of leadership, but what he found was that,

... leadership scholars and practitioners have no definition of leadership to hold on to. The scholars do not know what it is they are studying and the practitioners do not know what it is they are doing. (1991, p. 8)

Rost quoted Chester Barnard from 1948 who says that, "leadership has been the subject of an extraordinary amount of dogmatically stated nonsense" (Rost, 1991, p. 179). He also quoted his contemporary leadership scholar, James MacGregor Burns, who says, "Leadership is one of the ... least understood phenomena on earth" (1991, p. 5).

While Rost found no common understanding or definition of leadership, he certainly uncovered some common assumptions about it, namely that it was essentially, "rational, management-oriented, male, technocratic, quantitative, goal-dominated, cost-benefit driven, personalistic, hierarchical, short-term, pragmatic and materialistic" (1991, p. 94). He further interpreted this as leadership being popularly seen as good management. "Leadership as good management is a perfect summary of what leadership has meant in the industrial era" (1991, p. 94). In his view, the dominant concept of leadership, then, was of one person (the leader) getting other people (the followers) to do something.

Echoing Rost, leadership scholar, Galen Kroeck says,

The field of leadership inquiry is a conundrum of theories, definitions, measurements, descriptions, prescriptions, and philosophies. Few other topics in applied behavioural research have been granted as much attention, but the myriad theories and conceptualizations may be more diversion than asset. (In Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004, p. 72)

The more I read of Rost the more he explicitly confirmed my own much looser impressions of possibly flawed directions in the leadership 'literature'. In addition, he seemed to be confirming the deeply positivist perspective adopted by the vast majority of leadership scholars. Then he launched a 'post-industrial' concept of leadership, with a more fitting definition: "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (1993, p. 99).

Rost elaborates four 'essential elements' of this definition:

- An 'influence relationship' is a relationship in which influence flows freely in all directions; it is 'non-coercive' which means it is based solely on persuasive behaviours and not position or power (1991, p. 107). Leadership is what sits in this

relationship, rather than being traits or skills a person has, or behaviour they engage in.

- ‘Leaders and their collaborators’ are the people who come together for the leadership purpose. In his original 1991 (p. 102) version ‘collaborators’ were ‘followers’. Rost made the change because he believed that no matter how it is dressed up, ‘follower’ will always have connotations of inferiority, shallower thinking and compliance (1993, p. 109).
- ‘Real change’ is the intention of the influence relationship. By this Rost means that there must be an intention for purposeful action. It is the intention that matters and not the actual achievement of the change. By ‘real’ he means that “the changes are substantive and transforming” (1993, p. 100).
- ‘Mutual purpose’ refers to a shared goal held by leaders and their collaborators. It reflects a common, “the purpose or vision that leaders and collaborators have for an organization” (1993, p. 100).

These four elements combine to capture Rost’s belief that leadership is about the influence that flows back and forth across relationships, irrespective of formal positions held by people collaboratively engaged in the pursuit of substantive change. And he claims,

This definition is directly the opposite of all popular definitions of leadership from the 20th century, which emphasized power and control, individual leaders doing leadership and followers doing followership, and the view that the top-level decision-maker is the only person who does leadership. (Rost, in Volckmann, 2005, pp. 6-7).

Rost’s definition seemed revolutionary to me because, for the first time, I found articulated the proposition that leadership is more than a personal trait, technical skill, style or set of behaviours; it flows through influence in a relationship with others. Though I could find no reference in any of Rost’s writings to the philosophical traditions his beliefs emerged from, it occurred to me that what he suggested was a genuine shift in Kuhn’s notion of paradigm (Kuhn, 1970). Rost took a giant stride away from the pervasive industrial-era conceptions of leadership towards what he called a post-industrial paradigm (1993, p. 100). He made no bones about the positivist threads pervasive through the leadership research:

... all leadership theories have a structural-functional frame of reference in the hierarchical, linear, pragmatic, Newtonian background assumptions of

what makes the world go around.... They are utilitarian, short-term, and materialistic in their ethical base; and, finally, they are excessively rationalistic, technocratic, quantitative, and scientific in their background assumptions.

(1991, p. 27)

I was quite stunned by Rost's reconceptualising of 'leadership' because he seems to have crossed paradigm parameters without being aware of, or at least explicit about, the broader context and complexities of postmodern thinking, and certainly without any reference to phenomenology and hermeneutics. It seemed to me that he was well aware of his intention of breaking with the prevalent 'industrial paradigm', though did not appear to position his new definition on an horizon amongst postmodernism, other post-modern intellectual perspectives, or other philosophical perspectives.

There are aspects of Rost's definition of leadership that seem to hint towards hermeneutics: rather than leadership being an 'objective' phenomenon, perhaps like gravity, and while it sits partly within people, stemming from their thoughts, motivations and aspirations, he characterises it as being, at least partially, 'in the world' in the sense that it is relationally connected to the collaborator/s, and the real changes pursued and the mutual purpose envisaged. This struck me as being remarkably akin to a hermeneutical perspective – and certainly not conventionally positivist or empirical. This seemed to me to be a stark difference between his thinking on leadership and his predecessors'.

Rost embarked on a process for seeking the essence of leadership which seems remarkably akin to a phenomenological reduction. His first step in this is to methodically articulate why he believes the essence of leadership cannot be traced to a set of either behaviours, traits or styles.

He dismisses 'behaviour' as essential to the definition of leadership (1993, pp. 93-94) because he found from analysing studies of leadership behaviours, "an incredible diversity of successful behaviors (1993, p. 93), and that many of them defied "common wisdom or common sense, intuitive beliefs, and political correctness" (1993, p. 93). He claims there is no definitive list of behaviours that should be taught to aspiring leaders, and says that attempts at such lists are inevitably, "wish lists as to how leaders are supposed to be, not a description of how leaders really are" (1993, p. 94) .

He similarly stridently rejects 'styles' as essential to the definition of leadership, claiming they are,

... even more charlatan than the behavioral approach. By their very nature, styles are surface oriented, shallow, unauthentic, manipulative, and non-developmental. Styles are the very antithesis of everything for which real leader development stands. (1993, p. 95)

He also dismisses the personality and ‘traits’ perspective as being essential to the definition of leadership (1991, p. 94), concluding that from hundreds of trait-oriented research studies no analysis was able to conclude which traits, if any, leaders must have to engage in leadership.

For Rost, one of the most ingrained, pervasive confusions about leadership is, “the error that leadership resides in the leader(s), rather than being a relationship among leaders and followers” (1991, p. 43). This resonates with Peter Senge’s view, “In the West we tend to think of leadership as a quality that exists in certain people. This usual way of thinking has many traps. We search for special individuals with leadership potential, rather than developing the leadership potential in everyone” (In Jaworski, 1996, p. 2).

I found myself wondering what a phenomenological perspective may have added to Rost’s scholarship. His language in places is so certain; I was mindful of Sokolowski’s thinking about what a thing discloses of itself:

We are continually astonished to see what a thing is and also what else it can be, what “other sides” it can offer us... We never know everything that can be said about an object. The thing as an identity has depth; whatever appearances it may have presented to us, there are still others being held in reserve. (2000, p. 175)

Sokolowski’s words eloquently remind me of the folly of certainty and of seeking to capture the essence of a thing in a definition, since a definition will capture facets rather than its entirety, and that the essences of a phenomenon emerge over time. He cautions, in keeping with Goethe, that it is folly to seek a definition first, because an understanding of its essence comes about,

... only after we have grasped the essentials in the multitude of manifestations we have brought about concerning the thing in question. The definition does not come first; it involves a further reflection on what we have experienced and what we have come to know. (2008, p. 103)

Given Rost's significant contribution to opening up my thinking about leadership, I reluctantly begin to recognise a possible flaw in his scholarship because of his strident belief that for any body of knowledge to be considered a discipline it needs to be defined (1991, p. 179). I reflect again with my new thinking to wonder if Rost's great work may have been unwittingly compromised by the positivist methodology he followed in his research, and whether this might have limited his capacity to break free from a positivist paradigm.

I find myself needing to reflect a little more on how I might inquire further into Rost's contribution to find deeper insight into what it means to shape a hermeneutic perspective on leading. Another consideration to which I will return after that, is to inquire more thoroughly into how Rost's concept of leadership might regard Dreyfus and Kelly's sense of embodied skill – a wholly different sense than Rost's limiting of 'skill' to technical know-how.

Being here, and there, in the world

Questioning the questions offers a way of expanding thinking into previously unexplored territories. (Donna Ladkin, 2010, p. 5)

I had anticipated that Rost might articulate what remained as an essence of leadership after he dismissed all other definitions of leadership for being based on either behaviours, traits or skills. His methodology was to analyse the Twentieth Century literature to identify trends, to conclude that those trends reflected the values and cultural norms of the times from which they emerged; and to conclude that those trends in leadership studies were anachronistic for a post-industrial era. In addition, wanting to offer constructive thinking about leadership in a post-industrial era, he offered a grand, unifying definition. It now seems to me, that his scholarly inquiry aimed at a scientific, positivist, reduction of 'leadership'. And yet, it also resembled a phenomenological reduction by methodically exposing biases and characteristics commonly associated with leadership. I admire how he seems to have achieved this despite remaining in Husserl's 'natural attitude' and without any conscious step into a 'philosophical attitude'.

Sokolowski emphasises that phenomenology relies on pre-philosophical thought, and also clarifies that if it were to assert some sort of sense of ‘superiority’ it would be in danger of succumbing to a taint of positivism. He says that the benefit of the philosophical attitude is that it raises,

... the question of being, because we begin to look at things precisely as they are given to us, precisely as they are manifested We begin to look at things in their truth and evidencing. (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 64-65)

Reflecting on Rost is helping me grasp a keener appreciation of a distinction between Husserl’s ‘natural attitude’ and the ‘philosophical attitude’, his work aroused a curiosity in me about what a phenomenological reduction of leadership might further reveal.

Before considering ‘leadership’ further, I will attempt to clarify for myself how I might enter a philosophical attitude, and what insight on hermeneutical knowing I might glean from doing so. A recent personal experience involved nothing more profound than our customary walk along a path next to a local river. I was hardly aware of much about my surroundings. We walked up the usual steep road, testing several leg muscles and associated soft tissue I am not normally aware I possess, traversed several steep sections of path in the gorge, happily chatting – as much as my shortening breath allowed - largely taking the familiar features around me for granted, blithely unaware of everyday assumptions I was acting on: I was firmly in the ‘natural attitude’.

We stopped for a breather on that walk and I became aware of a different dimension to the elements in that scene and my being in it. I saw details I do not normally see: everything slowed; even the shimmering of young, spring leaves on trees in the gentle breeze seemed to be rustling unnaturally slowly. Each subtle movement of each individual leaf triggered its own flash of sunlight through the half-shade of the track, in a show of sparks like light flashing from facets of diamonds, each one of those leaves glistening in its own subtly distinct shade of green. And in each shudder of each leaf I saw a mirroring of the way the breeze gently shook the collective canopy of the gorge. As my gaze panned over the scene to trees and boulders and the rhythmic swirling of water flowing over and around rocks in the stream, I felt a soothing sense of perceiving the scene before me differently. As my gaze panned from tiny details to macro vignettes, I saw nuances of movement, texture, light and connections between elements that I am usually blithely unaware of. Often, while I might appreciate being outdoors and vaguely sense an aesthetic appeal to walking along

the gorge, it is rarely to this extent. Through a slowing down of my senses and an openness to what lay before me I saw far more than I usually do. The sound of water washing and rushing over smooth boulders evoked memories of relaxing, sensory pleasure from other times and places, such as the sound of the gondolier's oar gently dipping into the canal water of Venice. Bird calls similarly aroused associations in my mind of other experiences of marvelling at the apparent spontaneity and freedom of wild creatures. With a warm touch of mottled sunlight on my cheek and wafts of cool breeze in my hair, my mind eased and basked in sensory comfort. I sensed an intensity of fullness about where I was, quite unlike my more usual expedient sense of going for a walk in nice surroundings. There was nothing else in my consciousness, apart from the delight of my partner's presence and sharing it together.

As I stood contemplating that scene I now appreciate I was engaged in something approaching a phenomenological reduction: consciously examining the object of my intentionality and my experience by bringing together sensory data and prior experience; and also suspending assumptions, judgements and prejudices about the world. I felt a sense of how Husserl's process of bracketing the everyday assumptions and perspectives of the natural attitude allows a more basic consciousness to emerge. I am beginning to appreciate Husserl's sense of removing all perspectives on what is being experienced, conscious and subconscious, until what is left is the experience itself as a pure phenomenon untouched by assumption or interpretation.

Thus at this point we speak of such absolute data; even if these data are related to objective reality via their intentions, their intrinsic character is within them; nothing is assumed concerning the existence or non-existence of actuality. (Husserl, in Moran, 2000, p. 150)

I sensed and appreciated my connectedness with the world I intend, and was aware of this act of appreciation as I experienced it. The more I became aware of this the less I sensed I was looking at the scene before me, as seems to be the case in the natural attitude, saturated as it is with its world-conjecturing tendencies which mask its phenomenological facets, and the more I feel immersed in it as an integral part of it.

As I reflect further I became very aware autoethnographically and hermeneutically, of a transformative impact of feeling compelled to confront my selfhood – who I truly am, from a shifted perspective of being in the world as opposed to the world standing as something

before me. I sense that two things are happening simultaneously in my consciousness: this shift in the axis of my perception which enables a different type of awareness, and my internal processing and making meaning and commentary of this. I become aware of myself as another element in this scene at the gorge, no different from all the other elements which, even as I become aware of this, seems remarkable because my consciousness is not floating disembodied and detached, free to observe and interpret ‘objectively’. It is firmly embodied within me and my own very human, personal, subjective perspective.

I become aware that I am no longer taking the trees and the rocks and the stream for granted, in some separate or ‘over there’ sense, I am no longer taking my very self for granted. I become sublimely conscious of ‘me’ as integral within that vignette. In reaching this, I sense my own essence and the reciprocal nature of its capacity for intentionality. By this I mean that my consciousness relies on both an essence of ‘me’ as well as the ‘what’ beyond that essence of me of which I am conscious, in order to make meaning.

For most of the time in my ‘normal’ living my intentionality is not something I am conscious of: I am just aware of participating in the world, interacting with a range of disparate elements. However, when I unfold the world around me by stepping outside of the ‘natural attitude’ I sense perhaps Goethe’s ‘new organ of perception’ and a new source of meaning is revealed to me; but the ‘me’ is a different, transformed ‘me’; it is me as an integral element as the world, still perceived by my embodied consciousness but less so as a third party and more as appreciating a ‘fusion of horizons’ which converge from infinitely more perspectives than mine alone.

All of this is about my enriched intentionality: my awareness of, thinking about, relating to and being in the world. Heidegger wrote, “The compound expression ‘being-in-the-world’.... stands for a unified phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 49). This suggests a direct participation in the world that invites further thinking about what happens as we strive for that pure form of consciousness which peels away the assumptions and perspectives typical of the ‘natural attitude’, and which reveal us to ourselves as integral to the world we perceive.

In the ‘natural attitude’, no matter where I am, I have a sense that I am always ‘here’ and anything not ‘here’ is ‘there’. No matter how attached or integral I am to the world I inhabit, I still characterise my self as ‘here’ and other/s as ‘there’. As I reflect on my

thinking about my experience in the gorge, it seems that a ‘philosophical attitude’ can diminish the ‘there’ and extend the sense of ‘here’. The gap between my consciousness and the object of my intentionality narrows; the ‘here’ of my consciousness tends to blend and merge more seamlessly with the ‘there’ of my world.

I am tentatively suggesting that my experience of seeing ‘there’ occurs ‘there’. When I experience the gorge or a person, my experience seems to be ‘there’ in an embodied notion of intentionality: the object of my consciousness and my experience of it are where it is. When I test this thinking further it seems to hold up: when I touch an object with my finger, the experience of feeling the touch is not occurring in my head, even though nerves in my finger convey ‘messages’ to my brain to register that my finger is touching the object. Were my finger’s nerve endings to be rendered inoperative and my brain not aware of the object being touched, the object is still being touched by my finger. Clearly the experience is not occurring in my brain and it does not seem to be occurring in or on my finger. It seems to be occurring where my finger touches the object – ‘there’, which also somehow seems to be ‘here’!

At the same time I almost find this proposition counter-intuitive because ‘I’ am ‘here’ and surely if ‘I’ am experiencing something, I must be experiencing it ‘here’; how can I be ‘here’ yet experiencing it ‘there’? As I tried to make further sense of the apparent inconsistencies of this, I recalled Dreyfus (1991, p. 163) explaining Heidegger’s caveat that we can only ever consider ourselves as ‘being in the world (Heidegger’s *Dasein*) by virtue of a set of specific circumstances which Heidegger calls *‘llchtung’*, literally a ‘clearing in the forest’. Dreyfus continues,

We can capture some of the sense of clearing by calling *Dasein* a field of disclosedness. For Heidegger this suggests an open space in which one can encounter objects. *Licht* also means light. Things show up in the light of our understanding of being. (1991, p. 163)

Dreyfus goes on to consider something of the quandary I am puzzling over above by elaborating on Heidegger’s concept of the clearing –

Heidegger speaks of its there (*Da*) and of the clearing. Being-its-there is *Dasein*’s opening onto the clearing. “*Da*” in German means both “here” and “there”.... Each *Dasein*’s there is the situation as organised around its activity.

The shared situation is called the clearing, being-in-the-clearing is being-there.

(Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 164-165)

Considering this, I begin to develop a sense that I had been acting on a limiting sense of place while contemplating how “I” can be experiencing “there” when I am “here” and not “there”. I had been contemplating a sense of what seems an almost positivist sense of place which assumes that a person is manifestly either ‘here’ or ‘there’, with no other possibility for where one is placed. As I read Dreyfus’s thoughts on Heidegger I began to appreciate that Heidegger’s sense of ‘clearing’ suggests that when “I” am “here” and experience “there”, my very act of experiencing extends my “here” to “there” – ‘*Da*’-ness. In other words, what might otherwise be quite separate spatial entities merge into ‘hereness’ consummated through the act experiencing the object of my intentionality, which creates a new shared space, encompassing both “here” and “there”. As I write about ‘here’ and ‘there’ I sense a convergence of thinking with my earlier inquiry into the dialectic of parts and wholes. An extended sense of ‘here’ to incorporate a physical ‘there’ suggests to me a changed perception from ‘me’ as a distinct ‘part’ of something bigger, to more of a sense of embedded wholeness.

As I come to understand a philosophical ‘hereness’, it seems that my experience of the gorge occurred ‘there’ because although I am ‘here’, my act of experiencing it extended my field (or clearing) of my ‘here’ to include the ‘there’ of the gorge. Whereas previously the limits of contemplating ‘me’ in the ‘natural attitude’ may have been the physical parameters of my body, thereby defining my proximity to “here”, when I philosophically bracket the limits of those physical boundaries from my perception, I begin to see the possibilities for experiencing ‘here’ beyond those physical boundaries to the full context of my experience: my ‘here’ becomes a fuller Heideggerian-*Dasein* sense of ‘being in the world’, as opposed to a more ‘natural attitude’ sense of ‘me’ being a separate element in the world.

Bortoft (1996, pp. 62-63) describes how the structure of modern languages exacerbates the duality and separateness of ‘here’ and ‘there’ because of being organised into subjects and predicates. He describes how ‘I see the tree’ entails a polarity of disparate elements: the viewer and the tree, with the act of seeing almost artificially bringing them together for the purpose of the sentence. In other words, he suggests the structure of language entails a world of detached objects, with us assuming that this represents the world ‘as it is’.

I resume my writing here on a new day, having just heard a radio interview with the documentary maker Michael Palin who was describing a visit to the Amazon which I found added further clarity to my understanding of Heidegger's concept of the 'clearing'. Palin described his visit to an indigenous village deep in the Amazon rainforest in which a broad, open clearing suddenly opened up in the middle of the dense jungle foliage. Within the clearing were the inhabitants' huts and general living space. He described how the clearing defined the parameters of their daily living. I imagine the inhabitants would all describe themselves as being 'here', irrespective of whether I am 'here' and you might be 80 metres away; so long as we are both in the clearing then we are both "here". I imagine they have a very rich sense of family and community which only heightens this sense of 'hereness' beyond the limits of the physical body. You are only 'there' when you venture outside our common, shared space of the clearing.

I am curious to consider what this thinking about 'hereness' and 'thereness' might suggest for a consideration of leading. Perhaps as we go about our daily lives in the 'natural attitude', many of our relationships may rarely be considered beyond a transactional dimension. By this I mean that when we make a purchase in a store, or usher someone through a door before us, or lend a mower to a neighbour, 'I' – as a discrete entity – interact with 'you', another discrete entity; we are separate people living separate lives, the orbits of which happen to intersect. However, when considered from a philosophical attitude, some relationships appear to enter Heidegger's 'clearing', with each party's sense of 'hereness' and of 'me' extending into an extended or mutual 'us' of shared, overlapping 'hereness'. I wonder if Rost's notion of leadership being partly characterised by an 'influence relationship' might be just such a relationship. It seems possible to me that the parties to an 'influence relationship', in pursuit of their 'mutual purpose' may be engaging richly together in their shared clearing of 'hereness'.

As I continue exploring this, I wonder what I can infer from Rost's definition for an eidetic reduction of 'leadership'. Rost would have to have articulated a set of elements which would need to satisfy every instance of leadership. It would have to look like leadership irrespective of the facet from which it is being viewed. It seems that Rost's key elements of an influence relationship between people seeking real change and sharing mutual purpose, seem very close to a core or essence of 'leadership'. By this I mean that when other elements attributable to leadership which I encounter in much of the leadership 'literature' - such as traits, behaviours and styles – are tested for their essentialness to

leadership, Rost demonstrates (1991, 1993) that there can be effective leadership without them. On the other hand, removing Rost's elements seems to remove something intrinsic to leadership. For example, if one party or more is coerced into the relationship then it is something other than an influence relationship. Similarly if their purpose is not mutually shared, then one party or more is participating for reasons other than for pursuing a common goal.

I think there is more to unfold about a hermeneutic understanding of 'leadership' by inquiring more extensively into some implications of Rost's research becoming apparent to me. Rost's 'influence relationship' and 'mutual purpose' seem limited to a transactional dimension, with Rost seeming to suggest a pragmatic expediency around reciprocal benefits. This nags at my sense of something still missing from the *eidos* - from the Greek '*eidos*' meaning form or shape or essence (Harper, 2014b) - of leading. As I wonder about this missing element I think of Dreyfus and Kelly's *meta-poiesis*. Rost does not seem to see leadership as a means of humans 'whooshing' themselves into the realm of shining human excellence.

While I have some emergent thinking about the nature of 'influence' in an influence relationship which may assist with this, I feel I must first inquire further into how my thinking and perspectives about leadership might be shaped within limitations and devices of language.

Shaping leadership through mental models and the incompleteness of language

Man is made by his belief. As he believes so he is. (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in BrainyQuotes, 2014)

I am thinking that an entry point into exploring further the influence in influence relationships might be via an exploration of mental models as it seems to me that the mental models we hold about a phenomenon may drive how much interest we have in it, our dispositions towards it, what we actually see of it and the sort of behaviour with which we respond to it. If this is so, then it seems as if the role played by mental models in reaching an understanding of leadership could be instrumental.

Management consultant, Roger Schwarz and his associates provide a working understanding of mental models as, “the collection of assumptions, theories, anecdotes, and other mental facts and images used to understand ... reality” (Schwarz et al., 2005, p. 447). Peter Senge describes mental models as, “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 2006, p. 8). Essentially, Senge seems to be describing the values, beliefs and assumptions which drive our behaviour. He says mental models are immensely powerful in affecting what we do because they affect what we see. “Two people with different mental models can observe the same event and describe it differently, because they’ve looked at different details and made different interpretations” (2006, p. 164). As I reflect on these words of Senge I consider that a phenomenological perspective might suggest they are perhaps seeing different facets of the whole.

Mental models researcher, Philip Johnson-Laird says, “The theory of mental models is intended to explain the higher processes of cognition and, in particular, comprehension and inference” (Johnson-Laird, 1983, p. 446).

Johnson-Laird defines ‘mental model’ as,

... a representation of the world that is postulated to underlie human reasoning; a model represents what is true in one possibility, and so far as possible has an iconic structure. Mental models are the end result of perception and of understanding a description. Those of complex systems are a form of knowledge-representation in long-term memory. (Johnson-Laird, 2008, p. 428)

Johnson-Laird explains that when we draw a conclusion about something, we think of possibilities compatible with premises that occur to us. “We build the mental models of one premise, and then update them according to the next premise, and so on” (2008, p. 114). This suggests that when we experience something in the world, mental models sitting deeply and even subconsciously in our long-term memory, have a vital impact on the meaning we construct around that experience. This also suggests to me that cosseted inside mental models may be the prejudices Gadamer cautions we are all subjugated by, “The prejudices on the basis of which one makes judgments are not conscious” (2007, p. 416).

Johnson-Laird describes how language and the concepts represented through language, are engaged to make meaning from an experience and that the process of experiencing involves drawing inferences. As we encounter a new experience, we make connections with prior knowledge and experiences to make sense and meaning, from the new experience.

Mental models play a central and unifying role in representing objects, states of affairs, sequences of events, the way the world is, and the social and psychological actions of daily life. They enable individuals to make inferences and predication, to understand the phenomena, to decide what action to take and to control its execution, and above all to experience events by proxy; they allow language to be used to create representations comparable to those deriving from direct acquaintance with the world; and they relate words to the world by way of conception and perception. (Johnson-Laird, 1983, p. 397)

In other words, mental models may be described as ‘filters’ of our perception. They are the source of the meaning we make from an experience. If, after seven days of constant rain I look out the window and see that it is raining again, I might despair, but if there has been a long drought I might rejoice. Either response derives tacitly from the perspective I have constructed for myself from my mental models, based on what my life experiences have taught me, my aspirations and current circumstances.

In Husserl’s ‘natural attitude’ we might consider that what we ‘see’ is recorded in our brain similarly to how a video camera records images: ‘objectively’ recording reality, as in ‘the camera never lies’. However, Bohm illustrates (1996a, pp. 78-90) how the filters of mental models might suggest – to stretch the metaphor – that a sophisticated video-editing process takes place between what the senses experience and what consciously registers in the brain. So, not only do our mental models filter what sensory data reaches our consciousness, they also shape how much emphasis we place on some data as opposed to other data. Organisational culture researchers, Victor Bados et al elaborate,

Cognition is not a representation of a reality that is “out there,” rather it is a creation and construction and that perception is filtered by the observer’s experience, culture, mindset, upbringing, habits. Knowledge is shared among people and tied to their perceptions and experiences. (Bados, Martinez-Ferrer, & Lavella, 2010, p. 16)

Johnson Laird explains that, as we emphasise some elements over others, we draw inferences about them that we may not be even conscious of. We construct an understanding,

... on the basis of the discourse, its context, and background knowledge. Such knowledge is embodied in the [mental] model by default It becomes as automatic as any other cognitive skill that calls for no more than a single mental representation at any one time ... Implicit inferences lack the guarantee, then mental imprimatur, associated with explicit deductions.

(Johnson-Laird, 1983, p. 128)

It seems that as we experience something and are infused with sensory data from it, we subconsciously rank that data from highly significant to insignificant, with some data not registering. Nevertheless, from what I am coming to understand about mental models, such fragmentary filtering of perception generates our understanding of an experience. Physicist, Robert Jahn expresses this point as:

Our experience of the world and of ourselves is severely circumscribed by our observational inadequacies, yet it is on the basis of these shallow specifications that we presume to construct correspondingly limited models of our environment and of our cogent minds. (Jahn & Dunne, 2004, p. 549)

This seems to add a very complex, extra dimension to Husserl's challenge of phenomenologically reducing an experience to pure sensory data by bracketing out all prejudices and assumptions. Blithely unaware of our observational inadequacies, we typically assume that when we consider an experience, we are dealing with – just like an archetypal B-Grade movie detective – 'just the facts, Ma'am'. It seems a lot more is happening: in filtering what and how we perceive, we determine what we experience of a phenomenon. According to my developing understanding of mental models, the particular filtering pathway taken acts to further strengthen the values, beliefs and assumptions which activate the particular filters in the first place. This reinforcing loop would then actively seek data it recognises as being consistent with it and reject or not even see data which it evaluates as not being consistent with it.

Our mental models help shape our reality. Our most fundamental assumptions about the world, fear and love, create powerful self-fulfilling prophecies We can create for any situation, or about our life in general, a self-sustaining

virtuous cycle of creative awareness or a self-sustaining cycle of fear and reduced potential. (Schwarz et al., 2005, p. 433)

I believe this point made by Schwarz et al. is critical because it illustrates how the mental models that filter information from the world we encounter seem to substantively impact on how we then respond and interact with the world. This suggests that, fundamentally, our mental models directly influence our behaviour.

I typically hold doors open with a smile for anyone in my path and gesture for them to go through before me. Some men respond in a friendly way, while others do not seem to notice. Some women are very gracious and thank me politely while others are bluntly rude and take offense, saying that they are quite capable of opening the door for themselves. It seems to me that the key, substantive difference in any such response is the mental models of the other person. Those who are appreciative recognise a tiny, random act of civility in a busy day, while those who take offense perhaps assume that I have an anachronistic, chauvinistic view of women. It seems that people who have strong mental models that recognise kindness see it; others who have strong mental models about chauvinism see chauvinism. A person's response seems to be more than a mental response, because the mental response seems to trigger that person's actual, consequential behaviour.

What might this mean for leadership? Senge highlights that considering the role of mental models is a new frontier for leadership. "The discipline of managing mental models – surfacing, testing, and improving our internal pictures of how the world works – promises to be a major breakthrough for building learning organizations" (2006, p. 162).

Sokolowski offers insight into a key role contributed by language in constructing mental models. Specifically, he refers to syntax and to predication, by which he means, "something is said of something else" (2008, p. 48). He describes three fields of syntax: the word representing a thing, the same word referring to the concept of the thing and the actual thing itself. He uses unicorns to illustrate the potential confusion of exploring predication like this: 'unicorn' exists as a word; 'unicorn' exists as a concept of a horned horse, but unicorns themselves do not exist (2008, p. 53).

Sokolowski outlines a phenomenological role of syntax,

When we perceive an object, we run through a manifold of aspects and profiles: we see the thing first from this side and then from that; we concentrate on the color; we pay attention to the hardness or softness; we

turn the thing around and see other sides and aspects, and so on. In this manifold of appearances, however, we continuously experience all the aspects and profiles, all the views, as being ‘of’ one and the same object ... The identity of the thing is implicitly presented in and through the manifold... The identity itself never shows up. (Sokolowski, 2008, pp. 53-54)

Even though ‘the identity itself never shows up’, our mental models, drawing on deep prejudices and prior experiences, construct a whole from the fragment, in nothing like the way advocated by Goethe, and yet we tend to believe that what we experience is objective reality. For example a child who encounters a bearded man may shriek in fright at a ‘ho-ho-ho-ing’ Santa; this is because her experience of that phenomenon has revealed certain attributes of particular examples which shape a generalised mental model about bearded men. She is utterly unaware of any ‘flaw’ in her processing of her experience.

I now reflect on what syntax and predication may offer to an understanding of how mental models may influence a phenomenological perspective of an experience; something is said about something else, the ‘something else’ remains shadowy or incomplete, and our mental models compensate by filtering and constructing an image of wholeness of the phenomenon.

Closely related to the shades or layers of meaning contributed by syntax is the function of irony in language. Along with mental models and syntax, irony seems to involve a phenomenological incompleteness around the limitations of language trying to capture the fullness of an experience. At its simplest level, irony scholar Claire Colebrook quotes the Roman scholar Quintilian as defining it as, “saying what is contrary to what is meant” (2004, p. 1). More contemporary scholars of irony describe how there may be a ‘surface’ or literal meaning in a statement and an alternative meaning embedded beneath the explicit meaning, the nature and location of which is vexatious (Colebrook, 2004, p. 21). Colebrook goes on to make the identical point about irony as I made about syntax:

Any described subject is always other than the subject doing the description.
There is always a gap between the subject who speaks and the represented subject spoken about. (2004, p. 73)

In fact, Colebrook claims the gap is so large that the ‘other’ being described can never be known intimately, beyond being known as different from the subject. “The self that lies

behind masks and personae can only be known as different from what is presented, never presented ‘itself’ (2004, p. 73).

When I experience joy, in a sense I am inside of it; I experience a fullness of it (whether a great joy like seeing a loved one after time apart, or a minor joy like unexpectedly finding a parking space when running late). My life experiences and my mental models perhaps lay the groundwork for what will constitute joy for me, but when I experience it, that experience is direct and fulsome. Something else is happening when I describe that experience of joy. All of a sudden that experience is no longer being lived. While I may be able to replicate some of the emotional bliss of the experience, what I summon up will not be a reconstituted whole of that experience. At best, even thinking to myself, it will be an incomplete, constructed summary of some elements. Trying to express it in words seems to exacerbate the limitations.

An understanding of irony seems helpful to trying to make sense of the world phenomenologically and hermeneutically because I appreciate that an ironist is mindfully aware of their context in the world and acknowledges that others’ contexts are different, and that the gap between the two is essentially unbridgeable. I am thinking that this awareness accounts in large measure for the different meanings of words and other elements of communication that manifest as irony. As philosophy researcher Christopher Voparil and his colleague Richard Bernstein, discussing Rorty’s work, expresses it,

[Ironists] do not take the point of discursive thought to be knowing, in any sense that can be explicated by notions like ‘reality,’ ‘real essence,’ ‘objective point of view,’ and ‘the correspondence of language of reality.’ They do not think its point is to find a vocabulary which accurately represents something, a transparent medium.... Ironists agree with ... our inability to step outside our language in order to compare it with something else. (Voparil & Bernstein, 2010, p. 281)

Colebrook highlights this ‘gap’ I refer to by describing how irony, “produces and implies aesthetic distance; we imagine some authorial point of judgement that is other than the voice expressed” (2004, p. 160).

My developing appreciation of the complexities presented by both syntax and irony to ‘understanding’ one’s life and experiences, let alone someone else’s, has me wondering that language may perhaps be characterised as an imperfect conveyance of shades and

fragments of meaning. But this conveyance is different from an ordinary sense of taking something from one place to another like a forkful of food from plate to mouth, it is more like light being conveyed through a prism: an image has been conveyed by the light but is changed for having been conveyed as the white light changes to separate colours. If ‘truth’ is the full meaning expressed in words by a speaker, then we should recognise that, “truth is simply not there to be referred to by an innocent language.” (Colebrook, 2004, p. 177)

Or, as Colebrook also expressed:

Ironists are aware that what they see and what they say are only the seen and the said and not what is immediately. Irony is a perspective that sees only competing perspectives, a look that regards what it sees as thoroughly within a world of appearances, and a way of speaking that regards speech acts as moves of interaction with other speech acts. (Colebrook, 2002, p. 17)

Colebrook provides a perspective on irony which enables me to appreciate that although irony is perhaps a direct consequence of syntax, it cannot be detected or even analysed clinically from within a constructed theory of meaning like, for example, a metaphor. Recognising that what is said means other than what a speaker is saying requires more; Colebrook suggests it is as much a social act, as a linguistic one. She seems to be alluding to the ‘natural attitude’ when she discusses the ‘simple sincerity’ with which many people speak, oblivious of irony,

There are those who speak ‘sincerely’ when they utter received phrases and puerile dogmas, those who believe justice is capable of simple definition and morality is a question of self-evident truths or maxims. To speak with such simple sincerity is to assume an always present context of stable, shared, and recognised meaning. A certain theory of meaning is assumed. (2002, pp. 20-21)

Syntax and irony seem central shapers of mental models. I might assume that I convey an exactness of meaning through language as plainly as I convey a glass of wine by raising it. However, every word we use to describe anything in our realm of experience seems itself – at best – a brief and fragmented summary. When I describe the local weather during a long distance phone call and describe it as ‘hot’, ‘stormy’ or ‘windy’, a strong sense of what I intend is conveyed, without though the unique specifics of that particular set of meteorological circumstances. I select the word that best sums up my basic impression,

and even when I increase the specificity such as, ‘amazing electrical storm’, the vagueness remains: what does ‘amazing’ mean? Why was the storm amazing: the lightning itself, some aspect of the rain, the thunder, the duration of the storm – brief or long, the wind? No matter how extensively I describe the storm, the gulf between the experience and the describing of it remains vast.

Exacerbating this irony-gulf is the added distortion of the dimensions of meaning constructed from the description by a listener, according to his/her mental models, which in turn are derived from his/her life experiences. This contributes to my understanding of Sokolowski’s point that, “The ‘internal experiences’ of another person are always irreducibly absent to us; no matter how well you may know me, my actual flow of internal feelings and experiences could never become truly blended with yours” (2000, p. 34).

The ‘irreducible absence of another’s internal experiences’ emphasises the limitations of language for articulating and communicating understanding to others, known as the concept of intersubjectivity, the problem of other minds, as described by Gadamer,

It is clear that the life-world is always at the same time a communal world that involves being with other people as well. It is a world of persons, and in the natural attitude the validity of this personal world is always assumed. But how can its validity be based on an achievement of subjectivity? The principle of "radical" idealism - namely of always going back to the constitutive acts of transcendental subjectivity - must obviously illuminate the universal horizon of consciousness that is the "world" and, above all, the intersubjectivity of this world - although what is constituted in this way, the world as what is common to many individuals, itself includes subjectivity. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 239)

Intersubjectivity concerns a gulf between self and other, between two minds with entirely different lifeworlds and key mental models striving to make sense together. It suggests a hermeneutic response to the Cartesian perspective of subject and object, of observer and observed. A hermeneutic perspective suggests that other minds are not objectively detached from each other; while each mind has a subjective perspective on its life-world, the horizon from which it sees the world crosses and fuses with the horizons of other subjective minds to create an intersubjective perspective, as distinct from ‘seeing’ the ‘objective’ world, and also distinct from remaining disparate, subjective views.

Gadamer traces the development of ‘subjectivity’ since classical Greek times and cautions about facticity: the almost subliminal limitations in one’s understanding of anything:

Facticity is obviously that which cannot be clarified, that which resists any attempt to attain transparency of understanding. Thus it becomes clear that in every understanding there remains something unexplained, and that one therefore must ask about what motivates every understanding. This changes the entire concept of interpretation. (Gadamer, 2000b, p. 281)

Gadamer seems to be emphasising the complexity involved in seeking understanding; and that what motivates one’s understanding of something will influence the shape of that understanding. According to Gadamer, understanding is constantly unfolding because of facticity, and if there were always full understanding, the concept of ‘understanding’ itself would be redundant, much as the concept of ‘perspective’ would be redundant if we could see everything from all perspectives. As complex as this is for an individual seeking understanding alone, the variables become infinitely more complex when two or more people communicate. To Gadamer, the medium of intersubjectivity is language. “Who thinks of ‘language’ already moves beyond subjectivity” (2000b, p. 286).

For Gadamer, language is the medium through which one attempts to interpret and understand meaning from another -

Understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding. In accordance with this insight, interpretive language and concepts were recognized as belonging to the inner structure of understanding. This moves the whole problem of language from its peripheral and incidental position into the center of philosophy. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 306)

So important is language to Gadamer’s hermeneutics that he says (with his italics), “*the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language*” (2004, p. 370).

‘Fusion of horizons’ depicts Gadamer’s view of the intersection of perspectives at that point of mutuality which takes shape as shared understanding, creating a new reality and transforming participants, forging a new reciprocity with each other through their immersion in the object of their understanding. In Gadamer’s words:

... reaching an understanding on the subject matter of a conversation necessarily means that a common language must first be worked out in the conversation... To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (2004, p. 371)

I think it is critical I understand that, for Gadamer, language is something co-constructed in dialogue from which the object of the dialogue gradually emerges into sharper focus, rather than language being a pre-existing tool we reach for, to describe that about which we are in dialogue. Gadamer sees a role for syntax and irony in language to convey meaning within the limitations of discourse. In this sense, language is not a discrete set of precisely pre-defined words matching concepts, utilised to overlay my horizon onto yours, because that would confine meaning to the parameters of the existing language thereby restricting the potential of that fusion; rather, it is the fusion itself which sets new parameters of understanding, requiring language to be extended and constructed to 'capture' the fusion.

Gadamer describes this very point very eloquently,

I would say that the misunderstanding in the question of the linguisticality of our understanding is really one about language... In fact, language is the single word, whose virtuality opens for us the infinity of discourse, of speaking with one another, of the freedom of "expressing oneself" and "letting oneself be expressed." Language is not its elaborated conventionalism, nor the burden of preschematization with which it loads us, but the generative and creative power to unceasingly make this whole once again fluent. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 553)

While an individual person may construct language when in dialogue with a text or perhaps even with a memory when juxtaposed on a new experience, I can only imagine the greater scale of complexity when two or more people are exploring new meaning through dialogue. Gadamer expresses further this relationship between language and meaning, "The hermeneutical problem concerns not the correct mastery of language but coming to a proper understanding about the subject matter, which takes place in the medium of language" (2004, p. 387).

