“Our proposal is for an approach to leadership development which is experiential. In contrast to more formal pedagogies which rely on transmitting authoritative ‘truths’, an experiential approach begins with reflecting on work experience rather than from accepted theory, and in working in groups and teams rather than individuals. It allows for what the educationalist John Dewy called ‘active experimentation’.”

Reynolds and Trehan
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Part 1
Introduction and Review of the Theory and Practice

Introduction

The quest to find definitive answers about leadership has proved elusive. Leadership defies a single definition - it changes with the situation, and with shifting expectations and demands. It changes in everyday practice. This raises important questions for leadership development and for the pedagogies on which our development practice is based. Some would say that ‘leadership’ and by implication leadership development, is poised to become an expanding site of interest and development for students of organization as well as for those of us involved in designing, selecting and running leadership programmes (Ford and Harding, 2007).

In this paper we provide a summary of changes in thinking about leadership and leadership development and examples of recent approaches based on pedagogies which reflect these changes. We will first briefly review shifts in thinking and practice in leadership and leadership development and some recent developments in leadership pedagogy. Then we will describe two alternative approaches to more familiar practices and for each will summarise supporting ideas and present an illustrative example. The two alternative examples of leadership development will be: a narrative approach and a critical action learning approach. Finally, we consider the implications of these ideas for educators and learners.

Developments in Thinking about Leadership and Leadership Pedagogy

Before summarising some of the changes in the theory of practice of leadership development we will give a brief account of corresponding changes in how leadership itself is thought about. The changes we have selected are those which seem to influence current debate and are the result of over sixty years of questioning inherited ideas, by academics who were interested in making sense of organizations and by professional managers who either could see from experience that changes in practice were needed or were more desirable socially.

Changing Ideas about Leadership

From an emphasis on role to one of process

The shift here has been away from seeing leadership as a property of the person occupying a particular role or of the qualities and attributes invested in the role. Increasingly the idea has evolved that although role is an important aspect of leadership, we understand it better by looking at the practice of leadership as a
social and political process, and at the nature of the interaction between the people involved – even if there are some who are formally designated with leadership roles and responsibilities. In this sense leadership is located within a group of people rather than embodied in a single member of it.

**From an emphasis on personality traits to one of relational practice**

This change in thinking follows from the first. Again not in any way which discounts the relevance of personal qualities or attributes but to think of these not as fixed or absolute, or the property of a particular individual and certainly not as all that is necessary in order to understand the process of leadership. Rather leadership is seen as emerging and developing amongst the people involved and as negotiated rather than fixed, responding to a particular context. For this reason some authors refer to leadership as ‘situated’ in that its character depends on (often changing) circumstances, and ‘constructed’ in that the other people involved are unlikely to be passive in this process. Their expectations and responses will help shape the process of leadership.

An important part of these first two developments in thinking about leadership has been to accept that the way in which leadership has often been defined has been ‘gendered’ in that its ‘generally accepted’ qualities and characteristics were defined in ways which privileged men’s preferred ways of thinking and doing, reflected in the way leader role models, certainly historically, were drawn from men rather than women (Gherardi and Poggio, 2007). The same observation can be made about management education which has in the main been traditionally based on a pedagogy which is top-down, directive, and with the emphasis on received wisdom from revered and respected ‘authorities’.

**From absolute to contingent**

Since the middle of the last century the dominant model of organizations has been hierarchical with leaders correspondingly autocratic. This model has been challenged by a movement which proposed a more participative approach. This movement, often called ‘democratic management’ was pioneered by writers on organizations such as Douglas McGregor, Rensis Likert and Chris Argyris and gave rise to approaches such as Job Enrichment, Team Building and Organization Development – with varying degrees of success. For a while it appeared as though this approach was to be another ‘one right way of doing things’ to replace the first. But over time there was growing acceptance that different forms of structure, management and leadership were appropriate to different settings - depending on the nature of the work to be carried out and the degree of uncertainty in the economic or technological context (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). This ‘contingency’ approach challenged the blanket belief in a ‘one right way’ and might be seen as paving the way for the other developments we have summarised above and the importance of leadership as part of a process in which ideas, solutions and proposals for action are generated collectively, not issued by decree from above.
Changing Ideas about Leadership Development

As ways of thinking about leadership have changed, so have ways of thinking about leadership development – if more slowly. For convenience we have again summarised these changes in development practice under three headings although there is significant overlap. These changes reflect the shifts in assumption summarised in the previous section, requiring a less authoritative, more experience-based approach where managers and ‘leaders’ are given the opportunity to develop their understanding grounded in professional experience – putting them more in the role of active researchers than passive trainees.

