

**Exploring the Emergent Act of Leadership
in Processes of Social Interaction in Organisations**

Abstract

In this article, we propose a conceptual framework for leadership emergence in organisations regarded as complex adaptive systems. We suggest that in complexity leadership theory, the goal of formally sanctioned organisational leadership is the ability to influence others toward unpredictable objectives. Leadership is a locus of power in processes of human interaction, and we claim that leaders influence or attract followers through complex relational and self-related processes. We contend that the act of formal leadership in complex adaptive organisational systems either emerges or disappears within shifting organisational frameworks as a function of a leader's identity and his/her abilities to engage in processes of ongoing and shifting social interaction.

Keywords: Complexity; Identity, Self; Social interaction; Emergence

Introduction

What is leadership and what is the purpose of leadership? The answers depend on the ontological and epistemological assumptions one makes about the definition and purpose of leadership. Like all terms in social science, the concept of leadership is obviously arbitrary and subjective. An observation by Bennis (1959, p. 259) is as true today as it was many years ago: *the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So, we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it....*

Most people have little doubt that leadership is a ‘real’ and important phenomenon in most organisations, although opinions diverge about its substantial significance. Some downplay the impact of leadership (e.g. Andersen, 2000; Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985; Pfeffer, 1978; Svensson & Wood, 2005), whereas most emphasise its significance for organisational processes and outcomes (e.g. Fiedler, 1996; House & Aditya, 1997). Leadership is obviously constructed by leaders, subordinates, journalists, leadership researchers, and others. It is frequently a very shaky construction. The numerous definitions of leadership appear to have little in common, apart from involving an influence process towards objectives (Yukl, 2006).

People most clearly identify leadership when it is apparent that human agency makes a difference. It may therefore be worthwhile to understand subjects, relations, situations, and acts in organisations as leadership. To the extent that leadership is about influence, it makes sense to allow space for variation among different types of tasks, organisations, kinds of people, and societal and organisational cultures in terms of how such influence processes may emerge and be shaped. One such variation is the complexity perspective to organisational studies, which has been evolving during the last couple of decades and is challenging mainstream thinking on leadership. Scholars within the complexity sciences have promoted ‘substitutes’ to leadership by minimising the traditional leadership role to make way for self-organising or enabling principles. To date, findings from complexity approaches have not been widely accepted in organisation and leadership studies. A chief difficulty with the complexity theory view involves the role of structure within the organisation. Mainstream leadership theorists will not accept the notion of influence or coordination yielding nonlinear and essentially unpredictable future conditions. Essentially, they see leadership as a mechanism for steering towards predictable outcomes.

In this article, we will explore the topic of leadership emergence in organisations regarded as complex adaptive systems. In such systems, leadership is not always a formalised operation that is sanctioned by the organisation, nor does it always occur in the context of a leader-follower relationship. In this article we will, however, focus the discussion on the act of emergence or disappearance of formal leadership with sanctioned authority, as this is closer to the reality for most organisations.

Organisations as Complex Adaptive Systems

Common notions of leadership grow out of viewing organisations as equilibrium-seeking systems with predictable futures, arrived at by leaders who plan interventions and direct behaviours. Organisational theorists who have started to conceptualise organisations as complex adaptive systems (e.g. Anderson, 1999; McKelvey, 2001; Stacey, 1992; Wheatley, 1999) increasingly reject this view. They claim that organisations exist in conditions of instability, and as organisations move further away from equilibrium towards instability they show complex behaviour and may therefore be regarded as complex adaptive systems. Their chief argument is that this is the situation for many organisations today.