Gadamer makes a strong case for language as sitting at the heart of both the epistemological and ontological basis of being human. It seems from my reading and reflection of his work that Gadamer sees linguisticality as succouring us to become who we are: if at the heart of being human is a yearning for meaning, then it is language that conveys us to it. More than an inanimate tool for reaching understanding about things, we craft and shape language around our experience so profoundly that our linguisticality is inextricably woven around our very concept of experience and meaning. I believe he might suggest that without humans' linguistic capacity, there might indeed be no meaning.

Coming to an understanding... is a life process in which a community of life is lived out... as a special and unique life process since, in linguistic communication, "world" is disclosed... All kinds of human community are kinds of linguistic community: even more, they form language. For language is by nature the language of conversation; it fully realizes itself only in the process of coming to an understanding. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 443)

For Gadamer, discourse actively shapes the incompleteness of understanding as conveyed in communication due to syntax and irony inherent in all language. To be human is to be an 'understander', or at least one who seeks understanding. It is understanding that makes us who we are. While understanding is an object of our consciousness, it is always incomplete and may be built upon over time or even change as new meaning emerges. A key reason for this is the 'fore-meanings' or 'prejudices' encountered in the process of understanding and which colour understanding that takes shape. As Gadamer says,

A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from foremeanings that are not borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed "by the things" themselves, is the constant task of understanding. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 270).

This perhaps accounts for the magnitude of the impact of context on all human artefacts and actions, including attempts to interpret and understand. I suspect that Gadamer would not be advocating that 'fore-meanings' are problems to be overcome but that they simply constitute a dimension of experience and for what it means to be human.

Gadamer's view of experience as fundamentally linguistic has me wondering now what a deeper consideration of dialogue may disclose to me for gaining insight into how people

engaged in an ‘influence relationship’ may create new meaning and understanding together in dialogue.

To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.
(Gadamer, 2004, p. 371)

I recognised these words of Gadamer as a coalescence of what I was tentatively striving for in my own thinking about dialogue. The two key elements of reaching a new understanding and being transformed into a communion, strongly emphasise Glendinning and Zajonc's suggestions about the impact of engaging in phenomenological inquiry, as alluded to earlier when inquiring into the nature of phenomenological writing.

My own ‘fore-meaning’ about ‘dialogue’ might have been lost somewhere between a positivist and a hermeneutical perspective. I used to think that dialogue is a process for surfacing through conversation meaning that is somewhat already ‘known’, albeit tacit and perhaps deeply embedded in untested assumptions: a process for teasing out threads of understanding. A dialogue with a mentor would therefore have been a conversation in which the mentor skilfully guided one towards a ‘truth’, or towards the ‘right’ position or horizon. What has often frustrated me with this notion of dialogue and had me wondering about, is that I have often suspected myself during conversation of not being truly open in my thinking; that I may be shoring up a position I hold, or too ready to cling to ‘thin’ premises, or worse still, trying to impress someone with what I think I know. Through my reading and inquiry I am appreciating some deeper dimensions to dialogue, and they contribute further meaning to my understanding of leadership.

David Bohm explains that,

Dialogue comes from the Greek word *dialogos*. *Logos* means “the word,” ... and *dia* means “through”. The picture or image that this derivation suggests is of a stream of meaning flowing ... out of which may emerge some new understanding... which may not have been in the starting point at all. It's something creative. And this shared meaning is the “glue” or “cement” that holds people and societies together. (1996b, p. 6)

In my experience I have often considered ‘dialogue’ as a synonym for ‘discussion’. The etymological origins of each word could not be more different as ‘discussion means, "from

Latin discuss ... stem of *discutere* ‘to dash to pieces, agitate’” (Harper, 2014c; “Online Etymology Dictionary,”).

When I consider my everyday conversations, this sense of discussion seems to better reflect the nature of the conversational exchanges I sometimes encounter which purport to be dialogue. When exchanging views, there seems to often be a focus on persuading or convincing the other, of attempting to show the flaw in the other’s view. Listening sometimes seems to be a process of ‘reloading’, or waiting for a break in the other’s speech so as to resume the advocacy of one’s own position. Dialogue scholar, Bill Isaacs, suggests dialogue is vastly different to that.

Dialogue, as I define it here, is about a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together.... Dialogue is a living experience of inquiry within and between people.... The most important parts of any conversation are those that neither party could have imagined before starting. (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9)

Dialogue would seem to be blocked at times by people’s dysfunctional mental models; dysfunctional in the sense that they may be so deep-seated below the conscious level that the person holding them does not realise that a particular mental model may in fact be undermining efforts to achieve a particular goal; dysfunctional also in the sense that two people holding vastly inconsistent mental models, may come to see each other as protagonists with conflicting goals.

Where dialogue offers a ‘flow of meaning’ by enabling one to see and engage with another’s mental models in striving towards new understanding, Isaacs’ research suggests dialogue may open up a path for genuine collaboration. So I now begin to sense in far more pragmatic terms, the potential benefits dialogue offers to leadership, and I think to engage in being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were, may require great courage to step aside from the comfort of the known, and to invoke the risks and possibilities of the unknown. Indeed, Isaacs suggests that any significant failure in practical or professional life can be traced back ultimately to a failure of conversation (1999, p. 3). This has me pondering that perhaps the reverse also follows: that every great success might be traced back ultimately to a rich conversation.

Inquiring into mental models and language as mediums of meaning, and particularly the role dialogue can play in yielding new understanding, stimulated new thinking around how

I might inquire more deeply into seeking a *meta-poiesis* dimension to influence in Rost's 'influence relationships'.

What might be the influence in Rost's 'influence relationships'?

Leadership is influence. (John C. Maxwell, 2007, p. 11)

From my inquiring into dialogue, I have an emerging sense of influence which is not about convincing or persuading others, and certainly not about using power to assert one's opinion over others. So what might be the nature of a *meta-poiesis* inspired influence? Isaacs provides a wonderful point of connection by illuminating further the meaning of 'dialogue' from the word's etymology. Isaacs suggests a more accurate translation of '*logos*' in '*dialogos*' is 'relationship' rather than 'word' which changes the meaning such that,

... dialogue is a conversation in which people think together in relationship. Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result simply from being in relationship with others – possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred. (Isaacs, 1999, p. 19)

Isaacs illustrates how the interaction of atoms is like billiard balls zooming past each other, as a metaphor that applies equally well to 'typical' conversations (1999, p. 29). He says people in conversation typically zoom past each other, or collide and veer off. He suggests that each 'billiard ball' in a conversation is on its solitary, fixed trajectory of saying what it wants to say. In such conversations the voices may take turns but there is little genuine thinking together. Where a clash occurs there may be a great release of energy which consumes both, or one may prevail over the other. In fact he says that thinking alone is taken deeply for granted in our modern ways of living (1999, p. 29).

Rost alludes to a similar sense of 'influence' in, describing how leaders, "manipulate the relationship by coercive and/or authoritarian means" (1991, p. 156). He goes on to say that when these behaviours are present in a relationship, "we can no longer call it leadership" (1991, p. 156). I am reflecting here that Isaacs' notion of 'thinking alone' has much in

common with Rost's sense of people manipulating others because of the primacy they give to their own view.

Rost believes that any understanding of 'influence' is limited by our dominant mental models, "what each of us sees as influential is always going to be based, in part, on our perceptual and personal screens" (1991, p. 156).

As influential as Rost's work has been for me, he then goes on to outline an explanation of 'influence' which I find disappointing. While he loosely refers to influence relating to ethical standards, he defines 'influence' as, "an interactive process in which people try to convince other people to believe and/or act in certain ways" (1991, p. 157). This appears to consider that influence is concerned largely with one person using non-coercive arguments for inducing others to adopt their position. His focus seems overwhelmingly concerned with what influence is not, in particular coercion, and does not explore to a satisfying degree what it is. He equates 'influence' with persuasion, suggesting, "actions that are aimed at persuading others to one's point of view ... are generally thought of as within the concept of influence" (1991, p. 159). He claims that persuasion is, "more than reasoned argument to convince others to believe or do something" (1991, p. 160). He elaborates on the 'more': "persuasion involves the use of reputation, prestige, personality, purpose, status, content of the message, interpersonal and group skills, ... authority or lack of it, ... perception, motivation, race, gender, religion ... and countless other things" (1991, p. 160).

There seems to be a fundamental assumption in Rost's ruminations about influence that it is essentially about non-coercive strategies consciously employed by a person in order to achieve sway over another. When I sourced other references to explore this thinking further I was both amazed and dismayed to find that it is incredibly pervasive. Here are some such references:

To be an effective leader, it is necessary to influence others to support and implement decisions that the leader and group members perceive are necessary. Without influence, leadership does not occur. In other words, leadership is the act of influencing outcomes. (Hall, 2007, p. 1)

Influence can be with people, things or events. Strength and effectiveness of influence can vary. The process the leader uses to influence someone can take a variety of forms. (Hall, 2007, p. 1)

Influence is defined as “a force one person (the agent) exerts on someone else (the target) to induce a change in the target, including changes in behaviors, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs and values” and “the ability to affect the behavior of others in a particular direction.” To influence, a leader uses strategies or tactics, actual behaviors designed to change another person’s attitudes, beliefs, values or actions. (Hall, 2007, p. 1)

Influence is the art of getting others to take your lead – to believe something you want them to believe, think in a way you want them to think, or do something you want them to do. (Bacon, 2012, p. 3)

... influence is a function of power. It's as simple as this: The more powerful you are, the more influence you can have on others.... [There are] five sources of power (reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert). (Bacon, 2011, pp. 2-3)

Influence tactics are proactive, behavioural actions that are taken to change the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors of individuals. (Knippenberg, 2007, pp. 123-124)

We too can become master influencers – but not without some hard work. We have to stop tinkering with problems and learn to build a comprehensive influence strategy. (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008, p. 256)

The key concern I have about these – and many others similar – is the common thread which appears to run through them: they seem to suggest that influence is the outcome of a quest to impose one's will over another's. The leadership scholar James MacGregor Burns explores the thinking of Machiavelli and his strategies for manipulating people to serve one's own ends. Burns expresses reservations about texts that, “seek to train persons to manage and manipulate rather than to lead them” (Burns, 1978, p. 446). He goes on to say that the key strategy of such approaches is to, “search for the lowest common denominator of motives among persons and within persons and exploit these motives for the benefit of the power wielder, not the target” (1978, p. 447).

These explanations of influence leave me wondering about what seems a fundamental ambiguity about the source of this influence. Rost alludes to the ethical dimension of influence, almost in passing:

Having defined influence as more than reasoned argument to convince others to believe or do something, the ethics of using persuasion to influence takes on new meaning for those interested in the ethics of the leadership process. If persuasion is more than reasoned argument, the ethical question becomes: How much of one's power resources can one put into the persuasive process before the power of persuasion becomes power wielding? (Rost, 1991, p. 160)

Perhaps he may also have framed this as – when does persuasion become coercion? I find this is a key point, and it is where I part company with Rost's thinking. While he may well be correct in suggesting that the distinction between persuasion and power is an ethical question, it seems he is overlooking a key perspective on the very nature of influence and finishes his analysis by acknowledging that the ethical nature of the distinction makes it subject to the peculiarities of each set of circumstances, but that ethical leaders must confine themselves to persuasion rather than coercion, otherwise what they engage in is something other than leadership. Rost suggests that all is fine so long as the person being persuaded retains the real option of choosing to disregard the leader's persuasive efforts. I find this line of thinking very disappointing to my emerging sense of influence.

When I consider the challenge posed by Dreyfus and Kelly for *meta-poiesis*, I am looking for something nobler in the influence of influence relationships than what Rost suggests. It seems to me that most synonyms of 'influence' such as 'power', 'authority', 'persuasion', 'convincing', all have a common through-line of at least partial coercion. While each of them may arguably be about an influence relationship, the influence stems from how one party is able to exert sway on the behaviour of the other.

When I reflect on what I am understanding about phenomenology, no single facet of a phenomenon contains the full picture. It seems that a phenomenological perspective on leadership would not countenance a position adopted being based on one person's view prevailing over others following debate or discussion, as if it possesses superior insight.

I am contemplating a perspective on what might more helpfully drive influence, and propose a concept of 'fidelity of influence' which rises from the scholarly traditions of dialogue. I am suggesting simply that the 'influence' in an influence relationship derives from the object of the influence relationship, that is, whatever draws inquirers into deeper personal insight and resonance together about what is being disclosed. This 'whatever

'draws' is what I am thinking is the generative source of influence, rather than status, experience or reasoned argument alone.

I am suggesting that fidelity of influence means a focus on the intentionality of the influence relationship, without any party aiming to have his/her will prevail over another's. It seems to me that if there is any sense of one party convinced of the 'rightness' of his/her view, that could be a very limiting position to take because it seems to assume a completeness of knowledge. It may also be an act of positivist folly, as opposed to a phenomenological acknowledging that the fullness of any phenomenon is never disclosed in its entirety, and may unfold more thoroughly through a dialogic conversation featuring fidelity of influence.

Sometimes a more senior person in an organisation or a relationship may presume their opinion is more worthy than someone else's. And, while it may be better informed, drawn from greater experience and shaped with greater expertise, it may also be burdened with bias, fixed thinking and blind assumptions.

When people are faced with an important decision, I am suggesting that fidelity of influence emerges in their relationship through dialogue and inquiry around what will convey them to their goal. In keeping with phenomenology, I am suggesting that people engaged in an influence relationship bracket their biases, assumptions and their comforts, and open themselves to being influenced by what deep dialogue and inquiry may reveal to them.

So, rather than deferring to the most experienced or senior colleague's view, a rich influence relationship would aim to focus instead on drawing out key insights from all, building new, shared understanding. Such a process may indeed still feature persuasion, but I suggest the critical difference is that such persuasion would be guided only by realising the mutual purpose, untainted by other perspectives such as ego, status, experience, envy or personal stake.

I now see greater significance in Rost's sense of 'mutual purpose' in his definition of leadership if I see the mutual purpose as the object of the influence relationship: the common goal leaders and the 'collaborators' seek to pursue. As I think further, it seems to me that the mutual purpose ignites the bond between the parties in the influence relationship, and makes possible the influence in the relationship. Without a mutual purpose there would be no relationship.

As I consider all of this, it seems that parties engaging with each other in an influence relationship formed around a mutual purpose, may amplify the impact of the mutual purpose, because when that relationship holds strong fidelity with the object of the influence there may well be increasing resonance between the members, forging an increasingly stronger influence relationship, with strong echoes of the hermeneutic circle.

It occurs to me that one might suggest that all I have done in arriving at my understanding of ‘fidelity of influence’ in influence relationship is simply to describe the nature of a dialogic relationship. For me, what sets leadership in an influence relationship apart from dialogue is Rost’s remaining element in his definition: the intending of action for real change by human agents.

As I came to these deeper understandings about phenomenology, hermeneutics and an extended view of Rost’s definition of ‘leadership’ I encountered what felt like a dramatic convergence of thinking with research I was acting on in my work, seemingly entirely independently of this inquiry. Before long, these two channels of research merged to generate new energy as I drew from each to improve my understanding of the other.

Chapter 3 - Leadership and levels of perspective

Leading from events to vision

Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality. (Warren Bennis, 2009, p. 188)

Ten years ago when I wondered how to be an effective leader in my new capacity as a school Principal I wanted to learn more about leadership and emailed Peter Senge. Senge's secretary replied and suggested I approach, 'Peter's dear Australian friend, John Edwards'. Over time an email conversation culminated in my commissioning John and his colleague, Bill Martin, to work with my school on mentoring me to achieve key, sustainable changes. Bill is a retired North American secondary school Principal while John is an educational theorist and researcher. I soon discovered they offered a potent combination of wisdom and practical experience. What kept piquing my curiosity was their insistence that culture and especially leadership culture is crucial to the success of their process. Our conversations centred on how most change efforts focus on low-leverage efforts, with little to show for them.

The change process I initiated with John and Bill's mentoring, combined with my unfolding PhD study, forged stimulating synergies around cultural elements which deepened key influence relationships. Even so, I felt I might improve my chances of success by learning more about 'culture', so consulted several researchers for insight. Positive organisational scholar Robert Quinn defines 'culture' as representing,

... how things are done around here. It reflects the prevailing ideology that people carry in their heads. It conveys a sense of identity to employees, provides unwritten and often unspoken guidelines for how to get along in the organization, and it enhances the stability of the social system that they experience. (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 16)

Leadership researcher John Kotter adds that it, "refers to norms of behaviour and shared values among a group of people" (1996, p. 148). He explains that many change initiatives fail because they use either authoritarian decree or micromanagement, and claims that

only approaches based on vision succeed (1996, 68). I soon started sensing links between a healthy organisation's culture and my growing sense of fidelity of influence.

I learned over time that where members of an organisation respect and feel deep bonds with the culture, then significant, desirable practices may take root, and are often more sustainable and adaptable. The 'literature' I studied seemed united on this, but there was scant detail on how leaders achieve this in an organisation. And then I had a conversation with John Edwards which left me excited about possibilities for the 'how'.

John asked me how I spent my day and coached me to a growing awareness that a bulk of my time was spent busily responding to events. In a school this means that despite policies on a range of matters, not only do students demonstrate wildly-ranging behaviour, but so too do teachers and other staff. He asked me to imagine a school in which staff consciously articulated fundamental core values which they genuinely worked to see them reflected in their behaviour and practice. He asked me to imagine what might be possible in a school like this, and how much time and energy might be freed up for people to genuinely collaborate on pursuing a shared vision. Bill Martin recounted his experience as a secondary Principal in the USA. He described his team of teachers as being like a display of skyrockets in the night sky. He would watch with delight and sometimes awe as they arced across the sky in all directions making a brilliant spectacle. When he met John for the first time he had already been imagining what that display might look like if those skyrockets were tied together and fired into the sky in unison. That was a part of the vision he had for how his teachers worked together. He described the excitement over several years of achieving a measure of that.

I was disappointed to recognise that much of my day was spent attending to whatever cropped up, with little opportunity for conversation with colleagues actively designing and implementing processes to strategically improve the school. I was mired in responding to events: a student sent to me for inappropriate behaviour; a teacher disputing an outcome from a meeting; a parent complaining about her son's teacher; my own curiosity about why the flags were not flying from the flagpoles; a parent asking what was in the weed spray she saw applied during the holiday break; a student complaining that when he yells at a teacher he gets into trouble but that it is okay for a teacher to yell at him; the bus contractor wanting to know when I'm going to sort out 'little Johnnie'; the desperate parent wanting advice on how to get her 15 year-old son out of bed of a morning; the four 14 year-old boys who popped buttons off their shirts during rough play at lunch; the

Superintendent wanting to visit and discuss standardised test scores; the over-budget Art Department demanding more funds unless I want them to teach theory for the rest of the year; my daughter sending me a text message asking me to phone her when I can; oh and there's lunch in there some days, and I must make time to see how our two beginning teachers are going. While not all days were like this, events like each of these were typical. I was a hamster running faster and faster in my wheel.

John Edwards and Bill Martin had developed an approach to organisational improvement that I saw might offer me not just an exit option from my hamster wheel, but an opportunity to be more proactive in my work of leading a school. They spoke to me about their process for forming a shared vision and then bringing to everyone's consciousness the core values and mental models embedded in it. I learned that they also consider what established ways of doing things already exist in the culture, and what additional systemic structures, processes and protocols to support the mental models and the vision might need to be designed and implemented.

Bill and John taught me that by continuously inviting colleagues to contribute in dialogue about vision, mental models and systemic structures, people's thinking gradually aligns closer together around the shared vision; and that, over time, they come to recognise the shared vision is as much their personal vision. They suggested that this also conserves precious energy which otherwise dissipates through unnecessary tensions which occur in an organisation in which people are separately trying to do their best. Bill and John emphasised that if leading is about creating the sort of culture in which people actively participate together to realise a shared vision, then the work of leaders should be in the realms of vision, mental models and systemic structures, rather than being stuck in managing events.

I thought the approach outlined by John and Bill held great potential to create the sort of school culture needed to achieve desired outcomes, certainly more potential than I felt capable of creating alone. I was keen to engage the services of John and Bill for the school but believed also that there would be a fundamental inconsistency if I imposed the approach on the school.

I started a conversation with my Leadership Team and put a case to them for the benefits the project offered, its costs and commitment required. There was a palpable silence as I finished during which I felt sorry for them because, newly appointed, I appreciated they did

not yet know me and that supporting my proposal would require a leap of faith. I resisted the urge to break their silence, then one of them spoke, "Well I think this is just the sort of thing this school needs!" I'm not sure if my beaming face added any encouragement, but there was an immediate ripple of genuine support around the table.

I am very self-conscious when I reflect on my methodology in that meeting now. I am afraid there was minimal fidelity of influence to be seen. My approach was basically a sales pitch with no opportunities given to the members of the Leadership Team to quietly think and talk together to explore any questions and/or concerns. Nevertheless, I had achieved a vital step. I explained to these key colleagues that successfully eliciting the support of the rest of the staff would require us, as a Leadership Team, offering a united perspective to them. I acknowledged that that might be difficult as it be a normal human response to have misgivings and to want to share them. In return for their solidarity in being reassuring and supportive with the wider staff group, I offered my commitment to support each of them and to insist that any concerns or questions would be treated respectfully and seriously within the forum of our Leadership Team. A meeting with the whole teaching staff followed, and they agreed with the proposal. I felt greatly encouraged by successfully winning their agreement and felt I must repay their confidence by doing my utmost to ensure success of the initiative.

Bill and John began their assignment by engaging all teachers, non-teaching staff, a selection of parents, senior students and community representatives in a process for hearing everyone's voices to generate a shared vision. In order to lead in my participation in this as effectively as possible, I researched the concept of vision further. Vision researcher Jill Strange defines vision as, "the construction of a distinct image of a group's or an organization's future."(Strange & Mumford, 2005, p. 122). Leadership researcher Max De Pree says that, "we can teach ourselves to see things the way they are. Only with vision can we begin to see things the way they can be" (de Pree, 1997, p. 116).

John coached me to appreciate management consultant Robert Fritz's view that an, "authentic vision lives, breathes and is tangible. The term implies something that we can see well enough to recognize if it appeared in reality" (Fritz, 1996, p. 184). I understood vision as a concept of a preferred future state that is worthy, challenging and inspiring.

The shared visioning process began with Bill and John inviting all participants to respond to eight questions that Bill, John and I designed together, and which related to how

participants would like to see the school in the future. We called these questions ‘inquiry probes’ and were designed to probe participants’ mental models and elicit their deeply held values, beliefs and assumptions. All responses were recorded by a group scribe and collated word-for-word in real time in a transparent and visible process which distilled the clear trends of shared thinking amongst participants. At the end of day, John asked another staff member and me to use that information to each draft a one-page vision statement overnight. He offered to do the same. The instructions were that it must be written in the present tense in a narrative text form, within a maximum length of a single page, and wherever possible using the exact wording of respondents.

The next day, participants were presented with the three drafts and were asked to identify passages in each that best expressed their thinking. These passages were then synthesised into a single document which became our vision statement. I recall a palpable air of excitement in the school that day, with people slow to pack up and go home. I was excited too at having achieved an artefact of a shared vision, though was also nervous about how to ensure it truly became the guiding source of everything we do in the organisation. I had read about wonderfully worded visions mounted on walls baring little resemblance to what actually happens. I queried Bill and John how I might avoid that ‘trap’: I had a sincere yearning that the shared vision be the start of an improvement process but was not at all clear on how to proceed. Bill and John cautioned me about the folly of assuming that the artefact captured a ‘truth’ like commandments on a stone tablet – it simply reflected some thinking at a moment in time and that it will need to be monitored and updated as the thinking, priorities and learning of the school community inevitably evolve. While Bill and John’s caution seemed obvious to me, I recognised its wisdom and in each year since then I have led the periodic ‘refreshing’ of our shared vision by engaging in dialogue about its continuing currency and relevance, and we have modified it accordingly.

John and Bill reinforced in me that the achievement of the vision artefact is a starting point and they then introduced me to systems thinking consultant Daniel Kim’s systems-thinking-inspired framework of ‘Levels of Perspective’ for observing deeply what is happening in organisations (2001, 91). Kim suggests that an organisation can be observed from the perspective of a vision, or from the perspective of the mental models evident in members of the organisation, or from the perspective of considering systemic structures in place in the organisation, or by observing patterns of behaviour, or by observing events. With John and Bill’s assistance I inquired into each of these in more detail because Kim suggests that

leaders typically view their organisation from only one of those perspectives, which limits both their field of their view and their awareness and perception of what is happening.

I recognise now that I initially saw Kim's model, very positivistically, as a resource, a little like a roadmap in my day-to-day work. Over several years following, I slowly changed from seeing the Levels of Perspective in this utilitarian way, to supporting a hermeneutic perspective of five horizons from which to view an organisation, each offering insight into the organisation's functioning in a sort of cross-referencing which illuminates what I am seeing more richly than if I viewed what is happening from a single perspective.

Kim suggests that the most visible level of perspective, and the one most people restrict their view of an organisation to, is the observable events that occur: the conversations, the meetings, the cultural rituals, the tasks in which people are involved. They are the observable actions and consequences of actions. I came to appreciate that perceiving what is happening in an organisation at the level of events entails being consumed by the 'busyness' of constantly responding to events. I understood that the sheer exhaustion involved precluded much thought about what a leader might prefer to be doing or plan to be doing or ought to be doing – there is always something immediate and urgent which needs attention. The primary mode of action at this level of perspective is reactive and, "is the level of most people's direct experience of the world" (Kim, 2001, p. 99). Senge concurs and says that it restricts possibilities for improvement – "The dominance of the event mentality tells people that the name of the game is reacting to change, not generating change" (Senge 2006, 215).

Kim describes how this level of perspective serves us very well in keeping us out of harm's way and cites the example of a fire brigade dispatched to a house fire. Kim suggests that in today's complex world we need to extend our repertoire of actions beyond reacting to events (Kim, 2001, p. 101).

John and Bill described that each higher level of Kim's perspectives offers deeper insight into the functioning and purpose of an organisation. Viewing an organisation from the Patterns of Behaviour level refers to looking beyond events as disparate occurrences to deeper patterns of recurring events which form patterns. A high school-based example may be that a student who is occasionally late for school is particularly late on Thursdays. When a leader is mired in events they may be too consumed to notice a pattern. However, seeing patterns from this level of perspective is an adaptive response. In this example, it might

mean a teacher drawing the pattern of lateness to the student's attention. The house fire analogy at this level might see extra police patrols, or a media campaign about fire safety at peak times, or an additional fire station in fire-prone. Kim says that while seeing an organisation from a patterns of behaviour perspective is a little more helpful than the seeming randomness of the events level, it is still essentially reactive, "our actions are mostly reactive actions disguised as proactive (essentially, pre-emptive reactive actions)" (2001, p. 101). This level is all about identifying regular patterns in an organisation, for example: regular peaks or troughs in sales figures, in staff absenteeism, in production, or in other data sets.

Bill and John helped me understand that leaders who view their organisation from the three levels of perspective above events and patterns of behaviour find they can start to be able to have the type of influence on progress they imagine. The third level of perspective is systemic structures. Kim says these are the, "systems, structures, processes, policies, and procedures (2001, p. 100)," in place in an organisation. He says viewing an organisation from this perspective is a creative response and, "can be viewed as 'pattern generators' because they are responsible for producing the events that form a recognizable pattern (2001, p. 100)," at the lower patterns of behaviour level. This is the first proactive level because leaders can ask questions like, 'why is this student late each Thursday?' and then respond to them. (In one real-life example, the answer was that the boy was living with his father and brother in a caravan park and the shower block was only unlocked each morning at 8.00am; Thursday was morning shower day.) The school's student support team can then muster resources and/or refer the student to another agency for support and even perhaps praise the boy for arriving at all. In Kim's firefighting example, the 'fireys' might ask questions like, "Are smoke detectors being used? What kinds of building materials are less flammable? What safety features reduce fatalities?" (2001, p. 101).

The fourth level of perspective is mental models. This felt particularly congruent as Kim's sense of mental models was consistent with my earlier, separate inquiry into mental models as filters of how we perceive the world. Specifically, Kim says mental models are, "our deepest beliefs and theories about the world" (2001, p. 100). He also says that because of that, the Mental Models Level of Perspective is a reflective perspective and that mental models,

... can be viewed as 'systemic structure generators' because they are like the guiding specifications responsible for creating structures... If we are to be

effective at this level, we must take more reflective actions – ones that can help us surface, suspend, and test our own (and others') mental models. (Kim, 2001, p. 100)

So, a school would have a supportive systemic structure in place for the student late each Thursday if the leaders shared a dominant mental model of providing whatever support is possible to enable students to participate equitably in their learning programs. If their dominant mental model was that persistently late students would be disenrolled, it would have an entirely different systemic structure in place. If the 'fireys' welcomed the adulation and celebrity status of dousing fires, their response might be quite different.

Kim suggests that the most powerful level of perspective is the top level, vision. He suggests this is a generative level of perspective and has the highest leverage for a leader for influencing change. At this vision level, "we hold an image in our minds ... that guides what we do on a day-to-day basis" (2001, p. 102). This is the imagined, improved future state. It is aspirational and fires the imagination and dreams of those it engages: "Visions are about ideals—hopes, dreams, and aspirations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 133). For Kim, it is, "inspired by imagination and a sense of purpose" (2001, p. 91). A school which sees itself as committed to meeting the needs of students, or a fire brigade committed to building householder knowledge and skill in fire prevention, can create the impetus to re-examine orthodox mental models of what a school or fire brigade "should" be. I found Kim's concept of vision consistent with that of de Pree, Senge, Goleman and Kotter, outlined earlier.

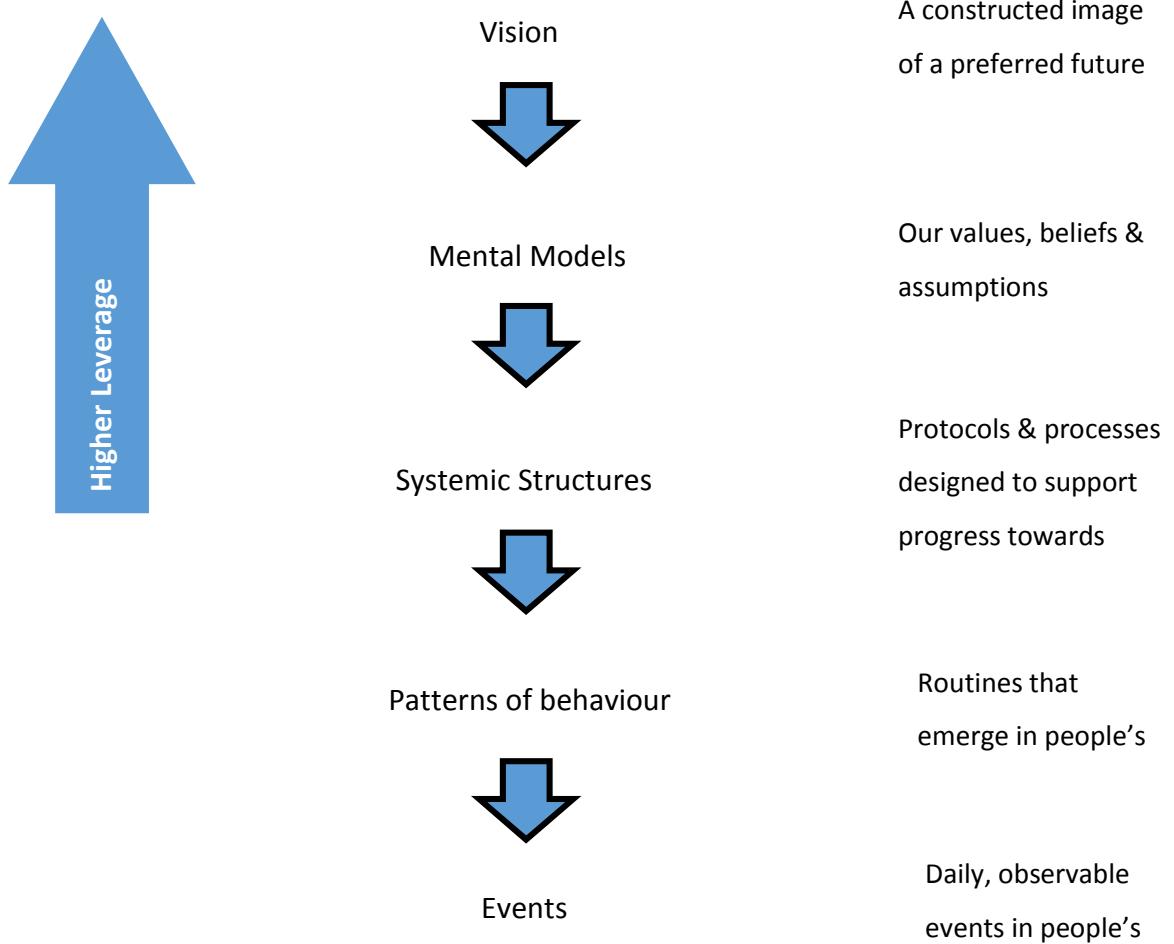
As I came to understand these basic attributes of Kim's Levels of Perspective I began to imagine that my leadership might be more effective if I consider the ways I come to understand what it might mean for my influence relationships in an organisation from each of the five levels, particularly the upper levels of vision, mental models and systemic structures. I learned from my conversations with John that if I could develop my capacity to perceive an organisation from each of these levels of perspective, I would develop a richer understanding of how the organisation is functioning. Kim says,

... we live in an event-oriented world and our language is often rooted in that level.... Our solutions, however, may be short-lived, and the symptoms can eventually return as seemingly new problems. (Kim, 2001, p. 100)

A dripping tap is an everyday, mundane illustration of how looking at the world from different levels of perspective might lead to more preferable outcomes. I might notice the event of water dripping from a tap and respond by tightening the tap in the ‘off’ position with my hand. While this may work for a time, I may need to use a spanner to tighten the spindle of the tap. Over time I may need to tighten the spindle more until I tighten it too much and the housing cracks, leading to a more serious problem. On reflection, had I had a clear vision of a properly functioning water supply, I may have responded differently than responding expediently to a dripping tap, such as replacing ageing taps. I may have had more functional mental models in place, such as, ‘I am not a plumber so will call for one should the need arise’; or perhaps, ‘taps drip for a reason – rather than dealing with the symptom of the ‘drip’ I should look further into what causes the problem’. I may have systems in place to assist me achieving my vision, such as the local plumber’s contact details at hand, or a spare washer-replacement kit. John and Kim both suggest that most leaders remain stuck in managing and reacting to events, and rarely consider what might be happening from other levels of perspective.

Over time I have come to recognise that I perceive my organisation, indeed the world, quite differently as a consequence of consciously shifting from one level of perspective to another. When I might be feeling overwhelmed by a rush of ‘events’ in my life, I might reflect on what patterns are emerging or reviewing any systemic structures in place might support me better. I am finding a useful type of discipline emerging, in my thinking, of mindfully shifting levels of perspective to gain greater insight into what might be happening. For example, if I find I am not achieving a goal (professional, financial, sporting, recreational, or whatever), I will actively consider the mental models I am utilising, the systemic structures I have in place and the patterns of behaviour becoming evident. I will reflect that having a goal and good intentions of losing weight or drinking less alcohol may not be sufficient without the other levels of perspective leaning in the same direction. I might need to take some action to clarify my dominant mental models, including any that may run counter to my goal, and I may need to implement changes to any systemic structures I have in place.

Levels of Perspective



(Adapted from Kim, 2001, p. 91)

I have come to recognise a certain discipline required to view a phenomenon from each level of perspective, which reminds me somewhat of the type of discipline needed to phenomenologically reduce a phenomenon to its essence. In fact, I am coming to see that viewing a phenomenon from five different levels of perspective potentially reveals to me five different facets of the phenomenon. While I realise that not every action I take will lead to an intended outcome, I have a sense that considering the likely implications of an action from each of the five levels of perspective leads to actions with improved likelihood of effectiveness.

Rost suggests it is not the achievement of an intended change that qualifies as leadership, but the genuine intention of achieving it (1991, pp. 113-117). I am finding that choosing an

action by viewing the context from each of Kim's five levels of perspective, offers me extra insight into the efficacy of the action I am contemplating, and so increases the likelihood of achieving any intended change. Kim explains why this might be so by illustrating that when an event occurs, such as a faulty product on an assembly line, the highest leverage action that can be taken is to be reactive and fix it. Viewed from the patterns of behaviour level one can respond adaptively by looking for any patterns that might explain seemingly random faults. Higher up at the systemic structures level, one may respond creatively by reviewing quality control measures and other processes to remove any apparent shortcomings in the production process. Kim describes the next level, mental models, as a reflective stage in which our mental models shape the systemic structures,

... we must take more reflective actions—ones that help us surface, suspend, and test our own and others' mental models. As we move up the levels from events to vision, however, the focus moves from being present-oriented to being future-oriented. Consequently, the actions we take at the higher levels have more impact on future outcomes, and less on current events. (Kim, 2001, p. 102)

After applying Kim's Levels of Perspective to guide my work around organisational improvement over nine years, I reflect on the desirability of all stakeholders developing explicit awareness of them as an important step in aligning the flow of energy in the whole organisation. When members of an organisation are continually reacting to events in disparate, unco-ordinated and expedient ways, like Bill's 'skyrockets', there can be a sense of chaos, especially if this develops into dysfunctional patterns of behaviour.

Every passing moment in an organisation is comprised of events, each following the previous in an ongoing temporal progression. Events are the momentary vignettes of living as each moment unfolds to the next: the parking of my car at work, noticing a bird in a tree as I enter the building, the greetings I give and receive, switching on my office heater when I feel it is a little cool. And when we are in the 'natural attitude' we are perhaps largely unaware of most of them. However, when something seems to go wrong, it is usually an event that draws our attention to it. Kim and Senge describe the leadership challenge of looking beyond events,

Organizations are in great need of new learning capabilities if they are to thrive in an increasingly complex, interdependent, and changing world. Yet

managers' attention is naturally focused on addressing their most important practical problems. Even when those problems are met successfully, there is little to guarantee that new capabilities have been developed to address similar problems more effectively in the future. We settle for fish rather than learning how to fish. (Kim & Senge, 1994, p. 278)

Kim and Senge are suggesting that the inclination of most people to react to events when things go 'wrong' or when things need to improve, sees most effort expended towards the locus of symptoms of a problem. I reflect that I have done this many times myself, rather than from a higher Level of Perspective, such as at the systemic structures or mental models level.

When colleagues all respond individually to each event they face, the business and apparent randomness can generate helplessness and despair. Why does the school not just ban mobile phones? What's the school going to do about my child being bullied on Facebook? The school's standardised test results for literacy and numeracy have dropped – what are you doing about it? It reminds me of what happens when a fisherman ties together a cast of crabs he has caught – he can leave them unattended on the beach for an hour, and when he returns, they will be in the same spot because, in spite of each one of them trying hard to sidle off, they have all been pulling in different directions and so have made no progress at all, despite all the energy expended.

What I have come to really value about Kim's Levels of Perspective is that, while recognising the pre-eminence of vision, as a whole, they can serve as a means of redirecting the flow of energy so that the events people are engaged in gradually become more aligned with the vision. Aristotle opens his Metaphysics acknowledging the pre-eminence of human vision over all other capacities (2008, 1). Colebrook supports this with,

This desire to see ... allows the human soul to think beyond sensible knowledge to those principles that are not given to the senses. The human eye is at one and the same time captured by this world and prompted to think beyond it. (2002, ix)

John Kotter also stresses the importance of vision,

Without an appropriate vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all... without a vision to guide decision making,

each and every choice employees face can dissolve into an interminable debate. The smallest of decisions can generate heated conflict that saps energy and destroys morale. (Kotter, 1996 7-8)

Kotter's words bring to mind a Japanese proverb: "Vision without action is daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare" (Anon, 2013). He seems to be describing a direct link between vision and events: a shared vision is likely to see a greater uniformity of events that are in line with the vision, and that without a vision, there is nothing in place with which to steer events in a common direction.

Kim says that, "Many organizations that catch the vision 'fever' believe the job is finished once a small group of top managers produce a vision statement and announce it to the rest of the organization" (2001, 85). This is echoed by Senge,

When you look carefully you find that most 'visions' are one person's (or one group's) vision imposed on an organization... A shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to because it reflects their own personal vision. (Senge, 2006, 192)

Emotional intelligence researcher Daniel Goleman suggests also that for an organisation to,

... transform itself ... into a vibrant workplace where people feel energized and purposeful requires a great leap: from a thorough understanding of the reality to a profound engagement with people's ideal visions – of both themselves as individuals and as part of an organization. (Goleman, 2002, 197-198)

Many of my previous experiences of visioning reflected Senge's sad observation of a small team of genuine people composing a vision statement for the school which the Principal was proud of and which parents were impressed by. However, each of those previous experiences of visioning foundered over time as people reluctantly acknowledged a growing gap between the vision and observable practice in the organisation, eventually resulting in the discrete distancing of the vision statement from conversation.