From prescription to reflection

This shift of emphasis reflects the change noted in the last section from absolute definitions of ‘what leadership is’ to more varied, situationally constructed interpretations. So as an alternative to selecting leaders based on a set of pre-defined skills and abilities, or to training programmes intended to develop these capabilities, there are approaches which enable professional people to reflect on the social and political process of leadership and the different ways people define and identify leadership in different contexts – organizational and cultural. This ‘process’ based approach is achieved either through looking back on past situations and making sense of them - developing the ability to ‘reflect on action’, a concept developed by the late Donald Schön; or through examining current experience – ‘reflecting in action’ through here-and-now experiential learning activities designed for that purpose (Outdoor Management Development is a good example of this). Action Learning (see later), combines elements of both these ideas to promote learning through reflecting on the on-going and current organizational situations and problems which managers and leaders are dealing with (Pedler 1994).

From an individual to a social focus

This shift in emphasis reflects the previous one. It is from using individually focussed educational methods designed to illustrate and develop leadership attributes and skills, to methods which place the emphasis on enabling course participants to observe and experience in real time the interactions between members of task groups or teams. Specifically, the aim is to understand better the social and political process of leadership and the different ways it is defined, contested and negotiated between people and the ways this process reflects the history and context of the group. If there is an individual focus in this approach it is because each participant can experience and make sense of the part they play in the process. But leadership as such and its associated dimensions of power and authority is a property of the group more than of a particular individual. Such methods reveal the complexity of the leadership process, one which involves moral and social aspects as well as the instrumental necessity of ‘getting things done’. Literature and discussions supporting such methods would be chosen to reflect this focus.
From didactic to dialogic

Again, this shift in emphasis is implicit in the previous two, but worth mentioning in its own right because it represents a fundamental change in educational approach. This is not simply a shift from an earlier approach to a more recent alternative. The alternatives have been around for a long time but the case for a dialogic approach seems more appropriate given current thinking about leadership as a social process. However these alternative pedagogies should not be seen as ‘either – or’. They can be complementary and are often used this way - ideas, concepts and research findings being introduced in the context of more dialogic, experiential approaches in which understanding is developed on the basis of collective observation and reflection. For example, in a leadership development programme, as well as introducing managers to current thinking on leadership capabilities, they might be asked to identify these by reflecting on who would they would most like in their team in particular situations: e.g. managing a change programme; a dispute with the workforce; dealing with a senior colleague's irresponsible behaviour. This is an approach to defining leadership from the ground up rather than by adopting pre-defined models from the literature or from organizational tradition and so more likely to be consistent with its work and working ethos.

We will return to these points in a later section where we will review recent changes in thinking which support this learning approach. An additional and important aspect of less didactic, more experiential approaches is that they present the opportunity to experiment, to ‘see what happens if…’.

Learning from Experience: A brief account of recent changes in thinking on pedagogy