Complexity theory encourages researchers and practitioners to see organisations as dynamic systems composed of a diversity of people who interact with one another, and thus promote behaviour for the entire system that also influences the environment of the system (Anderson, 1999; Marion, 1999; Regine & Lewin, 2002). Consistent with the arguments of Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) and McKelvey (2000), complexity science aims to broaden the view of leadership as individual interpersonal influence to stress collective influence processes – a relationship that emerges in the interaction between people as an act of recognition (Griffin, 2002). The premises of complex adaptive systems as an order-creating science are unpredictability in terms of overall system development and in terms of agent behaviour. Order-creation is a result of emergent interactions among agents, not a default condition given by initial design. Thus, for theories of leadership: (i) to better account for these premises, and (ii) to provide useful contributions, unpredictability, emergence, and order-creation must be part of theory development. This means that:

- Developed leadership theory cannot be premised solely on biological systems thinking that assumes there is some ‘whole’ in which it is possible to use control theory to establish rules governing whole system behaviour. The suggestion that an organisation is a living system sets up ‘a whole’ outside the interaction between people in an organisation, ‘a whole’ to which they conform by following rules if their behaviour is to be judged in accordance with organisational norms. Organisations function through processes of communication, of conflict, of emotions, of group forming, of learning, of power plays, of working together, and of joint action. The people, not the interactions in which they engage, are alive.
- In social systems as organisations, agents share a common social order to organise information from the environment into a knowledge structure (Boulding, 1956). Instead of simple rules, research needs to address internally competing interests (Anderson, 1999). ‘Simple rules’ prescriptions also have an ideological basis. The organisation is understood as an autonomous whole in which people participate. Such concepts distract the attention from the nature of human interaction in organisations. These concepts eliminate power relations and conflicting agendas, thereby distracting people from recognising their responsibility for what they are doing and what happens to them in organisations, leaving them feeling that they are victims of the system.
- Leadership theories that largely assume that the leader is able to calculate or meta-plan what style or role he/she should take to achieve order-creation are not in line with the premises of a complex adaptive system. Instability, unpredictability, uncertainty, and

emergence are central features of such systems, entailing a dynamic view of leadership not featured in concepts of pre-designed roles or styles. Leadership depends on a wide variety of environmental and organisational conditions. The meaning and importance of various leadership dimensions vary by context.

- A singular teleology does not capture nonlinear unpredictable dynamics. Within broad parameters, most leadership scholars agree that leadership involves asymmetrical relationships, in which influencing processes target people in some kind of dependency relationship (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Abstractions of complexity science fail to take these premises into account; they do not factor in the importance of agency in leadership processes. It is not possible to replace complex agency with yet another set of prescriptions to deal with the dynamics of organisational life.
- Finally, theories of leadership must focus on leadership domains where predictability governs and order-creation is possible. These are domains in which a leader may exercise influence or attraction in an organization. This means that leadership theory domains such as context, situation, and followers become less important, as unpredictability is a feature of agent and system behaviour in such domains.

Complexity leadership theory should provide a framework of order-creation within ontological and epistemological perspectives from the complexity sciences without losing predictability and the locus of responsibility as fundamental to leadership. Developed leadership theories must concentrate on domains of self-leadership and relational/power/influence interface; these are areas in a complex adaptive system where predictability and order-creation govern agent and system behaviour. Also, these are the areas where influence and attraction, by controlling material and symbolic resources, are feasible (Maguire & McKelvey, 1999).

Influencing and Attracting

Influence, attraction and power relating are essential in most leadership theories. Two concepts of power have dominated modern Western thought (Hindess, 1996). One is the idea of power as a simple quantitative phenomenon. Power in this sense is a capacity to act, a notion of power often attributed to Hobbes (1928, 1968) who argued that power is a necessary condition of human agency and a ubiquitous feature of human existence. This understanding of power has also been dominant in organisational and leadership theory (e.g. French & Raven, 1959; Pettigrew, 1972; Yukl & Falbe, 1991; Bass, 1960; Etzioni, 1991).