Senge highlights that,

... a vision is more than a goal. It is a goal that comes from our deepest sense of purposefulness. It also becomes a vehicle for living purposefully, because a

sense of purpose is only as real as the effort one gives to bringing it into reality. A vision focuses that effort. (In Frick, 2004, p. xi)

Other approaches to bringing about change in organisations that I have encountered imply to me that generating a vision is almost all that is needed. With a generative cohesion unlike other change approaches I have encountered, Kim's Levels of Perspective – vision, mental models, systemic structures, patterns of behaviour and events – seem to interact together to provide a means for getting a sense of the current reality of the events of an organisation, as well as providing hints for generating movement from the current reality towards the vision. In my experience, within a shared vision sit the key, common mental models of those who contributed to it. I have observed that when people recognise their own values in a shared vision to which they have contributed, there is a sense of them 'owning' it. This is a critical point because in my reading I regularly encounter the importance of securing 'buy-in'. The need for 'buy-in' often seems an incredible furphy which I assume comes from the efforts of leaders who try to 'sell' their personal vision to others because, in my experience, when a vision is truly shared there is no need for 'buy-in' because people 'bought-in' when they contributed their thinking to the generating of the shared vision.

I have had several staff remark to me the pride they feel when they see their word or phrase in the shared vision. Over the years I have remarked many times to the staff that if our vision is going to 'work' as a shared vision it must also 'work' as a personal vision for each of us, and that if it falls short of this we must keep working on it until it does so. I invite them all to be stewards and defenders of the shared vision which becomes something akin to a 'flag'; it is what we all rally behind and stand for. I imagine this level of commitment might be higher than from people who 'buy in' to someone else's vision.

I reached a new level of appreciating the generative capacity of a vision when I recognised a convergence in my thinking between 'vision' as being perhaps a wider-ranging version of Rost's critical leadership element of 'mutual purpose'. However, co-constructing a vision seems to potentially offer more than 'mutual purpose'. Two people who choose to collaborate after recognising they share a mutual purpose of higher profits, for example, may nevertheless differ markedly on fundamental values, and preferences around strategies, timeframes, priorities and resources. On the other hand, it seems that a co-constructed shared vision takes shape as the collaborators' values, shared mental models and key preferences are folded into it, and which are explicitly surfaced and 'audited'

against observable behaviour, and also used to inform the design of systemic structures to proactively support the realising of the vision. I have a sense that a ‘mutual purpose’ suggests a measurable timeframe, whereas a vision does not seem so time-dependent in the same way and can perhaps accommodate an ongoing series of ‘mutual purposes’.

From a hermeneutic perspective the great potential of a shared vision makes great sense to me because when participants contribute to a shared vision by responding to inquiry probes, they do so according to what each person’s life’s experiences has taught them according to their mental models accumulated along the way. I infer from this that embedded in the shared vision are the key, shared mental models of those who contributed to it. This seems to achieve the conditions of ‘alignment’ that so many of the researchers I have consulted (Collins 2001, George 2003, Kotter 1996, McGuire 2009, Quinn 2004, Schein 2004, Senge 2006) suggest is the purpose of having a shared vision. Senge describes ‘alignment’ as the phenomenon which occurs,

... when a group of people function as a whole... The fundamental characteristic of the relatively unaligned team is wasted energy. Individuals may work extraordinarily hard, but their efforts do not efficiently translate to team effort. By contrast, when a team becomes more aligned, a commonality of direction emerges, and individuals' energies harmonize... a resonance or synergy develops... The shared vision becomes an extension of their personal visions. In fact, alignment is the necessary condition before empowering the individual will empower the whole team. Empowering the individual when there is a relatively low level of alignment worsens the chaos and makes managing the team even more difficult. (Senge, 2006, p. 219)

As I learned more about it, the allure of alignment became a core focus. Whereas a shared vision can draw out a sort of ‘horizontal’ alignment in the sense of drawing out key, shared mental models of those who contribute to it, the Levels of Perspective can act also as both a lens and a tool for a type of ‘vertical’ alignment. It took me some time to appreciate the potential of not just viewing the organisation from each Level but to also consider how ‘vertically’ aligned each of these levels is. In other words, are the espoused mental models reflective of the mental models deeply embedded in the vision, and perhaps more importantly, do observable actions reflect the espoused mental models? Are the systemic structures that are consciously designed and implemented consistent with the mental models and the vision? Are there other unaligned systemic structures in place which have

evolved rather than being designed? Over time I came to appreciate that questions such as these can be very significant for considering where to focus leadership influence.

Aligning levels of perspective

When you find that special alignment, you and your team will have the power to move mountains. Nothing will be able to stand in your way. (Bill George, 2003, p. 198)

I had an early taste of what alignment can look like in an organisation when John Edwards asked to see my staff induction policy. I suspected he was testing how consistent the wording and style of the policy was with our vision. He helped me understand that if the vision says we respect the professional judgement of our teachers but then we dictate to them in our induction policy, then such a discrepancy may raise questions about how much of what we espouse matches what we do. John found the induction policy had a quote from our shared vision at the start about respecting what everyone brings to our work. In response to questions from him I explained how our induction processes drew from the vision and how we consciously aimed to ensure it was consistent with what we espoused for the culture of the organisation. Conversations with newly inducted staff confirmed a level of the alignment I outlined.

This started me on an ongoing review over many years of ‘auditing’ our espoused values and printed documentation, against our observable behaviour to see how closely what we espouse matches what we actually do. The vision included a statement about aiming to meet the needs of all students. When we mapped that against our ‘systemic structure’ for students signing in late, it showed there was a gap between what we espoused and our practice: our ‘late policy’ entailed a process of signing in late, obtaining a late pass from a senior member of staff, then heading off to class – nice and efficient. However, at that time, some of the office staff showed their disdain for latecomers. Their approach conveyed a view that latecomers are recalcitrant, with no differentiation about why a student may be late.

When the Leadership Team reflected on what it might mean for latecomers if we truly took a stance of aiming to meet their needs, it opened up a rich conversation about the purpose of a signing-in-late process, and how signing in late might just be the start of a rigorous,

pastoral care process involving contact with home, perhaps the social worker or school psychologist or school chaplain, perhaps a meeting of all the student's teachers, with ongoing support for the student and/or the student's family to try to support punctual attendance. And, if punctuality was not achievable for some reason (often poverty-related) then to show the student and the family genuine respect and warmth on arrival, still all within a broader framework of punctuality being expected, and working towards that.

Over years, we 'audited' each of the core mental models embedded deeply in our shared vision for consistency between what we espoused and what we practiced. The process of doing this seemed to contribute to progress on several outcomes, and aimed at generating more alignment between people, around keeping our shared vision 'alive' as the true foundation of everything we do. Our process used a range of strategies to address:

- regular dialogue around a particular mental model to build a common language and a closer, shared understanding amongst people involved in those conversations;
- participants being asked to consider what behaviour might be observed by people holding that mental model;
- people reflecting on the alignment of their own behaviour in relation to the mental model, how they 'rated' themselves, and to name an action or other step they might take to align their behaviour one step closer to the mental model.

By explicitly articulating and sharing core, common values embedded in our vision in this way, and by consciously considering how aligned they are with our actions, many people became more conscious over time, of values as 'drivers' of behaviour, and more readily engaged in dialogue about how closely their behaviour matched the espoused values.

I can recount many instances of senior teachers confronted with a challenging situation, whether a hard question from a teacher, professionally-inadequate teacher behaviour, a dissatisfied parent, or a distressed, distraught or aggressive student, in which the teacher concerned came to me after the event for a debriefing about what unfolded, and in which the teacher expressed a sense of confidence about the stance taken, due to the confidence they felt from deeply knowing our values and systems. They have expressed many times their confidence in our collective, shared mental models which guide them time and again through tough situations. They remark on their sense of being a respected partner and feeling professional satisfaction borne of exercising discretion in their pursuit of significant,

shared goals. They remark also on how this has been different from their previous experience of deferring to their assumption of what the boss might want.

Colleagues have expressed to me on many occasions that the confidence they have in ‘knowing’ how to respond comes from their understanding of the Levels of Perspective and the interplay between them. Several have expressed to me that having a clear understanding of the shared vision, our core mental models and systemic structures, provides them with a frame of reference from which to draw on in any given situation.

I recently saw a website called ‘3 Actions That Instantly Build Trust’ (Colan, 2014) which advises bosses, when a colleague needs to talk to them, to: eliminate distractions (eg, close the door, silence the phone and email notifications, move away from your pc); set time expectations (reschedule if there’s not enough time, though if it is urgent then start and reschedule the rest); ask, then listen (eg show genuine interest by asking questions, seek to understand before suggesting a solution, watch for nonverbal to get the full story). This website is clearly recommending behaviour in a specific situation which it deems appropriate to leaders. However, such messages would seem to reinforce the pervasive belief that leadership is essentially about behaviours, and there is absolutely no reference to any principles, values or personal vision that might sit under those behaviours. I suspect that were a workplace to ‘workshop’ what values/guiding principles might characterise a respectful workplace, along with some observable behaviours participants might be willing to commit to, then colleagues may become more values-guided over time, rather than acting from a set of behavioural guidelines; and they may be guided by mental models rather than by trying to respond ‘better’ to events.

I am coming to understand that ongoing reflection, dialogue and coaching around each of the Levels of Perspective might provide a means of building shared mental models and complementary behaviour which builds congruence amongst all those engaged in an influence relationship. I am learning from this that the ensuing, growing alignment at each of the Levels of Perspective is generative in that those collaborating feel the strengthening momentum of not just progress towards their common goal but also of their aligned behaviour as they go about it.

While Daniel Kim does not elaborate in detail, it seems to me that there are enormous learnings here for the practice of leading, especially in Rost’s sense of doing so to bring about real change. The bottom two Levels of Perspective – events and patterns of

behaviour - seem to describe the current reality of an organisation. That is, from the observable events and the deeper patterns of behaviour, an observer can ascertain precisely what is happening. It is the upper three Levels that seem to provide a means of leading; progressing towards realising the vision. Structural relationship researcher Robert Fritz describes how moving from the current reality towards a vision is a creative process,

I call the relationship between the vision and current reality structural tension.

During the creative process, you have an eye on where you want to go, and you also have an eye on where you currently are. (Fritz, 2010)

He describes how this tension stimulates action towards the vision and that when it is working well, it is 'advancing tension'. Fritz distinguishes this from what he suggests is the more common 'oscillating tension' which is when progress towards the vision is stalled by setbacks, in a continuing cycle of back and forth movement which consumes time and energy without much overall progress (Fritz, 2010).

My curiosity around this was how one might generate more 'advancing tension' and less 'oscillating tension'. I began by trying to generate awareness – mine and others – that the current reality is produced by the actual mental models and systems in place. Fritz suggests (1999) that if the observable events and patterns of behaviour reflect a current reality remote from the vision, then the systemic structures in place will need to be redesigned as it is they that open up a way to shaping progress towards the vision.

Fritz describes how electricity and water flow along a path of least resistance, and suggests that people and energy in organisations are no different - that underlying structures determine the path of least resistance, and that changing the path of least resistance means creating new structures (Fritz, 1999, pp. 3-6). Fritz argues that this applies to organisations and also individual people in their personal and professional lives. He describes that when, despite our honest efforts and intentions, things go awry as we pursue goals, they do so because we all follow a path of least resistance. As Fritz says, "we come to realise that often we are in situations that have their own rules and laws, and that we must follow these rules and laws whether we like it or not, and whether we know them or not" (Fritz, 1999, p. 3).

Fritz effectively describes 'structure' as the processes within an organisation which impact upon each other by the relationships they form, such as resources, reward systems, departmental mandates, policies and processes (Fritz, 1999, p. 15). I recognised strong

resonance between this and Kim's third Level of Perspective: the systemic structures in place. When a team of people engage in dialogue around shared vision, mental models and systemic structures, I have observed greater aligned thinking and strengthening of their shared mental models. Fritz shares his thinking on this,

Great organizations create systems that continually align people with... what the organization is trying to accomplish... Alignment is never assumed, it is managed... People share the same values [and] people want to work together toward common outcomes.... [around] the most generative characteristics of the human spirit – invention, creation and purpose. Alignment comes from the reality of these qualities. (Fritz, 1999, pp. 213-214)

This is enormously complex work because we may not even be aware of some of the structures in place, and when redesigning structures, we may make flawed assumptions about which ones are the key ones to modify, and even how best to modify them.

A shared visioning process, surfacing of shared mental models embedded in the vision and the active design of systems to support the realising of the vision are mutually supportive of the achieving of Rost's sense of real change; of transforming values and intentions into actions, challenges into innovations, isolation into teamwork and solidarity, and the grand prize of transforming vision into reality. Assuming my assumption that events and patterns of behaviour reflect the current reality, then 'advancing tension' may be achieved by adjusting the underlying structures so that events change, along with the patterns they generate.

Monitoring the type and incidence of events can then serve to monitor the effectiveness of 'advancing tension' towards the vision. For example, if a school vision highlights the importance of meeting students' needs and respect for all, then an 'audit' of relevant events will provide some indication of the gap between the current reality and the vision. Improving student attendance and suspension rates, and student survey data about feelings of personal safety and connectedness, as well as interviewing students, might all be suitable data for assessing progress towards the vision. Monitoring how such data improves can provide useful feedback on the level of effectiveness of any adjusted systems (eg, programs for teaching resilience and protective behaviours, improved teacher supervision of students during breaks). Indeed, explicitly highlighting any changing trends

in events can be extremely inspiring and generates energy as people begin to appreciate that realising a vision becomes something very concrete and potentially achievable.

I reflect that progress from current reality towards vision occurs one event at a time, often as a result of one conversation at a time. I suspect it is the reflection and the mediating of thinking in the conversations that engage people's mental models, stimulating renewed action and different events and new patterns of behaviour, in a continuing cycle of 'advancing tension' towards the vision. In my experience, such conversations tend to be extremely rich and robust, with many of them involving passionate discussion about what sort of behaviour is required to 'enact' a particular mental model. My observation is that these conversations can shave back disparate shades of meaning held by individuals, with each one adding a layer of clarity, congruence and shared meaning.

Some people find these conversations very confronting when they discover a mental model they espouse is starkly at odds with their observable behaviour. I have been amazed at the impact of such realisations on people: many find the exposure of their own inconsistency almost an epiphany and, in a culture of reflection and learning, can trigger renewed commitment to continuing growth.

An example of this was my early experience of the morning briefings I encountered at my school at the start of each day. When I was first appointed they were intended as a forum for sharing important information about the day. I was very challenged by the patronising tone that some teachers used when discussing some students. It was common for teachers to make a quip at a student's expense in order to raise a few laughs amongst colleagues. As surprised as I was that some people showed no compunction about publicly demeaning a student, I was equally puzzled by how readily others colluded by laughing. These were all otherwise good, principled people who seemed to me completely oblivious to having slipped into a pattern of behaviour that ran at odds to some of the values we were beginning to espouse.

This was an early challenge for me in my leading: what do I do about this to try to restore a professional level of respect and dignity without people feeling 'told off' or embarrassed? I knew that if I did nothing in the hope that the inappropriate behaviour might go away I too would be colluding and even conveying tacit approval. At the same time, I was not confident that I could draw their attention to it in a way that would not have some of them feeling I was being overbearing, or that I was taking myself too seriously. As important as it

was to me for that behaviour to stop, I also wanted those teachers to see for themselves the inconsistency and to choose to change their actions to find more alignment between what they espouse and what they do. As easy as it would have been to try to enforce compliance by announcing that we will not speak like that about students again, I wondered about how I might set up a systemic structure to shift their thinking, in order to change how they spoke about students, whether I was present or not. I discussed all of this with the Assistant Principal. Her thinking was utterly aligned with mine on this and so we discussed a strategy, which we shared with the rest of the Leadership Team.

A young, aspiring leader chaired those morning briefings. No doubt, he saw that his role was to keep the meeting moving, ensure anyone who had something to share was heard and wrap it up quickly so people could start their day, all in good humour. In my mind, the key purpose was not information sharing – we had other processes for that; it was to keep a diverse range of people in touch with each other and also to start the day in a positive, upbeat, fun tone, and to hopefully also build further alignment between people. We called him in, took him into our confidence and had a really positive conversation about the purpose of briefing and the importance of a ‘fun’ tone, and also the importance of people preserving their own dignity and that of students. All we asked of him was to be mindful of this as he ran briefings, and to gently steer a conversation in a different direction if he should detect any unhelpful behaviour.

From then on the Assistant Principal and I were more calculated and overt in modelling respect and a professional demeanour whenever we spoke about students during briefings. When we had to mention a student by name we explained that, while we try to respect students’ privacy by refraining from mentioning them by name, we are deferring to a higher value about confidentially sharing necessary information about a student. It was amazing how most teachers’ approach to referring to students gradually leaned towards us in like-manner. One in particular did not pick up on the changing tenor at all, and she continued to speak derisively about students unabated. The Assistant Principal engaged her privately in a genuine conversation about what we were trying to achieve and asked for her support. She ‘got’ it immediately and to this day, remains one of the staunchest adherents to respectful references towards students at morning briefings. She herself, in the intervening years, has taken it upon herself to gently admonish new staff members whose references to students fall below her new sense of par!

The gradually-improved alignment between teachers of respectful behaviour towards students was crafted, morning briefing by morning briefing, one conversation at a time. The more they experienced this respectful behaviour, the more they seemed to respond to it and then adopt it as their own, so that, over time, a much higher level of aligned, professional decorum, especially in terms of how teachers spoke about students, was achieved – so much so that new teachers since, are very aware of the very respectful tone towards students and also of the established pattern of behaviour. And of course, this flows over into other teacher conversations about students, separate from morning briefings.

It seems that a genuine realignment of behaviour with values was progressing, along the lines of what the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers describes:

Values that are based on authority, that derive from sources external to the person, tend to be diminished. Values that are experienced tend to be enhanced... Those behaviors or ways of being that are experienced as satisfying and meaningful tend to be reinforced... The locus of evaluation is in the person, not outside. Thus, the individual comes to live increasingly by a set of standards that have an internal, personal basis. (Rogers, 1980, pp. 194-195)

I designed professional learning to reinforce this newfound, professional respect for all students. As usual, I started by referring back to our shared vision, "... Students are supported by strong student-staff-parent relationships based on listening, dialogue, openness and respect (Lilydale-District-School, 2010)." I put to them the proposition that perhaps the highest mental model around this to which we might aspire is Carl Rogers' concept of unconditional positive regard: "an outgoing positive feeling without reservations, without evaluations" (1961, p. 62).

We workshopped together what this term might truly mean for us all in our work when all of us are functioning at our best, what it might 'look' like and 'sound' like. There was resounding agreement that if we are realising our vision we would be demonstrating unconditional positive regard to our students. The core understanding we co-shaped is that not only is every human being entitled to be treated with respect unconditionally on all occasions, but that what we are aspiring to goes beyond behaviour: it is also holding an unconditionally positive appreciation of each other person, irrespective of their behaviour. One teacher was too challenged by this, suggesting we would all have to be saints to do

this, and would it be all right to console ourselves with what we really think behind the closed doors of the staffroom – I replied by acknowledging the scale of the moral challenge and professional aspiration involved and, with a supportive smile, queried how genuinely unconditional her suggestion might make things.

We agreed that unconditional positive regard does not mean excusing inappropriate behaviour, but that we would keep the behaviour separate from the person; that no matter what a distressed, aggressive, frustrated or disruptive child might do, that person remains entitled to our respect and to having their dignity held intact.

Over a period of a year or so in which whole-staff workshops revisited the concept and during which the senior teachers in the school used it to actively and supportively challenge teachers' enacting of it, unconditional positive regard gradually became a touchstone amongst the staff for how they relate to students, each other and parents of students, and has remained so in the ensuing years. Many took it home with them and discussed how it influences how they live their private lives. This is not to claim success at reaching a constant state of unconditional positive regard towards others, but to acknowledge teachers embracing it as a very worthy aspiration and regularly entering into dialogue about the positive challenge it offers.

While Rogers proved to be one of the great, influential human psychologists of the Twentieth Century, with no apparent trace of an explicit philosophical tradition behind his work, I was fascinated by his allusion to hermeneutics:

I trust it is clear now why there is no philosophy or belief or set of principles which I could encourage or persuade others to have or hold. I can only try to live by my interpretation of the current meaning of my experience, and try to give others the permission and freedom to develop their own inward freedom and thus their own meaningful interpretation of their own experience.

(Rogers, 1961, p. 27)

One particular anecdote illustrates the incredible power of this mental model of unconditional positive regard. A young and inexperienced teacher was struggling to retain control of his class of 'prickly' Year 9 students which featured several girls who were very disengaged from learning and constantly feuding with each other. While the dysfunctional relationship of these girls was tightly managed during the school day it flared up most nights via social media. Out of desperation, the teacher devised a high-risk strategy: when

his students arrived at class for the next lesson they found the desks cleared away and the chairs arranged in a large circle. He asked them all to sit and despite initially having only their unsettled attention he told them of the struggles he was having with them. He then said he wanted them to listen while he went around the circle sharing with the whole class what he valued about each member of the class.

And so he started, and the students quickly settled and listened intently. He described what he appreciated about each of those young people in turn, describing attributes which included a beaming smile, shining eyes, a happy disposition, a wicked sense of humour, perseverance, a kind heart, great creativity, wonderful curiosity, great loyalty to friends, etc. Every quality he described he genuinely believed in and each assessment resonated with the class. There was not a single negative attribute mentioned. At the end of it there was brief silence and then the jovial boy who was the last one addressed then said to the teacher, "And now we'll take turns saying what we appreciate about you!" And so a student wave of appreciation swept back around the room. When it came the turn of the difficult girls there were tears as they each struggled poignantly to express what they felt. One said she was amazed at how patient he was despite her awful behaviour; another expressed how much she appreciated his friendly greeting each day; another said that there was no one else in her life who treats her like he did – he made her feel valued for who she was; another could not believe how he never held grudges against her – no matter what she did, he always bounced back and treated her the same as the 'good' kids.

The teacher found that that day marked a profound turning point with his class. While they were far from perfect after that day, a genuine bond was forged and those students learned about respect and the power of not judging others. An amazing footnote to the anecdote is that the cyber-bullying within the group of girls stopped that day. My interpretation of that is that he helped them see beyond the superficial identities they each constructed of themselves and each other, and they saw a glimmer of human worth in each other; perhaps more importantly, he helped them restore a measure of personal dignity and self-esteem.

It has been several such experiences that have led me to infer that mental models can indeed be, instrumental drivers of behaviour. If I value my personal safety and the personal safety of others I will drive my car according to the road rules; if I am consumed by the thrill of speed then that will prevail. If I believe that extra fertiliser on my tomato plants will help them bear more fruit I will apply it to them. If I assume that you will keep my secret I will

share it with you. If the teacher in the anecdote above had not held true to unconditional positive regard, I cannot imagine him achieving the breakthrough he experienced.

I also appreciate though, that this is far less straightforward than it may seem. My own set of core, personal, mental models may consist of several that are inconsistent with each other, and this can lead to dysfunctional behaviour. For example if I value the soothing effect of alcohol more than the virtues of not over-indulging, I will over-indulge. If I believe that having a healthy lifestyle will benefit my quality of life and longevity I will monitor my diet, weight and exercise; where this may become an issue is when I love to relax and wine and dine even more.

In reference to the complexity of being aware of one's own mental models, especially any dysfunctional ones, John Edwards introduced me to his concept of 'delicious delusions' in which he suggested to me, drawn from the work of Harvard scholar, Chris Argyris, that we are often oblivious to the gulf between the mental models we espouse to others as well as to ourselves, and those that are observable in our practice.

Argyris's theories of action and a phenomenological considering of leadership

The cost of showing respect by not disagreeing with those in authority carries a heavy price. (William Noonan, in Howlett, 2014)

Although Chris Argyris does not explicitly refer to 'mental models' or Kim's Levels of Perspective, his work has been enormously influential in my understanding and application of them, because he helps me understand that while a person's deep beliefs and assumptions may shape behaviour, people may not be aware that some of those beliefs clash with each other or even that they hold them at all, and hence may not be aware of a gap between what they believe and the actions they take. Argyris describes such "discordant beliefs" (2004, p. 45) or "inner contradictions" (Argyris, 2004, p. 3) as where a person believes he/she is following a particular mental model but is actually following an entirely different one. Of even more significance to me is that Argyris, in whose research I can find no reference to phenomenology or hermeneutics, describes a view of observing the world and making meaning of experience, in what seems like a very pragmatic facsimile

of phenomenologically reducing extraneous elements from an observable phenomenon, and also for then making meaning from that experience.

Argyris describes how people and organisations espouse values and intentions and exercise action which they believe will help them realise their goals and yet constantly behave in ways that actively and directly undermine the goals they are trying to achieve. He describes two different mindsets that he claims we all possess: a defensive thinking mindset and a productive thinking mindset. He suggests (2004, pp. 1-2) that the defensive mindset is more dominant than we would dare admit and that its characteristics are:

- the goal of protecting the self
- making explicit the premises on which the view is based and testing them using self-referential logic
- protecting the self by avoiding transparency and denying that one is doing so
- self-deception denied by cover-up. In order for this cover-up to work, it too must be covered up.
- acting as rationally as possible.

Developmental psychologist Robert Kegan raises a very similar concern when he suggests,

... most people at work... divert considerable energy every day to a second job that no one has hired them to do: preserving their reputations, putting their best selves forward, and hiding their inadequacies from others and themselves. We believe this is the single biggest cause of wasted resources in nearly every company today. What would happen if people felt no need to do this second job? (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming, & Miller, 2014, pp. 45-46)

Argyris suggests (2000, p. 5) that the deep values (i.e., mental models) which drive the behaviour of people with a defensive mindset are:

- Be in unilateral control.
- Win; do not lose.
- Suppress negative feelings.

For Argyris, the purpose of this, "is to protect and defend the self against fundamental, disruptive change"(2010, p. 63). He describes that the impact of defensive reasoning is a sort of delusional blindness in which we discourage inquiry into our views and the robust

testing of our claims by advocating our position and making attributions about others' intentions so that we remain in control, maximize our chances to win, and suppress negative feelings. Argyris asserts that the only test possible under defensive reasoning is self-referential logic: "Trust me, I know what I am doing" (2000, p. 5).

Argyris cautions (2000, p. 5) that these actions create a reinforcing loop of self-fulfilling prophecies and escalating error. This, in turn, reinforces the need for being in unilateral control, winning and not losing, appearing rational and also projecting blame for errors on others.

His account for this dysfunctional and subconscious behaviour is entirely due to how,

... people consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use, between the way they think they are acting and the way they really act. (2008, pp. 23-24)

Argyris explains (2010, p. 60) that this occurs because while most people desire to improve their skill at achieving their goals, what they become far more, "competent at is avoiding threatening and embarrassing situations". Argyris describes how this fundamental commitment to protecting our vulnerabilities is to create, "a generic syndrome against learning" (Argyris, 2004, p. 2).

In Argyris's view (2000, p. 7), the logic behind this is:

- state a message that is inconsistent.
- act as if it is not inconsistent.
- make all this undiscussable.
- make the undiscussability undiscussable.
- again, act as if you are not doing so.

Argyris explains (2008, p. 4) there is an irony of most professionals experiencing a lot of success along the way and rarely experiencing failure. This inexperience with failure means they have never learned how to learn from failure. So when things go wrong, their defensive reasoning screens out self-reflection and criticism, and attributes blame on anyone but themselves. Sadly, their ability to learn shuts down precisely when they need it the most.

As I reflect on this contribution of Argyris, I find it begins to untangle confusion in my mind about what I often experience in my work with colleagues – both senior and junior. There

have been times when I have invited a colleague to take the lead on an initiative and, over a period of time, have been disappointed by their progress. I tend to side-step this main issue and ask them how they are going, already having assumed they are not going very well, and try to disguise my frustration or disappointment. When I am at my best and genuinely coach them I sometimes learn that what I attributed to poor judgement or expertise on their part is actually revealed as a consequence of my initial communication with them about the task. So, while I am reinforcing the undiscussability of the frustration I am feeling, I am pretending that by discussing how they're going, that it is, in fact, discussable! I am aware of my gross hypocrisy because I am the one deciding what is actually discussable, often leaving a core issue that perhaps should be discussable, undiscussable.

I can see this more plainly when the tables are turned and I am in the more junior position: I was recently in a meeting with seven other colleagues, and we were asked to be 'fiercely frank and honest' in our feedback to a supervisor. I could not think of a more career-limiting invitation! And I decided I would offer politically expedient feedback that was politically correct and 'hearable' while also faintly hinting at what I thought, in a vain attempt not to compromise my ethics. Given the supervisor's judgemental pattern of behaviour observed over time, I was unsure about how warmly the feedback sought might be received. What certainly occurred to me at the time was that the undiscussability of genuine feedback was definitely undiscussable.

Considering all of this, Argyris asks what are good, genuine people to do to improve their leadership, "when we censor our thoughts, blame others for problems, make topics undiscussable, and that undiscussability off-limits" (2010, p. 89)? And this especially when the purpose of our actual action is to, "shield us from threatening truths and protect us from uncomfortable change" (2010, p. 89). He suggests (2010, p. 84) we must first confront that our delicious delusion of default, defensive reasoning is not inevitable. He suggests doing this begins by developing awareness of its signs, and then to actively practise productive reasoning which most people espouse and which is characterised by (2010, p. 64):

- Seeking valid (testable) information
- Creating informed choice
- Vigilant monitoring to detect and correct error.

What I find particularly alluring about Argyris's work, especially within the context of the Levels of Perspective is that it might be one thing to be aware that teamwork improves when people's mental models are more aligned, it is quite another to be clear that the mental models actually in use – as opposed to those espoused - support teamwork. Just as significantly, Argyris also puts a strong case that we may genuinely believe our actions are taking us towards our goals, but that in fact, they may be undermining them.

A frustration I often have when reading research on effective leadership is that desirable elements or outcomes of leadership may be written about, but rarely with any attention on how those elements or outcomes might be achieved. I find this as disappointing as a novice wheelwright seeing what a master wheelwright produces, without any insight into how to emulate that expertise.

It seems there is an extremely pervasive assumption that once being told what 'success' looks like, people will somehow know how to achieve it in some obvious, or self-evident way. Argyris too acknowledges this great omission in the 'literature' and, as an example, describes how research sometimes advises that leaders should be more inspirational and that being enthusiastic and optimistic will help them in this. "This advice does not inform us how leaders can make it attainable. Nor does it tell us how leaders who are not enthusiastic and optimistic can become more so, if they wish to act in these ways" (Argyris, 2010 86). I sense from what Argyris says that he believes a key flaw in such advice is that it is derived from abstract ideas that derive from espoused theory, rather than from concrete ideas derived from a productive reasoning-based, theory-in-use.

A strong thread running through Argyris's work is that people make amazing, unfounded assumptions about themselves and between cause and effect when it comes to improving their leadership effectiveness. He is especially critical of leadership researchers who he hints at constructing theories and then finding evidence to support those theories, rather than building theories from observable practice. From a phenomenological perspective I find his research helpful for bracketing out biases, delusions and assumptions. The challenge he offers of facing up to our real theory-in-use seems critical to ensuring that the gap between what we espouse and what we do is narrow.

Argyris analyses (2010, pp. 83-116) a sweeping cross-section of contemporary researchers of leadership and is very critical of their overly generalised and impractical theories. An example of this is a transcript of a statement by a CEO who, in accounting for success, said,

"I know only that we had good people and a discipline to approach the situation, plus a high degree of good humour and a good sense of our own fallibility" (2000, p. 33). While such reflections are perhaps often seen as wise advice to others, Argyris suggests that people hear such broad statements as practically useless. He says,

What are the characteristics of "good people"? What are the features of a "good disciplined approach" and a "good sense of our own fallibility"? How would one recognize them? (2000, p. 33)

To Argyris, such advice is so vague and, based on his direct observations, often wrong! One example he cites (2010, p. 92) is a CEO who believed he inspired motivation by displaying enthusiasm and optimism, but who was observed by others to be unenthusiastic and intransigent. Argyris cites other examples (2010, pp. 83-116), by contemporary, eminent researchers, of what he suggests is meaningless advice, for example, Avolio who advises leaders to act 'integratively'; Bass and Riggio who advise leaders to build others' respect for them; Bower who suggests leaders need to convince others that their plan is the best one; and Runde and Flanagan who advise leaders to deal effectively with conflict.

To highlight the delusional state Argyris suggests most people hold on the causal connections of their leadership, he describes a corporation in which the CEO employed consultants to interview his 40 senior managers to identify nine target areas of growth in the company. Nine areas were duly identified and the, "resulting initiative met its goals one month early and saved more money than management had anticipated. The CEO was so elated that he treated the entire team to a champagne dinner to celebrate what was clearly a victory for everyone involved" (Argyris, 1994, p. 77).

When Argyris interviewed the managers privately they disclosed that the changes implemented had been long overdue (1994, p. 77). To Argyris this was a classic case of addressing a difficulty that ignores a more fundamental problem, in this case it was why the needed changes had been undiscussable; why the managers had colluded in inefficiency and why the CEO had not invited genuine input from his managers into what is working well and what needs fine tuning, and why it took an expensive team of consultants to find out what was really happening.

Argyris says (1994, p. 78) that co-creating a culture in which conversation is open and transparent, requires everyone to question their own assumptions and behaviour. He suggests that leaders' defensive reasoning censors what everyone needs to say and hear,

and that this is often done under the guise of ‘morale’, which deprives people of the opportunity to take responsibility for their own behaviour by learning to understand it. “This apparently benevolent strategy is actually antilearning” (1994, p. 78).

I appreciate Argyris’s suggestion about the inherent dysfunction embedded in such an approach: inconsistency, undiscussability and defensive reasoning would seem to mitigate strongly against reflection, inquiry, learning and growth, despite what may be espoused.

When I reflect on this from the perspective of my inquiry into Rost’s ‘influence relationship’ it seems vastly remote from the type of fidelity of influence I outlined. The mirror that Argyris holds up to us suggests that leaders typically and subconsciously protect their own personal interests and fears first, and from within those parameters, then pursue the goals they espouse. He describes (2010, p. 83) how such behaviour traps them in the status quo feeling like victims, unwittingly from their own hand!

By describing the gap between what we espouse and what we do Argyris seems to be echoing the great challenge of phenomenological reduction: to bracket aside biases, fears, preferences, dishonest thinking and assumptions, to reveal what is left: the real object of contemplation, rather than a blindly, self-authored caricature hopelessly flawed and mistaken. In fact I sense an interesting parallel between his approach and that of Rost: two researchers from the empirical realm who suggest complementary approaches for reducing down the thing itself as experienced, rather than a positivist reduction into mechanistic components.

Argyris’s ladder of inference and a phenomenological considering of leadership

Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth. (Marcus Aurelius, in BrainyQuotes, 2014)

Peter Senge describes another device Argyris proposes with his colleague Donald Schon, for assisting with the meaning we construct from our observation of and communication with others. This is the ladder of inference, a metaphor for describing the unconscious steps people typically take to,

... leap to knee-jerk conclusions with no intermediate thought process, as if rapidly climbing up a ladder in our minds.... Individuals who are undisciplined in reflective thinking have difficulty hearing what others actually say. Instead, they hear what they expect others to say. They have little tolerance for multiple interpretations of events because they often “see” only their own interpretation. (Senge, 1994, p. 237)

My understanding of Argyris's beliefs is very consistent with what was described earlier about the filtering role of mental models. He observed that people are very selective in the data they perceive from the world and are even more selective in what data they select to act on (1993, p. 57). He uses the concept of a ladder to describe how each metaphorical step up a rung reflects a step in a sequence of assumptions that begins with observable data and ends in abstraction of interpreted understanding usually assumed to be 'fact'.

The first rung of the ladder represents observation, the data we notice and absorb as relevant. An everyday example might be that Jim is 15 minutes late for an after-work drinks date. The second rung represents the cognitive step of extrapolating an explanation from the data – Jim has not offered an explanation and does not seem troubled. The third rung represents assumptions which are laid over the top of the explanation to fill in any gaps – obviously whatever Jim was doing beforehand was more important, and he is not bothered by making me wait. The fourth rung represents making a decision about what needs to be done – that is not good enough and I will not let him get away with it. The top rung represents beliefs and action – next time Jim suggests we meet, I will either keep him waiting or turn him down, depending on what else I have got on.

Argyris (1982, pp. 8-16) believes that all through our lives we are constantly scaling 'ladders' – the meanings we create from experiences keep accumulating, shaping and reinforcing our mental models along the way. Over time the data we select is sieved through our mental models so that we only select the data we look for without even noticing other data. With our mental models guiding us we take action and then examine the results which we accept as 'facts' which further reinforces our mental models. This becomes an endless loop in which we scale ladder upon ladder. "This phenomenon is known as the "reflexive loop": our beliefs influence what data we select next time" (Senge, 1994, p. 244). We are blithely unaware of any of this, assuming we have been clearly informed by what we experienced, by what we assume those experiences mean, how much we think they matter and by what we think should happen next.

Jim's drinks date made so many assumptions about what was happening, but assumed those assumptions were 'facts'. Perhaps one of us made a mistake about the agreed meeting time, perhaps Jim thought he was actually 15 minutes earlier than he was and was not aware of being late; there could be any manner of explanations. However, by sifting out one particular explanation which happened to fit the circumstances as I saw them, I might have been very mistaken and caused harm.

The example of my drinks date with Jim seems also to represent what writer Lawrence Weschler (1982, pp. 180-182) intends by quoting artist Robert Irwin's process of 'compounded abstraction' in which what we initially perceive is filtered through six stages which seem to me – like Argyris's ladder of inference – to act together as an antithesis of a phenomenological reduction in that each stage takes us further through compounding abstractions from direct experience to arrive finally at a subjectively constructed, yet formalised 'truth'. Organisational theorist Karl Weick cites one of Irwin's maxims – 'seeing is forgetting the name of the thing seen' – and suggests that the, "naming that transforms originary seeing into consensual seeing is done to introduce order... But the conceptions that accomplish this often come to mean something wholly independent of their origins" (2009, p. 34).

It seems that we may be assigning far more than a label when we assign a name, label or title to something. As I recall my earlier inquiring into syntax and irony, it occurs that a term assigned to a particular experience abstracts and subsumes it into a more generalised concept. While names and terms may sometimes be a helpful shortcut to help expedite our understanding of what we see, I think Irwin is suggesting that sometimes they make us blind to what is before us and need to be avoided so that we may see more.

Researcher Kathryn Schulz suggests (2010) that we tend to be remarkably impervious to even recognising that we might be mistaken, and coined the expression 'error blindness'.

Beware a leader's error blindness

... our love of being right is best understood as our fear of being wrong. (Kathryn Schulz, 2010, p. 169)

Schulz reinforces a view of how mental models drive our behaviour which seems complementary with Argyris's.

Our beliefs, then, are models of the world ... our mental ones exist to help us make predictions and policies ... Our beliefs are inextricable from our identities ... Regardless of whether they are right or wrong, regardless of whether they are conscious or unconscious, they determine how we feel and how we behave every day of our lives. (2010, pp. 93-95)

Her concept of 'error blindness' contributes helpful thinking for confronting the assumptions in our ladders of inference and for confronting our espoused theory. She defines error blindness as assuming the correctness of an action during its execution; we never feel wrong as we actually do something – we only conclude wrongness after the event (2010, pp. 18-19). Schulz illustrated this by asking an audience (2011) what it feels like to be wrong. They volunteered suggestions like: remorseful, embarrassing, humiliating, guilty, regretful. She corrected them and helped them see that those feelings only arise after we know we are wrong – we are usually blithely unaware that we are wrong during an action. She suggests that up until the moment of realisation feeling wrong feels right.

I am reminded of the Warner Brothers cartoon character, 'Wile E Coyote', who continues running past the edge of the cliff top in pursuit of 'the Road Runner' until a moment of realisation of no longer having firm ground under his feet, at which point gravity takes effect and he falls. Phenomenologist and sociologist Marianne Paget offers her perspective on this retrospective nature of being mistaken,

A mistake follows an act. It identifies the character of an act in its aftermath. It names it. An act, however, is not mistaken; it becomes mistaken. There is a paradox here, for seen from the inside of action, that is from the point of view of an actor, an act becomes mistaken only after it has already gone wrong. As it is unfolding, it is not becoming mistaken at all; it is becoming. (Paget, in Weick, 2009, p. 32)

Schulz describes how verisimilitude – 'convincingness' – seduces us into deluding ourselves that our correctness is 'a fact', and offers a perspective which hints at phenomenology and hermeneutics, and also mental models, by saying that error arises from a gap:

... between the particular and the general, sometimes between words and things, sometimes between the present and the primeval, sometimes between

the mortal and the divine – but in every case, and fundamentally, between our own mind and the rest of the world. (2010 22)

Weick describes a tendency he sees of people drifting from perceptually-based knowing to schema-driven knowing, of going,

... beyond the information given and elaborate their direct perceptions into types, categories, stereotypes, and schemas. The result is that now people know less and less about more and more. (Weick, 2009, p. 32)

In echoes of both Argyris and the process of phenomenological reduction, Schulz urges us to ‘alienate’ our experiences, by which she means for us to ‘make them unfamiliar and so to see them anew’ (2001, p. 23), which sounds remarkably reminiscent of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, of “suspending all beliefs characteristic of the ‘natural attitude,’ ” (Husserl, 1995, p. xvii). Schultz’s research suggests that, until we ‘alienate’ our experiences, perhaps through some Husserlian type of bracketing and reduction which peels back our assumptions, or perhaps through direct experience of an assumption being exposed starkly to us as false, we tend to all be prone to assuming that the sense we make of an experience is somehow universally ‘obvious’ or objectively true.