It is probably clear from what we have said so far that our proposal is for an approach to leadership development which is experiential. In contrast to more formal pedagogies which rely on transmitting authoritative ‘truths’, an experiential approach begins with reflecting on work experience rather than from accepted theory, and in working in groups and teams rather than as individuals. It allows for what the educationalist John Dewey called ‘active experimentation’, or as we put it – seeing what happens if…, an opportunity to try out different structures, interpretations of role and ways of interacting with others when a task of some kind needs to be carried out. Experiential learning methods have the aim of being able to observe and experience the ‘what happens if’ when a number of people have to work together towards some shared purpose. As readers of this paper will probably have experienced in some form or other, an experiential learning design can provide an opportunity to be part of and observe in real time the interactional processes we have associated with leadership: authority; power; roles and responsibility; difference, including gender; and the ways these are experienced within a work or study group, practically, emotionally and conceptually.
But these methods have been available to us for more than sixty years. Why do they need to be introduced now? One answer to this is that the model of organization implicit in the method was not always welcome (Reynolds, 1979). In the educational domain didactic, authoritative approaches to education and development mirrored the hierarchical approach to leadership prevalent in organizations. Experiential methods on the other hand usually devolved authority in making choices and in making sense of the consequences, to participants. This points to a further reason why experiential approaches are to be preferred in leadership development. People not only learn from the content of programme, they learn from what some have described as the educational ‘milieu’ – the methods used and the relationships these methods generate between participants and the staff of the programme. So, for example, participants will learn from how choices and decisions are made within the programme, how much discretion and influence they have over this and over the development of ideas and understanding. In this way a development programme re-creates in microcosm structures and power relationships which parallel those in the workplace or can offer alternatives to them (Hodgson and Reynolds, 1980; 1981).

If experiential methods were not always welcomed by senior management they have until recently, been equally distrusted by academics because of their dependence on individually focussed and predominantly psychologised explanations, insulated from historical and contextual factors. Another criticism has been that experiential methods have tended to be used to demonstrate ‘truths’ more often than to encourage exploration. This might be described as ‘uncovery learning’ - participants finding out what they are intended to learn rather than developing ideas through dialogue. One of the more interesting developments in experiential learning in the last ten years or so is the application of a broader range of ideas to interpreting the social and political processes these methods invariably surface. This we would argue makes a good fit with current thinking about leadership summarised earlier and represents an important and fairly recent advance in what has come to be called ‘critical’ management education. The examples we will use as illustrations in this paper are of this type in that they combine experiential learning with a wider range of explanatory frameworks than we have been used to. We have depicted the differences between these and more familiar alternatives in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Education</th>
<th>Management Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received wisdom and hierarchical method. ‘Process’ is not seen as important.</td>
<td>Participative methods, an emphasis on ‘process’ but in order to convey received wisdom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Management Studies</th>
<th>Critical Management Education¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and questions received wisdom but educational approach still hierarchical. ‘Process’ is not seen as important.</td>
<td>Ideas generated and co-constructed. Participative approaches as microcosm - an additional and valuable source of learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ For a review and critique of critical management education see Perriton (2007)
There has always been a certain dissatisfaction with traditional, ‘top-down’ methods of education and training which are disappointing in that a ‘one solution fits all’ approach does not respond adequately to the range and complexity of the situations professionals in organizations have to deal with in their day to day work. Furthermore, they tend to reinforce the idea of charismatic teachers and by implication, the idea of charismatic leaders. The case for experiential learning approaches is that they should be fit for purpose because they are collectively focused and present an opportunity to observe, experience, interpret and to question the assumptions which underpin interpretations. They support the idea of generating theory through discussion in preference to deferring to received wisdom. As we hope our illustrations will support, experiential methods can provide an opportunity to examine social and political as well as the psychological processes which permeate working groups, work towards an understanding of these events which is collectively constructed and take account of wider social discourses reflected in the microcosm of the learning event.
Part 2
Two Alternative Pedagogies: Theory, Practice and Process

So far we have argued for an approach to leadership pedagogy which applies a broad range of ideas (psychological, social, cultural) to help us understand the complexities of the leadership process; a perspective on leadership which is more one of social process than individual characteristics and which is responsive to particular contexts. The two examples we describe in some detail in the following sections have been chosen because to a large extent they have been designed to reflect these principles.

1. A Narrative Approach to Leadership Development

If we accept the view of ‘leadership’ as socially or collectively derived, grounded in people’s understanding of experience, what differences should that make to development practice? How from this perspective might we deepen people’s understanding of leadership and enable them to develop their abilities based on this understanding.

The example which follows is based on a perspective which places emphasis on the discursive and relational nature of leadership and that the notion of ‘leader’ is, in practice, constructed by and for individuals, reflecting contrasting cultural and political values as well as immediate demands and expectations of the organization.