Although the concept of power as a capacity resting in a single individual is widely employed in political, sociological, organisational, and leadership studies, other views are more consistent with the premises of complex adaptive systems. Such views entail an understanding of power not only as a capacity but also as a right to act, with both capacity and right being seen to rest on the consent of those over whom power is exercised (Hindess, 1996, Hobbes, 1996). Elias (1939, 2000) also suggests that power is not something anyone possesses but is a characteristic of all interactions between people. Foucault (1980) argues that power is a structure of actions bearing on the actions of individuals who are free. This

eschews the determinism of power as a quantitative capacity. Instead, power is seen as a matter of instruments, techniques and procedures employed in an attempt to influence the actions of those who have a choice about how they might behave (Hindess, 1996).

Following this, power is then understood in organisations as a concept involving a capacity and right to act resting on the consent of those over whom power is exercised. Power manifests itself in a relational manner (Simmel, 1964). Power therefore appears as a process, an aspect of an ongoing social structure, and may be understood as a dialectical process; oppositions work together and in tension with each other. Hence, in organisations power is understood as the ongoing patterns that paradoxically both form and at the time are formed by the processes of relating between people (Griffin & Stacey, 2005). In forming and maintaining relationships with others, people constrain and are being constrained by others and, of course, they also enable and are enabled by others. In human action, power is this enabling-constraining relationship where the power balance is tilted in favour of some and against others (Stacey, 2006).

As the human interactions, organisational structures, and organisational cultures become more complex, so also do the power. A leader (appointed or not, formal or informal) may tilt the power balance in his or her favour by influencing people's behaviour, thoughts, desires, needs, feelings, ambitions, dreams, or hopes. The enabling and constraining mechanisms of social interactions between people mean that influence in organisations arise from combinations of consent and capacity, as follows:

- Influence or attraction by a leader who personalises or role models important aspects of what it means to be a member of the organisation. The impact of 'leading by example' or role modelling as a source of influence is frequently cited in the popular press, often in the form of authentic leadership (Bennis, 2003; George, 2003), as well as in the literature of social cognitive (Bandura, 1997), ethics (Trevino *et al.*, 2000), and neo-charismatic (House & Aditya, 1997) theory. This also includes theories of charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Shamir *et al.*, 1993) and transformational leadership (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Among core behaviours leaders seek to model or exemplify are confidence, high moral standards, innovative problem solving, commitment, and self-sacrifice, which may influence followers to emulate their behaviours and actions (Bass *et al.*, 1987; Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998, 1999; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).
- Another reason for power tilts may be found in attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Green & Mitchell, 1979; Martinko & Gardner, 1987): the ways in which people attribute the behaviour of others or themselves to something else. Each follower holds an implicit theory of the leadership role, including appropriate behaviour, the cause of leaders' behaviours, and external constraints to effective leadership. When the leader's behaviour matches another individual's implicit theory of effective leadership, the leader will be given the consent to lead.

- A third explanation of power tilts is the dynamics of relating in organisations. Shifting relationships between people in a group are predominately governed by dynamic (such as emotions, trust, motivation), social (such as group forming and social identity as explained above), cognitive (such as perception, learning, knowledge gathering), and coordination related psychological processes (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2005; Karp & Helgø, 2008). Movements in the power balance alter people's experience of enabling-constraining, which may be seen as the movement of the created identity in the leader-follower relationship. Identity is then created through power (Stacey, 2006; Griffin, 2002; Holmgren, 2006). This patterning of power may be understood as ongoing iterations of identity in a group of people (Lee, 2005). This is a property the leader (formal or informal, appointed or not) may influence and tilt in his/her favour by actively engaging in human interaction, but not control. It also follows that those in a position to direct the group are those who are seen to be the most prototypical of the group position in a given context (Reicher, *et al.*, 2005).
- Influence or attraction may also come as a response to people's needs (Stacey, 2006; Griffin, 2002). Needs in a leader-follower context may include sense making, support, trust, acceptance, motivation, knowledge, experience, aspirations, and dreams. Such needs explain the reasons for people to engage in particular behaviours (e.g. Geen, 1994; McClelland, 1985; Maslow, 1954; Alderferd, 1972). Sheldon (2004) proposes that different adaptations of people's behaviours in organisations serve at least three psychological needs: needs to sustain a basic sense of self (autonomy), to manipulate the environment in order to achieve instrumental goals (competence), and to form cooperative relationships with others (relatedness).
- A final explanation offered for the power tilt in favour of a formal leader may be found in leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Deluga, 1998; Liden, *et al.*, 1997). Graen & Cashman (1975) suggested that exchange relationships are formed on the basis of personal compatibility and follower competence and dependability. In addition to exchange of labour, competence, rewards, and other formal matters, the exchange of trust in organisations is important. Trust therefore creates conditions for interaction; power and trust are opposites but also dependent on each other (Sørhaug, 1996).