‘Error blindness’ is a timely reminder to me of the dangers of untested assumptions, whether empirical or phenomenological. Our attachment to our own rightness can lead to disaster. The etymology of ‘disaster’ seems helpful here: ‘dis’ means ‘apart from’ and ‘aster’ is derived from the Latin ‘*astum*’ for ‘star’ (Harper 2013); so ‘disaster’ suggests the dangers to early navigators of plotting a course by something other than the certainty offered by the stars in the night sky. I can imagine the perils to early navigators of cloudy or foggy night skies. Similarly when we subjectively intuit or ‘read’ a situation without being discriminating – our predispositions, assumptions and biases can lead us up a ladder of inference to disaster, perhaps in far more likely a manner than someone who phenomenologically reduces the elements of a situation to the starkness of the phenomenon disclosed. Neurologist and certainty researcher, Robert Burton, describes the shock of suddenly discovering something we have been certain about, being wrong,

Most of us have agonized over those sickening "crises of faith" when firmly held personal beliefs are suddenly stripped of a visceral sense of correctness, rightness, or meaning. (Burton, 2008, p. 4)

Schultz says that one of the reasons many people are blind to the possibility of being wrong is due to the entertaining statistical fallacy known as the Lake Wobegon Effect, based on Garrison Keillor's fictional community where "the women are strong, the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average" (Gilovich, 1991 77). Gilovich refers to this well documented psychological phenomenon which sees average people believing they have above-average attributes in every respect – including impartiality! He provides the example of motor car drivers, a majority of whom regularly assess themselves in surveys as being above average drivers.

Shultz's concept of error blindness and the Lake Woebegone Effect reinforce the blindness Argyris and Irwin suggest we are prone to about the accuracy and reliability of our assumptions, and the dysfunctional mental models many of us possess that actually undermine what we might be trying to achieve.

I am developing a view that effective influence relationships may be partly dependent on keen awareness of one's own key mental models and also of those which may be most generative towards realising a shared vision, and then prudently taking steps to act on them, rather than merely espousing them, while also striving to phenomenologically reducing what is perceived of an experience, as free as possible from inference, bias and assumption. I suspect progress accelerates when there is widespread, deep, personal commitment to the shared vision, with supportive systemic structures in place which clear the path ahead for action.

When I first encountered Kim's Levels of Perspective, I learned the model developed from his background in systems theory. A persistent doubt I have held about my interpretation being too linear, too hierarchical and too positivist, took me to considering what current research on complex adaptive systems might offer my unfolding understanding about leadership.

Chapter 4 – Leading in complex adaptive systems

How might complex adaptive systems thinking offer insight into leadership?

Individuality is only possible if it unfolds from wholeness. (David Bohm, in Weber, 1986, p. 30)

I feel I have arrived at a pivot point in this inquiry. Up to now I have been trying to draw to my consciousness my own paradigms about perceiving, making meaning, knowing, and my ‘place’ in relation to ‘other’, all within a context of leading. An autoethnographic dimension to the inquiry has me recognising that I am gradually casting aside a lifetime of positivist mental models and growing in appreciation that I construct meaning idiosyncratically, drawing on my life’s experiences and mental models. My life is a life in the world, with others, featuring a multitude of influence relationships, with varying degrees of fidelity of influence. I am coming to appreciate the potential insight into influence relationships offered by Kim’s Levels of Perspective.

In seeking a fuller understanding of Kim’s Levels of Perspective, I turn now to consider what systems thinking may offer. Senge cautions that, “most organisations are dominated by linear thinking, not systems thinking” (Senge, 2006, p. 215). To Senge, systems thinking is the best model yet developed for making sense not just of living systems as studied by science but also of complex human systems like organisations. He says systems thinking,

... is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’ ... Systems thinking is needed more than ever because we are being overwhelmed by complexity. (2006, pp. 68-69)

I understand from Senge, and Wheatley, that systems thinking views organisations as webs of interconnecting relationships, with “a focus on holism rather than parts. Systems are understood as whole systems and attention is given to relationships within those networks” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 10). Capra (2005) outlines how systems thinking is evolving from a model of viewing a context holistically, to incorporating complexity theory and

offering possible insight into how the web of relationships of elements within a system interact in patterns.

I am curious about what seems an emerging convergence between systems thinking and my earlier inquiry into Goethe's sense of whole-ism, Dreyfus's sense of the essence of a whole as experienced, and Bohm's sense of the implicate order. According to Goethe, Bohm and Dreyfus, one's sense of a 'whole' experience is deepened and enriched by developing a sense of the deeper network of connections within which the experience lies. At this deep level of insight, the enfolded 'whole' becomes visible in the direct experience of the particular. Complexity Scholar, Rita Preisler describes a, "dialogical hermeneutics of complexity thinking" (2014), which occurs when different epistemological foundational positions intersect, which then generates, "a fusion of epistemological and hermeneutical concerns [enabling] a focused quest for intelligibility through the epistemic skills of responsible, critical judgment and discernment" (2014).

Goethe and Bohm's implicate order came to mind when I read the poet William Blake's Auguries of Innocence, in which he rejoiced in what it is:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour (In Aldington, 1958, p. 621)

For me, Blake's marvelling at the enfoldment of nature touches something beyond the poetic that lies at the heart of every perceptual experience. Even though my eyes occupy a very small, defined space when I gaze at the stars in the night sky, light reflected from every distant object in the night sky conveys information for my brain to construct a visual experience. I am no detached observer of this phenomenon. In fact, in a real sense the whole of the visible universe is reconstructed in that tiny part of the universe occupied by my ocular system. Somehow, light from the whole sky is present in my eye with all the information required for my eyes to reconstruct the image of the full expanse of the sky. No matter from where on the surface of this planet I look at the night sky, light that carries the information about it enfolds every vantage point. And yet, as I discussed earlier in relation to being here and there in the world, while I experience this viewing, it seems to also paradoxically occur out in the vastness of the night sky. I wonder if this represents

anything of Bohm's notion of connected relationships and movement as being at the heart of the universe (1980, pp. 224-225).

A sense of the intimate connection between all things is not new thinking. Before William Blake, the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius said:

All things are implicated with one another, and the bond is holy; and there is hardly anything unconnected with any other things. For things have been coordinated, and they combine to make up the same universe. For there is one universe made up of all things, and one god who pervades all things, and one substance, and one law, and one reason. (Aurelius, 1960)

My understanding of Bohm suggests an essential connection between parts and a whole, not in a mechanical sense, but actively and internally related to the whole, and that this connection is a dynamic relationship, which connotes a sense of action and movement, rather than being passively inert (1990, p. 273). If I consider the 'parts' of a human organisation as being integrally connected in dynamic relationships, I feel a strong sense that systems thinking may very significantly offer something for my understanding of leading.

Organisational learning consultant Art Kleiner explains that the word 'system' is derived from the Greek verb '*sunistanai*', originally meaning "to cause to stand together" (In Senge, 1994, p. 90). Senge describes the elements of a thunderstorm to explain the concept of a system. He describes how clouds mass and the sky darkens; it rains and the runoff feeds into the groundwater miles away. He says, "All these events are distant in time and space, and yet are all connected within the same pattern. Each has an influence on the rest, an influence that is usually hidden from view" (2006, p. 6).

The following are additional researchers who have assisted me to understand the concept of systems thinking:

... an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something.... A system must consist of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose. (Meadows, 2008, p. 12)

... a group of parts that function as a whole. When you affect one part, you automatically affect all parts. When you affect the whole, all parts are

affected. The individual parts are in some kind of communication and feedback with each other. (Ollhoff & Walcheski, 2002, p. 14)

Senge suggests that we have been conditioned by our tradition of Western science to view events in the world as singular, detached and lineal which blinds us to how the parts of a whole hold themselves in influence relationships, and that 'systems thinking',

... means any reciprocal flow of influence. In systems thinking it is an axiom that every influence is both cause and effect. Nothing is ever influenced in just one direction. (Senge, 2006, pp. 74-75)

As my understanding of systems thinking grows, I begin to appreciate that it may offer me insight into the nature of leadership influence relationships in which influence flows freely between those in the relationship, irrespective of status or power. And then, veering very close to a phenomenological perspective, Senge states:

From the systems perspective, the human actor is part of the feedback process, not standing apart from it. This represents a profound shift in awareness. It allows us to see how we are continually both influenced and influencing our reality. (Senge, 2006, pp. 77-78)

Senge carefully emphasises his sense of feedback as a flow of influence, as opposed to the more everyday which means, "to gather opinions about an act we have undertaken" (2006, p. 74).

Systems thinking researcher Donella Meadows describes how the most stunning feature of systems, whether 'living' or 'social' is their self-organising capacity because it is what enables them to adapt to changing circumstances (2008, p. 159). She explains that in living organisms DNA is the vehicle for self-organising and evolution, and that in human communities a similar store of behavioural repertoires is found in culture. She cautions about what happens to a system which does not have this capacity,

... insistence on a single culture shuts down learning and cuts back resilience. Any system, biological, economic or social, that gets so encrusted that it cannot self-evolve, a system that systematically scorns experimentation and wipes out the raw material of innovation, is doomed over the long term.
(Meadows, 2008, p. 160)

Meadows (2008, p. 161) identifies a significant difference between a human system and a biological system. People in a human system think and act according to their own goals and mental models, which may or may not be aligned with whole-system goals. In a biological system the parts do not ‘think’, they simply combine for the optimal functioning of the system. Unlike in a human system, there are no competing goals. Meadows highlights that in a commercial human enterprise, people are often oblivious to the system goals, and that that can ultimately be disastrous (Meadows, 2008, p. 162). This caution has me immediately thinking of the benefits of a system perspective reflecting individuals’ perspectives, and reinforces the importance of a vision being a truly shared vision.

When I consider corporate failure after corporate failure, perhaps the biggest challenge is how to support the flourishing of a human system’s capacity to self-organise so as to be able to survive, adapt and flourish as its environment changes around them.

Emergent qualities of my inquiry into leading

Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots. (Peter Senge, 2006, p. 53)

According to Jeffrey Goldstein and his fellow complex adaptive systems researchers, inherent to the concept of systems thinking is emergence, “the coming into being of new structures, practices and processes” (Goldstein, Hazy, & Lichtenstein, 2010, 75), with the emergent properties of a system being a product of the interactions of those parts coming together.

An example is the chlorofluorocarbon gas, freon, used in refrigerators and aerosols. It seemed perfect: harmless to humans and posed no risk of contaminating food or causing fire if it leaked. What no one anticipated was that when leaked freon reached the upper atmosphere sunlight broke it down releasing chlorine which reacted with ozone, the gas which protects humans from the harmful effects of ultraviolet light which causes cancer. ‘Holes’ appeared in the ozone layer above the north and south poles triggering higher skin cancer rates. Fearing skin cancer, the use of sun screen lotions has increased dramatically, leading to increased Vitamin D deficiency.

Remarking on such emergent qualities of complex adaptive systems, holistic physicist F. David Peat says,

When we make an intervention in a system we may feel everything is going smoothly, but if we don't know the full and complex details of how that system operates, then down the line we could run into trouble. (Peat, 2008, p. 49)

Complex adaptive systems researcher James Hazy and colleagues caution about how he and his fellow-researchers believe emergence manifests in social systems, "emergence captures the natural tendency of agents... in a social system to interact in complex, dynamic ways – to exchange information, take actions, and continuously respond to feedback" (Hazy, Golstein, & Lichtenstein, 2007, p. 23).

Specifically in relation to applying complex adaptive systems thinking to organisations, Kurt Richardson says,

It is the existence of nonlinear feedback in complex systems that allows for emergence, self-organization, adaptation, learning and many other key concepts that have become synonymous with complexity thinking – and all the things that make management such a challenge. (Richardson, 2008, p. 14)

It seems that emergence is a phenomenon which ensues from the interacting that occurs when a complex web of elements converge. Complexity researcher Ken Baskin illustrates how we typically overlook the existence of a system, and even when we are aware of causal antecedents in a situation, we oversimplify the complexity involved. He explains how he used to complain about his parents' poor parenting of him as he was growing up. He found this satisfying until it eventually occurred to him how overly simplistic and linear that explanation was. He realised that his parents' parenting skills were derived from their parenting and so on back over innumerable generations, "until I would have to blame about a tenth of the Jewish population of Central Europe" (Baskin, 2008b, p. 2). This reminds me also of my earlier of considerations of Gadamer's hermeneutical quandary of beginnings.

Baskin also noted that various other contextual and/or cultural influences affected his parents' upbringing including the Great Depression, World War 2, American capitalism, the science of Newton and Einstein, the polio epidemic of the 1950s and so on. "What had

been a satisfying, simple story of my parents ruining my life was becoming a bewilderingly complex tapestry involving millions of people”(2008b, p. 2).

It seems that complex adaptive systems thinking might be genuinely helpful in trying to understand the dynamics of human organisations. As complexity researcher George Rzevski states, “it is extremely useful if used for clarifying complexity issues, for planning how to react to unpredictable, disruptive events, for designing adaptability into social, business or technological processes at hand” (Rzevski, 2011, p. 38).

I wondered about the precise meaning of ‘complexity’ intended in this context and appreciate a distinction with ‘complicated’,

In customary usage when people say ‘complex’ they usually mean ‘complicated’ in the sense of an intricate and detailed interweaving that one might see in a tangled fishing line. In contrast, the technical meaning of complexity does not refer to how complicated organizations are, but to the type of interactions that occur between their elements. (Hazy et al., 2007, p. 4)

According to the phenomenologist and complexity theorist Goktug Morcol, ‘complexity theory’ seems to be a term derivative of systems thinking describing several areas of study including:

... ‘chaos theory’... ‘study of dynamical systems’... nonlinear studies’... ‘science(s) of complexity’... ‘nonlinear paradigm’... ‘complexity theory’... and ‘complex adaptive systems theory’. (Morcol, 2005, p. 2)

According to emergence researchers Christopher Goldspink and Robert Kay, while complex systems theory originated from the natural sciences, the latter part of the Twentieth Century saw researchers inquiring into the nature of human ‘systems’ and have made a case for the same principles to apply (Goldspink & Kay, 2010, p. 52). Emergence researcher Saadia Mahmud concurs, and suggests that the dynamics of complex adaptive systems apply to any systems, including organisations. He suggests that the capacity to evolve and learn over time can enable organisations to develop the capabilities required to address adaptive challenges, specifically the internal capacity for, “spontaneously emerging structures, depending on what is required” (2009, p. 2).

As I began seeing similarities between a phenomenological and hermeneutic view of the incompleteness of any perspective we might have of an experience in the world, and also

of the interplay between parts and whole in complex adaptive systems and our incapacity to experience a completeness of a complex experience, I was reassured somewhat by complexity theorist, Göktuğ Morçöl who suggests a convergence between complexity and a hermeneutic perspective on the world,

Different complexity theorists found parallels between phenomenology, hermeneutics ... and the implications of complexity theory. All these theories agree that complexity theory forces us to at least question or even abandon Newtonian, Cartesian, and positivist assumptions about reality and knowledge (Morçöl, 2012, p. 187).

Assuming that complex adaptive systems theory applies to human organisations, then the concept of emergence might apply also. This suggests that as the 'parts' of the organisation engage together, emergent qualities will take shape in ways that may not be predictable. This reinforces further my thinking that the different facets of the organisation, revealed by viewing it from each of Kim's Levels of Perspective, might offer deeper insight into the nature of emergent qualities as they manifest.

For human systems to self-organise, they must adapt, like biological systems, to changes in their environment. Leadership researcher Ronald Heifetz describes this as organisations', "adaptive capacity - their ability to clarify values and make progress on the problems those values define" (1994, p. 5).

For example, if customer service is a prime value, then a self-organising company will orient itself towards a standard of customer service it envisages. If profit is a key value, then a different orientation may ensue, as might occur too if innovation or staff satisfaction were key values. Mahmud describes how shared values and culture generate rules that guide behaviour to create a shared frame of reference which strengthens interactions and enhances the learning capability of the system (2009, p. 3)

This explanation seemed congruent with my earlier inquiring into how mental models and values drive behaviour, and helped me clarify some thinking about the nature of self-organising in human systems: they self-organise around values! As the environment changes, whether through policy, resourcing, personnel, strategic direction, client base, or whatever, the dominant shared values will influence adaptations to changing circumstances.

What considering complexity might offer my learning about leadership

The art of simplicity is a puzzle of complexity. (Douglas Horton, in BrainyQuotes, 2014)

One reason I began exploring systems thinking was to clarify any sense of positivism I might mistakenly have been applying to Kim's Levels of Perspective. My confusion stemmed from a simplistic meaning I held of 'systemic structures'. It seemed that leaders designed these structures to 'steer' an organisation in a particular direction. It seemed fairly logical and intuitive – if things are not working the way we want, design a new system so they change course. I appreciate now that such a view is suggestive of a predictable and mechanistic chain of causes and events. Senge describes (1994, p. 278) how many executives get this wrong by building great structures which calcify an organisation's adaptive capacity, with disastrous consequences.

The meaning I now construct about this incorporates Fritz's thinking about structural tension, which seems more to do with how the underlying structures in an organisation shape the flow of energy in an organisation – either towards the vision or away from it. It seems to me that often the shape of the structures may arise from interconnected patterns of behaviour which take shape as dynamic structures around key, shared mental models. What also deeply resonates for me now is that when leaders design a systemic structure to guide progress more effectively from the current reality to the vision, we are likely to have little idea of the emergent qualities of the dynamic relationship between that structure and others in place.

It seems that a particular systemic structure successfully implemented in one context may be diabolical in another due to the myriad variables within different contexts. It seems to me then, that relying on a specific systemic structure can be fundamentally flawed because its level of efficacy will only become apparent as it is deployed. It gives me cause to reflect that a prudent leader might consider as many contextual variables as possible in designing a systemic structure and, if it does not 'work', then not to blame the system, but to look more closely at those other variables for how the systemic structure may be more effective. I feel a stronger sense too now, of values sitting at the centre of an organisation's capacity to self-organise, and that it is likely to be ongoing feedback about values in a healthy organisation that determines the shape and role of systemic structures.

As I reflect on my emerging understanding of the role values can apparently play in a dynamic human system, I am reminded more and more of how I viewed leadership when I first became a positional leader.

He was a very experienced senior teacher in charge of the Mathematics Department. I was in my first day as the acting Assistant Principal. He came to my office, gave me a list of student names and asked me to transfer them from one Maths class to another. I looked at the list and felt a very private shiver of incompetence as I realised I did not know how to do that in the computer program. I looked up, smiled and said, sure, leave it with me. He thanked me and left. I closed the door after him, went straight to the phone and called a colleague who I knew could talk me through the vagaries of the software.

Perhaps I would handle the same situation today in identical fashion, but for different reasons. On that occasion I had a strong sense that I had to be operationally competent. My picture of an Assistant Principal, based on others I had known and worked with was that they always observably knew how to respond; it was as if there was a guide or handbook of how to respond in the myriad situations one found oneself in. And I thought of this in a very positivist, mechanistic way: this type of situation calls for this type of response. I had a sense that when I ‘mastered’ those behaviours and internalised them for automaticity, I would have reached a level of professional, predictable competence. This, to me, seemed the hallmark of an Assistant Principal’s effectiveness. I, on the other hand, exposed myself to myself as an imposter and perhaps, if I phoned my friend and carried out that task, I would mask my incompetence from others. And then fastforward six years.

Mattie was in Grade 3, a bright-eyed boy battling internal demons, the only child of a single mother who lived with her kindly, doting parents. Mattie had missed a lot of time off school and on the days he attended would either be brought in by his mother or would catch the school bus. Often he would only attend half a day. On this particular November Friday he stayed on past lunchtime to watch a senior assembly in the afternoon, and insisted on catching the bus home. The bus dropped him at his usual stop but he never made it home. After climbing off the bus, he walked in front of it, saw his mother waiting across the road and ran straight for her. The driver of the car approaching from behind the bus had no chance of avoiding him and Mattie was struck and died. In full view of his waiting mother and of many of the students on the bus.

I received word of the tragedy as I was packing up after a busy week, ready to head home. Rushed conversations followed with Police, senior Department of Education personnel and, of course, media. My Assistant Principal and I worked for several hours mapping out our plan of response and getting started on it. We passed on our carefully scripted ‘message’ in phone conversations to the family of every student on the bus and to every family of his classmates. Every staff member and current volunteer was also contacted. Back at school the next morning I phoned Mattie’s mother and my Assistant Principal still recalls her shock when she heard me say on the phone, “We’d like to come and visit you – would that be okay?” We were warmly greeted by Mattie’s utterly bereft grandparents and, shortly after, his ashen-faced, grief-struck mother who gave us a silent hug. All the superficial torment I had felt about what to say to her disappeared: no words were necessary. Here was a meeting of humans connecting over a most fundamental event; normal and natural yet unspeakably hideous under the circumstances. How do I make sense of this tumultuous event? First and foremost I was there as a person, yet had I not been Principal of the school I would not have been there. After the right amount of time lapsed, which I have no capacity now to estimate, we respectfully withdrew from this nest of despair, knowing that at best, our visit was a gesture of kindness which offered no relief to their pain. And yet, it also seemed that that plausibly dismissible gesture was primarily a moment of deep, human connection which I suspect can be a source of energy to the person in receipt of it. A bond of deep intimacy was forged that day. And though the intimacy remains episodic it touches me and – I suspect my Assistant Principal and the grieving family – to a depth and of a type rarely encountered. It seems that the uniqueness of this experience provided an almost Husserlian-type of bracketing in which all my ‘normal’ expectations, familiarity, assumptions, predictabilities and confidence were excised and I was bare, facing a fundamental human experience in its rawness, with minimal conditioning or normalised behaviour to fall back on.

For the rest of that day and a fair part of the Sunday we continued our phone calls and preparations for the days and weeks ahead, especially the staff meeting first thing the following Monday morning, the level of support the school would need that week and beyond into the recovery period.

There is so much more in terms of extent and depth that I could outline from this tumultuous event, but suffice to say that as I reflect on it, I appreciate that at any given moment there seems to be a complex totality of experience that draws on an underlying

web of connected, contextual elements. While on the one hand I have a sense that every moment of experience is unique and can contribute to an overall sense-making of the broader experience, my appreciation of complex adaptive systems also suggests that there may be pivotal moments that heighten into consciousness previously tacit connections of significance.

I found this event was so complex that there was no clear way forward. There was no friend to phone to provide ‘the answer’. There were waves of perspectives surging from all directions: my own as a person – not necessarily the same as mine as a Principal; though I discovered over the unfolding days that in fact those two internal perspectives were very closely overlayed. Other perspectives which I considered included my Assistant Principal’s, Mattie’s mother, his grandparents, the students on the bus, his classmates, his teacher and other teachers and adult volunteers, and various elements of the broader community. All of these had to be addressed, respected and engaged with. Every person I spoke to reacted uniquely; each wanted to make a connection with a personal experience or fear: the parents who suddenly felt their children were extra-vulnerable; teachers in shock; the canteen manager for whom this event wrenched to the surface her barely-buried trauma of the loss of her own son twenty years earlier.

What drove my thinking and behaviour in those heady days was a sense that this tragedy touched everyone in the school (and wider) community far beyond anything that might occur in the life of a school; touched them so profoundly that it was disorienting to many, it raised questions and concerns they do not normally consider consciously, such as personal safety of children and the gap in their lives that might open up should a child be prematurely taken. It seemed that this impact on those touched even went as far as rocking their sense of identity: I am a mother (or father or child) – who might I be if I lost my child (or parent)? In responding to that event as the school Principal, I sensed that this axial shifting or crisis of normality in people’s lives was what I needed to consider first; what actions might I take, words might I say and behaviour might I exhibit that might be most helpful? How can I support everyone touched by the event to navigate through it in a way and at a pace that meets their needs? At that time I sensed that nothing is more important than acknowledging the mighty loss of Mattie’s family and to a lesser extent – though still mighty – of the school community; of enabling time and space for people to ‘process’ it, while also providing a beacon of order, purpose and – in the shadow of that shattered life – of life for everyone else rebounding respectfully, somehow enriched by

being forced to confront mortality at close quarters; and sensing the strengthened community bond of staring down their own mortality.

As I reflect now on what guided my colleagues and me during that time, and what seems to have enabled us to respond as appropriately as possible in the circumstances, I sense it was our organisation's self-organising capacity around our values. Amongst the chaos and unpredictability we were very clear about how the school should be during that time and how it should respond. It was our shared values that shaped our response, even temporarily reshaping some systemic structures to support our intentions.

Leadership forged in a crucible

The deepest things in life come not... singly but in paradoxical pairs, where the light and the dark intermingle. (Parker J. Palmer, 1999, p. 11)

The period of Mattie's death was a time in my life of unprecedented 'white noise'. Every moment was so crowded as I had never previously experienced. It seemed like the private entirety of my life had brought me to that point. There was a wholeness I reached for without being clear what it was. Might it be the tacit understanding I knew I was leaning towards, yet remained beyond my grasp, no matter how much of it I reveal? And as I leaned towards it and peeled back more of it, do those very steps of knowing keep changing it so that it remains always unknowable? Could that perhaps be an emergent quality of the wholeness I sought?

As far as Kim's Levels of Perspective go, I was responding to one almighty event. However, as the hours and days, weeks and months unfolded after Mattie's death I learned about the visceral value of the Levels of Perspective – I drew myself towards a vision of myself needed for that time, I co-shaped with a close colleague the mental models we needed to sustain us, and we consciously shaped emergency systemic structures as needed in those tragic circumstances. From being overwhelmed by the sheer weight of white noise, a tentative clarity emerged, and I believe the source of the tentative clarity was the enormous self-organising capacity of the school to regroup around its values.

Confronting the challenges the event presented, professionally and personally compelled me to confront dimensions of my own character and identity previously only imagined and not revealed. The manifestation of these new elements to what makes ‘me’ were not clearly visible to me; it was more their existence that was revealed. I sensed a new edge to the parameters that define ‘me’. In this sense it felt healing: not because I was necessarily ailing but more because of a renewed sense of wholeness. I actually feel it means more even than that but I do not have words to capture that thought.

As I reflect on this curiosity around who I was or became through that tragic event the concept of a crucible comes to mind. I have encountered this several times in my reading and it seems to come closest as a metaphor to describe what I am sensing. Leadership scholar John Maxwell describes how,

A crucible is an opportunity, test, or emergency that summons the very best from a person and reveals their finest inner qualities... [and] they are transformed forever. The crucible is a challenge or crisis that proves the leadership capacity lying within a person and becomes a defining moment in their leadership journey. (J. Maxwell, 2006)

Perhaps what occurs in a crucible is something akin to Dreyfus and Kelly’s sense of those rare, ‘whooshing’ moments of human excellence. It seems to be a test in that it takes a person to the brink of what they can do and the key variable that enables them to prevail is courage. Maxwell suggests that no matter what we may think we are capable of, we do not really know until we are tested by the heat of the crucible. Another leadership researcher, Robert Thomas, echoes this view:

... a crucible is a transformative experience from which a person extracts his or her “gold”: a new or an altered sense of identity... Crucibles are more like trials or tests that corner individuals and force them to answer questions about who they are and what is really important to them. (Thomas, 2009, p. 21)

Perhaps a limit of the crucible metaphor is the notion of transformation. Unlike the chemical transformations that can occur in actual crucibles which change the chemical properties of substances, the transformation that Maxwell alludes to seems to be one of bringing to the surface qualities which may already be present but dormant or even perhaps tacit. As he says, “Crucibles don’t make the man or woman; they simply reveal the

character within" (J. Maxwell, 2006). Perhaps the key similarity with an actual crucible is the metaphorical sense of intense heat, stress and pressure which releases fundamental properties. From Maxwell's writing I form a sense that a leadership crucible experience purifies purpose and motives, compelling the person in the crucible to draw down on their deepest values which only become visible or more clear at that moment of need, and that the transformation component is the sense of richer clarity and insight into 'what's important here'. Bill George describes how a crucible is essentially about learning that leadership is about far more than being the hero of your own journey.

[A] crucible may cause you to challenge your underlying assumptions about who you are, enable you to redefine your values, or help you see the major themes that weave an underlying thread throughout your life. (2008, p. 36)

As I reflect on that time, it was clearly a very significant crucible: in my 'normal', day-to-day work as a school Principal I encounter students, parents and teachers gripped by tragedy, sadness, despair, despondency and desperation, as well as many others elated by success, inspired by their opportunities and/or fulfilled by achievement. As deeply touching as many of those daily brushes with poignant humanness have been, very few have been genuine crucibles for me. For most of them I go home and sleep well at night, or at least after a few days.

Not with Mattie.

A community-funded playground stands in his memory, echoing every day with the joyous sounds of happy children clambering over it. Nine years later the memory of that tumultuous event is still never far from my consciousness. Most other challenges I face in my work seem routine by comparison. I can lull myself into how 'important' turns of events can be and I can be indignant, offended, disappointed and critical when they touch me in various ways. However, when I remember Mattie, I am confronted with my artificiality. I learned from that experience that, in my work, very few things really matter.

I experienced another crucible, one in my personal life, one that fired a greater heat even than Mattie. That was the erosion of my closest personal relationship, my long-term marriage, and the simultaneous and separate rising of a new relationship. This proved to be my ultimate crucible. While Mattie tested my professional persona and overflowed into my consciousness as a person, this experience shifted the axis around which my whole life revolved, with immense repercussions for all involved, including children, friends and

extended networks. It tested me at the deepest human levels and brought to the surface of my consciousness the values on which my life is based. This crucible event unfolded during the course of this study. I recall an esteemed mentor of mine cautioning me when I embarked on this study to take care and, in fact, not to proceed as he had witnessed too many PhD studies accompanied by broken relationships. He was referring to the level of commitment of time and energy a PhD requires. While I do not believe this study contributed to this crucible event in that way, I am aware that it triggered deep reflection about my life purpose, trajectory and goals, and so may have played a role.

I am sensing a connection between the lens of a crucible and the lens of complex adaptive systems. While their source may be from quite different perspectives there seems to be a point of confluence on the horizon at which they merge. Crucibles and complex adaptive systems both have defining qualities which defy predictability; in the case of a crucible, the occurrence of it seems unpredictable along with the course one takes while in it. Even if one ‘prevails’ through a crucible to emerge transformed in a positive sense, there may be no telling what unfolds from there. At the same time, leadership researcher Robert Thomas distinguishes between three types of crucible: ‘new territory’ – the type alluded to so far, with the experience heralding a painful elevation to new insight and/or expertise; ‘reversal’ – a type of crucible experience characterised by loss, defeat or failure; and finally ‘suspension’ – a type of crucible experience which is extended over time and which involves contemplation and deliberation with no obvious way forward (2009, pp. 21-22). This suggestion of Thomas is helpful in further illustrating that not only is the encountering of a crucible unpredictable, but the course one takes through it and the outcomes of the experience are all unpredictable; they shape their own emergent properties.

I am also reminded of Gadamer’s reference to the transformative fusion of people’s horizons when engaged together in making meaning. The point of fusion seems one of emergence with its own emergent qualities.

I am sensing a fundamental compatibility between complexity and hermeneutics as I further reflect on, and inquire into, my practice and deep persona as a leader; or in deference to Bohm’s rheomode, in my practice and persona in leading. From here I wish to autoethnographically explore further how seeing organisations as complex adaptive systems might offer insight into my thinking and practice of leading.

Leading complex organisations

Low-leverage interventions would be much less alluring if it were not for the fact that many actually work, in the short term... In complex human systems there are always many ways to make things look better in the short run. Only eventually does the compensating feedback come back to haunt you. (Peter Senge, 2006, p. 60)

I am coming to appreciate that a view of leadership from a perspective of complexity offers me a concept, or at least a metaphor, for articulating the sort of non-linear, non-predictable and non-positivist leading I have been seeking to apprehend. Complexity and leadership researchers Goldstein and colleagues seem almost to be speaking of my own concept of ‘fidelity of influence’,

A complexity science based view sees leadership as an influence process that arises through interactions across the organization: leadership happens in the “space between” people as they interact... the true catalysts of innovation are the web of relationships – in the nexus of interactions – that connect members to each other and to others in the environment. (2010, p. 2)

Goldstein and his colleagues are describing leadership as a multi-directional flow of influence, which also describes the relationship of elements in a complex adaptive system.

Uhl-Bien and Marion elaborate with several critical notions as premises for a complexity leadership perspective. The first relates to context which socially constructs leadership from its, “interactions and interdependencies among agents” (2008, p. 187). The second distinguishes leadership from leaders, “as an emergent, interactive dynamic that [produces] adaptive outcomes” (2008, p. 188). The final critical notion refers to adaptive leadership which the authors differentiate from administrative leadership and which they suggest is needed in, “emergent, informal adaptive dynamics throughout the organization” (2008, p. 188)

David Snowden and Mary Boone offer research I found helpful while making meaning of complex leadership in organisations. They suggest that there is a,

... fundamental assumption of organizational theory and practice: that a certain level of predictability and order exists in the world. This assumption, grounded in Newtonian science... encourages simplifications that are useful in

ordered circumstances... We believe the time has come to broaden the traditional approach to leadership and decision making and form a new perspective based on complexity science. (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 1)

I understand from this that relationships between cause and effect can be somewhat predictable in some circumstances but that as complexity increases, emergent qualities become less predictable. I think I typically assume throughout my career and broader life that most challenging situations I encounter can be 'handled' by analysing the causes of an issue, understand what is happening, then design and implement an intervention based on reducing the situation to a sequence of steps to be addressed sequentially, and the issue will be resolved as anticipated - perhaps the archetypal Newtonian-Cartesian approach!

Snowden (2007) offers a four-domain framework of organisations' contexts for assisting with appreciating when an approach similar to this might be appropriate and when it might not be. He describes: simple and complicated contexts which are 'ordered', and complex and chaotic contexts which are 'unordered'. This seems very helpful to me because he believes people can become better at recognising their context and then reading it more helpfully.

Simple contexts (2007) are stable, with clear cause-effect relationships, with the 'right answer' self-evident and undisputed. A command and control approach by leaders is appropriate, with leaders sensing, categorising and responding. A loan repayment schedule is an example of a simple context in an organisation.

Snowden cautions (2007) about issues being incorrectly classified as 'simple' through oversimplification. He also cautions about 'entrained thinking' which blinds people to new ways of thinking due to past experiences and successes. This immediately has me thinking of what I have already described about how our dominant mental models drive our behaviour and are reinforced by experience. He also cautions that when things go smoothly people become complacent and tend not to see different patterns emerging. He reminds that 'best practice' is, by definition, past practice.

Snowden's second domain is complicated contexts (2007), in which there are patterns fundamentally similar to the simple domain in that the relationship between cause and effect is clear but requires analysis to identify an optimum intervention/response. 'Experts' are often required in this domain. An example may be that a driver knows his car is not

working properly but must take it to a mechanic for the issue to be resolved. Simple and complicated contexts reflect an underlying order and predictability in an organisation.

Snowden then outlines two unordered domains; the first being complex contexts, (2007) in which cause and effect relationships can only ever have coherence retrospectively, and developments are often hard to distinguish between being opportunities or threats. He suggests that hindsight will not offer insight into solving problems, and certainly not foresight. The number and nature of interacting elements and variables is so vast that prediction, analysis and order are impossible. Snowden suggests this is the domain most organisations are typically in, but that leaders mistakenly use ordered strategies to try to impose order and predictability. Snowden's fourth domain is chaotic contexts (2007), in which patterns of cause and effect are constantly disrupted, leaving only turbulence. Where there is such disruption a leader's job is 'to staunch the bleeding.' This requires a leader to act to establish a sense of order, find a source of stability and marshal resources to transform the context from chaos to complexity. This will most often require a command and control type of response.

Snowden (2007) says that adept leaders skilfully read their context and implement the type of intervention needed. He criticises business schools for concentrating their courses on the ordered domains of simple and complicated contexts, despite many organisations sitting in unordered contexts characterised by complexity and chaos.

Snowden (2007) cites the example of the film Apollo 13 in which a group of experts is gathered in a room containing exactly the same materials as were available to the astronauts in the stricken space vessel. The group's challenge is to devise a solution to the technical failure on the spacecraft using only those materials. Snowden described how they had to let a solution emerge from the materials at hand. He emphasises that the 'trap' of leaders in complex situations is to revert to a command and control approach in order to find elusive order. He advises that such overcontrol can lead to the stifling of helpful patterns emerging. They may also become intolerant of failure which Snowden says is an essential part of 'experimental understanding'.

I appreciate Snowden's insight in suggesting that leaders sometimes mis-characterise one context for the other. It seems to me I have observed firsthand, and certainly read about, circumstances in which a complex or chaotic context in a social system has been responded to as if they are ordered contexts, with awful consequences.

Peat adds something to this with his distinction (2008, pp. 73-84) between 'strong' and 'rigid' organisations. He describes how a healthy organisation has the strength to respond to its emergent qualities. He says (2008, p. 73) it is able to adjust to sudden changes by making whatever internal changes are needed to adapt to a new environment. He also says though that many organisations meet change in inappropriate ways by exerting more power while remaining rigid and not adapting. He outlines several ways this manifests, including sticking ever more fervently and blindly to policies, reinforcing a hierarchical structure in which people are conditioned not to question orders from above, not ensuring healthy feedback loops and a free flow of information in all directions, or where there is poor communication and collaboration between different sections of the organisation. Peat also describes how the nature of the formal and informal structures within an organisation contribute to either its strength or its rigidity.

Considering this is helping me with more insight into Kim's Levels of Perspective. I now appreciate better a distinction between a pattern of behaviour and the emergent qualities of a system. In a complex adaptive system, a pattern might be characterised as a manifestation of how the variables within it impact on one another; once those variables establish a pattern, it is describable, organised and has an integrity in itself. I am appreciating more keenly that the elements making up patterns in a pattern of behaviour are constantly moving, and their emergent qualities tend to defy predictability.

I take from this that Fritz's notion of 'advancing tension' towards a vision is likely to be far more complex than I earlier appreciated. Far from being a process of adjusting the levers that calibrate a system, any intervention in a human system would seem to have unpredictable consequences, no matter how predictable they might seem. In a school, low standardised test scores for literacy might be addressed by implementing a comprehensive, whole-school literacy program. Despite the logic of such a response, I am aware in some such cases of teachers feeling challenged by the accountability they feel and who narrow the curriculum in order to focus more on literacy, in one example, eliminating physical education to create extra literacy time. I suspect that the sort of 'drilling' instruction that sometimes results sees more students able to pass standardised tests but with a troubling lack of deeper understanding about language.

I sense now that the capacity to read structure in a human system can offer potential for hermeneutic insight into causal connections between variables. As I write this I am sensing that a system of interacting patterns might form a structure. I had previously thought of

the patterns of behaviour Level of Perspective in a relatively narrow way of referring to people's behavioural habits, rather than a much broader sense of patterns in a system. For example, in a school, where there are patterns of high student and staff attendance, low staff turnover, high parent and student satisfaction and strong standardised test results, one might expect these patterns to be reinforcing of each other because they all seem to be 'moving' in the same direction: when one improves the others tend to; when one declines, the others tend to also. I am sensing that interacting patterns such as these might align and bond as a systemic structure and I now appreciate the wisdom of Fritz's structural tension because once we appreciate that a system's behaviour is not random and learn to see patterns sitting below the visible surface, we might construct some useful meaning for what is driving the behaviour. This might then open up further learning around how actions might more predictably impact on a system.

And while experience and history might provide some assistance in this, the emergent qualities of any complex system tend to undermine predictability. Taking the school example further, while the introduction of a mandated whole-school approach to teaching literacy may lead to lower literacy results, I have worked with colleagues whose morale has been sapped by a drive towards greater focus on literacy scores, feeling that their passion for nurturing the growth of learning-oriented, resilient, respectful, competent contributors to the community is less valued; they do their best but their heart is not in the drilling of literacy skills and they feel reduced from the noble traditions of teaching to having become trainers.

What I am constructing from learning about complex adaptive systems, along with what Bohm and Goethe offer, is that living systems may be described as being in a state of constant motion. Wise leaders seem to appreciate this and inquire deeply into the dynamics of deep structure so as to reach some insight into the deeper, underlying patterns and how they interact with each other. Fritz's 'advancing tension' towards the vision requires interventions that affect the pressure on key variables in the system, in the full knowledge that even a small adjustment to a structure can have far-reaching, rippling effects throughout the system. I am gaining a sense that when structural adjustments resonate with the organisation's values, there can be a measure of confidence that the system's adaptive capacity is being enhanced, rather than being undermined, by interventions that ironically may actually weaken it by making it more rigid.