The aim is to derive a working definition of leadership according to particular contexts and its meaning or interpretation as a result of discussion and debate between members of an organization and based on their experience of working practices. In other words the definitions which are of interest are those which are negotiated or ‘co-authored’ by organizational members rather than handed down. So the result is likely to be different in the context of a voluntary organization driven by collectivist values than might be the case in a multinational corporation in which ‘manager’ is a demeaning term reserved for lower levels of white collar staff.

Leadership Development – A narrative approach

The description of a leadership development workshop which follows is based on an account by Sylvia Gherardi and Barbara Poggio (2007), in this case for women in leadership positions working for Local Government in an Italian City.
First: the participants were asked to read a short piece of fiction which was chosen because it highlighted the way traditionally women are expected to compromise their identities in order to gain the approval of men in authority. Gherardi and Poggio used a story taken from Italo Calvino’s *Italian Folktales* about a dying king with no sons who sends his daughters – dressed as men and instructed to behave like men – to parlay with an invading emperor. They all fail because they do not adequately impersonate men’s ways of behaving and peace is only achieved because the third daughter ends up marrying the emperor who has fallen in love with her. The king is greatly pleased and bequeaths his lands and wealth to his son-in-law.

Comment: the purpose of this part of the workshop is to use a piece of fiction to highlight injustices whose less florid (perhaps) equivalents of gendered choices in daily life have become accepted as taken-for-granted. In the 1960s this device might have been described as consciousness-raising. A similar function might be achieved by introducing a case study or newspaper report, for example, of an HOD of a research institute who suppresses publication of the team’s findings in response to a funding tobacco corporation which does not like the implications of the research. This would raise questions of ethical leadership.

Second: following discussion and reflection of the thoughts, feelings and experiences which the story aroused, the workshop participants were asked to write their own short story describing an episode from their own professional experience which the story about the king and his daughters had brought to mind. As Gherardi and Poggio write:

“The exercise elicited reactions ranging from admiration, through identification and frustration, to anger, and it generated numerous stories which developed aspects and nuances of the relationship between gender and leadership as experienced by the women. They recounted experiences of discrimination, episodes of revenge and affirmation, introspective analyses of their relationships with leadership and power, anecdotes about when they had to disguise themselves as men, or when they had refused to do so.”

Anna Kayes (2007) describes a variation of this idea in which as part of their leadership development, following discussion of actual narratives with the benefit of support and challenge from co-participants, they re-write the narrative as they would like to enact it in the future.

Third: in discussion, participants work towards identifying similarities and differences in their accounts and the assumptions and models of leadership which were reflected in them. Issues of power, authority, and the emotional consequences of exercising leadership and of dealing with conflict were brought into the discussion and applied to organizational situations they were familiar with – including their own roles in exercising or being involved in leadership.
Comment: in summarizing the benefits of their workshop based on reading, writing and discussion of narratives, Gherardi and Poggio emphasise the realisation of diverse approaches to leadership, and the way these can be connected to and sometimes connect with the organizational ‘culture’. The workshop they describe was for women in leadership positions and surfaced the ways some participants felt they were expected to ‘behave like men…without losing their femaleness’. The approach also enabled participants to appreciate how leadership was inextricably linked with power in ways which reflected particular values depending on the context.

Participants’ learning was from being able to articulate and make sense of their professional experience of leadership and through the interactions and negotiations they experienced from engaging in the workshop - an organization in microcosm, witnessing and being part of a process in which ideas and practice of leadership were constructed. Through the content and the experiential process of the workshop Gherardi and Poggio describe the women as being able to reflect on and transform ‘leadership practices and power relations. They conclude:

“The person’s unique autobiographical narrative constitutes the occasion for collective experiential learning, since it represents that persons understand and act in their organization and how it can be done differently. Experiential learning has a development character since it builds agency among participants, confidence that they can act together in meaningful ways and develop their own organizational repertoire of practices for exerting power in future challenges.”