The Emergent Process of Leadership

The emergent act of leadership has been postulated to be a function of identity, personality, context variables, social interaction, relationships, group dynamics, gender roles, physical appearance, group cohesion and commitment, or some combination and/or interaction between or among these factors (De Souza & Klein, 1995; Ellis & Cronshaw, 1992; Griffin, 2002; Judge *et al.*, 2002; Mahar & Mahar, 2004; Karp & Helgø, 2008). Definitions of such emergence processes vary from being a social process during which a specific individual adopts the role of leader (Moss & Kent, 1996) to a process of framing reality to provide a basis for action (Cook, 1994). Emergence processes may occur formally, whereby group members, senior executives, or boards officially designate an individual to be the leader; or

informally, whereby an individual evolves as a group's leader without being designated officially (Yukl & van Fleet, 1992). We will address leadership as a sanctioned formal operation by suggesting how the act of leadership emerges in complex adaptive organisational systems.

Individuals form groups and are also being formed by the groups (Burnes, 2004). The important aspect is that the self is relational, and organisational processes are the shifting identities accomplished by conversations (e.g. Hegel, 1807; Elias, 1991; Cozolino, 2006). Understanding is shared in organisations by people testing and checking each other's communication, questioning and challenging it, reformulating and elaborating it. Understandings are developed or negotiated between people in organisations over a period of time (Shotter, 1993). People communicate in order to couple their activities in the organisation with those around them to create meaning and to express identity (e.g. Reicher, *et al.* 2005; Stacey, 2006). In these attempts, people are constructing relationships (Shaw, 2003).

Leadership is therefore not static or permanently possessed (even though somebody has this in his or her job description) but emerges from the ongoing interaction between leaders and followers. What is being recognised in the leader-follower relationship is a configuration of power in which the power balance is tilted towards the identity of the leader. The one who is recognised as a leader (being formal, informal, appointed or not) is the one who has the capacity to influence the group. Obviously, such capacity is not static. The potential for a shift in power is therefore present in any given moment as long as there is interaction going on.

Leadership is identified when it is apparent that human agency makes a difference. Leadership action is made possible by the way leaders construct their identities as leaders. Leadership therefore emerges in the interaction between people as the act of recognising and being recognised (Griffin, 2002), as well as the act of gaining the necessary power, trust, credibility, and respect to perform as a leader. The leader is embodied in an individual person but, more importantly, leadership is a phenomenon that emerges only in interaction – and has no value without interaction. In organisations, people engage in communicative interaction in which people are continually choosing what to say and do next, so evoking responses from others. These social processes most commonly take the form of everyday conversations. This social interaction forms and is formed by individual selves and collective identities. What emerges, and is continually iterated, is a diversity of identities. One such identity is that of the leader. This identity of the leader is thus co-created by processes of social interaction.