Complexity-leadership researchers Ralph Stacey and Douglas Griffin encouraged me in my drawing from complexity to better understand leadership by enabling me to see complementary perspectives between hermeneutics and complexity science. Stacey's concept of 'complex responsive processes' describes how, in a complex adaptive system, there is no separation between the individual and the context in which an individual dwells, seeing mind and body as co-implicated. (Griffin & Stacey, 2005, pp. 93-98)

I came to consider that within the broad context of a human organisation are sub-contexts, some of which may be more subject to the nature of complex adaptive systems than others. I found this helpful because it seems a wise caution that while situations experienced may look similar, they may be quite different in nature, and that it may be very prudent to engage in them quite differently, according to the context. By distinguishing between different contexts, and by suggesting types of responses, or orientations at least, for each one, I found Snowden particularly offers helpful points of reflection for leaders to clarify a perspective for action.

I am curious to inquire further into 'context' and about how it might influence people and their actions. I return to Dreyfus for insight into what I sense is an intimate relationship between the context in which a person dwells, and the nature of human skill needed for a person to flourish in that context, and how considering context and skill might lead to further insight into leadership.

Chapter 5 - Seeking understanding of context in leading

Acquiring skills in context for leading

... we can also lure back the gods of old [by]... developing the skills for responding to the manifold senses of the sacred that still linger unappreciated at the margins of our disenchanted world. (Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, 2011, pp 261-262)

While Snowden describes four different types of contexts in organisations, each requiring different ‘reading’ by leaders, Dreyfus offers a different analysis of context, which is more to do with the relationship between context and skill development. The more familiar I become with it, the more insight it seems to offer me about how context might impact on leadership skill – as Dreyfus might define it.

A key point of Dreyfus’s research (1998a, 2005a, 2005b, 2007a) is his suggestion that expertise is significantly learned and developed, in context. It seems to me that context may be every bit as relevant to a leader as he suggests it is to the deep skill of the timber craftsman.

Dreyfus (1998b, p. 1) paraphrases phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty to describe how humans strive for a ‘maximum grip’ on the world, and how they orient themselves and their faculties to connect optimally with their immediate context in order to achieve the most from the experience. He cites Merleau-Ponty’s example of where one might stand in an art gallery in order to see a painting at its best. Dreyfus suggests that humans can adjust to their context to, “take account of improvement without a representation of what would count as success” (1998b, p. 11). Where one stands would depend on the peculiarities of a specific context, and the lighting conditions and viewing ambience would differ from gallery to gallery, and perhaps even from hour to hour in the same gallery.

Dreyfus and Merleau-Ponty seem to allude to emergent, interactive qualities of humans which arise from the specific elements of their context, and which are not always entirely consistent or predictable. In other words ‘maximum grip’ is a tendency towards human congruence with context which results in ‘improvement’, without a prior ‘plan’ or ‘strategy’

being necessary because what may unfold is emergent and cannot be anticipated through specific planning. I understand from Dreyfus that skill acquisition is to do with ‘learning-from-context’ rather than from a decontextualized theory, protocol or template.

Learning from context aligns with the notion of humans making meaning hermeneutically from the uniqueness of an experience, which itself seems consistent with the concept of emergence in complex adaptive systems: the meaning is always made in the moment and/or retrospectively. While attempts may be made to make meaning in anticipation of what may unfold, because the experience has not occurred, making meaning from likely future events seems always destined to be speculative and anticipatory. Trying to accurately predict the emotion of an experience, along with nuances of detail which may or may not unfold as expected seems likely to be fragmentary and generalised at best. Along these lines, Dreyfus suggests,

... what the learner acquires through experience is not represented in the mind at all but is presented to the learner as more and more finely discriminated situations, and that, if the situation does not clearly solicit a single response or the response does not produce a satisfactory result, the learner is led to further refine his discriminations, which, in turn, solicit more refined responses. (Dreyfus, 1998b, pp. 7-8)

Such discriminations might be responsive to an event or experience and are progressively more refined in pursuit of the construction of meaning and sense-making. Dreyfus again quotes Merleau-Ponty describing the relationship between experienter and experience as an, “intentional arc: ... [a] feedback loop between the embodied agent and the perceptual world” (In Dreyfus, 1998b, p. 8). Dreyfus describes a pattern of neural pathways that past experience blazes in the mind. As an experience similar to a past experience occurs, the brain follows the pre-blaze neural pathway to shape a direction for a response. He says it is not about remembering a past experience and choosing to follow a response similar to that on the previous occasion, but more about a level of automaticity derived from the neural pathway at a level deeper than memory (1998b, p. 9).

Dreyfus offers a model of skill acquisition which begins with the experience of the novice. At this stage learners are given rules for completing a task and the rules are applied to tasks ‘decomposed’ into “context-free features that novices can recognise” (2007a, p. 6). A novice requires no skill or expertise, just the capacity to follow simple steps of action,

perhaps like the experience of a learner driver's first few driving lessons. 'Foot on the foot break, gentle on the accelerator, release the handbrake...'

A novice can reach a level functioning that is governed almost entirely by rules, with negligible processing of data from the context. When I was first appointed as a Principal, I recall hoping that my feeling of being an imposter would be masked by my dependence on Departmental guidelines when finding myself in situations requiring me to respond in some way. I often felt great relief when a policy stipulated what my response should be. And should a teacher, parent or student, have felt unfairly treated I would console myself that I was following a rule I was required to follow, with minimal personal responsibility for what that might entail for others.

The novice stage suggests an almost positivist, mechanical response to an environment and seems reminiscent of Snowden's 'ordered contexts'. Implicit in Dreyfus's theory is that the low level of functioning of a novice only starts to develop beyond that stage when the agent learns to combine the rule-governed behaviour with the intricacies of the specific context.

The second of Dreyfus's skill acquisition stages is advanced beginner.

At this stage beginners begin to see meaningful aspects of a situation.... Since a sense of what is important in a particular situation is missing, performance is exhausting, and the student may wonder how anybody ever masters the skill.

(Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 6)

Because there are so many diverse variables and little experience to draw on to evaluate options, performance is restricted to a few basic drills, albeit with a growing awareness of context variables. Dreyfus says (2009, p. 29) an advanced beginner begins to recognise 'situational aspects' as well as now being guided by broader maxims rather than only by very specific rules. In my developing role as a Principal I recall this manifesting in several ways, with one being an emerging sense of an apparent inequity in treating everyone the same, and of coming to modify my interpretation of the 'rules' governing my practice, to take account of circumstances I might judge to be mitigating. An example of this might be in deciding on different consequences for students who had engaged in identical, inappropriate behaviour due to one having been recidivist and the other a first-timer.

The third stage of Dreyfus's model is the competent stage. There would be simply too many relevant elements and procedures for a competent practitioner to rely on rules and

maxims alone. To cope with this overload and to achieve competence, people learn, through instruction and/or experience, to devise a plan, or choose a perspective, in ways that then determine which elements of the situation or domain must be treated as important and which ones can be ignored (2009, p. 30).

A competent practitioner still seeks rules to govern their behaviour and tries to recognise the characteristics of a situation to determine which optional response is appropriate for the circumstances. Understanding and decision-making become easier as they draw more on situational elements, rather than falling back on non-situational rules. They decide for themselves which response is appropriate, albeit without real confidence. Many situations they face are not covered in the rules or manual available to the novice.

When uncertainty grows, coping becomes frightening rather than just exhausting. Until now, if the rules do not work, learners are able to rationalize that it is not their fault as the rules were not adequate. Now they feel responsible for their actions, which can often lead to confusion and failure. But when things work out, the competent learner experiences a kind of elation unknown to the beginner (2007a, p. 6).

I can recall early experiences of great satisfaction when I sensed success at exercising influence – although not always with fidelity – as a result of engaging in dialogue with others which led to an outcome I might judge as ‘successful’. There are no clear rules governing many of the myriad requests I regularly encounter. In my early experience I recall the sense of elation Dreyfus describes when responding to, for example, a small delegation of staff asking me to postpone a planned event due to a jammed schedule, a student seeking respite from the harassing behaviour of others, or a parent insisting their child be moved to a different class. It seems to me that a Principal might need to respond to such interactions ‘competently’. I look back now and sense that even though I rejected some such requests and agreed to others, I drew satisfaction from recognising that I had moved beyond blindly following rules and maxims, and had developed a rudimentary sense of what I judged was required in each context. I recall several times phoning a respected colleague for coaching when I was not clear on a way forward.

Dreyfus notes that it is only at the competent stage that a level of emotional involvement emerges, and that, “unless learners stay emotionally involved and accept the joy of a job well done and the remorse of mistakes, they will not develop further” (2007a, p. 6). He suggests that what happens instead is reliance on more and more rules which, on a large

scale, is fatiguing and ultimately leads to stress and burnout from trying to keep track of too many details and elements. Dreyfus cautions that a real risk of a lack of emotional commitment at the competent stage is regression of performance to a more manageable set of rules.

Generally, seeking the safety of rules one will not get beyond competence, while the true goal is expertise. Experiencing deeply felt rewards or remorse seems to be necessary for the performer to learn from examples without rules. (Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 6)

Dreyfus's critical point here hinges on his sense of how 'emotional involvement' triggers a shift in perspective from an empirical, analytical approach of ascertaining what is needed based on a formula of rules, to a more synthetic type of thinking which constructs a more creative, bespoke response drawing together the subtle complexity of elements specific to the context,

Emotional involvement seems to play an essential role in switching over from what one might roughly think of as a left-hemisphere analytic approach to a right-hemisphere holistic one. (Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 7)

Dreyfus argues that the competent person takes responsibility for successful and unsuccessful choices, and that that may mean going to great cognitive and emotional lengths to weigh up whether any particular choice is the best one. A competent person is able to devise a plan and decide what is important in a situation. A critical part of this is letting mistakes sink in. "One has to go on dwelling emotionally on what critical choices one has made and how they affected the outcome" (2007a, p. 7).

While I could cite many examples of this, one that I think illustrates Dreyfus's point about the significance of emotional involvement to learning from mistakes was a decision I made in my third year as a Principal to require a teacher highly specialised in teaching a particular subject to diversify into teaching additional subjects. My decision was well-intentioned and based on operational needs, but over the course of the following year the teacher concerned grew increasingly unhappy and resigned. I felt remorse and was left wondering what my apparently-inspired decision achieved, and resolved to never again be so carelessly blind to the full impact of a decision on others.

Dreyfus suggests that it is this emotional involvement in a task that paves the way for further advancement of skill, and it becomes increasingly difficult to revert to the rule-

governed behaviour of the novice. When there is this genuine anxiety over choice, "The resulting positive and negative emotional experiences will strengthen successful perspectives and the performer's theory of a skill represented by rules and principles will gradually be replaced by situational discriminations" (2007a, p. 7).

Dreyfus's next stage of skill acquisition is the proficiency stage, reached when reliance on rules,

... will gradually be replaced by situational discriminations, accompanied by associated responses. Proficiency seems to develop if, and only if, experience is assimilated in this embodied, atheoretical way. Only then do intuitive reactions replace reasoned responses. (Dreyfus, 2009, p. 34)

Dreyfus is describing what he believes is a key threshold of skill development in which rules are no longer the primary guide to action. Instead, the rich vein of experience has built a store of embodied knowledge and skill which can be accessed to compare with a currently-faced situation and an adaptive, tailored response shaped. Intuitive behaviour replaces reasoned responses. As Dreyfus explains,

Many instances of apparently complex problem solving... are best understood as direct responses to familiar perceptual gestalts. After years of seeing chess games unfold... a chess grandmaster can play master level chess while his deliberate, analytic mind is absorbed in something else. Such play... incorporates a tradition that determines the appropriate response to a situation and makes possible long range, strategic, purposive play, without the player needing to be conscious of any plan or goal at all. (Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 7)

Dreyfus's 'familiar perceptual gestalts' recalls for me Goethe's sense of the whole emerging from the part. Dreyfus's proficient practitioner, though experiencing a new situation with different contextual elements (or parts), recognises a broader contextual familiarity of a 'whole' from earlier experiences, or allusions to or 'echoes' of familiar experiences, which are then synthesised in the brain into a guide for thinking and action in the current situation. According to Dreyfus, the hallmark of the proficient stage, is this capacity to read accurately what is occurring in the current context. A proficient practitioner recognises contextual elements, understands their significance and understands what is happening when they combine, all emerging from rich experience.

Dreyfus's stage of a proficient practitioner's skill at reading context, hints to me of familiar thinking from patterns of behaviour in Kim's Levels of Perspective in that both are concerned with recognising what is happening in a situation beyond discrete events (or parts) which might each otherwise be addressed separately by novices and advanced beginners, with little regard for a perspective of wholeness. Dreyfus's description of proficient practice featuring skill at reading nuances and subtleties in a situation might also offer insight for finding meaning from a complexity theory perspective in its suggestion that reading a context involves recognising deeper, underlying patterns of influence.

The proficient performer, after spontaneously seeing the salient features of the current situation, must still fall back on a rule or maxim to decide what to do (2009, pp. 34-35). Thus, for the proficient performer,

Deciding what to do next, how to respond, still requires reference to a detached maxim, rule or principle. Without that support they have little hope of deciding which of the available options will best support achieving a goal.
(2009, p. 35)

The critical quality needed for advancing from proficient to expert is that,

Proficient performers see what needs to be done, but must decide how to do it. Experts see what needs to be achieved and thanks to their larger repertoire of situational discriminations also see immediately how to achieve their goal.
(Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 7)

As I continue to make sense of my leading, I have a sense of how I intuitively respond. I recall a situation in which some teachers needed assistance with a student whose aggressive behaviour led to a stand-off at an after-school bus. A verbal exchange between the student and a teacher escalated to the student abusively refusing to do as the teacher instructed. The situation had escalated further when the student responded similarly to a more senior teacher who had been summoned for assistance. Both of these teachers had tried to use their authority and a stern voice to enforce compliance. That strategy had not worked for them and, as I approached, I understood it would not work for me too. I asked the two teachers to remove other students from the scene and approached the student slowly and calmly stood beside him, a little way away.

"How are you going, Smithy?" I asked quietly.

"Crap," he replied.

"Yes, I can see that. That's no good. Tough day?" I asked.

"Crap day."

"And now you just want to go home, yes?"

"What do you reckon?"

"I reckon that's exactly what you want to do, but you've dug yourself a big hole and now you're not sure how to climb out."

When there was no response from Smithy, I said, "I reckon I can help."

With still no response, I said, "I'll make sure you get home okay. First though tell me about what happened in your day. Let's get away from all this so I can listen properly."

I turned and started to walk away, aware I could hear no movement behind me. After six or so steps I paused, half turned and quietly said, "C'mon, mate. It's okay."

Smithy muttered gruffly and stalked off briskly ahead of me towards my office.

As I narrate this lived experience I reflect that I followed no accepted principle of responding; I certainly appraised that 'Smithy' felt trapped and I needed to protect his dignity from further harm. Apart from that, I tried what felt a good intuitive fit for the circumstances. Reflecting on that experience in this way helps me link my practice with Dreyfus and a sense of his concept of expertise.

Rethinking leadership skills, from technical to embodied.

There is only intuitive knowledge. Deduction and discursive argument, incorrectly called examples of knowing, are only instruments which lead to intuition . . . Intuition is the presence of consciousness to the thing. (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1992, p. 240)

The test of someone's expertise under Dreyfus's model is their capacity to make subtle discriminations of worth, and then to immediately and consistently make successful, intuitive responses to specific situations.

It seems that, rather than only drawing on a vast repertoire of successful experience which has been subsumed into long-term memory and the source of reliable intuition, the expert recognises patterns and structures which are deeper than surface details. And, where there may be too many new contextual details to be reliably guided by past experience, the expert has, by that stage, a very reliable set of values and other mental models on which to intuitively assess a situation and generate an immediate, expert response. When I audit this hunch against my career as a teacher and Principal it seems to be plausible – an experienced, capable teacher has the capacity to ‘connect’ with a class of students, even a new class, in a way that an inexperienced teacher can often hardly even imagine. The experienced teacher can often open up an entry point for learning for a student reluctant to engage in learning. I suspect the same may be true of leading, with experienced, capable leaders responding to challenges from the richness of prior experience which will have built a store of helpful mental models, and helpful ‘strategies’ for engaging people under various conditions, all of which I suspect is premised on a clear set of underlying principles which might govern purpose and behaviour.

Dreyfus’s research has been a substantial influence, through several waves, on my work. When I first chanced upon his stages of skill acquisition, it seemed to make sense and was helpful in how I orientated my thinking around myself and others in terms of both teaching and leading. It helped me to make meaning of how some people need a set of rules to govern behaviour while others seem to have an intuitive grasp of how to respond in a situation.

Until my own ‘turn’ to phenomenology I had initially seen Dreyfus’s framework as a reasonably empirical model which describes the acquisition of technical skills. I now appreciate the emergent quality of the deeply embodied skill Dreyfus describes, and the transformation in thinking and perspective that unfolds in the competent stage from an empirical, analytical thinking of the lower stages, to a more holistic, synthesis-oriented, hermeneutic thinking characteristic of the upper stages.

I imagine context becomes important to Dreyfus because it is where direct experience of the world occurs, and provides a unique setting within which an agent makes unique meaning from that experience. Dreyfus’s ‘distinctions of worth’ are shaped by the skilful practitioner according to the fine nuances of each unique context. The more I read and reflect upon Dreyfus’s research, the more I have a growing sense of what it is to be in the

world, and of meaning I construct from any given experience being an emergent quality of my life experiences and my mental models in that unique context.

As I continue to unfold this new meaning of skill, it has great resonance for me in my leading. Far from leadership emanating from lofty, generalised principles or rules, or non-Rostian elements of pre-determined behaviours, or styles, or traits, I begin sensing that who I am as a leader is far more fundamentally to do with the distinctions of worth I make in my influence relationships in a given context, as I try to maximise my grip on the world and to reach towards what I sense is highest in me, in order to realise a shared vision.

Leading with a new view of skill

He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the universe. (Marcus Aurelius, 1960, p. 28)

The stark convergence I see in Dreyfus's concept of 'skill' and how one might develop it, with a hermeneutic view of the world, seems no coincidence. The meaning that Dreyfus suggests an agent shapes of a phenomenon depends on both the agent's experience and the situational elements of the context in which the phenomenon occurs, rather than the agent reducing down any notion of 'objective' or positivist 'truth'.

This is an enormously liberating thought, and enormously terrifying also. It is liberating because it frees me to make the richest meaning I can as each moment moves to the next, and terrifying because, as I pass through Dreyfus's stages of skill acquisition towards that of expert, I dare to 'break' the rules or invent new ones or at least to blaze an entirely new trail; and while that may lead to great successes (however I might measure them) it may lead to disasters and setbacks with great cost to innocent parties.

Aristotle rejects a blind, rigid adherence to rules. He describes (2009, p. 99) circumstances of observing master stonemasons who could not make round columns using a set square ruler, so in adapting to what their context required, they developed a ruler made from lead that bends for measuring curves. Using this analogy he made the observation that there are times when we might need to bend a rule because the conventional ruler will simply not be adequate.

Even so, there seems an inherent, frightening risk at stake in continually seeking to strengthen my skill outside of the realms of ‘safe’ practice. However, in my judgement, this seems a worthy risk as it seems there may also be an inherent, ethical hypocrisy in the comfort of competence as it may limit my striving to improve practice - certainly for any sense of *meta-poiesis* - and may see one languishing in competent mediocrity.

Often, in the work of leading, decisions do not need to be made instantly; time can be taken for further data to be collected, to consult with others, to reflect, to be coached, etc. However, there are certainly times when decisions need to be made immediately. These would be the times when the benefit of the expert response would be most felt. They may not always be momentous occasions and could be during a conversation. I recall a typical example recently over a relatively innocuous matter with a keen, aspiring, young leader. She asked my opinion about which of two alternative options she had narrowed down her choices to, she thought I might prefer. In my own busyness I felt like smiling and suggesting that I have delegated the task to her with great confidence and that I will be very content with whatever she decides. However, I sensed a coaching moment and asked her which of the two she was leaning towards. When she answered confidently, I asked what she saw as the benefits of that choice over the other. She was very clear and expounded enthusiastically on the advantages of her preferred option. After listening for her mental models which I included in my paraphrasing of what she said, and posing a couple of gently probing questions, I thanked her and asked her the next step.

As she left, I sensed a new level of confidence, clarity and affirmation in her. I suspect that by inviting her to share her thinking I demonstrated that I valued her processes and thinking and that I valued her work. I think our exchange demonstrated too that I support her decision without her having to receive my explicit permission. I think also that the conversation helped to mediate her thinking and build a tiny additional level of alignment of thinking between us. I made the judgement that a friendly, “whichever you choose will be fine” may have felt dismissive, may have reinforced her need to defer to me and that her work was not all that important to me. With the same person on another occasion or over a different matter, or with a different person altogether, my response may have been different.

Often in the busyness of those moments it seems that we only have clarity about the ‘rightness’ of such immediate situational responses, as I explored earlier through Schulz’s concept of error blindness, with hindsight afterwards, as we reflect on the scenario. Only

after the response has occurred and the consequences of the action experienced might we possibly measure the rightness or wrongness or appropriateness or richness of an action – at least in terms of achieving anticipated outcomes. An apparent virtue of the Dreyfus stages of skill acquisition is that progressing to an expert level reduces the risks of less preferable consequences of a choice because successful actions reinforced over several iterations are stored as embodied predispositions for subsequent acting upon, rather than such action being dependent upon conscious, mental representations, so that the master will immediately do, “the appropriate thing, at the appropriate time, in the appropriate way” (2005a, p. 7).

Perhaps nowhere might this be starker than in the field of military operations. Military theorist Jorgen Eriksen used the Dreyfus stages of skill acquisition to explore the question of whether or not soldiers should think before they shoot (2010). He found that in contemporary war zones enemy combatants may not be immediately identifiable, and so a soldier needs to make an immediate situational response to either shoot or not. By the time a soldier tries to evaluate whether the approaching innocent-looking local inhabitant is hostile or not, a lethal improvised explosive device may have already been detonated. Eriksen makes the Dreyfus-inspired connection that moral behaviour is a skill and can be learned through practice which transforms it into an intuitive situational response. (2010, p. 198). Nevertheless, he concedes several times during the article, quoting Patricia Benner’s research into nursing, that the progression from novice to expert typically takes seven years, a span of time not usually available to combat soldiers; whereas an expert soldier would respond intuitively and immediately, most soldiers would never attain that level of skill development, which meant for him that most soldiers should continue to think before they shoot. Eriksen highlights a hermeneutic view that, “knowledge should be understood as embodied, concrete, incorporated, and lived” (2010, p. 199). The article draws several times on the Dreyfus notion that this kind of experience-based knowledge should not be seen as a foundation for analytical behaviour, but as a goal in itself for building future capacity.

Journalist and best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell suggests that there may be a simpler explanation for what happens in acquiring a skill, “Ten thousand hours is the magic number of greatness” (2008, p. 41). He suggests that expertise, such as that achieved by world class baseball players, chess players or musicians is achieved by practising skill drills over and over, for 10,000 hours. On the face of it, I can imagine that this may well be the case for a

repetitive, technical skill, perhaps such as learning to ride a surfboard. However, a recent study from Princeton University found that practice only makes, on average 12% difference, and that,

... in less stable fields, like entrepreneurship and rock and roll, rules can go out the window ... mastery is more than a matter of practice... There is no doubt that deliberate practice is important, from both a statistical and a theoretical perspective. It is just less important than has been argued... For scientists, the important question now is, what else matters? (Baer, 2014).

I suspect that insofar as there may be an answer to this question, I am now coming to appreciate more finely that 'skill' as described by Dreyfus is a concept of embodied knowledge: more than a mechanistic or technical capacity to carry out a function, like sharpening a knife. Eriksen describes what an expert level of embodied military skill might look like. I seek now to inquire further into what embodied knowledge for leading might look like.

Bringing hermeneutics to embodied knowledge for leading

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are. (Anais Nin, 1972, p. 124)

As I wonder about the potential applicability of the Dreyfus stages of skill development to the growth of a person's leadership, I suspect that for further clarity, I might need to consider more thoroughly what 'embodied knowledge' might mean.

Merleau-Ponty illustrated his concept of embodied knowledge through the example of touch typing as essentially being a type of 'knowledge in the hands':

To know how to type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditioned reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter as it comes before our eye. If habit is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary action, what then is it? It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 166)

Embodied knowledge also seems to incorporate an emotional dimension, alluded to by Dreyfus's reference to the emotional engagement necessary to keep advancing skill development. This suggests to me, in harking back to my earlier tracing of my coming to hermeneutics and my consideration of mental models, that the things we learn through experience – which seem to gradually build our store of intuitive knowledge – are shaped by our mental models.

As we construct meaning and personal knowledge from our experiences, it seems we do so courtesy of our mental models which act as dual purpose lenses: first as a sensor, recognising the familiar and the acceptable, and secondly as a filter, taking in 'data' from the world which fit with our mental models. If this is the case, then from our earliest cognitive awareness we have been sifting and sorting information from the world as we experience it, adding more and more to our constructed knowledge in the world.

And, as I recall from my earlier consideration of mental models, there can be a deep emotional component to this process. Experiences which I find discomforting are likely to be interpreted negatively whereas those which I find comforting are likely to be interpreted positively. I suspect that many people may believe they mainly consider the rational/logical attributes of an experience when weighing up its value, without being consciously aware of how their level of emotional attachment may also be influencing them. This emotional attachment to an experience, whether positive or negative, seems to inherently shape the value or quality I ascribe to it, and therefore to the meaning I make from it and therefore, eventually over many iterations, to the embodied knowledge I have of it. This suggests to me that the bank of knowledge each of us builds up over the years is utterly idiosyncratic and unique, even should several individuals share the same experience. Sokolowski reinforces the uniqueness of such private and hidden constructions of the world - "Another's 'internal experiences' are irreducibly absent to us" (2000, p. 34).

One of the features of a hermeneutic perspective on the world I find most attractive is that it acknowledges a direct, participatory, humanised 'connection' with the world. I am now understanding that this suggests more than a superficial, introspectively-arrived at, subjective impression of an experience. The phenomenological and hermeneutic legitimising of direct experience of the world seems to me to enable a liberating of the human spirit, in large part by how it allows for meaning to have an irreducible, experiential core. I am attracted to the elegant simplicity and respectfulness this offers via a sense of primacy, as I see it, of the self in the world; this is a self not independent of the world or

separate from it or subservient to it, nor is it one mechanistically locked into it – it is a self actively interacting in the world, acting and reacting based on meaning shaped from experience.

I imagine that each person's life builds a trajectory that, far from being predetermined, is shaped by experiences encountered along the way and the meaning constructed from each experience. I imagine that at each step – with each newly-constructed nuance of meaning – there is a departure from the previous path of the trajectory and a modified course set, sometimes hardly discernible, other times momentous, depending on the depth and scale of each instance of meaning-making. It seems that none of this is preordained and that all of it is open-ended, with each new experience fuelling new meaning which influences a reset life-direction. Impacting on this dance between experience and meaning-making is the previous life-trajectory, the horizons of experience, hope or expectation, and any sense of future possibilities, all of which seem to swirl together in unique meaning forged in a constantly-fired crucible of the temporally grounded present, to shape the next point in one's continuing life trajectory.

I feel I am beginning to grasp that a hermeneutic perspective on living is a call for recognising the dignity of direct human experience of the world, and the meaning shaped from it, rather than 'explaining' a person's experience in terms of an objective or orthodox view or creed. I sense I am poised to now better grasp a hermeneutic perspective on leading.

Leaning more naturally towards a hermeneutics of leading

As a leader, the first person I need to lead is me. (John C. Maxwell, in 2007, p. 139)

Rost's definition of leadership is the only one I encountered that has leadership reside in a relationship between people. And yet, what is the space it occupies? When I reflect on Dreyfus, it seems the influence relationship occupies the space of the context in which the leading occurs. And so I wonder about the elements which make up such a context. I think immediately of environmental factors, such as physical location, climate, range and type of resources available, technology and culture, and the myriad elements which make up each of those; I think also though, of the more fundamental significance of the personal

attributes of the people involved in the relationship: their dispositions, values, other mental models, aspirations, vulnerabilities and all their intrapersonal resources; all the variables of a relationship in context. And so it seems to me that if I want to strengthen my leadership I must see it as being fundamentally necessary to cultivate the influence relationships from which it stems and with profound mindfulness that this is a part of the nuanced context in which it exists.

It seems to me that in order to support those engaged in an influence relationship embarking on mutual purpose to effect real change, it is constantly necessary to articulate and test the key mental models guiding those in the relationship. Without doing that, people may draw unhelpful inferences, be unintentionally influenced by bias and other life experience and operating from mental models other than those they espouse. With this in mind then, I try to bracket out such unhelpful distractions by regularly reflecting with colleagues on what we are aiming for in our vision, and on what we judge will help steer us towards the vision. We invariably have dialogue about our shared mental models: those values and other key beliefs on which our whole shared enterprise is built. Without attending to this discipline of essential, ongoing feedback through dialogue, I believe that confusion, delusion, generalisations, vagueness and inevitably conflict may arise, leading ultimately to a breakdown of alignment and the dissipating of precious energy.

I reflect that the dominance of the natural science discourse seems so pervasive I still find myself often feeling almost defensive for pursuing a phenomenological or hermeneutic methodology. Perhaps I'm reading too much into an accumulation of experiences over a lifetime, but it seems that the natural science discourse culturally prevails over interpretive, human science perspectives. There seems to be a pervasive sense that natural science is 'right' and human science is 'wrong'; or at least soft inferior against the hardness of natural science. The pride of natural science's objectivity seems to intimate that human science is shamefully subjective. After all, how on earth could personal meaning and poetic resonance have as much validity in the 'real world' as 'hard data'? I sense that such reasoning explains my understanding that, for example, Goethe's 'scientific' methodology was largely dismissed by his contemporaries. So influenced have I been by all of this throughout this inquiry that I have worried at times about not having a dataset to analyse or a formula to apply. Surely every serious PhD study has a rich set of empirical data from which to draw conclusions – can it really be taken seriously otherwise? The whole time my mind wants to veer back from phenomenology to my predisposed positivism; I feel almost

guilty that my lack of ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’ somehow taints my ‘results’; that my very connectedness with my inquiry undermines it, and that any serious scholar would recognise that. How on earth can my ‘interpretation’ of something have any rigorous validity and reliability?

This brings to mind an analogy of trying to write a letter in a second language before fully mastering the language - I am writing my letter in my native positivist tongue and then translating it. I sense my attempts to prevail in asserting a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective are gradually becoming more successful because of something more fundamental: the mental model I hold of it. I have come to appreciate that phenomenology is not something I front-load for the purposes of a study. I take heart as I sense it is becoming a part of who I am. It is becoming my ‘mother tongue’ rather than a foreign language I struggle to converse in while forming concepts and phrases in my native tongue.

And as I acknowledge a leaning more naturally towards a hermeneutical perspective of leading, I grow in confidence that the richest meaning I seek to shape of experience is likely to occur in the very moments of an experience unfolding. I anticipate further inquiry into this clarifying my thinking further.

Chapter 6 – Realising virtue in embodied leadership practice

A hermeneutical view of personal practical knowledge for leaders

No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience. (John Locke, in BrainyQuotes, 2014)

I anticipate a growing sense now of a type of embodied leadership knowledge closely aligned with Dreyfus's notion of expert skill; I sense a knowledge which features a reciprocity between actor and world; I sense a knowledge that sits between actor and world and which draws them together in action; I sense a knowledge that is not fixed or complete but with potential for continual evolving through iterations of knowing-doing; a knowledge which navigates the contextual, continuously unfolding present.

In Donald Schon's research on reflective professional learning, he explored a type of embodied knowledge characterised by a, “dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skilful” (1987, p. 31). Schon describes how in the popular consciousness professional knowledge is largely seen as amounting to ‘technical rationality’, reminiscent of the Dreyfus novice, and which sees practice as, “instrumental, consisting in adjusting technical means to ends that are clear, fixed, and internally consistent, and that instrumental practice becomes professional when it is based on the science or systematic knowledge produced by the schools of higher learning” (1995, p. 29). For Schon, technical rationality is a positivist epistemology of practice based on the assumption that there is a sequence of rational steps which can be followed to resolve a problem.

Technical rationality is flawed for Schon due to two inherent concepts. The first is its ignoring of context: “it fails to account for practical competence in ‘divergent’ situations” (Schon, 1982, p. 49). I am reminded, of course, of Dreyfus's similar emphasis on the importance of context for expertise. The second is Schon's view that most universities focus on teaching a positivist-inspired sense of convergent thinking skills as opposed to

divergent-thinking skills which competence in divergent situations calls for, so most researchers use the thinking they have been conditioned to use (1982, pp. 21-73). Schon describes the choice professionals have when addressing matters of concern,

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the use of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowlands, problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or to society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner is confronted with a choice. Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to his standards of rigor, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems where he cannot be rigorous in any way he knows how to describe? (Schon, 1995, p. 28)

It is in the face of this dilemma that Schon suggests a theory of action based on an embodied knowledge oriented around action. He suggests that technical rationality borrows too heavily from positivist methodology for it to be helpful in human sciences and that it has created a false distinction between theory and practice, between knowledge and action,

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what we know... the workaday life of the professional practitioner reveals, in its recognitions, judgments, and skills, a pattern of tacit knowing-in-action. (Schon, 1995, p. 29)

Drawing on Polanyi's work Schon says that where we instantly recognise a face in a crowd or a child makes subtle adjustments to throwing a ball based on how accurate he/she is, "these are examples of what Polanyi calls "tacit knowing" and what I would like to describe as "knowing-in-action" (Schon, 1995, p. 30).

Neurologist researcher, Robert Burton, describes the incredible embodied knowledge of the professional baseball batter: a fast-pitched ball will have travelled three metres before the batter's brain has registered from his retina that the ball has left the pitcher's hand.

The ball will reach – or pass – the bat in .38 to .46 of one second, and by the time the batter's brain registers where the ball is, it is already way past that point. His swing takes .16 to .19 of a second. In all, the batter's reaction time and swing time approximately equals the time it takes for the ball to reach him.

Once the ball is in flight, it is too late for detailed deliberation. The batter sees the release and the beginning of its path, and then goes on automatic pilot... Yet we all know that a hitter's skill, beyond mere athleticism, is dependent upon prior practice and extensive study of the game... The combination of circumstances is infinite, yet each hitter develops a probabilistic profile of the speed, trajectory, and location of the next pitch. It is in this realm that great players have a greater accuracy than novice players.

(2008, p. 71)

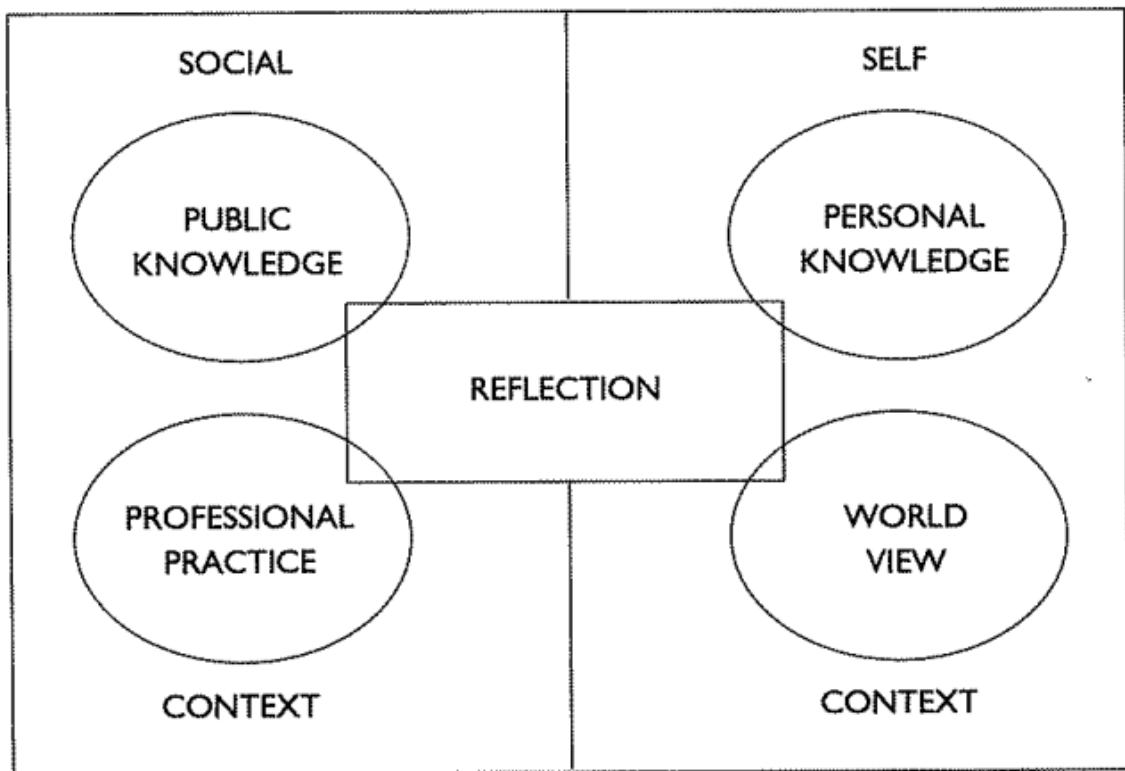
Burton seems to be describing an intuitive dimension to the technical skill of the batter. It seems that accumulated experiences develop a deeply embodied knowledge that enables the batter to respond instantaneously in a way that a novice simply cannot.

Schon calls for practice to be acknowledged as integral to knowing by arguing that practitioners know in action - that is, they deploy 'know-how' in action to match their skill with the variables of the context – a piano teacher who senses when a student plays a part wrongly and demonstrates the preferred way is using tacit knowledge and 'knows' how to adjust the playing for the student. I sense a strong link with Dreyfus's higher stages of skill acquisition which enable a proficient practitioner to intuitively read the context to know what is happening and an expert practitioner to intuitively know what response a situation requires.

Our knowing is in our action. And similarly, the workaday life of the professional practitioner reveals, in its recognitions, judgments and skills, a pattern of tacit knowing-in-action (Schon, 1992, p.).

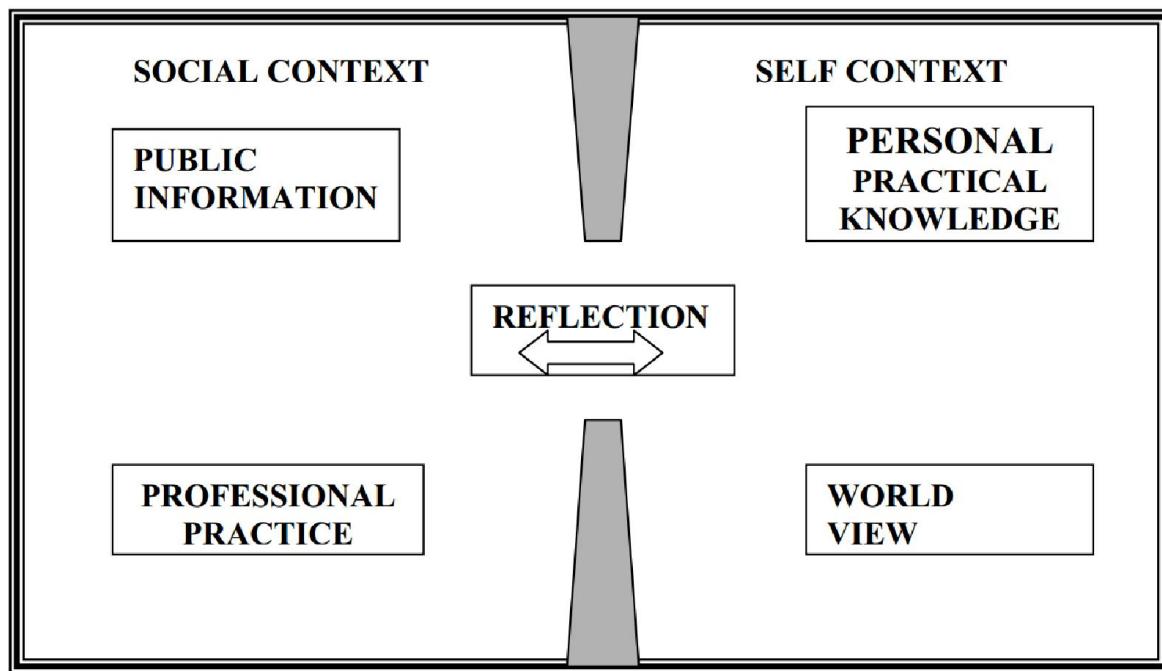
Schon's emphasis of knowing being in our action, seems to capture Burton's description of the actions of the elite, professional sportsperson who achieves a masterful level of expertise, which itself seems reminiscent of Dreyfus and Kelly's *meta-poiesis*. Schon emphasises how the concept of 'know-how' is more than a cognitive capacity, "know-how is in the action - that a tightrope walker's know-how, for example, lies in, and is revealed by, the way he takes his trip across the wire" (Schon, 1992, p. 56).