2. A Critical Approach to Leadership Development

Increasing attention is focusing on the value of critical approaches to enhancing leadership development. This section examines how critical leadership processes like action learning, experiential learning and psychodynamic perspectives can be harnessed to produce valuable learning through critically reflective practice. Critical approaches not only explore underlying power and control issues, but actively engage in an examination of political and cultural processes affecting leadership development. Such perspectives enable one to move beyond purely instrumentalist approaches towards embracing the complexity of leadership development.

The example which follows is based on an approach called Critical Action Learning adopted by Trehan and Rigg (2007). Critical action learning is of increasing importance to the pedagogy of leadership development, because of its focus on understanding and changing interpersonal and institutional practices. Action learning (though broadly interpreted and open to contestation) is to do with collaborative enquiry, problem-solving and self-development, and the potential for criticality in action learning derives from the tensions, contradictions, emotions and power dynamics that inevitably exist both within a group and in individual managers’ lives. Critical action learning as a pedagogical approach emerges when these dynamics are treated centrally as a site of learning about managing and organising. McLaughlin and Thorpe (1993) highlight that:
“At the level of their own expertise, managers undertaking Action Learning programmes can come to know themselves and their organization much better. In particular, they can become aware of the primacy of politics, both macro and micro, and the influence of power on decision making and non-decision making, not to mention the ‘mobilization of bias’.” (p.170)

Leadership Development – A critical approach

So, if we were to look through the window of a critical leadership development programme, what would we observe? The illustration below contextualises a programme described by Trehan and Rigg (2007) where a critical approach was applied.

First: the programme highlighted takes an experiential learning approach where, supported by a small number of lectures, students spend two thirds of their time working collectively in action learning sets (ALS) of six to nine people facilitated by a tutor (see McGill and Beaty (1995) for more on action learning). The ALS fulfils a number of functions. It undertakes group tasks, which are predominantly real organisation problems, and participants are encouraged through facilitation, to reflect on how they work together and to work through process issues in some depth. Participants are also encouraged to exchange their experiences of working within the ALS, and of carrying out their individual course assignments. They are also involved in the assessment of their own and each other’s work. In this sense students’ dialogue and social support can be fundamental to the course.

Learning is through assignments that are almost entirely based on student-selected live organisational issues and based on their interpretation of tutor-written summaries. These are not organisational puzzles or problems with ready technical solutions, but are ‘situations’ in the sense that Schön (1983) describes, characterised by uniqueness, uncertainty, instability, complexity and value conflict. Learning about leadership and developing the capacity to lead comes from the experience of working with these ‘situations’. A prime example is an overseas residential event in which the students’ task is to undertake a comparative study of the market environment of a product or service in the overseas destination in contrast to their home context. Staff organise the destination, accommodation and travel arrangements, but task the participants to identify client organisations and arrange visits. Through this activity they not only learn about international market research in practice, rather than simply through lectures, but also learn about leadership experientially, about working outside their comfort zones and about difference and cross-cultural comparisons in leadership development. They also learn from their involvement in leading and managing participative assessment.
This integration of critical reflection with action learning is a significant aspect of the programme, as the following extract from a student highlights:

“The action learning sets represented a move towards a critical approach to learning where the frustrations, power differentials, emotions, indifferences and conflicts which occur within groups can be focused upon and treated as tops for the exploration of management/leadership issues that are sensitive in our everyday experience. By focusing on our experiences as students in the action learning set context, a forum was provided for critical reflection on that experience, as a means of countering our conventional knowledge about the world. I had not considered leadership in these terms before.”

Comment: within each of these processes the task of learning about leadership is focused on the group itself, its internal relationships, and relationships with other groups and the larger learning system of which the group is a part, which often generates strong emotions. During this process the programme draws from psychodynamic approaches to explore learning about the group dynamics which includes a critical study of the leadership roles that participants take up and the roles that are imposed on them.

Throughout the programme many features aim to reinforce interdependence. The question of who owns the learning, diagnosis of issues or problems and the solutions to these are central to the students’ learning. Tutors take two basic, mutually supportive roles: those of Task Consultant - offering information, models or reading related to the task; and Process Consultant - making the participants aware of group processes. Tutors take care in responding to participants’ questions not to position students as dependent and passive. The course is structured around individual and group tasks framed in terms of learning outcomes. However, there is room for interpretation, which provides considerable leeway for participants to influence the content of the curriculum. But this is also a situation of uncertainty, through which students have to direct their own paths, individually and collectively.