Influencing and Attraction in Processes of Social Interaction

Social interaction processes are the acts of organising that contribute to the structuring of relationships in complex adaptive organisational systems. Organisations are regarded as patterns of interaction between people that are iterated in the present (Griffin & Stacey, 2005). One moves from the perspective of thinking of leadership in terms of a spatial metaphor, as one does when one thinks that individuals interact to produce a system outside

of themselves at a higher level, to a temporal processes way of thinking, where the temporal processes are those of human relating. This means that a leader cannot step outside the interaction to design that interaction. Overall plans or designs exist only insofar as people are taking them up in their local interactions (Griffin & Stacey, 2005). Hence, the key word is process, signalling that human interaction in organisations is to be understood not as a system, as argued by many (e.g. Senge, 1990), but as processes of social interaction. The focus of attention is not on some abstract systemic whole but on what people are doing in their relationships with each other (Stacey, 2004). This is also a view of leadership as social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organisations and their members (e.g. Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995).

Collective and individual identities are thus socially constructed. The possibility of leadership depends on the existence of identities and, more specifically, shared identities (Haslam, 2004; Haslam, Postmes & Ellemers, 2003). Leaders and followers are actively involved in framing such identities. The construction of identities is a process of individual and collective self-awareness and self-development. The leader's activity and leadership effectiveness largely revolve around the leader's ability to construct an identity and to engage people in the process of turning those constructions into practical realities (e.g. Reicher, *et al.*, 2005). The balance between creating reality and being created by reality is a matter of the development of interactions over time. The insight is that leadership involves self-awareness (e.g. Reicher, *et al.*, 2005) as well as self-development (e.g. Day, Harrison & Halpin, 2005). Leadership becomes a matter of interpreting what it means to be 'me' and 'us' in a given context (Reicher, *et al.*, 2005). Thus leaders are dependent upon the individual follower conceiving of him/her self both as an individual 'me' and a common 'us', and thereby accepting his/her interpretation of what that implies for action in a given context.

Processes of social interaction assume that a reality lies in the context of relationships (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). The concept of leadership and follower-ship is then a social reality connected to context (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Hosking, 1988). This is an iterative and messy process that is shaped by interactions with others (Sayles, 1964). Organisations are elaborate webs of dynamic interactions of the effects of interplay between individual organisational members and the system to which they belong (Abell & Simons, 2000). A perspective of social interaction changes the focus from the individual to the collective dynamic. Processes in this respect are the influential acts of organising that contribute to the construction of identities, interactions, and relationships. Relationships involve a connection or bond between an individual and another (a person, group, organisation, or other). In some cases, interactions produce these bonds, and in other cases they do not. Scholars do not know why relational bonds form in some instances but not in others, or what factors contribute to the formation of relational bonds. When relationships do result, they can be characterised as strong or weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) as well as more positive or more negative in nature (Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003). Moreover, they can be motivated by instrumental or affective drives. Once formed, they provide a context for behaviour – they establish expectations or norms that serve as guidelines for behaviour. However, they remain dynamic; if the guidelines are violated, the relationship is threatened and relationships can dissolve or re-form in positive or negative ways (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2000).

Taking account of social interaction in the act of leading is leading by acting in the moment but at the same time paying attention to one's own and others' reactions. This will mean allowing for a thinking and feeling self in the presence of others through listening to one's own bodily physical, cognitive and emotional responses and taking account of these in the act of leadership. This is leading by being aware when in a leadership role and, by this, influencing the processes of ongoing interaction between people.

Influencing and Attraction by Displaying Conceptions of Self

Identity is a multidimensional concept used in the social sciences to describe an individual's conception of him or her self as a separate entity. In psychology, identity often relates to self-image, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-regulation, personality and individuation (e.g. Hoyle, *et al.*, 1999; Leary & Tangney, 2003). Identity is contrasted to the concept of the self. The self-concept is based on people's observations of themselves, their inferences about who they are, their wishes and desires, and their evaluation of themselves (Stets & Burke, 2003). Erikson (1959) linked the concept of identity and self, and proposed a framework to describe identity based on a psychological sense of continuity; the ego identity more commonly known as the self. The self is thus the personal idiosyncrasies that separate one person from the next and the human being responsible for the thoughts and actions of an individual – the individual core and substance, which endures through time (Erikson, 1959).