Adult learning researcher, Jim Butler, incorporates Schon's concept of knowing in action in his model of human action as he depicts (Butler, 1996, p. 270) in this diagram:



Butler's colleague, the same John Edwards whom I consulted to work in my school, explained to me (2011) how this model works. It describes two contexts for a practitioner: an internal context shaped by personal knowledge and the practitioner's world view; and an external context shaped by knowledge available to the practitioner and the range of professional practice observable in others. According to Edwards, a practitioner improves practice by drawing constantly on each of the four quadrants via the mediating role of ongoing, evaluative dialogue of reflecting in practice. For example, if my personal experience of 'effective' leaders is of charismatic demagogues, that is likely to influence my world view of what 'makes' good leaders. As I think more about that and observe other leaders and perhaps read biographies of leaders with those same characteristics, then all of that together, is likely reinforce my current practice and open up a path of similar thinking and action for me to follow in the future. However, should I experience an entirely different type of 'effective' leader, reflect on that and inquire into other examples and then research into that particular type of leading, I may well change my world view and be influenced sufficiently to change my practice.

Edwards explained to me (2011), how within a few years, as depicted below, ‘personal knowledge’ had been rebadged as ‘personal practical knowledge’ to acknowledge that a person’s ‘personal knowledge’ may be limited to a store of information held in the brain, whereas ‘personal practical knowledge’ focuses on what I know and can do. This appears to capture an essence of Dreyfus’s embodied skill and Schon’s knowledge in action. I liken this to the distinction of ‘knowing’ the theory of being able to ride a surfboard, with the capacity to actually ride a surfboard being something more.



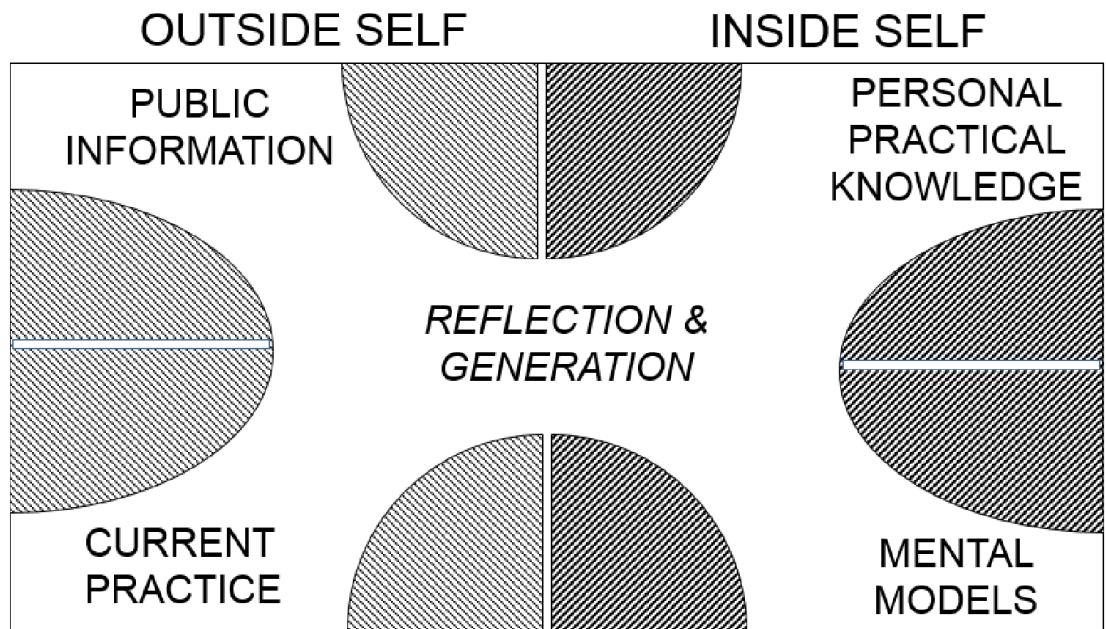
(Butler, Scott, & Edwards, 2002, p. 56)

Edwards explained further (2011) that within a few years more, through continuing reflecting in action on the model for action itself, two other quadrants had had a change of terminology also. Firstly, ‘mental models’ replaces ‘world view’ in order to convey a clearer meaning of what is intended, with ‘world view’ seeming more generalised, and with ‘mental models’ aligning referring to, “our values, beliefs and assumptions” (2011).

This current iteration of the model also sees ‘professional practice’ changed to ‘current practice’ to accommodate the emerging appreciation that the model might apply to all modes of human action, not just professional ones.

This version also introduces ‘generation’ in order, according to Edwards (2011), to emphasise the notion of reflecting being ‘in action’ rather than in a more passive sense of reflecting on action but without influencing future action. ‘Reflection and generation’ at

the heart of the model suggests that reflecting in action draws constantly on each of the four contextual sources of thinking depicted and then directly influences future courses of action. I imagine that, especially as a reflective practitioner phenomenologically reduces down their focus to ‘the thing itself’ and narrows the gap from Argyris’s ‘espoused theory’ and ‘theory in action’, the sort of iterative reflecting in action suggested by Butler’s model, may well support a practitioner advancing up the Dreyfus stages of skill acquisition.



(Edwards, 2008)

Having worked with this model over many years now, by ‘mapping’ my practice against it, I have come to appreciate more and more a hermeneutic perspective on its efficacy. I suspect that constantly reflecting in and on action over a lifetime of experience simultaneously shapes and is shaped by my mental models, out of which is distilled an accumulating personal practical knowledge, which continues being built by observing and reflecting on both the practice of others and the store of accessible information external to the self. Butler reinforces Schon’s sense of embodied knowledge by arguing that,

Personal practical knowledge is a store of knowledge and understanding attained through lived experience... [it] is distinct from the system of abstract knowledge ... [it] is excellent for this time and this context, it is designed for the now and the how. (Butler, 1996, p. 271)

Butler also rejects positivism and seems to reinforce Gadamer and Dreyfus's hermeneutical perspective about the primacy of context for making meaning of what is happening at any given moment,

The type of reasoning that confirms personal practical knowledge cannot be a reasoning that is universal, or ahistorical, or decontextualized. (Butler, 1996, p. 271)

Butler's thinking here seems very complementary with the early positive psychology researcher, Victor Frankl's view of there always being a choice in a moment – an almost non-temporal space – for selecting options which can shape subsequent developments (Frankl, 1959, pp. 74-75, 110, 124). It is also strongly echoed by Dreyfus's take on the Aristotelean notion of, "practical wisdom - the general ability to do the appropriate thing, at the appropriate time, in the appropriate way" (Dreyfus, 2009, p. 46). Practical wisdom scholar, Barry Schwartz, suggests similarly, that Aristotle's concept of practical wisdom can be described as,

... the combination of moral skill and moral will ... Real-world problems are often ambiguous and ill-defined and the context is always changing. A wise person is like a jazz musician - using the notes on the page, but dancing around them, inventing combinations that are appropriate for the situation and the people at hand. A wise person knows how to use these moral skills in the service of the right aims. (Schwartz, 2014, p. 2)

As I reflect on the connections I am drawing together here about how I might shape meaning of my leading, I see new connections with a model of learning that has grown in my thinking over recent years in my work, from teasing out with the teachers at my school our key, shared mental models about learning. It emerged from several professional workshops on the values that are most important to us as professionals and has served in building shared understandings and greater alignment of efforts in realising our vision. I find it affirming that it also captures very succinctly my perspective on reflecting in action. I acknowledge it was significantly influenced by Butler's model.

What emerged was a sense that 'knowing' may require a rigorous immersion in the moment, and may involve phenomenologically reducing a phenomenon to its core, bracketing as many biases and assumptions as possible, and then hermeneutically reflecting on what sits on my horizon of meaning as I gaze at it and shape understanding. A

belief also emerged that knowing, and certainly learning too, is constantly emerging in the ever-unfolding moment of the present and is never ‘complete’ – as variables change, so too does my knowing. It seems relational yet personal, dynamic, and deeply contextual.

Essentially, then, the model I am contemplating simply involves three elements which constantly interact together in my ongoing experience of the world and the meaning I construct from it. Implicit in it is a disposition to keep learning and seeking more knowledge. As I reflect on any experience, it seems that my beliefs shift slightly. For example if I am late for my train for the third time in a week, it seems that I will make some meaning of that: perhaps reinforcing how hopeless I am, or perhaps steeling my resolve not to be late again, or perhaps continuing to be indifferent to punctuality, or perhaps appreciating that missing the train enabled me to encounter an old friend. I imagine that the meaning I make of it triggers one or more of:

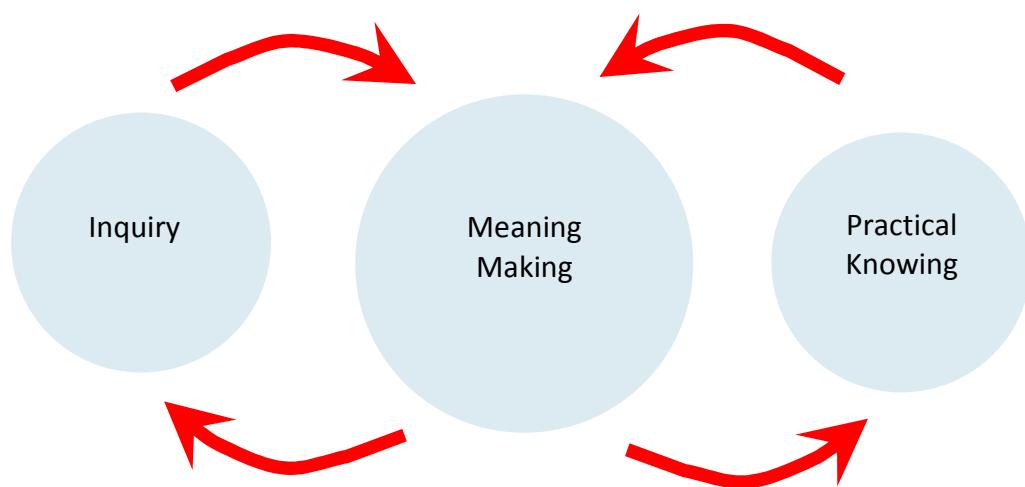
1. inquiring into some aspect of it (asking a question, becoming aware of a paradox or confusion which becomes apparent, anything that piques my curiosity about it),
2. the meaning I make of some aspect of that experience (an inference, assumption, conclusion, or new belief – all of which may influence my mental models towards it and influence my disposition towards or against it),
3. an action (the practice of my knowledge and skills, any attempt at doing, or any action).

Whether I begin by inquiring or doing, according to this model, I am always reflecting in action; I am always hermeneutically making meaning of what is happening and considering my options for next steps, as I then proceed with either further inquiring or further actions, in ongoing iterations of inquiring, making meaning, doing, making meaning, inquiring, making meaning, etc. I am not bound to alternate between inquiring and doing as I pass through the stage of making meaning. I may oscillate back and forth between inquiring and meaning making and/or attempt an action or, vice versa, I may oscillate between doing and making meaning and/or venture into inquiring. This configuration will be influenced by my skill level, dispositions and the context. If what I am envisaging were a three-dimensional model it might spiral upwards to represent growing ‘skill’ levels.

My intention is that the model captures the non-linearity and complexity of how practical knowing might be developed, so it is structured to accommodate an entry point of either wondering about something, or constructing meaning about it or attempting an action.

Wherever I might begin, I move to and from the outer two circles via the central one. For example, I may purchase a flatpack item of furniture, unpack it and attempt to assemble it without checking the instructions. As I am doing that I am constantly making meaning, assuming that my efforts are successful or not. Perhaps I oscillate constantly between ‘doing’ and ‘making meaning’ until the successful completion of the task. However, if at some point I make the meaning that I am ‘stuck’ I will then inquire – perhaps by consulting the instructions or asking someone else for help – and hopefully reach the point of making sufficient meaning to conclude I am back on track, at which point I will resume ‘doing’.

Morgan Model of Practical Knowledge



As I describe my model, what suddenly seems extremely important is that the speed of movement between the three modes is a blur, so fast that in real time they can often feel simultaneous, and certainly so fast that I am not aware of them and would be hard pressed to deconstruct them.

As I reflect on the uniqueness of every moment of the endless cycling-through of making meaning, inquiring and practical knowing, Schon’s varied topography of ‘high, hard ground and swampy lowlands of professional practice’, captures superbly the tensions and contradictions I have experienced throughout this inquiry about leadership and leading. On reflection, I am hoping that my model reflects the murky, swampy lowlands of rich context, rather than the remote, logical perspective afforded by objectifying distance.

So much of what I have encountered along the way about the nature and practice of leadership seems to sit on the high, hard ground. This seems to apply to most of what I have studied about leadership as style, behaviour or trait. I sense that elements of all of these are variously significant to a leader's leading, but I sense that any essence of leading is more likely to be found in Schon's 'messy swampland below', or in the intricacies of the Dreyfus expert's context, which both stand very much apart from technical rationality and is more apparent in the emergent messiness of knowing in the action of leading and the ever-building tacit knowledge a learning leader develops as he/she graduates through the Dreyfus stages of skill acquisition.

What I wonder significantly about now, is how I might cultivate a *meta-poiesis* type of leading in which I can grow in confidence that the fine, intuitive distinctions I make in my leading are virtuous and contributing to something worthy beyond myself. I recall Dreyfus and Kelly's caution that there is a thin line between the 'whooshing' excitement of a demagogue's rally and a football game.

Reflective practice in the moment of leading

Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful. (Margaret Wheatley, 2002)

The horizon of understanding I am yielding to now is suggesting that 'reflection', for this practitioner, largely concerns what is happening in this moment, more so than what has happened, or what I would like to happen. I suggest this because it seems the meaning I shape in the momentary present will influence the shape of meaning I find in the next moment.

I am increasingly aware of a troubling absence from my inquiry of ethical principles that guide my actions, behaviour, choices and decisions. If thinking and doing are of the head and hands, then the third point of this holistic trinity might be the heart. While I have reflected considerably on the driving force of my mental models and core values, I feel a need to explore further the domains of ethics and wisdom, especially since I am aware of often encountering situations with competing moral options. It seems the questions I ask at such times are more important than the answers I arrive at because the questions may help

uncover key ethical considerations and shine light onto blind spots or reveal assumptions and bias. The ethicist and leadership scholar Joanne Ciulla, suggests that,

Leadership ... is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good. Ethics is about how we distinguish between right and wrong, or good and evil in relation to the actions, volitions, and character of human beings. Ethics lie at the heart of all human relationships and hence at the heart of the relationship between leaders and followers. (Ciulla, 2004, p. xv)

While I have addressed earlier some aspects of the nature and source of influence in an influence relationship, I think that ethical considerations might stretch beyond that relationship in matters of leadership. How does one know that the agreed mutual purpose or vision is a worthy one, a good one or a wise one? The correctness of any moral perspective seems so bound by context, even within shared, cross-cultural beliefs such as in not killing other humans except, in some contexts, in war, self-defence, abortion, or voluntary euthanasia. Closer to home in my role as a school principal, there are countless examples of situations with no 'obvious' ethical pathway forward. A few examples:

- The immigrant parent of a Moslem girl, himself a doctor, came to me to warn me about the repercussions for all if his sons exact vengeance on a boy in his daughter's class who had been sexually harassing her. He urged me to apply the most serious sanctions at my disposal otherwise he might not be able to stop his sons for what, in his culture, he told me was a 'blood issue'.
- Innumerable cases of two students involved in the same misdemeanour. For one it is the latest in a long line of similar offences with numerous opportunities for redemption; for the other it is his/her first offence. Should they receive the same consequence? Not many parents of children in the first category agree they should be treated differentially.
- Two senior teachers on the same pay scale already have disparate workloads due to one's energy, positive dispositions and competence while the other is typically 'too busy', already feels overworked and chronically tired, and rarely completes tasks satisfactorily. A new responsibility emerges – which one do I ask to take it on?
- Growing awareness of a teacher's underperformance. What do I do to address this?

I suspect that if I have a set of rules to which I can readily refer then choosing a correct course of action might be relatively straightforward – which is how I reflect it feels at the novice and advanced beginner stages of Dreyfus's model of skill acquisition. However, when the rules do not seem to cover every contingency and when a decision needs to be made in-action, it seems the reliability of making a virtuous response is exceedingly more challenging. I imagine that my capacity to do this might be developed gradually as I ascend the Dreyfus stages of skill acquisition. I suspect that, with a philosophical leaning towards truthfulness, a person's core values are likely to influence the intuitive response in a moment when there may not be sufficient time to ethically weigh up options.

I have a hunch from my experience that actively reflecting on intuitive responses, and the values which may have played a role in shaping them, might gradually shape a hierarchy of personal values, based on which ones prove to be the most influential.

Even so, I am nervous about claiming some sense of ethically-privileged insight into the values I hold. Perhaps there may be more to virtuous leading.

Some challenges to the virtuous practice of leading

All the soarings of my mind begin in my blood. (Rainer Maria Rilke, in BrainyQuotes, 2014)

Ethical practice seems deeply embedded in context and culture, and I am aware of a great scourge it sometimes seems to suffer from: expedience. While I understand that a Kantian perspective might never allow for a noble and worthy end or goal to be achieved by otherwise abhorrent means, I am aware also of the Utilitarian perspective, which would see the means that one chose being acceptable, so long as the eventual benefits outweigh the costs. I am not raising this to explore the relative merits of each position, but to clarify that many ethical issues of leadership are murky and messy, and take place in Schon's 'swampland', and require something more than high levels of practical knowledge as so far outlined.

Before I dare to try to give shape to an emerging sense of virtuous leadership practice, I seek deeper insight into how I might make my way through the murk and messiness of the low swamplands to choose ethically and wisely between multiple options in my leading.

What I am trying to describe, I think, is something akin to Aristotle's sense of, "Practical wisdom — knowledge of how to secure the ends of human life" (2009, p. 105). Aristotle incorporates pursuit of a sense of 'what is good' into 'practical wisdom' as, "a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man" (2009, p. 106). For Aristotle, practical wisdom is an intellectual virtue in a similar way to the related character-oriented moral virtues he describes, with its role being to guide decisions and action towards what is 'good'. In this sense, rather than being an acquired knowledge of preferable ethical actions, it is more an intuitive resourcefulness of mind that responds in particular circumstances.

Aristotle also suggests that practical wisdom guides *praxis*, the actual action and which incorporates a moral disposition behind it to act truly. He believes *praxis* needs constant practice to be habituated. Committing to such 'good action' then serves as an end in itself and, when deployed with practical wisdom, sees 'good means' pursuing 'good ends' (2009, pp. 103-104).

Aristotle seems to be describing a deeply embodied skill of knowing what is right according to a particular context and then doing it, combining a sense of pragmatic, contextual action governed by virtues, a sort of enacted moral excellence. Developing a capacity for practical wisdom would seem to be an on-going process of growth and development from reflexive inquiry, deliberation, and 'good' actions in everyday lived experience.

I hear discernible echoes here of Dreyfus and Kelly's reference to *meta-poiesis*. I stop to reflect that 'personal practical knowledge' perhaps describes those things I know and can do. 'Practical wisdom' seems to be almost a subset of this, being that which I can do and which I seek to do for virtuous reasons and which will produce 'good' outcomes.

As I reflect on this I am inspired by the challenge of finding a 'good' means to achieving a 'good' end in my leading. When I reflect on how I consciously answer that very question in my work, when confronted by competing options, I am encouraged to realise I go to the values I sense should guide me. In my professional work I usually fall back on what seems genuinely in the best interests of students and their learning. I usually then consider actions designed to meet that criterion, and try to do so in a way that is respectful to others and

which preserves the dignity of all involved, with a focus on learning for all, and an utter absence of any sense of blame, guilt or wrongdoing. As I write this, I recognise that I am essentially mapping out the same source of guidance as I outlined about fidelity of influence, which I suggested is the object of the influence relationship.

I usually start with what I now appreciate might be a phenomenological reduction of ‘what is important here – what is fundamentally at stake?’ I sometimes feel a strong emotional conflict between what may feel ‘right’ but which might extend beyond the limits of my professional discretion, or I may be aware I am being influenced in my thinking by factors extraneous to the matter at hand (perhaps by a student’s aggression or civility, an assumption based on prior experience, or what may reflect best on me). I aim to reduce the impact of such thinking by actively querying myself about whether I am scaling a ladder of inference, by challenging my assumptions and what they are based on, by trying to look beyond established patterns of behaviour, and perhaps especially by reflecting deeply on key values upon which I am really basing my proposed course of action. Sometimes I seek a trained and trusted colleague to coach me through my thinking, to help me mediate my thinking and to ensure that my theory-in-practice closely matches my espoused theory. And sometimes there are several options which may lead to a mutually satisfactory outcome; this is where it seems a capacity for making fine distinctions accumulated from rich experience and reflection over time, may enable a practitioner to achieve a worthy end by good means, given the nuances of any given context.

I try to draw on this thinking during the myriad examples I encounter daily in my work, such as a teacher who asks to come in late for personal business reasons, a teacher who wants to be excused from a meeting in order to attend to something urgent, a student who has reacted violently to harassment, a student beseeching me not to tell parents about a misdemeanour, a parent who defends a child’s inappropriate behaviour, or a senior bureaucrat who insists on a meeting at a very inconvenient time.

A vignette from my experience comes to mind here which I think illustrates some of my thinking. Julie was a teacher at my school. She was well-qualified and newly appointed to my school having just acquired permanent tenure as a teacher at a previous school. It very quickly became apparent that Julie was struggling professionally: although she cultivated appropriate relationships with students individually, and although she could make significant contributions to professional conversations with her colleagues about curriculum and pedagogy, it became very clear very quickly that she had minimal capacity

to implement her knowledge into effective, professional practice in the classroom. Nevertheless, after consulting with her immediate supervisor, I decided to not be too hasty and to give her time to find her feet in a new school. However, casual visits to her classroom kept reinforcing though that a crisis was growing. Over a period of several weeks complaints from students started being lodged, followed by complaints from parents. Students were confused about their learning program and frustrated by disorder in the classroom. From our conversations together and with her, her immediate supervisor and I sadly concluded that far from having a planned curriculum in place from which she was strategically working, her program consisted of loosely assembled fragments of activities and strategies which she picked up on from colleagues, with minimal substance or rigour behind them.

As this situation unfolded I quickly concluded that, in the interests of students and their learning, I needed to intervene. I formed a premise that things would not improve left to themselves and so I would need to discuss the matter directly with her. I talked through my thinking and options with a trusted colleague who coached me to a point of my deciding that in the proposed meeting with her the ‘end’ that I would be pursuing would be an outcome that better addressed the learning needs of students, and so I decided that in the meeting I would outline my concerns and their basis, and explore with her options for improving the situation. In my mind I felt confused and frustrated that our ‘system’ could have given permanency to a teacher with such minimal competence, though also resolved that I would offer every support I could to enable her to reach a more satisfactory standard of professional practice, and I imagined that if that worked, all would be good and that if it failed I would need to initiate formal proceedings to determine incapacity which might ultimately lead to ‘termination’. I had no preconceived idea how the situation might progress but in terms of the ‘means’ I resolved to run the meeting in a way that, while making clear the goal and the necessity for it, I would do so in a way that would remain respectful towards her and in a way which would preserve her dignity.

I began the meeting with a genuine greeting and then sat next to her and, with my coached and rehearsed line said, “Thank you for coming in, Julie. I’ve asked you here to talk about a situation I have become aware of which I believe is unsustainable.” I paused momentarily as I saw the anguish that expressed itself on her face, then continued, “Over the past four weeks I began to sense that you may have been struggling in your role as a classroom teacher. At first I put that sense to one side while I waited to see what might happen. While

I had a ‘sense’ that things were not right I also thought it would be unfair to raise with you something which is just an impression I had. However, over the last week or so that sense has strengthened following concerns from six students and three parents, all expressing frustration with the learning program.”

Julie seemed genuinely surprised and was clearly genuinely distressed by this. She asked for more details so I obliged and filled her in on the specifics of the complaints. I then asked, “What do you make of these concerns from students and parents, Julie?” She began to respond to each one in turn and explained the lack of co-operation of each individual student concerned and the unreasonableness of the parents. I let her finish and responded with, “I understand that’s how you feel, Julie. And in many cases students and parents can be mischievous and can make real trouble for an unsuspecting teacher acting in good faith, as I believe you have done. Even so, when there is a continuing flow of concern from students and parents, such as is currently happening, it could suggest something else – it could suggest that there is an underlying issue with the teaching or learning program that has to be addressed. And while I’m not assuming that’s the case here, would you agree it’s worth considering?” She nodded in agreement. I continued, “I would like us to look into exactly what is the basis of the concerns and then to see what we can do to address them.” I knew for Julie’s sake I needed to close the meeting quickly – she was barely keeping tears at bay, so I finished with, “okay, Julie, so I think you’ll need a little time to process all of this. How about I give you a few days and then we meet again to work out a plan together of where we go from here?”

Julie went home that day and called in sick the next day, and then for several days afterwards. After a week or so she contacted me and asked if we could meet. She came in looking relaxed and content, and told me she had just resigned. She was very composed and looked confident in a way I realised I had not seen before, and told me she had suspected more and more for some time that she was not cut out to be a teacher and that my meeting with her had brought her own concerns to a head, the result of which was that she realised that teaching was not for her. She confessed that turning up to her class each day had been an enormously draining charade which was now over; she felt a new sense of freedom and had enrolled in training for a very different career. When we finished the meeting she shook my hand and smiled, genuinely thanking me for the professional, respectful and dignified way she felt treated by me.

As Julie left, I knew I could have confronted her sooner and more expediently, however, in a typically busy day I felt a few precious moments of poignant affirmation: I had been clear about my ‘good’ goal in this process and also on the ‘good’ means I would utilise. The outcome was about as successful as I could have hoped for; we were able to appoint a replacement teacher and there were no more complaints from students or parents. On top of that, Julie was appreciative of a process that preserved her dignity and enabled her to disengage appreciatively from an unsustainable situation.

I suspect that on the occasions when I intuitively ‘know’ what to do in-action, this embodied knowledge has grown from iterative, ongoing experiences and reflection of similar experiences, constantly trying to refine my judgement and capacity to make decisions and take action in line with what I believe, value and intend.

This vignette featuring Julie also helps me appreciate that, to me, there is no contest between means and ends: a virtuous goal or end achieved through means which might be compromised by a sense of being less than ‘good’, would feel to me, a very hollow achievement. It highlights for me the duality of practical wisdom and the other virtues advocated by Aristotle. As I consider this further I appreciate that I have a range of options at each instant of every moment and I strive to make my selection based on key, personal values which I believe are important to me – values which I espouse to myself and which I strive to demonstrate through my actions. I am reminded here of my earlier inquiring into values and their central role in a human system’s capacity for self-organising. Again, I find Aristotle’s concept of the mean useful in helping me clarify what those key values are and how I arrive at them.

According to Aristotle scholar, Christopher Shields, Aristotle’s sense of a virtue is an,

... acquired but entrenched condition of character, achieved through guided development and habituation... which presupposes prior deliberation... [and] which eventuates in decisive action” (Shields, 2007, p. 326).

This seems to capture what I have been coming to understand from both Schon and Dreyfus: an intentionally-developed skill of taking pragmatic action guided by values or virtues which aims at progress towards virtuous outcomes.

Aristotle also describes virtuous behaviour as a mean between extremes of deficiency and excess,

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of what it is, i.e. the definition which states its essence, virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme. (Aristotle, 2009, p. 31)

Aristotle is also describing here the pre-eminence he reserves for practical reason above all the other virtues, suggesting in fact that without well-developed practical reason, the other virtues would be lived to excess or in deficit, and would become vices.

Shields (2007, p. 327) highlights how the precise manifestation of that mean, in action, is very much dependent on contextual circumstances. And while the balance point for the mean may be relative according to the specifics of a context, a wise person will exercise practical wisdom to arrive at the virtue, the mean, in just the right way. Aristotle cites examples such as courage being the mean between cowardice and rashness; as moderation lying between self-indulgence and self-deprivation; of generosity lying between wastefulness and miserliness.

I pause here to consider what Aristotle's thoughts might contribute to trying to shape a hermeneutic perspective on embodied leadership skills. It seems that Aristotle is tracing something akin to a phenomenological, eidetic reduction of the concept of 'virtue'. He seems to suggest there is an essence of virtue that, as humans, we can universally recognise. At the same time, given his emphasis on the location of the virtue's mean, between its deficient form and excessive form, depending on the specific variables of a given context, it might also suggest something of a hermeneutic process of shaping meaning in a given context. As I strive towards shoring up the 'good' in my influence relationships, it seems there is a necessary place for virtue.

Seeking an aesthetic of leadership virtue

We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. (Aristotle, in Durant, 1962, p. 74)

I am keen to seek deeper understanding about finding wisdom in my leading. I wish to inquire into how I might achieve confidence that whatever heights of leadership I might aspire to, that I am doing so with practical wisdom and virtue in accord; in this sense, that my leading is ‘good’. While I reject a proposition that might suggest an objective standard for the mean of any virtue, I sense there may be a fundamental, universally recognisable, human essence of these means.

Kant seemed to be making precisely this point in his analysis of judgements of aesthetic beauty; that far from beauty being in the eye of the beholder, he suggests there is a similar essence of beauty which we can learn to perceive, independently of subjective, human judgements about what constitutes beauty,

... despite the standard of comparison being merely subjective, the claim of the judgement is nonetheless one to universal agreement; the judgements: ‘That man is beautiful’ and ‘He is tall’ do not purport to speak only for the judging subject, but, like theoretical judgements, they demand the assent of everyone. (Kant, 2007, p. 79)

Kant seems to be describing an almost phenomenological essence of beauty which eludes us in its totality but which is nevertheless universally recognisable when its elements are apparent, and largely seems to be to do with Classical and Enlightenment perspectives of balance and symmetry creating an appealing sense of aesthetic harmony in which,

... the subjective conditions of judging objects forms the sole foundation of this universal subjective validity of the delight which we connect with the representation of the object that we call beautiful. (Kant, 2007 49)

Kant’s sense of ‘universal subjective validity’ of beauty seems, in a very similar way to Aristotle’s treatment of virtues and wisdom, to suggest a wholeness which is not empirically or objectively demonstrable, but which we can come to grasp and know in an experientially-iterative, contextually-informed, embodied way.

Aristotle argued that the highest 'good' a human can aspire to is happiness,

... what remains is to discuss in outline the nature of happiness, since this is what we state the end of human affairs to be. (2009, p. 192)

And,

... what is the highest of all goods achievable by action? Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness. (2009, p. 5)

In the Introduction to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics translator David Ross highlights that 'happiness' is actually a limited translation of the Greek '*eudaimonia*' (2009, p. x). It seems that something may be lost in that translation because Aristotle appears to be talking about something far more than happiness in a hedonistic or momentary sense. It seems to evoke more of a state, and ensuing actions, in which those attributes which are unique to us as humans are at their highest expression,

... happiness... we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honour, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself.

(2009, p. 10)

Throughout the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle also highlights the role of those highest, human capacities of judgement and reason, for example -

... a man of understanding and of good or sympathetic judgement consists in being able to judge about the things with which practical wisdom is concerned; for what is equitable is the common concern of all good men in their dealings with others. (Aristotle, 2009, p. 113)

Considering these elements together seems to clarify that for Aristotle then, the highest good for people is an end in itself, devoid of being sought for some other end; it is more than a state we are in – it involves action, and it must have a wholeness in itself, a self-sufficiency. Moreover, happiness, or at least *eudaimonia*, also engages humans in that function that sets them apart from other creatures: rational activity. He describes this

highest human good as rational actions performed in accordance with virtue. (Aristotle, 2009, p. 12)

Aristotle's *eudaimonia* seems to embrace an implied sense of pragmatic judgement of action in context, indeed, one might say knowing-in-action, in the moment, around what will lead to 'good' consequences. Considering this in my emerging sense of embodied leadership knowledge brought me to contemporary positive psychology research by Martin Seligman (2011) and his a concept of 'authentic happiness' or 'flourishing' which he acknowledges derives from *eudaimonia*.

Aristotle suggests wisdom is concerned,

... with the first causes and that which is in the highest sense object of knowledge, the science of substance must be of the nature of Wisdom. (2008, p. 31)

This suggestion of wisdom being the highest form of knowledge is elaborated by Shields who describes how Aristotle believed that a wise person, "is able to grasp what is in fact true about what is good or bad for a human being" (Shields, 2007, p. 327). This seems to suggest that when people exercise the sort of context-based, virtuous judgement he envisages, it becomes wisdom when a person's accumulated experiences of 'good' judgements become reliable for leading to 'good'- *eudaimonically* - outcomes. For Aristotle, then, a 'good' life for humans seems a life expressly striving to develop further those features which make us distinctively human.

Mark Strom, (In Thompson & Bevan, 2013, pp. 85-100) researcher into the scholarly works of Paul of Tarsus, criticises Aristotle's virtues and suggests we heed the contributions of Paul. The major limitation of Aristotle's perspective on virtues and wisdom is that, "Aristotle's virtues read to us like those attributes whose practice (*habitus*) could transform any manager into a leaders of great character and influence" (In Thompson & Bevan, 2013, p. 88). While reducing Aristotle's virtues to a set of personality traits may be a little harsh, Strom goes on to argue that the knowledge advocated by Paul was intrinsically relational, "Paul positioned *agape* (love) as profoundly other-centred; in this sense it was the antithesis of *arête* (virtue)" (In Thompson & Bevan, 2013, p. 93). Strom emphasises that this sense of love sits at the heart Paul's relational epistemology rather than intending a moral perspective.

What Strom highlights for me is that I suspect the goodness I seek in my leading may only partially be realised by my aspiring to a set of Aristotelian virtues, and that what might enable me to make wise distinctions of worth with a *meta-poiesis* type of embodied skill, is somehow connected relationally to others in context, and a sense of worthiness that transcends my own personal goals or aspirations.

My ‘Julie vignette’ helps me appreciate that I am forming an emerging understanding of virtuous practical wisdom which seems to embody a synthesis between actions I have the capacity to take, what I ‘know’ is right or good, and what I reflect-in-action will best take me towards my goal. I must make an admission at this point though: I acknowledge that my cognitive processes during the vignette about Julie were nowhere nearly as virtuous as I intimate. As I read it again now, it reads as if I am operating from an almost holy sense of selfless, noble spirit with utter clarity about purpose, goal, values and means. The reality was quite different, and I am reminded of Schon’s ‘swampy lowlands’. When the deficits in Julie’s professional practice first became apparent, I recall a whole suite of conflicting and disparate emotions and thoughts: I felt annoyed, disappointed and frustrated that I would have to divert precious time and energy from other matters to addressing her situation; I felt let down by the broader employment processes within the Department that someone with such limited capacity could ‘slip through’; I felt nervous about how the situation might pan out over time and how that might reflect on me personally and professionally; I felt ill-equipped to deal effectively with the situation. I was attributing this situation to Julie and to the Department and saw myself as something of a potential – if not actual – victim. Basically, I just wanted the problem to go away so that I did not have to deal with it.

Robert Quinn writes about this and describes how all of us have an inherent hypocrisy (2004, p. 24). He suggests, “we tend to be comfort centered, externally driven, self-focused, and internally closed” (2004, p. 22), but pretend the opposite. This is strongly reminiscent of Arygris’s defensive reasoning. I am attracted to the honesty of a state of leadership Quinn describes which seems very consistent with Aristotle’s state of virtue –

... it is possible for anyone, no matter how high or low their position, to enter the extraordinary state which I call the fundamental state of leadership. In this state, we become results centered, internally directed, other-focused, and externally open. (Quinn, 2004, p. ix)

Quinn is alluding to a state of personal authenticity which, when I inquired further into the concept, I discovered can be perilous.

The siren voice of authenticity

Authenticity is the alignment of head, mouth, heart, and feet - thinking, saying, feeling, and doing the same thing - consistently. (Lance Secretan, 2010) (Lance Secretan, 2010, p. 113)

Quinn's suggestion of our fundamental hypocrisy captures mixed emotions I feel at those times when I am challenged to find a virtuous path. When he describes that we have the capacity to transcend this, he also seems to capture Aristotle's view that finding that path requires being in a state that can be learned, and which drives actions for desired outcomes. He also seems to be strongly alluding to closing the gap between Argyris's concept of espoused theory and theory-in-use.

We begin to transcend our own hypocrisy, closing the gap between who we think we are and who we think we should be. In this process of victory over self, we feel more integrity, and we feel more whole. Our values and behavior are becoming more congruent. (Quinn, 2004 22)

This indeed sounded like the type of virtuous behaviour Aristotle describes – actions which stem from virtue and honourable motives, rather than appearing as that while masking more expedient, self-serving motives. As I explored Quinn further, I was struck by the italicised sentence in the following quotation (my italics) -

To be authentic is to be genuine, actual, legitimate, true, real, pure, and uncorrupted. *We become authentic by being true to what is highest in us.* We do this by committing to live by principle, to do what is right even when it is not pleasurable. In the normal state, we flee pain and pursue pleasure. It is unnatural to do otherwise. Yet when we make fundamental commitments, we are choosing to be unnatural. We choose, if our commitment requires it, to embrace pain and sacrifice pleasure. We become positive deviants... (Quinn, 2004, p. 118)

I initially had no immediate clarity about what ‘being true to what is highest in us’ means, beyond a sense of strongly ethical behaviour. I was also intrigued by the sense of ‘authenticity’, so much so that I initially pondered that perhaps who I am as a leader is an ‘authentic person’, and I was keen to explore what that may mean. I had been assuming ‘authenticity’ is a desirable quality, perhaps by association in common usage with being pure or original, as opposed to being artificial or lacking transparency.

This initial impression was reinforced by the popular texts on leadership I began accessing which all essentially describe personal authenticity and/or authentic leadership as an alignment between what one thinks, believes and does:

To be authentic is literally to be your own author... to discover your own native energies and desires, and then to find your own way of acting on them... then no matter what happens, you have played the game that was natural for you to play. (Bennis, 2009, p. 47)

Authentic leadership means to know oneself, to be consistent with one self... Such leaders are transparent with their values and beliefs. They are honest with themselves and with others. (Avolio, 2008, p. 197)

... [a profound personal experience can trigger the opening of a whole other dimension of emerging self], a coming into being of a new self, the essential or the authentic self that connects us with who we really are. (Scharmer, 2007, p. 187)

You can only be authentic when you lead according to the principles that matter most to you. Otherwise you’re just putting on an act. (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 50)

Personal congruence of belief, statement, and action is often called authenticity. (King, Altman, & Lee, 2011, p. 84)

Authenticity—or, more precisely the lack thereof — lies near the heart of the crisis of confidence in contemporary corporate leadership. (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 419)

... leaders are authentic to the extent that they act and justify their actions on the basis of the meaning system provided by their life-stories. (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 396)

Authenticity implies that one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings. (Michie & Gooty, 2005, p. 442)

Authentic leaders are those that are true to themselves. (Hansen, Ropo, & Sauer, 2007, p. 550)

Authentic leaders whose actions are consistent with their own beliefs are likely to have more influence on followers in part because followers interpret authenticity as evidence of reliability of the leader. (Fields, 2007, p. 195)

The one essential quality a leader must have is to be your own person, authentic in every regard. The best leaders are autonomous and highly independent... My advice to the people I mentor is simply to be themselves. (George, 2003, p. 12)

To say someone is authentic means at least two things: First, they are honest with themselves about what is and is not in their control... Second, they take full responsibility for the direction of their lives and try to make transparent the meaning and purpose of what they do. (White & Arp, 2008, p. 200)

... the authentic self, [is] the self which has explicitly grasped itself. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 130)

The antithesis to this is perhaps what Palmer refers to as what happens when we 'succumb to fear and frenzy, greed and deceit, and indifference to the suffering of others' which sees us living a 'divided life' (2004, p. 1),

... so far removed from the truth we hold within that we cannot know 'the integrity that comes from being what you are'. (2004, p. 4)

Throughout this study I had anticipated that I might add my voice to those who call for people to seek greater 'authenticity'. Just as Polonius counsels Laertes : "This above all - to thine own self be true" (Shakespeare, 1600 Act 1, Scene 3), I had been forming a view that authenticity is perhaps the noblest state of ethical being.

I certainly recognise in myself a creeping feeling of ethical unease when I sense my thoughts, words or deeds strike in directions which I know are not lined up with what I hold to be 'true'. I felt that authenticity, as outlined in the series of quotations above, suggests a

higher wholeness or perhaps that sense of Quinn's call to reach for what is highest in us. In the foreword to one of his works, George says, "let me offer my personal welcome to you in your desire to become an authentic leader and to follow your True North" (George, 2007, p. xvii), seemingly suggesting that being 'true to yourself' is the means of ensuring virtuous leadership.

I thought similarly until I reflected on Charles Taylor's great caveat based on what troubles and perplexes us about modern society, and which seems to suggest that conceptions of 'authenticity' have progressively diminished over many decades, if not recent centuries. He describes how this is a result of three malaises of contemporary western society, the first being individualism,

Modern freedom was won by our breaking loose from older moral horizons.

People used to see themselves as part of a larger order... People no longer have a sense of a higher purpose, of something worth dying for... the dark side of individualism is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society (C. Taylor, 1991, 2-4).