The self-view in the form of self-awareness, self-perception, and self-knowledge has an important role as a meta-structure that guides knowledge access, goal information, actions, and interpretations of social actions (Lord & Hall, 2005). Across different approaches to the self, Vollmer (2007) points to two closely related central themes with respect to arriving at an understanding of the self; namely action and the body. Vollmer therefore argues that the self as action – the owner of action – is the human being. Thus, it follows that the owner of the identity is the self (Vollmer, 2007). To another person, the self of one individual is exhibited in the conduct and discourse of that individual. Therefore, the intentions of another individual can only be inferred indirectly from something emanating from that individual. The particular characteristics of the self determine its identity – the individual's personal, highly subjective comprehension of him or her self as a separate human entity. This subjective comprehension of the self may contrast with the other domains of the self; namely between 'one's own' versus 'others' images of self-state representations.

Following the above, identity promotes a view of the dynamic and multifaceted self as the enduring substance in identity forming (Lord & Brown, 2004), thus favouring processes of self-development. An important issue is the notion that there are certain identity formation strategies that a person may use to adapt to the social world. Higgins (1987) proposed that people have two basic self-regulation systems. One regulates achievement of future rewards, while the other regulates avoidance of punishments. Promotion goals may represent the 'ideal self' whereas prevention goals may regulate the 'ought self', in order to develop behaviours that reinforce the identity of a person in processes of self-development (Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1968).

Influence and Attraction through Developing One-self and Others

Leadership thus involves development of one-self (e.g. Day, Harrison & Halpin, 2005), as well as development of others. Mental and emotional events form the basis for silent conversations in people's minds. Over and over, people replay the events, dreams, and interactions that are important in their life, attempting to make sense and find their way to leadership, and to cope with organisational life in general. Day and Harrison (2007) argue that such processes apply to leadership in the form of self-development, as this will build the capacity to deal with unpredictable objectives (Day, 2001). Self-development is motivated by fundamental needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2003). A person who identifies himself or herself as a leader would be expected to find satisfaction in that identity to the extent that it: (1) helps him/her feel connected to other members in the organisation; (2) elicits feelings of self-efficacy; and (3) provides a means for expressing his/her true self (Ryan & Deci, 2003).

There are two areas of interest in terms of leadership development: the processes by which a self is formed (the 'I'), and the actual content of the schemata which compose the self-concept (the 'Me'). Marcia (1966) focuses on choice and commitment as central to this process. His idea is that any individual's sense of identity is determined in large part by the choices and commitments that he or she makes regarding personal and social traits. People create and construct their own identities (the 'I' becoming the 'Me') through awareness and development. One way to approach such development of self and others is from the concept of personality. Personality is the personal traits that constitute a pattern of behaviour in different situations over time (Moxnes, 2007). There is an 'I' who seeks to become a 'Me' where the 'Me' is the end product and the 'I' the reflective process (McAdams, 2006). Seen together, these constitute a person's identity where personality comprises part of the identity. The two other identity elements in addition to personality are; the tasks that interest people – the concerns, and what they have experienced earlier in life – and their stories (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Pals, 2006).

A distinction is often made between leader development and leadership development. Leader development stresses individual perspectives and intrapersonal capabilities such as, for example, self-awareness and self-motivation, whilst leadership development focuses on relational perspectives and interpersonal capabilities such as social awareness, group motivation, and social skills (Day, 2001). Such differentiation is meaningless as leadership is a process in which the distinction between leaders and leadership, between the individual self and the collective self, is blurred. The important point is that the development of leadership identity is based on a leader's self. In the case of leadership development, the emphasis typically is on individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leadership roles (Day, 2001). The function is to build the intrapersonal capability necessary to form a view of one-self (Gardner, 1993), to engage in identity development (Hall & Seibert, 1992), and to use that self to perform in organisational roles (Day, 2001). Examples of intrapersonal capabilities associated with such development may include self-awareness (e.g. emotional awareness, self confidence), self-regulation (e.g. self-control, trustworthiness, adaptability), and self-motivation (e.g. commitment, initiative, optimism) (Manz & Sims, 1989; McCauley, 2000; Neck & Manz, 1996; Steward *et al.*, 1996).

Another emphasis is to build interpersonal competence (Day, 2001). Gardner (1993) defines interpersonal competence in terms of the ability to understand people, including social awareness and social skills. In general, a person will have to negotiate separately on each identity he or she possesses by interacting with those who are affected by the role in question; and in this context, the leadership role. As social creatures, the meanings people assign to the self are influenced by the 'reflected appraisals' of others (Cooley, 1902). Hence, the self both shapes and is shaped by social exchanges with others (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Mind is emerging in social relationships and it is itself in processes of relating (Stacey, 2003). It therefore follows that the self is a social construction. In the case of leadership this means that the identity of the leader is as much formed by the group as he or she forms the group in his or her recognition of others. As a result, scholars have taken more interest in the psychological contract between leaders and followers, and there is a growing body of research showing the importance of leadership-follower dynamics, for instance in the form of relational leadership theory (e.g. Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leadership-wise, it is more prudent to discuss an 'I – me – we' dialectic as leadership is a process of social interaction, as well as a dynamic process of developing oneself and others.

There is a growing body of work arguing the importance of leaders' life stories (e.g. Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Avolio, 2003, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003) and the advance of a life stories approach as a source of leadership, as well as an approach to develop followers. Life experiences are stored in people's memories as self-knowledge and serve to shape their identity (Hoyle *et al.*, 1999). Scholars and practitioners within this approach describe how leaders' life stories provide insight into the meanings they attach to life events to guide followers, and in turn to develop themselves over time (e.g. Shamir & Eilam, 2005; George, *et al.*, 2007). Following, Bennis and Thomas (2002) promote a phenomenon they call 'crucibles' as critical to finding ways to leadership; experiences that test people to their limits. This has to do with how potential leaders in early years find personal strategies to cope with difficult challenges from which they later manage to develop leadership capabilities and motivations on which they build their narratives. Similar concepts are trigger events that can be identified by a leader as having served to stimulate growth and development (Avolio, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003) or jolts – discrepancies that cause people to pause and reflect on their experiences (Louis, 1980; Roberts *et al.*, 2005).

Scholars within positive psychology (e.g. Sivanathan *et al.*, 2004; Roberts *et al.*, 2005) argue that the ability to positively reinforce one's own strengths, virtues and health is believed to strengthen a person's self-view, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-esteem and self-efficacy have been advocated as important characteristics in several trait-based leadership theories (e.g. Stogdill, 1974). Self-efficacy reflects a leader's ability to accomplish a certain level of performance (Bandura, 1997) and involve a leader's self-beliefs about his/her abilities. Self-esteem, on the other hand, influences a person's behaviour and reflects a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of her or his own worth as a leader and ultimately, as a human being.

Self-awareness as a Premise for Development

Self-awareness – including self-clarity, self-certainty, and self-knowledge – is a determinant of psychological wellbeing (Baumgardner, 1990; Kernis, 2003). Self-awareness is also the

foundation of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). The act of leadership in complex adaptive organisational systems is a process requiring self-awareness (e.g. Day & Harrison, 2007; Pearce, 2007). Without self-awareness, development as a leader will not progress (Hautala, 2005; George *et al.*, 2007) and a leader with a high level of self-awareness may inspire followers to identify with him or her, prompting motivational mechanisms (Shamir *et al.*, 1993).