For Taylor then, individualism has led to a profound loss of purpose in people's lives, such that individuals tend to be focused on 'good' for self, rather than 'good' for others or society. Taylor's second malaise of contemporary western society is,

... the primacy of instrumental reason. By 'instrumental reason' I mean the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio, is its measure of success. (C. Taylor, 1991, p. 5)

In echoes of Dreyfus and Kelly's perspective on the universal 'truths' of the Axial and modern ages, Taylor describes how, in earlier times, there was a sacred structure prescribed by the church and reinforced by established social order. He is concerned that despite instrumental reason liberating us from artificial strictures, he is fearful that, "the independent ends that ought to be guiding our lives will be eclipsed by the demand to maximize output" (1991, p. 5).

Taylor's third malaise is a political one; a consequence of individualism and instrumental reason. It is a popular withdrawal from the democratic process because people,

... will prefer to stay at home and enjoy the satisfactions of private life, as long as the government of the day produces the means to these satisfactions and distributes them widely. (C. Taylor, 1991, 9)

Taylor summarises his three concerns as the rise of a “culture of narcissism” (1991, p. 11). And while he acknowledges that people have perhaps always felt pressure to compromise what is important to them,

... what gets lost... is the moral force of the ideal of authenticity. It is somehow being implicitly discredited... That the espousal of authenticity takes the form of a kind of soft relativism means that the vigorous defence of any moral ideal is somehow off limits (C. Taylor, 1991, 17).

Taylor argues that while being true to oneself can be a valid basis for a value system, this goes far beyond simple, subjective, navel-gazing, self-indulgence, egoism or moral laxness. He outlines a proposition that we cannot know what we are ‘about’ by looking only within; we need to also make reference to factors beyond us. We begin this through dialogue with others. While he acknowledges we should not stop listening to ourselves, we should also be more critical about the truth we think we hear.

What Taylor seems to be exposing here, is an unfortunate impact of what seems like a strong cultural tradition of the ethical primacy of an introspective type of authenticity: a conceit around people deluding themselves that their subjective, authentic views hold a privileged position of insight and ‘rightness’ over and above other people’s.

Heidegger scholar, Taylor Carman (in Dreyfus, 2007b, p. 291) relates Heidegger’s perspective on authenticity which tries to overcome any taint of subjectivity. While it retains Quinn’s notion of being true to what is highest in us, Heidegger’s sense of authenticity, suggests a type of phenomenological reduction of what is being considered and then taking full responsibility for responding to it honestly.

Heidegger highlights the huge challenge this presents because of our inherent tendency towards “falling prey” (1996, pp. 175-180) to voices beyond our own that beckon us like sirens away from truthful thought and behaviour, away from an authentic perspective firmly rooted in our own deep, personal values.

It seems that ‘falling prey’ is perhaps what Dreyfus and Kelly were alluding to (2011) when they describe the thin line between being swept up by the inspiring fervour of a Martin

Luther King civil rights rally and being swept up by the more sinister fervour of a racist Nazi rally. While both elicit the awe of witnessing extraordinary, elite human performance, only one might capture a sense of *meta-poiesis*, with the Nazi example illustrating what happens from Heidegger's perspective when the human spirit 'falls prey' to the lifestyle or mood of others.

This state of 'falleness' can seduce us away from a sacred, *meta-poiesis* type of pursuit of the extraordinary which serves others. Heidegger describes this (1996, pp. 121-122) in his distinction between the 'authentic self' and the 'they-self', which is the 'they' of conventional wisdom; the voice of, 'they say you shouldn't drink and drive'. He says when we follow the 'they-self' instead of thinking or acting for ourselves we just accept what the anonymous 'they' of society say.

Falling prey to the "world" means being absorbed in being-with-one-another as it is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 164)

Taylor offers what appears a very helpful perspective for avoiding this by suggesting that beyond every individual's sense of what is right or good or preferable lie horizons of significance which extend our feeling of authenticity by connecting it to a sense of significance beyond ourselves,

... the general lesson is that authenticity can't be defended in ways that collapse inescapable horizons of significance... independent of my will there is something noble, courageous, and hence significant in giving shape to my own life. (C. Taylor, 1991, pp. 38-39)

Taylor describes his view of how our horizons of significance were gradually displaced in our culture by individualism and instrumental reason with the rise of logical positivism and the emergence of naturalism, "the ambition to model the study of man on the natural sciences" (1985, p. 1). He elaborates,

This picture is deeply attractive to moderns, both flattering and inspiring. It shows us as capable of achieving a kind of disengagement from our world by objectifying it... the great shift in cosmology which occurred in the seventeenth century... of the universe as mechanism, was the founding objectification, the source and inspiration for the continuing development of a disengaged modern consciousness. (Taylor 1985b, 4-5)

Taylor seems to be suggesting that this is the source of the deep-seated malaise he describes because it casts a whole different perspective on authenticity: ‘good’ is reduced to being a mere personal projection onto a world which is inherently values-neutral (1989, p. 53), leaving us to draw the inference that if the world is values-free, the only source of values is the self and that therefore, being authentic means being true to oneself alone.

Taylor describes an irony inherent in shunning ‘horizons of significance’ in pursuit of an authenticity of being ‘true’ to self,

... to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters. Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands. (C. Taylor, 1991, p. 40)

Taylor’s key point appears to be that true authenticity extends beyond being purely self-referential to also recognise our horizons of significance — those larger contexts and influences beyond the self which contribute to ‘who’ a person is. These might include a person’s sense of personal connection with a larger political, social, cultural, historical, or religious community of meaning.

Taylor’s observation of the contemporary world though, is that authenticity is no longer ordered to anything other than self. It seems that Taylor sees a consequence of this is the individual assuming a new kind of autonomy. And rather than horizons of significance having intrinsic meaning, the whole cosmos, to Taylor, seems now ordered to the dispositions of the individual.

I am grateful to Taylor as his horizons of significance offer me a frame of reference for seeking personal guidance on what is ‘good’ in a post-Axial, post-Modern age which in place of universal truths might otherwise only offer a narcissistic subjective, instrumental reason. I will now seek to clarify my understanding of my horizons of significance and how I might incorporate them into my virtuous practical wisdom of leading.

Leadership ‘horizons of significance’

It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition. (Hans Georg Gadamer, in 2004, p. 272)

As I reflect on Taylor’s treatment of authenticity, it seems to me that much of the current thinking on authentic leadership I inquired into is self-referential. Perhaps Hitler was being true to himself. Without reference to something ‘higher’ beyond the self, I now appreciate what seems a folly for me to assume that I am being virtuous so long as I am being ‘true to myself’. I am drawn to Taylor’s notion of authenticity being a ‘truth’ of self in connection with others; of being true to self and to one’s wider horizons of significance; and that this type of ‘connected’ authenticity might serve as a bulwark against malaises of our time such as individualism and instrumental reason.

From a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective, this resonates strongly for me, because of my sense that I am in the world and of it, and not apart from it. Every belief and mental model I live by, conscious and unconscious, I believe has been shaped by my being in the world – I was not born with them. All of these mental models are consequential of my being in the world; and that being in the world involves intimate interaction with other people and our traditions and customs, and with our environment; my life has taught me which ones to follow. My unique configuration of mental models has been shaped by my unique experience of the world.

And as I ponder how much of a child of individualism and instrumental reason I might be, I wonder about how I have settled on one mental model over another, how I have been drawn to some mental models over others – and to what extent my behaviour has been virtuous and authentic, as a person and as a leader. I sense I must continue to acknowledge that I constantly find myself entangled in Schon’s ‘swampy lowlands’ where life is messy and a virtuous path ahead is anything but clear, all of which also has me seeking the safe havens of looking after myself and serving my own interests.

As explored through my reflections on ‘Julie’ above, no matter how much I might enjoy the warm glow of feeling honourable and virtuous, I have come to appreciate that indeed I am very much mired in those swampy lowlands in the world, where honour and virtue are not always immediately obvious, let alone achieved. Though I am not an automaton

programmed into permanent selflessness, I am nevertheless drawn to a notion of horizons of significance beyond myself.

As I consider this a little more, it seems that most self-referential goals I set myself lack something and ultimately feel like unsustainable luxuries and self-indulgences, the pleasure from which, soon dissipates. This applies not just to ‘treats’ like a delightful dinner party, avoiding an unenjoyable task, or a relaxing afternoon of fishing, but also extends to longer term projects such as a personal fitness ‘kick’ or a savings plan, or landing the dream job.

On the other hand, by reaching towards what is highest in me to contribute something to others, I sense that what is highest in me tends to be things that cross the great void between my self and what lies beyond me on broader and richer horizons of significance. I suspect that far beyond anything solely self-referenced, engaging in these broader horizons of significance perhaps draws me closer to Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*, Paul’s *agape*, and Dreyfus and Kelly’s *meta-poiesis*.

Leading in the ever-unfolding present

When I want to understand what is happening today or try to decide what will happen tomorrow, I look back. (Omar Khayyam, in Aminrazavi, 2005, p. 336)

Gadamer describes a complementary view of the distinction between my self and how I might make distinctions of worth drawing on horizons of significance beyond me. He explains that,

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 277)

Gadamer suggests that we are thrown into an historical set of stories to which we are connected, our historicity. These stories shape our view of the world and the meaning we make from/of it. These are stories which began long before us and will continue long after

we are gone, but which we will shape by however we engage – or do not engage – in them. He explains,

... the structure of the historical world is not based on facts taken from experience which then acquire a value relation, but rather on the inner historicity that belongs to experience itself. What we call experience (*Erfahrung*) and acquire through experience is a living historical process; and its paradigm is not the discovery of facts but the peculiar fusion of memory and expectation into a whole. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 252)

This perspective of Gadamer's underscores for me, the wisdom of seeking a dimension of authenticity which reaches beyond my self. Gadamer seems to be suggesting that sitting below any level of conscious awareness of trying to make sense of who we are in some detached, remote, introspective way, there sit pre-existing influences which guide any meaning we construct; and we are deluded if we think we make meaning independently of them. He believes the prejudices we hold are key to the range of possible understandings we can shape from our historical lives. Though he does not refer to Taylor's horizons of significance, it seems to me that Gadamer argues a strong case in support of Taylor for our historicity shaping for each of us, a unique landscape of horizons of significance, and that,

... a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings.... It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition. (Gadamer, 2004, 271-272) [alterity = otherness]

Gadamer describes how a deeper level of insight into what speaks to us in tradition, may be achieved by engaging in dialogue with the 'text', with dialogue being a type of engagement with our historicity which involves questioning. "The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further -i.e., the art of thinking" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 360). For Gadamer, the art of questioning steers us towards deeper thinking about the object of an inquiry, but only when it is characterised by open-mindedness which can push perception

beyond our fore-meanings and prejudices. In this way it could possibly serve as a dialectical device for creating a ‘third way’; a fusion of disparate horizons of meaning.

Joel Weinsheimer, the translator of Gadamer’s landmark work, ‘Truth and Method’, describes how this occurs through the discipline of,

... the dialogue of question and answer. This kind of "experience" is not the residue of isolated moments, but an ongoing integrative process in which what we encounter widens our horizon, but only by overturning an existing perspective, which we can then perceive was erroneous or at least narrow. Its effect... [gives] us that implicit sense of broad perspectives, of the range of human life and culture, and of our own limits that constitutes a non- dogmatic wisdom. (Weinsheimer in Gadamer, 2004, xiii)

Gadamer himself expresses this as,

There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather; understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves. (Gadamer, 2004, 305)

This suggests to me that each dialogic encounter with a subject of inquiry, of meaning-making, does not simply add to a sequentially expanding store of knowledge. The experience of the encounter changes the inquirer by building depth of insight into the ever-unfolding present via new meaning created as a result of the fusion of perspectives or traditions from the past, with the inquirer’s own horizons of significance. I think Gadamer’s critical point here, for me, is that if one is not at least somewhat aware of one’s prejudices, then this fusion may not occur; rather, the horizon of tradition may be subsumed within the inquirer’s existing horizon and selectively filtered to fit into it. He describes that a genuine fusion of horizons is, “an inner dialogue of the soul seeking understanding” (Gadamer, 2004, 181).

From Gadamer I have come to feel growing resonance with Dreyfus’s role of context – described by Gadamer as, “the particular practical situation” (2004, p. 311) – as being critical for ‘knowing’ how I might respond authentically to something. While my horizons of significance and historicity may ‘point’ in generalised directions in relation to virtuous behaviour, I appreciate I might need to weigh the specifics of any particular situation to make a fine distinction between virtuous options.

Philosopher Ruth Chang triggered a startling realisation for me about how my own mental models mitigate against me making such fine distinctions. Considering her research into values, revealed to me I that have been applying positivist concepts to my horizons of significance. By using words (as in the previous paragraph) such as ‘weigh the specifics of any particular situation to make a fine distinction between virtuous options’ I suddenly realise that virtues and values cannot be ‘weighed’ or empirically measured. She suggests that,

... when we face hard choices, we shouldn't beat our head against a wall trying to figure out which alternative is better. There is no best alternative. Instead of looking for reasons out there, we should be looking for reasons in here: Who am I to be? ... What we do in hard choices is very much up to each of us.

(Chang, 2014)

Chang has helped me appreciate that there is no objective measure of which option might be the more virtuous – that is for me to judge based on my historicity and horizons of significance.

Gadamer seems to be alluding to a sense of practical wisdom when he suggests that,

If man always encounters the good in the form of the particular practical situation in which he finds himself, the task of moral knowledge is to determine what the concrete situation asks of him. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 311)

As I ponder on this, and reflect on how my ethical generalisations accumulate over the course of my life, it seems that they are somewhat dormant until a situation summons me to make a virtuous response. And as I make my choice of action in a particular situation I begin to grasp what may be calling me to do in future situations. I sense that each iterative response I make in its unique, practical situation, impacts on my mental models and any generalised concepts I may be acting from, creating a newly-fused horizon of meaning and understanding, revealing new insight for me.

As I read more of Gadamer on openness and questioning, it struck me that, no matter how seemingly open-ended we may assume a question to be, he suggests its meaning is revealed to us from the context of our historicity,

The openness of a question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question. A question that lacks this horizon is, so to speak, floating. It becomes

a question only when its fluid indeterminacy is concretized in a specific "this or that" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 357)

In this sense a question seems always limited by its horizon, which Gadamer describes as the finitude of our historical consciousness (2006 -b, p. 277), which adds more weight for me to the premise that an ethical question cannot be resolved self-referentially alone, and that to do so is to deny a deep, personal truth about who I am in the world.

Gadamer describes what, to me, is a unique intimacy in which we all experience the world,

It is not so much our judgments as our prejudices that constitute our being...

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9).

I appreciate here from Gadamer that a 'prejudice' is not some sort of tacit assumption we make, blinding us to a truth. He seems to be suggesting almost the opposite: that our prejudices are those perhaps-values-free, accumulated meanings we construct from our own past experiences, and which almost subliminally position us towards a particular perspective of interpretation towards the future. In other words, we always encounter the world from a position, which has within it inherent perspectives. While our view of the world is bound by an horizon, we are not confined by that horizon: our questioning and encounters with them change horizons: every experience we have and choice we make takes our personal history in a bespoke direction. To be human seems to be to embody unique dispositions in a given space within an historical context. Our prejudices filter what we experience, and in reflecting carefully on what is revealed to us, we can begin to become aware of our prejudices. And then, as we return our attention to the world this hermeneutic focus which alternates between whole and parts widens our circle of understanding, and engages us more richly in our horizons of significance.

Towards leading with virtuous practical wisdom

... understanding is always interpretation (Hans Georg Gadamer, 2004, p. 306)

It seems to me that the wisdom of a choice made in the moment may not be immediately apparent, and may often only become so with the passage of time and the benefit of the full implications of that choice having become apparent. As I wonder about this, I wonder also how I might acquire a capacity to more confidently make choices that are wise – not just as a result of being vindicated by the passage of time as consequences from them materialise – but to make choices in-action, in the moment.

In trying to resolve this, I find myself needing to explore more deeply a personal truth I am seeking which captures Aristotle's sense of practical wisdom as a virtue guided by the other virtues: a sense I have of virtuous practical wisdom. I sense that striving to reach for what is highest in me incorporates reaching for my horizons of significance and acknowledging my historicity, and being truly authentic in an alignment which fuses my personal authenticity with them. And at the heart of virtuous practical wisdom lies *action*, the embodied activities of human experience in the world, rather than any sense of disembodied thinking and reasoning, much as Dreyfus cautions. (2005b).

This is what I envisage by my concept of virtuous practical wisdom. I imagine that virtuous practical wisdom enables me to mediate between competing possibilities of arguably 'virtuous' options by honouring what has brought me to this point and generously considering the most virtuous outcome I can imagine.

I feel great relief and renewed confidence that this might be what sincere authenticity is about: an authenticity which mirrors what is virtuous for the self with what is considered virtuous within my historical circle and across my horizons of significance. I sense that this also approximates Dreyfus and Kelly's sense of *meta-poiesis*.

The sort of embodied knowledge I allude to and seek seems to sit somewhere on a threshold of being cognitive and being embodied, existing in Merleau-Ponty's sense of residing elsewhere in the body, like the knowledge I have of the right moment to flick my fishing rod. As a parent, partner, leader, I sense a developing, intuitive, embodied sense of when to just listen, when to smile reassuringly, when to pat a shoulder, when to ask a question, or when to challenge another's thinking. As I consider this in light of Dreyfus's

stages of skill acquisition, I suspect that embodied skill develops through constant reflecting-in-action in making fine distinctions of worth.

As this process of constant reflection and evaluation becomes more refined over time and countless iterations, I imagine an expert level of embodied knowledge becomes less dependent on waiting for consequences to manifest themselves before deciding if it was ‘wise’ and ‘good’. As the reliability of outcomes becomes more predictable, it seems a practitioner becomes less conscious of wise choices and actions as they become more intuitive. I suspect that as this capacity grows, the practitioner is able to focus more conscious attention on making finer grained ‘distinctions of worth’. I suspect that this in turn then fuels the continuing, iterative refinement of a practitioner’s embodied, practical wisdom.

When I apply this thinking to my leading, it inspires me to set directions for my continuing growth into wise leadership. I am proud of the consequences and outcomes described in my ‘Julie vignette’, and as I reflect on what I think was ‘good’ about it, I am hopeful and confident that I am fuelling my leadership intuition – taking myself a step closer to being able to make wise choices for action less consciously and more intuitively, drawing on my personal authenticity and my horizons of significance and historicity to guide my choices and actions.

Leadership scholar Robert Greenleaf who popularised the term ‘servant leadership’ offers advice which has been a core mental model I strive to follow in building my virtuous practical wisdom of leading.

The really critical question is, what distinguishes the servant of others from the self-serving person? ... The best test and difficult to administer is: do those served grow as persons; do they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous while being served, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?” (Greenleaf, in Spears & Lawrence, 2004, p. 6)

Greenleaf throws me a continuing challenge with these questions. They offer me a helpful scaffold for consciously confronting any self-referential thinking about the impact of my choices and actions on others and remaining mindful when I might be otherwise deluding myself into ignoring some aspects of my horizons of significance. They offer me helpful criteria for trying to gauge how genuine I am in leading with virtuous practical wisdom and

being mindful of my horizons of significance. Again, reflecting on the vignette about Julie, Greenleaf's words were close in my thinking as I prepared for my meeting with her. They were also helpful in guiding my reflection afterwards. I suspect that, having tried to actively work with such values over many years, they have fed an embodied, practical knowledge that I drew from in the moment.

I clutch this thinking as I confront who I am as a leader because it illustrates for me both the limitations and also open-endedness of phenomenological 'knowing'. As I continue to struggle with what 'knowing' phenomenologically means in a rigorous and scholarly way, I continue finding vestiges of positivism and empiricism to shrug off. As soon as I might presume to suggest "I know ..." I am conditioned to believe that I must prepare for a third party to ask, "how do you know?" and that my answer must be able to satisfy them empirically to avoid them dismissing my position as 'subjective', not 'evidence-based' or superficial in some soft-relativistic sort of way.

However, as Chang (2014) illustrated about the incommensurability of values and virtues, what I am coming to appreciate more and more through this inquiry is that phenomenological knowing is cut from a different fabric: it may have different qualities and may even be less fashionable, but is nevertheless no less valid a sense of knowing. My experience of the world allows me to follow and concur with Aristotle's agelessly sophisticated sense of practical wisdom in pursuit of *eudaimonia*. It also allows for me to support Taylor's view that being authentic to what is highest in me extends outwards to envelop others through action in the world. And I certainly appreciate that deep connections with others is fundamental to Gadamer's thinking.

I find Taylor's concept of horizons of significance resonant phenomenologically, because it allows for a 'truth' despite all facets of that 'truth' not being visible. What rouses me about this is that as I construct my own meaning of my own horizons of significance, I do so reassured that, with each phenomenological and hermeneutical 'step' I take, I am phenomenologically reducing confusion, haze, tradition, assumption and bias, and approaching closer and closer to a pure link between what is highest in me and how that might connect to others in the world beyond me.

For me, the prospect of this is more than esoteric insight, it seems almost transcendental, or at least, potentially, personally transformational. As I am constructing this thinking, the sense I have is that my historicity sets me on a general trajectory of where and how I

'bridge' the gulf between 'me' and 'beyond' which I refine by the options I seek and choices I make. I sense that my historicity shapes the 'DNA' of the good I seek in life, shapes my horizons of significance and the 'truths' I construct from them, which seem an inextricable element of my 'story' and the actions I take in the world.

I also appreciate that given the complexity of most phenomena, even recognising the intrinsic properties of a phenomenon might be a formidable challenge. For example, as I peer into the expanse of the night sky and see the cosmos in its majesty reflected back, my attention might be distracted by a fluttering snowflake. As a metaphor for my interactions with others in my role as a leader, I wonder about how I fix on what is important in a given moment, especially when it is so dynamic and complex. Another dimension to the sense of wisdom I described might be the capacity to comprehend a whole panorama with its webs of interconnections and unpredictable possibilities, while staying focussed on a detail.

Perhaps Julie was a snowflake against the backdrop of the cosmic night sky.

I wonder about where to find a sense of balance in all of this between the specific with my perspective of the general, and how I might find a virtuous balance between self and other, and how I might find Aristotle's sense of virtuous balance between excess and scarcity.

I left my writing here for a few days and returned to it wondering if there is something more that may assist me related to the concept of balance. And so I came to wonder about equanimity, defined as "fairness, impartiality," from the Latin *aequanimitatem* meaning "evenness of mind, calmness," which itself contains the two Latin words *aequus* "even, level" and *animus* which relates to the "mind, spirit" (Harper, 2014b). 'Equanimity' seems to evince for me a paradox of making meaning in a specific experience by reference to my accumulated experiences and generalised understandings, while also deepening my insight into my broad historical horizon by constructing meaning from specific experiences. A hermeneutic process is perhaps neither entirely one nor the other, but a balanced oscillation of the two. This would seem to require a discipline of mindful openness and evenness, and would seem to apply to wisely choosing virtuous considerations in my practice of leading.

As I now approach the end of this narrative I imagine, as I have experienced through earlier sections, emergent insights may still be waiting to disclose themselves and to be brought to consciousness as I ponder my research question of, 'Who am I as a leader?'

Chapter 7 – Culminating my inquiry - who am I as a leader?

A continuing purging of positivism from my grip on the world

... reaching an understanding is a process that must succeed or fail in the medium of language. (Hans Georg Gadamer, 2006 -a, p. 13) ... hermeneutic reflection discloses conditions of truth in the sciences that do not derive from the logic of scientific discovery but are prior to it. (Hans Georg Gadamer, 2006 -b, p. 556)

I sense I am nearly across a threshold that has been widening as my foot crosses it. I have lost my balance, stumbled, retreated, and stepped out again several times in my attempt to cross this verge of perception and understanding. As I look out at the new horizon I can now see, the world looks very different and I am uncertain about so much.

And yet, the transformation in perception and meaning-making I feel I have experienced feels more complex! I understand crossing a threshold means leaving something behind and entering a new environment. In shedding one perspective and set of paradigms for perceiving the world and adopting another, I continue to discover, even at this late stage of my inquiry, traces of positivism, long after I dared think I had perhaps purged myself of it. Two significant recent examples slowed my progress. One relates to my very research question and the other to the concept of ‘alignment’. I will elaborate briefly.

A strong, lingering positivist taint in my thinking I recently awoke to, sits very comfortably in the very wording of my research question: ‘Who am I as a leader?’ As I look at that question now, sitting very snug within it seems to be a suggestion that ‘who I am’ is a definitive and constant state of being waiting to be revealed. If I were embarking on my study at this stage of my learning, perhaps I would recast the question as, ‘Who might I be as a leader?’ I reflect just now that when I framed the question originally I was unknowingly under the thrall of positivism and assumed there was a definitive answer to it. In having come to appreciate something of viewing the world hermeneutically I now acknowledge that there is no empirically measurable answer and that my inquiry into the question is intended more towards my own seeking of truthfulness as I pursue it, and that

any outcome is likely to reflect an evolving crystallising, around my horizons of significance, of the understanding I am shaping.

A second positivist influence deeply embedded in my thinking relates to the concept of 'alignment' which I referred to many times in my inquiry into Kim's Levels of Perspective. I suggested that it is desirable for leaders to consciously work at aligning the levels of perspective in an organisation to maximise the flow of energy towards realising the shared vision. I learned from Argyris that success is more likely when individual people's theories-in-use are aligned together. My belief in a generative capacity of alignment, features prominently in my work of leading. After looking more closely at 'align' I now baulk at using it. 'Align' derives etymologically from Old French '*alignier*' meaning to "set, lay in line" (Harper, 2014c). The further away I lean from positivism, the more I recognise positivist undertones in 'align', with 'aligning' alluding to a very mechanical process like laying lengths of railway track in line or calibrating and using a theodolite for measuring angles on the ground. I now realise I mistakenly misuse that word for the meaning I intend and want to reconsider precisely my intending, and what alternative word may represent my meaning more accurately.

I wondered if 'resonate', might suggest a sense of harmonious action but discovered that it derives from Latin *resonare* "to sound again" (Harper, 2014c), which does not suggest the shade of meaning I sought. When I checked 'reverberate' I found it to mean "beat back, drive back, force back," from Latin *reverberatus* (Harper, 2014c). This too did not seem satisfactory with its forceful undertones. 'Harmony' derives from the Old French *harmonie* to mean to "bring into agreement" (Harper, 2014c). Again, what I was seeking seemed beyond simply being in agreement. In wondering if "synergy" might suffice, I found it derives from the Greek *synergia* to mean "joint work, a working together, cooperation; assistance, help" (Harper, 2014c). This seemed close but still seemed to lack a dimension of shared belief I was seeking. 'Accord' comes closest to conveying the not-so-positivist sense of alignment I was seeking. While it is derived from the Old French *acord* meaning "agreement," (Harper, 2014c), it also derives from the Latin "*accordare*", literally meaning to "be of one heart, bring heart to heart," (Harper, 2014c).

I understand 'being of one heart' to mean the sense of shared values and mental models I intend when previously using 'aligned'. In fact, a mantra we have used for years on my leadership team is that we can test our 'alignment' by how closely we are of 'one mind and one voice'. By 'one mind' we mean sharing key, underlying mental models and values; I

believe we could just as legitimately express this as being ‘of one heart’. By ‘one voice’ we mean we test our decisions with each other to be confident that ‘messages’ we convey in our conversations will also be ‘aligned’. However, their ‘alignment’ was not in any sense of ‘lining up’ with each other in either actions or processes or in how they interact with others. Indeed, I believe there has been rich diversity of talent, skills and approaches by the various members of that team over the years. Any ‘alignment’ was more to do with the mental models driving our efforts to realise our shared vision being common and in accord. This entailed scrupulous, ongoing dialogue, coaching and feedback over many years, even as members of the leadership team left and others were inducted in their place.

From our dialogue we have shaped a shared belief that so long as our core mental models are in accord with each other, we will be on a clearer path of fidelity of influence together in our efforts to realise our shared vision. I believe this sense of being in accord also more accurately describes our efforts to ‘align’ what we perceive of our organisation as we consider it from Kim’s Levels of Perspective.

Replacing ‘alignment’ with ‘accord’ feels liberating to me because it seems to offer a more open-ended invitation amongst colleagues who are of one ‘heart’ to explore together how they might proceed in realising a shared vision with fidelity of influence. I can see also a connection with the etymology of ‘courage’ from the, “Latin *cor* ‘heart’ which remains a common metaphor for inner strength” (Harper, 2014c). This suggests to me that being in accord might also suggest a certain collegial strength and courage of colleagues seeking truth and insight, whatever the risks and challenges. As a perspective, it also seems consistent with Gadamer’s hermeneutic fusing of horizons when people in dialogue and accord seek truth and shape new insight together.

I pause here to concede there may be no end to other blind and perhaps positivist assumptions I may be harbouring inadvertently. This reflecting on shifting from ‘alignment’ to ‘accord’ also reminds me of the limitations of language and the role it plays in expressing and conveying meaning. Gadamer describes the primacy of language as a medium of understanding, “Hermeneutical experience ... is language - i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us” (2006 -b, p. 352). He seems to be suggesting that although language may be separate from us, it is integral to who we are. Indeed, my settling on ‘accord’ over ‘alignment’ seems to exemplify Gadamer’s suggestion that, “in language the order and structure of our experience itself is originally formed and constantly changed” (2006 -b, p. 453).

Learning from my ignorance as I lead

The most important product of knowledge is ignorance. (David Gross, 2004 Nobel Physicist, in Overbye, 2004)

I feel empathy for people who carry a label of ‘leader’, because of an apparent societal expectation that leaders know and can do everything their role requires of them. So, for a leader to embrace their ignorance, publicly at least, would almost seem like an admission of failure as a leader. I encountered a recognised phenomenon about this called ‘imposter syndrome’ as described by researcher Hugh Kearns (2013) and psychologist and business consultant Harold Hillman (2013). Imposter Syndrome is a state of mind in which people feel they are not equipped to discharge their responsibilities, irrespective of data to the contrary. People,

... are unable to internalise their accomplishments, attributing their success to luck, timing or some other external factor beyond their making... [they] believe they have tricked others into thinking they are bright and that it is only a matter of time before someone ‘outs’ them as frauds. (Hillman, 2013, p. 15).

The stress of this, and of trying to remain unmasked can be very debilitating for some people. I have had conversations with close, trusted colleagues about this, and we share a fear that we are ill-equipped for our roles but dare not admit it. Out of fear of public shaming and humiliation we keep up a charade, an outward display of competence. (I note that even as I write this, I do so in the first person plural, as if there is some safety for me in numbers!) I think of the metaphor of the circus performer who has a series of plates spinning on upheld rods, running from one plate to the other to keep the plates spinning, aware they will come crashing down if I leave the slightest thing to chance, leaving me feeling exposed as a public failure amongst the ruin around me.

I appreciate starkly that I have been living an illusion of knowledge my entire life. I am learning now that what I used to ‘know’ about the positivist attributes of leadership, I was actually ignorant about. There actually seems very little in my life which I can know in that empirical sense, drawing on generally accepted ‘truths’ in which I have always used ‘know’. My deepening understanding about hermeneutic knowing and embodied knowledge are also suggesting a similar impoverishment of truthfulness arising from what Palmer describes as, “the mindlessness of relativism” (2004, p. 126). Learning to see the world

hermeneutically is teaching me a ‘third way’ that allows for a personalised, unfolding and idiosyncratic truth of things, which is neither subjective nor objective.

I turn again to Gadamer as I struggle for glimmers of insight into how dialogic knowing might offer me deeper understanding of who I might be as I lead. His notion of horizons fusing where they meet simultaneously suggests to me both an ‘otherness’ of me in the world, and an enfolding together through the fusing of horizons. Gadamer explains how this sense of growing together involves a commonality between a text and the interpreter of the text, between what a text discloses and what meaning the person accessing the text constructs from the experience of accessing it.

However, Gadamer also outlines a significant problem: “The inner fusion of understanding and interpretation led to ... the hermeneutical problem, application” (2006 -b, p. 306). He elaborates with, “Understanding, then, is a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation” (2006 -b, p. 310). Gadamer seems to be describing here a gap between understanding a text in a generic or universal sense and then applying that understanding to the circumstances of a particular (2006 -b, p. 308). I interpret him to mean that every instance of understanding involves a ‘fuzziness’ of how that understanding comes to be interpreted and applied in a specific circumstance. When Gadamer says, “Understanding here is always application,” he seems to be suggesting that irrespective of any intention behind what is conveyed, when it is ‘understood’ it is also interpreted and applied in the particular.

I find this especially helpful as I ponder leadership. While I am clear of the shift of emphasis in my inquiry from positivist to hermeneutic, I am also aware of just as fundamental a shift from seeking a phenomenological essence of leadership to yearning to know more about how I might choose a virtuous path of practical wisdom in my leading.

I now seek to engage dialogically with others’ ‘true’ positions, confident that as well-informed as my starting position on any matter is, it is incomplete and can only be improved by my thinking being mediated by engaging dialogically, with fidelity of influence, with others. I suspect that the new horizon that this inevitably takes us to, as a fusion of our previously-separate horizons, seems to offer new steps in our path of seeking truthfulness. Sokolowski offers a suggestion which helps clarify for me a philosophic sense of truthfulness,

Philosophy... is concerned... with truthfulness, ... with the human conversation, the human attempt to disclose the way things are, and the human ability to act in accordance with the nature of things; ultimately, it is concerned with being as it manifests itself to us. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 156)

I understand from Sokolowski that by ‘truthfulness’ he is describing a human disposition towards what might be true, not in an empirical, objective sense, but in Aristotle’s sense of a desire for truth and for what is morally good (2008, p. 20). This entails for me an active openness to phenomenologically reducing the experience of something, bracketing out as many extraneous blocks to new understanding as possible, such as biases, prejudices, assumptions and inferences. A mental model which I find helpful in this is to try to assume that my knowledge of something is so minimal as to be bordering on ignorance. This has me keen to learn more, to question everything and to take less for granted. I suspect this is healthier – in the sense of leaning towards truthfulness – than perhaps being overly confident of what I feel I know, which might otherwise have me filtering-in evidence that shores up my position and being oblivious to contrary evidence.

While I suspect there has conceivably always been this human seeking of truth, perhaps the loss of familiar, universal, axial-era ‘truths’ in postmodern times, now sees a more discernible yearning for a new clarity of how to seek truthfulness – certainly this is so for me! I sense also that this might be exacerbated by the deep-seated, cultural malaise, described by Dreyfus and Kelly (2011) and Taylor (2007), stemming from the decline of other universal truths which, according to Dreyfus and Kelly (2011) and Taylor (2007), has led to a rise of instrumental reason and subjective relativism.

It seems to me that a robust bastion of pervasive, unquestioned, positivist assumptions, is the leadership ‘literature’, with writer after writer declaring and asserting a position on leadership and what people need to learn or do to be ‘better leaders’. Many support their well-described theories with empirical data and reasoned argument. For someone seeking a fundamental truth about leadership, such treatises might appear highly attractive. However, I could not discover any coalescing from this wealth of research around essential leadership ‘truths’.

I am beginning to see that whereas I initially aspired to join that field of researchers, my aspiration is now for something I believe might be paradigmatically different. It seems there is a dearth of hermeneutic research of leadership and yet my own experience is of

hermeneutics offering more for my truthfulness about leadership than I have experienced from much of the ‘literature’ I have accessed. I account for this by acknowledging that while much of this seemingly positivist research has contributed to my unfolding understanding of some aspects of leadership, it was my hermeneutic inquiring into my own leadership experiences, and the meaning I construct from them, that I believe has helped me appreciate that leadership is opening up insight into who I might be.

The further I have progressed through this inquiry and the more I have learned about hermeneutics, and the more hermeneutics has helped me learn about myself, the more I have seen a widening gap of disconnection between me and the concept/s of leadership I have encountered in much of the other research I encountered. Indeed, one key reason I characterise much of that research as positivist is because it seems to depict leadership as something which can be observed remotely and objectively, evidence of its efficacy collected and tested for validity and deconstructed into component parts which can be analysed and even discretely taught; with little proximal relationship acknowledged between the knower and the object of what is known.

Such a positivist approach seems to honour the acquisition of knowledge about leadership over ontological considerations of who the knower is and what he/she brings to any knowing, and how what is brought may influence the knowing shaped.

As I inquire further into leadership, I sense a general absence of ontological considerations, albeit with exceptions such as Greenleaf (1976, 2003), Senge (2006; 2005), Wheatley (2002, 2005, 2006), Quinn (2004) and George (2003, 2007). I suspect it is often omitted because it is possibly less observable and harder to collect ‘data’ about. For example, sales figures increasing following my introduction of a new piece of technology seems far more quantifiable, in terms of commercial success than, for example, how much I value being loyal to my staff.

No matter how we perceive a world external to our consciousness or organise it conceptually, we seem to keep thinking that what we perceive is what actually is, and we seem to keep thinking that the observable – what we are seeing – is the complete account of a phenomenon.

As I learned to begin looking anew at leadership phenomenologically and hermeneutically, I eventually found guidance for truthfulness about leadership by turning towards philosophy, especially Husserl’s rigorous methodology of phenomenological and eidetic

reductions, and Gadamer's insight into the limitations of language and the influence of historicity on the interpretations we make of experience.

I am sensing that of far more significance to the meaning I construct of my experiences of leading than any technical skills I possess or professional behaviour I exhibit, is my historicity which has shaped my mental models, dispositions and deeply-held values. Most technical skills may perhaps be able to be learned, along with appropriate behaviours, however, it seems to me that it is our mental models, dispositions and deeply-held values that ultimately drive our behaviour. It seems then that high fidelity of influence, in my influence relationships, might be somewhat dependent on the mental models, dispositions and deeply-held values which motivate me. No matter how 'skilful' I might be at, for example, behaving collaboratively with others, if I do not value that skill, or if others harbour fundamental doubts about my sincerity, commitment or other 'virtuous' personal qualities, and if I have not cultivated my capacity to make fine distinctions of worth, in action, it seems my influence might well be less.

Learning to shape meaning as I lead with less certainty

'Therefore' is a word the poet must not know. (Andre Gide, 2000, p. 403)

Leadership scholar Warren Bennis makes a statement about not seeking leadership directly, and which captures something of a more explicit ontological dimension to leadership I am seeking to describe. It seems consistent with Quinn's call to strive for what is highest in us.

So the point is not to become a leader. The point is to become yourself, to use yourself completely - all your skills, gifts, and energies - in order to make your vision manifest. You must withhold nothing. You must, in sum, become the person you started out to be, and to enjoy the process of becoming. (Bennis, 2009, pp. 111-112)

Bennis's reference to 'enjoying the process of becoming' suggests to me a sincere, ongoing reflective process of striving for a sort of deep, virtuous, personal authenticity, as envisaged by Taylor. It also seems consistent with Dreyfus and Kelly's call for a *meta-poietic* striving

for what is shining, for what will spark the most ‘sacred’ response - the most superlative moments of human performance or existence. I learned from Argyris that it may be very easy to believe that what we espouse aligns with what we practice, oblivious perhaps that others can see from our behaviour a gap between what we espouse and what we practice. I sense that crucial to achieving deep, virtuous, personal authenticity, might be how aligned our mental models, dispositions and deeply-held values are with any goal of who we might want to become. I suspect that pursuing such alignment itself might only stem from a disposition which openly values striving towards what is highest in me, in keeping with my horizons of significance.

I often console myself when stumped in my thinking that leadership is a slippery concept. On the one hand it seems much like the greased pig of village fairs from times past, and just as hard to grasp. On the other, it also often seems like the indistinct shape I am vaguely aware of at the edge of the campfire light or at the edge of my peripheral vision and which eludes all efforts to be seen.

I began this inquiry with the question: ‘Who am I as a leader?’ And while that remains as valid to me today as ever, the meaning it now holds for me is vastly different. I chose the quotation from Gide at the start of this section because, for me, it captures something of this non-positivist perspective I am now grasping for. As I have alluded to earlier in this inquiry, the insight of a poet does not appear arrived at empirically, yet seems universally respected for contributing to our appreciation of what it is to be human. It perhaps draws out something of the tacitly known or perhaps of inherently gestalt qualities of a phenomenon.

At the outset of writing the narrative of this learning journey, I likened my looking at leadership to my looking at the night sky and the sense I try to make of all the indistinct objects it contains. I later shifted my gaze to within. I now have a hunch about how I may still have been looking in the wrong place, or at least, may have been looking for the wrong thing within. A great clue to this came as I re-read Nazi Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl’s autobiography, in which he reinforces the gist of Bennis’s point about focusing on ‘becoming’,

Don’t aim at success — the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it

must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself. (1959, pp. 12-13)

I wonder if leadership might be similar, whether like success and happiness, – it may perhaps emerge from the pursuit of a cause greater than oneself which we recognise on our horizons of significance as being worthy or 'good'. Psychologist and servant leadership scholar Hamilton Beazley suggests something of this,

... each of us is connected to the other, and in recognizing that connection, we are moved to... a more profound understanding [and] appreciation... of our own attitudes and behaviour; and to the building of community. (In Greenleaf, 2003, p. 5)

This reference to each of us being connected to the other brings to mind Bohm's implicate order and his view (1980) that this interconnectedness manifests as a constant movement of interacting and influence between elements in a context. It suggests to me too from complexity theory (Goldspink & Kay, 2010; Meadows, 2008) that leadership may be an emergent quality of people engaging, with fidelity of influence, in an influence relationship in pursuit of a shared vision. I also find it reminiscent of Gadamer's view of humans coming to understanding together, through language (2006 -b, p. 442).

Perhaps there may be another reason for the slipperiness I find with leadership which comes to mind as I recognise a complexity and a non-linearity of the path my learning has taken to date, defying my attempts to depict it. Goethe scholar Henri Bortoft might ascribe this to my mode of consciousness; he describes a positivist, "analytical mode of consciousness ... which naturally emphasizes distinction and separation" (1996, p. 61). He says the subject-predicate structure of modern language articulates the world analytically, and has us thinking this is how the world actually is. He gives the example (1996, p. 62) of 'I see the tree' which depicts what he sees as an artificial union of the artificially separate elements of subject, object and the act of seeing. Bortoft then distinguishes this mode of consciousness with what he describes as an holistic mode which,

... is non-linear, simultaneous, intuitive... and concerned more with relationships than with the discrete elements that are related ... The experience of a relationship as such is only possible through a transformation from a piecemeal way of thought to a simultaneous perception of the whole.
(Bortoft, 1996, p. 63)

Bortoft, inspired by Goethe, uses the distinction between analytical and holistic modes of consciousness further by distinguishing between seeing a bird fly and seeing flying,

Seeing a bird which flies [implies] a separation between an entity, ‘bird’ and an action, ‘flying,’ which it performs ... By plunging into seeing flying we find that our attention expands to experience this movement as one whole that is its own present moment. (Bortoft, 1996, p. 64)

I wonder now about whether there might be a similar distinction between seeing someone leading and seeing leadership. I am thinking that my emerging sense of virtuous practical wisdom may reflect my move towards a more holistic mode of consciousness about how I consider leadership. I realised too that this might also explain and offer some reassurance for some of the latter directions of my inquiry, particularly my leaning towards leadership as an influence relationship, which perhaps also accounts for my being drawn ever more strongly to a hermeneutic perspective of making meaning of me in the world. Bortoft describes this wholeness (1996, pp. 58-69) as a ‘unity without unification’, whereas the analytical mode observes the discrete elements first which it then assembles into a type of constructed whole.

Further strengthening my grasping at what it might mean to consider leadership from a holistic mode of consciousness is Bortoft’s reference to intuition, in which I recognise a direct link with Dreyfus’s sense of an expert’s intuition.

When consciousness is thus restructured into an organ of holistic perception, the mind functions intuitively instead of intellectually... [defined as] knowledge without recourse to inference. (Bortoft, 1996, p. 67)

It seems now that perhaps I am coming closer to developing an holistic perception of

Looking anew at leadership with my new view of embodied knowledge

The fact that our misdirected actions often bring hardships does not mitigate the value of embodied knowledge. (Leslie Paul Thiele, 2006, p. 114)

I feel that as I trace my emerging understanding of leadership throughout this inquiry, there is a gradually unfolding clarity of my leadership feeling utterly inseparable from my experiences of it; it seems experiential, relational and deeply contextual.

I suspect that any meaning I am constructing of leadership from a holistic mode of consciousness might reveal more of ‘leadership’ than I can perhaps ascertain from somehow, directly engaging dialogically with ‘leadership’ itself as a discrete concept.

I am currently conceiving of leadership as being fundamentally about a dialogic relationship which emerges between people intentionally engaging together their separate understandings, with each opening their thinking to be mediated by the other’s thinking, and with new understanding and action being generated towards realising a shared vision. I imagine a Gadamerian perspective might describe leadership as being what occurs when people’s horizons of understanding converge towards each other dialogically and fuse together on a new horizon, creating possibilities and energy for seeking the virtuous realising of the shared vision they seek. I imagine a complex adaptive systems perspective might describe leadership as an emergent quality of people engaging together dialogically in the realisation of a mutual purpose. I would propose too that inherent also in such a suggestion about leadership, might be an holistic mode of consciousness, constantly seeking to experience the fullness of a phenomenon, and constantly making new meanings from horizons expanding continuously in the ever-unfolding present.

Human science consultants Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel Rasmussen express how pervasive linear, positivist mindsets remain in human science research, represented by views such as: “if we can only ask the right questions, design the right algorithms, analyse the right data set” (2014, p. 3) we will get all the information we need. They suggest that using quantifiable data to learn from, “past examples will give us a false sense of confidence, sending us astray into unknown waters with the wrong map” (2014, p. 13).

This seems to precisely echo what I understand from Dreyfus’s model of skill acquisition: the lower stages of the model require a capacity to analyse past data. As a person develops expertise, and becomes less reliant on rules, and advances up the stages, a different type of intuitive, synthesising, holistic thinking is required since analysing empirical data is always based on what has happened in the past as a general indicator of future possibilities. Holistic consciousness requires a capacity to not only analyse the past, but to read a changing context so that as a new set of circumstances emerges an expert skill-level will

dialogically synthesise what has been previously experienced with the requirements of the changing context and adapt successfully to the changed circumstances.

I think I have come close many times in my experience to approaching an holistic mode of consciousness in my influence relationships. My ‘Julie’ vignette is perhaps such an example. As significant as such experiences feel, I have also experienced something almost arcane, and certainly even more significant, when engaged in influence relationships with colleagues who also bring a holistic mode of consciousness to our dialogue. On such occasions we have felt a generative wave of energy as we strive together, in accord. This sense has me thinking again of Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow’ which evokes a rare sense of effortless action in people performing at their best.

I am coming to appreciate now that rich, embodied knowledge seems to be more drawn from an holistic mode of consciousness, by intuitively considering the contextual whole, rather than assembling the constituent parts into a belonging together. It seems that learning Goethe’s sense of considering the wholeness of a phenomenon might be what allows for Schon’s sense of intuitive, knowing-in-action and Dreyfus’s intuitive expertise, rather than from any conscious deliberation.

I am contemplating one remaining dimension to the context of my influence relationships, and it is to do with the temporal and spatial dimensions within which I engage through language to make meaning of my experience in the world.

Finding agency in storied spaces

We don’t experience life ... We experience the stories we tell to explain what happens to us. (Ken Baskin, 2008b, p. 1)

I am aware of a deepening sense I am coming to of what it might mean for me to ‘be’ in the world, and also of what this may mean for realising a life of virtuous practical wisdom. It seems to me I can only aspire to such living if I also believe I have personal agency to make choices between options and then carry them out. By ‘agency’ I mean a capacity to act, a sense of “active operation” as entailed by the word’s etymology (Harper, 2014b). Integral to this deepening sense is also a growing appreciation of some of the functions we ascribe

to language to assist us in making meaning. In considering this aspect, I will retrace some earlier thinking about metaphor, syntax and poetic meaning as devices for striving towards clarity of meaning.

Considering what agency I may have is important to me because I have an emergent sense that I may have more agency in my influence relationships than I imagine. I used to feel that agency came from being clear about what I should do in a situation, and then doing it. I recall feeling that while I had a capacity to literally make a choice, I felt my agency was limited as I believed I needed a level of certainty in order to have a clear sense of how the consequences of a decision might unfold. As I learned from my life that the things I am certain about are very few, I gradually abandoned my former belief in the existence of objective knowledge about a whole being ‘out there’ waiting for me to come to, with knowledge being the outcome of an empirical quest of inquiring and collecting data from the world which accumulates into a near-complete set amounting to ‘certainty’. Seeking clarity by reaching certainty seemed like a continuing exercise of jousting at windmills. I feel like my life had taught me to shun uncertainty as a close relative of chaos, confusion and ruin, and yet, I felt a continuing frustration at the elusiveness of certainty-based clarity.

I now appreciate that any meaning I construct of what I experience seems more dependent on what I bring to an experience. I feel a release from what seems a chimera of certainty, and a joy from uncertainty freeing me to draw on my horizons of significance to construct my unique meaning, without having to comply with an objective, positivist ‘truth’, nor also being reduced to a superficial, relativist opinion. And oddly, it seems to me, it is uncertainty that seems to evoke this sense of greater agency. I have come to embrace uncertainty, not as a quality of my life that I prefer over clarity and order, but I embrace it now as an acknowledgement of what I am coming to know of the world from my phenomenological perspective. There seems to be almost a paradox about this: accepting that all I ever ‘see’ of anything I experience as being just a facet of a whole, clarifies some key mental models I hold about what might be happening as I experience the world. If all I experience is fragmentary, I infer that there is much about an experience that is not disclosed, and that I simply do not know about - much that I am uncertain about. Further, it seems that the knowledge I reach is nothing more than my own idiosyncratic, personal knowledge, shaped by what my mental models allow my senses to register of an experience. Accepting or assuming this about my knowledge of the world shores up my perspective that knowing

and understanding seem to be about a continually unfolding quest for meaning which seems forever incomplete, and which defies prediction and certainty.

I am thinking that how I choose to view the world may depend significantly on the stance I take when considering an experience. I choose “stance” as it suggests to me the mindful positioning I need to take when approaching a horse, when presenting certificates on a stage, when greeting my grandchild or walking through an ill-lit park at night. In my judgement, each scenario requires a different stance, which seems to suggest more than how and where my feet are placed. While I need to approach a nervous horse obliquely and to its left, I know I can boisterously approach my young granddaughter, though not too boisterously! The etymology of ‘stance’ reveals more nuances of connotation that resonate with the meaning I intend. Harper, (2014a) confirms that “stance” means ‘standing place’. Harper also reveals a connotation deriving from a Middle French word of the same spelling meaning ‘resting place, harbour’. This suggests to me that the way I approach something and the stand feel safe to me, they feel balanced and appropriate. Harper also indicates a Latin connection meaning ‘place, abode’ and Spanish *stancia* ‘a dwelling’, which has me thinking immediately of Polanyi’ and Heidegger’s sense of ‘dwelling’ in the world, and which suggests to me that my stance on something is deeply connected with who and how I am in my being in the world. These etymologically-derived connotations of stance have me thinking that ‘stance’ suggests the space in which I position myself from which to both view an experience and also from which to contentedly participate in it, in ways that perhaps feel both natural and efficacious.

I wonder how conscious a sense of stance might be between people in organisations engaged in pursuing mutual goals. We typically assign a primacy to written text in organisations: minutes of meetings, reports, plans and budgets. These artefacts of conversation often become reference points for further conversations and action, even though they are usually a summative statement of a point reached, devoid of capturing the tentative and emergent manner in which they were arrived at, and the fullness of deliberation and coming-to-understanding experienced by the minds which engaged in producing them. As I reflect on my experience in organisations it is not the decisions reached which drive action, it is more the talk that led to them, the intricacies involved in people questioning, laughing, describing, judging, agreeing, puzzling and promising; the meaning each is constructing as they make sense of what they experience in the conversation.

Thinking about this had me considering that not just our use of language but our very experience of being in the world is a spatial and temporal experience. It occurs in a space which seems more than a physical container of human acting in the world. The physical space we occupy seems to hold greater significance for us than simply being the location of our stance. It seems to be a part of that stance. Any significance it holds for us seems based on what we ascribe to it rather than any intrinsic properties it may hold. The meaning I make of an experience seems always contextualised – the experience occurred somewhere and this seems to have an intrinsic influence on the meaning we construct. For example, the wasteland of the interior of the Australian continent which so many non-indigenous Australians see, is a space of rich tradition with deep ties of kinship, alive with songlines and Dreaming stories for indigenous Australians. Places seem evocative of the stories we associate with them: Kosovo, Golan Heights, Bethlehem, Thermopylae, Auschwitz, Lourdes, the Sea of Tranquillity, Gallipoli, and it seems the stories would be vastly different had they occurred elsewhere. The experiences of people who live stories survive in their memories and are invoked in words and images, as much of the places, as by the stories themselves.

Essayist Joan Didion suggests that the stories we tell sustain us: “We tell stories in order to live” (2009, p. 11). As I consider this it seems that stories are the source material for autoethnographers to describe and critique experience, beliefs, purpose and culture. It seems that our stories with their allusions, metaphors, rhetoric and irony offer sense-making and understanding. Autoethnography researcher Tony Adams suggests that stories also offer,

... reflexivity in considering a researcher’s location in research and representation. Here, reflexivity includes both acknowledging and critiquing our place and privilege in society and using the stories we tell to break long-held silences on power, relationships, cultural taboos, and forgotten and/or suppressed experiences. (Adams et al., 2015, p. 103)

I find it exciting to consider how an autoethnographic inquiry might lead to insights beyond the realm of a positivist methodology. I wonder what impact a positivist tradition may have instilled in us around assumptions we might make about language and the experiences it attempts to capture. It seems that a natural, everyday attitude (Sokolowski and Husserl) might see language as a faithful recorder and conveyor of events, of faithfully representing reality. It seems that a philosophical attitude might see language as an imperfect medium

of representing events, acknowledging that what it represents falls short of the fullness of a lived experience, perhaps presenting an incomplete and interpreted version at best.

Foucault (2005, pp. 3-18) expands on this thinking in describing what he sees in the Velasquez painting *Las Meninas*. This image from 1656 depicts an artist looking towards the viewer of the painting, and only the rear of the canvas he is painting is visible. There are several other people in the image, but the subjects of the painting, to whom all the characters in the painting appear to be directing their gaze, cannot be seen and are only hinted at from a partial image reflected in a mirror on the wall behind. The painting appears to be a visual representation of something which is not visible, and Foucault seems to use this description of *Las Meninas* as a metaphor for how words convey only a part of what is present in an experience. He describes in extensive detail what he feels is Velasquez's exploration of space in the painting, attempting to describe in words the fullness of the visual representation which may not be immediately apparent when viewing the painting. Foucault uses that description to suggest,

... it is in vain that we say what we see: what never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. (Foucault, 2005, p. 10)

It seems that a great limitation of meaning conveyed in words might be what the words leave behind. Gadamer describes a riddle often uttered by his mentor, Heidegger: language speaks. He explains,

Of course there is a person who speaks, but not without being restricted by language, for it is not always the right word that comes to one. Hermeneutics helps us to realize that there is always much that remains unsaid when one says something. There is a lot in the same direction of meaning that almost completely escapes our attention because of the abstraction contained in the concepts of modern science. Thus I have designated as a central point of hermeneutical procedures that one is never supposed to have the last word.
(Gadamer, 2007, p. 417)

As I sit before my window overwhelmed by the beauty of the panoramic view of the city, mountain beyond and great expanse of blue sky, I lament at my incapacity to convey the

extent of my experience. Whereas watching that view unfolds temporally in a linear sequence, the richness of it seems non-linear: emotions may be aroused and dampened and re-aroused, combining with memories, feelings, fears, hopes and inferences, all impacting upon each other and often beyond the scope of words. There seems to be a fullness to the space of the story of my experience that words only partly fill in their retelling. There seems to be a space between the words that contain ineffable but vital elements of the experience.

Gadamer captures precisely the point I am trying to make:

... when we say, for example, that we are “totally immersed in the matter,” [we are suggesting] not a one-after-another sequence but the at-the-same-timeness that the temporal structure of tarrying ... possesses. It is not a doing of this and that, first this and then that; it is a whole that is present in the seeing, and in the considering that one is immersed in... In German too we say that one “is alive.” So long as one is alive, one is united with both one’s past and one’s future. (Gadamer, 2007, pp. 210-211)

Gadamer uses the word ‘tarry’ to describe the process of being wholly absorbed in something to allow meaning to emerge -

... what comes forth “addresses us,” ... It holds with seeing an artwork as well as with listening to or reading such a work that one tarries with the work of art. To tarry is not to lose time. Being in the mode of tarrying is like an intensive back-and-forth conversation ... Reading a poetic work is like this, even though we read it line by line and page by page. It is not like running through a stretch of space until the finish line. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 211)

Gadamer seems to be describing a shimmering, tentative, unfolding understanding that takes place within a timeframe and yet its fullness as a whole emerges almost outside of time. The ‘tarrying’ that takes place as I make meaning of a work of art or a conversation or of a landscape is surely unique to me, and is shaped by my stance, my mental models, my past experience, my unique historicity. Gadamer again elaborates on this point.

...there are real factors conditioning human life, such as hunger, love, labor, and domination, which are not themselves language or speaking, but which for their part furnish the space within which our speaking to each other and listening to each other can take place. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 25)

I am very curious about Gadamer's reference to a 'space' within which conversation occurs and that we each 'furnish' that space. Gadamer draws on his study of Plato to reflect on Plato's concept of *chora* which he translates tentatively as perhaps, "space that originates?" (2007, p. 398). He describes how it is neither an intellectual thing nor a material thing, but "something that is neither the one nor the other!" (2007, p. 398)

Perhaps French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard is alluding to something of *chora* when he suggests, "Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 47). Bachelard quotes composer Noel Arnaud, who wrote, "I am the space where I am" (In Bachelard, 1994, p. 137). Bachelard himself describes his view of how, "Through every human being, unique space, intimate space, opens up to the world ..." (Bachelard, 1994, p. 202). It seems that there may be more to the space in which we dwell than its physical dimensions.

In wondering about the form of this space which seems to be more than temporal and spatial, and 'neither intellectual nor material' I encountered this reflection from Polish writer Oscar V. De Lubicz Milosz's novel 'Amorous Initiation', that alludes to its dimensions,

"As I stood in contemplation of the garden of the wonders of space, I had the feeling that I was looking into the ultimate depths, the most secret regions of my own being; and I smiled, because it had never occurred to me that I could be so pure, so great, so fair!" (Milosz, in Bachelard, 1994, p. 189)

Milosz seems to be suggesting that this 'space that originates' has a fullness that envelops us. Bachelard also quotes Rilke who describes our struggle of finding, "communion with the universe, in a word, space, the invisible space that man can live in nevertheless, and which surrounds him with countless presences" (In Bachelard, 1994, p. 203).

Bachelard (1994, pp. 232-234) refers to several sources who all intimate that the fullness felt in this enveloping space can perhaps best be described as a roundness to it, with a sense of a full life being a well-rounded life. In reflecting on roundness, Bachelard suggests, "being is round ... In fact, it is not a question of observing, but of experiencing being in its immediacy... being cannot be otherwise than round" (1994, p. 234). This connotation of fullness or completeness is confirmed by the etymology of 'round' which sees it derived from an, "earlier sense [of] 'full, complete, brought to completion'" (Harper, 2014c). As I think about it, this makes so much sense when I consider common expressions such as: 'all year round', 'well-rounded', 'an all-round, good idea', 'sphere of influence', 'round off',

'round out', 'a round dozen', even the word 'surround', all of which seem to suggest a sense of completeness.

Rilke seems to capture the round fullness, of a *chora*-like space in this verse,

This round bird-call

Rests in the instant that engenders it

Huge as the sky above the withered forest

Docilely things take their place in this call

In it the entire landscape seems to rest. (Rilke, in Bachelard, 1994, p. 238)

For Rilke, the bird's cry fills the instant in which it is heard, and fills the horizon right across the landscape as full as an egg in its shell. The fullness of the bird cry's roundness seems to transcend being intellectual, material-physical and temporal.

In trying to shape an understanding of the form of this space, I realise I am experiencing a fundamental, hermeneutic challenge of language, with roundness becoming a useful metaphor for conveying dimensions of the fullness of this space, which may not otherwise have been accessible to me.

I certainly feel the limitations of language and syntax for describing precisely what I wish to describe, and yet also acknowledge that those limits can be extended via metaphor, irony and poetic meaning. The 'space' of conversation and of Plato's *chora* to which Gadamer refers, seems immediately subject to a fuzziness of syntactical meaning because precisely what it is referring to is not clear. It seems derivative of a metaphor for physical space, and seems ironic in that it suggests a meaning of 'space' other than physical space, which appears paradoxical and impossible. And yet, I feel very content with the meaning conjured by Rilke's poetic rendering of 'space' conveying a connected sense of being in the world which is intimate, visceral and integral, and which also extends beyond physical space.

And when I add to that the notion of roundness and its ironical connotation of fullness, I discern a connotation of that *chora* space as enveloping a person's full presence and consciousness. When I look again now at the panoramic landscape from my living room window on this glorious spring day, I see sublime tufts of cloud suspended motionless, a majestic backdrop for the only movement I see: a lone, white goshawk slowly spiralling upwards without the slightest movement of wings. I am in that space – not looking at it,

more seeing in it - and it is as large and round and full as Rilke's bird-call. The roundness of my being in it transcends any capacity I have to convey it precisely in language. I feel constantly limited by the narrow scope of language and its syntax to capture the richness and fullness of meaning I experience. No combination of words comes close to doing justice to this yearning I have to give form to the experience. Nevertheless, the different 'space' I enter when I consider such experiences using metaphor and other rich imagery in any medium of art, has me sensing a measure of that round fullness.

Baskin (2008b) describes a view of "storied spaces" which adds to my developing understanding of Gadamer's interpretation of *chora* succinctly. Baskin suggests that, "All of us ... experience life as a space defined by the stories we've accepted to explain the events that have happened, and continue to happen, around us" (2008b, p. 1). Novelist Scott Turow has a main character frustrated in her attempts to find meaning in her life, uttering, "Who are we... but the stories we tell about ourselves and believe" (2005, p. 601)?

Baskin suggests that two different types of narrative dwell in our storied spaces, "narrative, by which people describe the past, and antenarrative, by which they try to describe the present" (2008b, p. 1). Management researcher Maurice Yolles draws on the work of story researcher David Boje to describe antenarrative as, "a speculation that is fragmented, nonlinear, incoherent, collective, non-deterministic, and pre-narrative" (Yolles, 2007).

Yolles also suggests that whereas narrative follows a pattern, in antenarrative patterns may not be apparent. Instead, in an antenarrative, we reach uncertainly for fragments of understanding and that we might typically experience confusion and a sense of messiness and incoherence. This distinction between narrative and antenarrative is a helpful reminder to me of a point Kierkegaard makes,

"It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards." (Kierkegaard, in Gardiner, 1988, p. 90)

It seems Kierkegaard may have been describing the inadequacy of analytic reasoning: when we look back on a sequence of past events we can often feel clarity about causal sequencing and perhaps assume that each progression was a lineal advance on the one preceding it, perhaps overlooking that in any given moment there is a messiness of almost unlimited options from which we choose, and each of those options perhaps pointing

towards unlimited other options, often with an utter absence of any clear sense of what the next step might be.

Baskin suggests that the interplay between narrative and antenarrative in the construction of a story is that, contrary to bringing together an organised understanding of assembled facts, we are actually piecing together fragments of meaning in an order of our creating,

In creating a story, the teller chooses and orders events for inclusion or exclusion, putting them in sequence, and indicating cause-and-effect relationships... each of us does this unconsciously hundreds, maybe thousands of times every day, as we interpret our world in order to respond ... Meaning emerges from the storyteller's particular choosing and sequencing of events.

(Baskin, 2008b, p. 3)

There seem enormous responsibilities here for a storyteller, and enormous consequences from how a story is shaped. As I consider the limitations and ambiguities of language, and the selective filtering of data by mental models, the telling of a story seems to assume an orthodoxy and an apparent assumption of 'rightness' that challenges anyone wishing to infer differently or disagree. The very telling marginalises or even expunges other ways of constructing the story. And yet, in that process Baskin describes, perhaps only a slight re-ordering of events or of cause-and-effect might result in a significantly different story.

As I think further about storied spaces it seems to me that each 'story' I create to shape meaning of an experience might have a sensory effect on me like a still photograph. I look at a snapshot – and whether it is of people and places known to me or not, I begin to make meaning – I look for cues and clues that might suggest to me what is 'happening'. And if I were to look at a series of snapshots over time, such as a webcam which takes photographs of the same scene at regular intervals, I might start to piece together a progression of events and meaning from earlier photographs 'leading up to' the current one. I might feel very comfortable in the meaning I have constructed, believing it to be a 'true' account of how events unfolded, without the least consideration of Kierkegaard's observation of the life-trailing nature of consciousness, that we understand our life backwards but live it forwards, with us imposing our account of what is happening in the world, in any antenarrative. Gadamer seems to be alluding to something like antenarrative when he refers to how, "the *chora* is positioned in the middle between being and becoming and is presented as that which mediates" (2007, p. 400).

I imagine that, in a perhaps similar way to how the defined, physical parameters of a photograph seem to enclose the proximity of subjects within a space, evoking an intimacy between them, despite whatever else may have been happening around them, something similar seems to happen in our storied spaces – we single out disparate snapshots of our experience in a metaphorical space and assign meaning to them based on our previous experiences, which we assume to be a ‘true’ account.

Our storied spaces each seem to be frozen in time, comprising a ‘space’ of time and thoughts, existing between the words we utter, and amounting to a vital dimension of the meaning we shape. And that, while coming to ‘know’ something might emerge in this coherent, retrospective and continually unfolding way, we are simultaneously trying to accommodate what is happening in any given present moment – as we struggle in our efforts to grasp, question, reflect, hold and resolve tensions and ambiguities that unfold like ocean waves rising and surging or dropping and crushing - into our unfolding narrative.

Within cautions around denial and delusion, Fiction writer Scott Turow captures something of this when, in response to a question by her son alluding to what he has just learned about his mother’s remarkable past, a main character shrugs it off declaring,

This is life... Right now. This is life. You know the philosophers? The present never stops. There is only the present. You cheat life to live in the past... The past is beyond change... [this] is the present and the truth. (Turow, 2005, pp. 602-603)

Making distinctions between wisdom and noise in my leading

Because the nature of the world is unknowable... we are left with only sensemaking... And so we must pay attention to the world as it unfolds. (Reuben McDaniel, in Weick, 2009, p. 36)

I wonder now about the choices I make as I make meaning in a storied space. I wonder how much I let meaning present itself to me and how much I might consciously shape. I suspect that in any given storied space there are many meanings I can shape, depending on the

elements within the space which I recognise as being significant. I now sense new meaning when I revisit these words from Dreyfus and Kelly:

If you tried to listen to all the sounds of the universe at once it would be deafening. All the various meanings would cancel each other out. You would hear the chaos of white noise instead of the single, hidden truth... This is exactly parallel to what would happen if you tried to see all the colors in the world at once. It would look like something that has a meaning, you would be driven to find out what that ultimate meaning was, but you would be driven mad in the search. Because when it is universal it is deafening, it is a chaos; and although this chaos is itself the ultimate nature of the universe, you can only fathom it from one perspective at a time. (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 174)

To me, Dreyfus and Kelly are describing the risk of what may happen when we do not consciously make discerning distinctions of meaning from what we experience. They seem to be suggesting that without making those discerning distinctions, the 'noise' and 'chaos' of the world is overwhelming, as far as 'meaning' is concerned. This seems a terrifying risk of being consigned to conceding life as a random sequence of events, and that trying to weigh all the elements of experience empirically, without any reference to our historicity, would prove crushing. In suggesting that meaning depends on a perspective, Dreyfus and Kelly have me thinking again about stance: the position I take from which to regard an experience. The nuances of meaning of 'stance' I have described, including 'resting place' and 'dwelling', hint to me that when I wisely take a position on something, it feels natural and even – perhaps when I am at my best - efficacious; a seamless part of the flow of my continuing unfolding participating in the world. It seems that the information I select from the swirling noise all around me is transformed within my storied spaces into knowledge I need to flourish in my life. As I consider this, it follows, for me, that everything I have learned and been influenced by prior in my life, might bring me to my current stance. Only I can choose what I need in order to be able to flourish, and only I can even shape what I mean by 'flourish'.

I want to inquire a little deeper now into how I think I might aspire to wisely participate in my storied spaces. A piecing together, in this way, of storied spaces suggests an agency around creating meaning. Baskin cautions that there is a risk in this of,

... creating a self-reinforcing feedback loop that enables us to define our stories as the whole story, The Truth. At all times and places, people in the thrall of such stories are able to justify almost any act" (Baskin, 2008b, p. 4).

As a typical example, Baskin describes varying ways people have accounted for the movement of the sun across the sky, including Apollo driving his chariot, the sun rotating around the earth, or the earth rotating around the sun, each one having been influenced by,

Greek mythology, the Bible, or the Big Bang, respectively. For the most part, what anyone "knows" about any information appears to depend largely on the narrative, socially negotiated stories through which he or she processes that information. (Baskin, 2008b, p. 4)

While I am drawn to the concept of storied spaces as a way of considering how I come to know something, I want to learn more about how I might come to better trust what I know in my storied space and how I might use that knowledge for virtuous, practical action. I have a hunch that further considering of 'antenarrative' may yield more insight.

Antenarrative seems to be a knowing which discloses itself to me as I experience a phenomenon. It seems to be how I account for what is happening at the edge of the current moment, with the rest of my narrative tapering back from it. I think of the place at which the drop of water containing a speck of limestone drips onto the tip of the stalagmite on the cave floor below, and how the drip welds itself to it, drawing the whole stalagmite forward.

My stalagmite metaphor is useful only to a point as there is something almost predetermined about where each drop will fall, and the whole structure calcifies and is unyielding to change. At the point of antenarrative in a storied space, there seems no 'welding' onto narrative; there are countless possibilities. I return to a question I seem to have been stumbling over throughout this inquiry: how might I choose wisely between options, to lead with virtuous practical wisdom?

It seems to me that, above all else, how and what I choose assumes enormous moral challenge. Moral philosopher Susan Neiman quotes former British Secretary of Education William Bennet,

Moments of moral clarity are rare in life, and they are exceedingly precious. They usually follow upon hours – years of moral confusion and they are never accompanied by a lifetime guarantee. (Neiman, 2008, p. 424)

Gadamer suggests that moral clarity might be so hard to arrive at because it is experienced in the moment, and cannot be choreographed in advance; he seems to allude to it happening as antenarrative unfolds -

Moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance like knowledge that can be taught. The relation between means and ends here is not such that one can know the right means in advance, and that is because the right end is not a mere object of knowledge either. There can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed toward as a whole. (Gadamer, 2006 - b, p. 318)

In describing his sense of *meta-poiesis* in which humans are at their virtuous best, Dreyfus (Dreyfus, 1998b, 2005a, 2005b, 2007a) describes how this is achieved by progressing through his stages of skill acquisition culminating in the ‘expert’s’ contextualised, intuitive, embodied skill, or practical wisdom. The sort of moral clarity reached in a state of *meta-poiesis* is not achieved by following a process or formula. In seeming to reinforce Dreyfus’s belief that rules are only useful for novices, Neiman suggests,

“There is no rule for applying rules. If you had one you’d need a rule that told you how to apply that one, and the next one, and the next; this is one slippery slope that no one can climb.” (Neiman, 2008, p. 205)

Schwartz concurs, “Rules cannot substitute for practical wisdom... tighter rules and regulation... without wisdom are blind” (2010, pp. 9-10).

Both Schwartz and Neiman suggest that in a world of increasing complexity and confusion, our longing for moral clarity sees people reaching for a simple but flawed solution based on rules. Neiman quotes philosopher John Dewey on this,

Dewey ... thinks our longing for certainty pulls us toward rigid, ready-made rules ... he writes, ‘... a hankering for certainty, born of timidity and nourished by love of authoritative prestige, has led to the idea that absence of immutably fixed and universally applicable ready-made principles is equivalent to moral chaos.’ (Neiman, 2008, p. 206)

Rather than a state of chaos, Baskin (2008b) likens what happens in storied spaces to the interactions within complex adaptive systems. "What makes human social systems so complex is the dynamics that emerge as people behave as agents in an intricate nested network of storied spaces"(2008b, p. 6) Baskin likens the way we create meaning in storied spaces - by absorbing our current experience into our emergent antenarrative - as being similar to the way complex adaptive systems process information and adapt to their environment. The dominant narrative of a storied space resembles the role of attractors in complex adaptive systems, keeping behaviour congruent with ways that have always worked. Baskin reminds me of the parallels between a Dreyfus expert's intuitive capacity to respond to the nuances of context, with a complex adaptive system's self-regulating capacity, dependent on features of its context, "For complexity, context is everything. The nature of any entity depends largely on the context of its history and environment" (2008a, pp. 18-19).

As we live our lives in Husserl's 'natural attitude', constantly seeking order, moral clarity and meaning in the complexity and confusion of our lives, it seems our senses are flooded with a crushing weight of 'white noise', much of which our historicity and mental models filter out. Even so, being human seems to entail a bewildering array of options and complexity as life continues unfolding, with a constant stream of questions, challenges, confusion and uncertainty. Daniel Kim might describe this as being mired in the busy-ness of responding to 'events'.

It seems to me that a wise person who enters Husserl's 'philosophical attitude' seeks to make fine 'distinctions of worth', enabling a distilling of hidden truths from within the continuing rush of white noise. My emerging understanding of how this capacity might develop takes shape around Dreyfus's concept of an expert constantly reflecting and knowing in action, according to his/her horizons of significance, all of which continually contributes to a cumulative strengthening of contextual, intuitive, embodied skill.

Gadamer seems to be referring to just this sense of intuitively grasping at hidden truths when he describes,

... the structure of living, organic being in which the whole is in each individual: the whole of life has its center in the heart, which by means of common sense grasps countless things all at the same time. (Gadamer, 2006 -b, p. 26)

I suspect that as I continue striving to lead with fidelity of influence, and aspiring to ‘whoosh’ towards *meta-poiesis*, any continuing progress will depend on my continuing capacity for making fine distinctions of worth, particularly as I do so intuitively, shaping emerging antenarrative at the edges of my storied spaces – never complete and never fully grasping the meaning I yearn for.

Who I might be as a leader as I strive to lead with virtuous practical wisdom

... practical wisdom has an explicitly moral character. Phronesis is not simply knowledge; it is the capacity for knowledge in action. (Leslie Paul Thiele, 2006, p. 21)

I had long been looking forward to this section: the time when I might get to distil key learnings into a brief set of conclusions and take pride in some concrete outcomes of my study, along with recommendations for pathways of those following in my steps. Now that I am here I fully recognise a folly for me in that assumption. Throughout this inquiry I have traced a narrative of unfolding understanding and I have become very wary of any form of reductionism that might risk its diminution to something akin to an executive summary. How more complete a reversion from holistic thinking to analytic thinking might there be?

My hope of developing an empirical rubric of effective leadership faded as my poorly-formed touchstones of leadership crumbled one after the other. Throughout, I have been pursuing a truth; initially an empirical truth, and I reflect now that at the core of my learning lies a turning towards a phenomenological truth of leadership essence and also a hermeneutic truth of lived leadership. Palmer defines truth as, “an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline” (2004, p. 127). This resonates particularly deeply in me now as I am coming to appreciate that there is no ‘universal truth’ about truth, nor do I see any desirability in pursuing my own brand of purely self-referential truth.

For now, I sense that before I might begin experiencing any truth, I might need to heed Sokolowski’s call for a leaning towards truthfulness. I understand this to mean a sincere pursuit of revealing what might be true, irrespective of how remote or slippery grasping at a truth might prove. I learned from the great philosophers I accessed that, for me, ‘truth’

seems grounded in the centrality of human experience in all its forms. Shaping hermeneutic meaning from lived experience about things that matter - with passion and with a discipline to make fine distinctions of worth - as it unfolds in each moment, seems the highest form of truth to which I might now aspire. And the autoethnographic process of exploring my personal stories of encounter with different perspectives on truth against the backdrop of cultural influences and my broader historicity continues taking me into new, unanticipated storied spaces in which I continue to shape new learning and insights into who I am in the world.

A reassuring insight I am gaining from this inquiry is that falling prey to ill-founded inferences, assumptions and dysfunctional mental models is not inevitable. A rigorous seeking of truthfulness can mitigate the likelihood of falling prey in that way, and progress towards this might be achieved through phenomenology, by suspending assumptions and judgements and by describing phenomena as carefully as possible; and also through hermeneutic dialogue, by vigorously considering a phenomenon against the horizon it sits upon, and by understanding that horizons are constantly changing as people constantly engage in new meaning; and also through the dialectic of autoethnographically inquiring into the shaping of personal understanding as I come to deeper insights of cultural understanding.

What does seem inevitable is the incompleteness of what we perceive and understand. Phenomenologically, we can only ever experience a single facet, a single part, of a complex whole, and once it is lived it is objectified in our consciousness, no longer a live moment. The situational complexity of the context of influence relationships seems to generate emergent qualities which often defy leaders' intentions, and which suggests a folly of focusing on rigorous planning, tight structures and control. Instead, what seems crucial is a capacity for the continuous, in-the-moment shaping of meaning in our storied spaces, contextual intuition to recognise emerging patterns, and virtuous practical wisdom with which to respond to them; and all of this from within a disposition of learning.

The practical wisdom of being guided by the continually unfolding antenarrative of our storied spaces seems vindicated by the perspective of firefighting commander Paul Gleason,

If I make a decision it is a possession, I take pride in it, I tend to defend it and not listen to those who question it. If I make sense, then this is more dynamic

and I listen and I can change it. A decision is something you polish. (In Weick, 2009, p. 56)

I feel Gleason's words reinforce for me that my mental models shape what and how I perceive. When I see myself in a detached, positivistic way, decisions and actions I intervene with become hallmarks of my reputation and my capacity to be 'right' or 'wrong'; hallmarks which my ego will want to keep polishing to keep them shiny. When I see myself participating rigorously in the fluidity of continuous, unfolding 'sense making' within the complexity of our storied spaces, I feel more humbled, more disciplined and more concerned with shaping meaning amongst emerging patterns to support a fidelity of influence towards a shared vision.

It seems that my seeking to lead with virtuous practical wisdom might approach Dreyfus's *meta-poiesis* if I pursue phenomenological and hermeneutic truthfulness about how virtuous my goals are and how virtuous my 'means' of achieving them are. Beyond my personal honesty and authenticity, in accord with my historicity and my horizons of significance, I sense I might further measure the goodness of my leading by applying Greenleaf's challenge (In Spears & Lawrence, 2004, p. 6) to reflect on the extent to which my leading - my influence relationships - is enabling me to contribute to something worthy beyond myself, and whether those I serve, as a leader, grow as people, as a result of my leading.

When I envisage who I might be as a leader, I want to be authentic to myself, as guided by my horizons of significance. I want to reach for Quinn's sense of what is highest in me, with a *meta-poiesis*-type of 'whooshing' human excellence, utilising my virtuous practical wisdom to engage with others dialogically, with rich fidelity of influence, in pursuit of a noble, shared vision.

I understand that just as a phenomenological perspective on an experience only ever reveals a single facet of that experience, any understanding of every experience is similarly incomplete and my very functioning in the world is a constant, dialogic process of shaping meaning from those experiences.

In my efforts to try to autoethnographically narrate the unfolding story of my participative inquiry I cannot hold back the subtle but significant hermeneutic change to my original question of, 'Who am I as a leader?' to 'Who might I be as a leader?' As much as anything else I have learned is an unslaked thirst for ongoing inquiring and asking the questions that

will drive forward my learning. Early in this inquiry I quoted Gadamer's wise reflection that, "Every question points in the direction of what is asked, and places what is asked about in a particular perspective" (2004, p. 361). I can acknowledge now that perhaps my 'official' question pointed me too closely to a positivist inquiry and that it had subliminally evolved, enabling a more hermeneutic and autoethnographic perspective to unfold.

It took the long journey of this inquiry to come to 'know' my question, perhaps a little like in T S Eliot's 'Little Gidding',

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time, (Eliot, 1943)

I am feeling something of having traced a full circle: in pursuing a deep inquiry in response to my original question and explicitly reflecting on it, I find myself questioning now my question, and coming to know it for the first time. I feel this has enabled me to make critical and transformative shifts in methodology necessary for shaping a hermeneutic perspective. Late in his life atomic theorist, Albert Einstein, articulated the importance of continuing inquiry by stating simply to journalist William Miller, "The important thing is not to stop questioning" (1955, p. 64).

And so I pause in this narrative, but not in this inquiring. I have become a seeker of truthfulness through dialogic inquiry. I am now less bound by an artificial finitude of what I know and do not know, and seek to continue refining my hermeneutic grip on my living, to continue holding at bay my deep-seated positivist mental models, and seek to embrace the inquiring, the learning, the seeking of unfolding meaning.

As I embark further on this learning about who I am, and who I might be as a leader, I am inspired to forge new horizons and new understanding by Rilke's words of over a century ago, about the great challenges that remain. Though I, and the meaning I shape of my living, are indissoluble from the world in which I dwell, and from the people with whom I dwell, and from my historicity; the path I tread of shaping meaning in my consciousness remains private and solitary – however much others might contribute to it. Rilke seems to hint at all of this, as well as to the capacity in all of us to make distinctions of worth about things that matter.

... there is no one anywhere who can answer for you those questions and feelings which, in their depths, have a life of their own; for even the most

articulate people are unable to help, since what words point to is so very delicate, is almost unsayable. But even so, I think that you will not have to remain without a solution... if you have this love for what is humble and try... to win the confidence of what seems poor: then everything will become easier for you, more coherent and somehow more reconciling, not in your conscious mind perhaps, which stays behind, astonished, but in your innermost awareness, awakeness, and knowledge. (Rainer Maria Rilke, 2014, p. 9)

(Gannon, 2006)(Gannon, 2006)(Gannon, 2006)(Gannon, 2006)(Gannon, 2006)(Gannon, 2006)(Gannon, 2006)

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