The self-development process is related to knowing oneself through self-awareness. Self-awareness is linked to self-reflection: through introspection leaders may become aware of the flow of thoughts and feelings that constitute their selves, and thereby influence their behaviour. Self-awareness is not an end in itself, but a process whereby one comes to reflect on one's identity, values, emotions, goals, motives, needs, knowledge, talents and capabilities (Gardner, *et al.*, 2005). Gaining self-awareness may mean working to understand how one derives and makes meaning by introspective self-reflective, testing one's own hypothesis and self-schema, as well as becoming aware of one's own goals and motives (Gardner, *et al.*, 2005). Knowing oneself also involves more than awareness of one's thoughts, values and motives. As the burgeoning literature on emotional intelligence suggests (Goleman *et al.*, 2005; Salovey *et al.*, 2002), self-knowledge also encompasses awareness of one's emotions. Self-awareness thus represents an attention state in which the individual directs his or her consciousness to some aspect of the self (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Hannah, 2005).

A leader's ability to become aware of his/her own internal states promotes self-development. Human beings have an innate need for self-realisation (Jung, 1927). This is the individuation process, or the process of becoming an individual. People develop through human interaction and Jung (1927) proposes that the goal of self-realisation is to pull people to their highest possible state. This development is based on the self, and the development may be charted in terms of a series of stages in which identity is formed in response to challenges and human interaction. Being aware when in a leadership role will define such stages (e.g. Moxnes, 2007; Dearlove & Coomber, 2005). People experience various internal mental, emotional, and physical states, and these states provide motivation, meaning, and drives, in developing themselves (Wilber, 2007). Such flow of perceptions, thoughts and feelings is due to the operation of a reflective consciousness that in turn influences behaviour. Individuation may be promoted through role perspectives. A role is a set of connected behaviours, rights and obligations as conceptualised by people in a social situation (Biddle, 1986). The role may be seen as the set of expectations that society places on an individual. In a leadership context, this is a set of expectations that the organisation and its stakeholders place on the leader. By unspoken consensus, certain behaviours are deemed 'appropriate' and others 'inappropriate'. The role may also be regarded as something that is constantly negotiated between individuals (Mead, 1934). The act of leadership entails role perspectives (Moxnes, 2007; Jacques & Clement, 2001), as roles are configurations of leadership identity.

Ample evidence from social psychology makes it abundantly clear that humans are inherently flawed and biased as information processors, particularly when it comes to processing self-relevant information (Tice & Wallace, 2003). If a leader wishes to relate self and affect, he/she should discriminate among self-state representations by considering whose perspectives on the self is involved; his / her own view, and the standpoint of others (Turner, 1956). Family members, friends, and organisations provide people with feedback about who they are, and this information is integrated into people's self-concept (Cooley,

1902; Tice & Wallace, 2003). Research supports that people's perceptions of how they are viewed, rather than the absolute 'truth' – not how they are actually viewed by others – have the strongest impact on people's self-concepts (Tice & Wallace, 2003). Research also suggests that more powerful individuals' opinions carry weight because they command more attention (Fiske & Depret, 1996). In leadership development terms, this means feedback and learning, including that from superiors, peers, and subordinates. Common practices promote methods such as 360-degree feedback, coaching, mentoring, and action learning as sources of development (Day, 2001).

Conclusion

In complex adaptive organisational systems, the goal of formally sanctioned leadership may be understood as the ability to influence toward unpredictable objectives. Leaders influence the ongoing interactions between organisational members by dealing with realities within changing structural, cultural, and systemic organisational frameworks.

In contrast to most contemporary complexity leadership theories, substitutes for formal and sanctioned leadership have not been sought herein. We contend that influence or attraction is as important in organisations regarded as complex adaptive systems as in classical leadership theory. Leadership is a locus of power in processes of human interaction in any kind of organisation – complex adaptive or not. This means that the acts of leadership in organisations involve influencing or attracting people. We have therefore proposed a framework for complexity leadership theory entailing that leaders influence or attract followers in organisations through relational and self-related processes.

Complexity leadership theory will certainly not provide all the answers: if such answers were to exist, and they do not, they would be found in leaders' capabilities to mobilise the self-discipline and willpower necessary to know and develop one's self and others, as leaders and as members of the organisation and, ultimately, as human beings.

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