Second: following on from working and learning about leadership development through critical action learning sets, the programme moves to the second step of developing participants’ process skills.

Process skills are fundamental to leadership and organisation development. Throughout the programme an equal emphasis is placed on process as on task content. In undertaking course tasks and investigating leadership situations, participants are supported by tutors in reflecting on how they work together as a group. This principle is also reflected in the course assessment in that many of the assignments require participants not only to demonstrate learning about content (for example, about leadership development, leadership behaviour or leadership performance models), but also to reflect on process issues they experienced in the course of undertaking the tasks, such as how they made decisions, what happened in their group, the strategic exchanges that occurred in the course of carrying out their research, and how they felt throughout the activities.
Student evaluations of the group experience provide insight into their learning, with such comments as: ‘It raised awareness of the complexities that exist within organisations’; ‘Most events in organisations are influenced by the way individuals interact in groups’. As one woman wrote:

“I would argue that my experience of being a member of these action learning sets has led me to experiencing a process of real personal ‘change’, which would not have occurred if, as students, we had been allowed to stay with the problem-oriented rationality of ‘sharing’ experience, rather than being made to ‘work through’ our experience within the group. It was in this forum that I was encouraged and supported in examining my values and attitudes, my behaviours in given situations and my understanding of the impact of group dynamics on what occurs within organizations. It is in this context that most change has occurred, both for me as a person and for me as a manager.”

Comment: the action learning set is itself therefore a source of learning about leadership dynamics, in what Reynolds and Trehan (2001) have termed ‘classroom as real world’. The student cohort each year is often a source of gender, cultural, class, religious, age and occupational diversity and each learning set consists of participants from a variety of roles and backgrounds, where issues mirror some of the patterns in organisations and society. Students are encouraged to reflect upon, act on and learn from their feelings and experiences of these dynamics.

Thus, engaging with critical approaches to leadership development provides a mechanism for integrating the emotional, cultural and political context into the programme, which allows the students to move beyond just thinking about leadership development as a rational process.

Third: the third step engages participants in critical reflection through psychodynamic practice. On the programme participants write reflective papers, both individually on their learning, and collectively about their learning from the group process within their ALS. At the final stage they write a critical self-reflection paper, an autobiographical reflection on their leadership development. In this participants are encouraged to identify their core assumptions, to understand some of their patterns, and the contextual influences on them. Depending on their particular focus, individuals may be introduced to critical concepts derived from such perspectives as feminism, post-colonial literature, Marxism, social constructionism or critical pedagogy. It has proved important to have individual knowledge of each student in order to judge what might be appropriate for them, and to help them make sense of their particular experiences. For example, some of the black participants on the course attributed what they described as a sense of enlightenment to the literature adopting an anti-racist pedagogy to which they had been introduced (Mirza, 1997).

The following group dialogue recounted by a facilitator illuminates how engaging with critically reflective approaches can be a source of learning about, and transformation of social relations within leadership dynamics.
A group of six were a newly formed action learning set. The members were Nirmal, a Sikh man, Wole, from Nigeria, Dave, a white man, Sally, a white woman, Geoff, a white man, and Mohamoud, a Somali refugee. The group’s facilitator was a white woman. After 4 weeks of meeting and just prior to going on a one week residential, Mohamoud told the other group members he was likely to have to withdraw from the course because he could not finance the course fees, so he would not be attending the residential.

On the residential Sally joined the group, transferring from a different set. As they all sat talking one afternoon, Geoff told Sally of the group’s history and Mohamoud’s probable departure.

**Geoff:** “So that’s why Mohamoud’s not here. But it’s probably just as well because he wasn’t a very good communicator. We couldn’t understand him very well.”

**Facilitator:** “Did the group consider cultural differences?”

[There was no answer]

**Sally:** “Look it’s almost tea-time, shall we stop for a break now?”

[There was awkwardness in the room and this suggestion appeared to be welcomed by most with relief. Despite the attempted avoidance of an uncomfortable issue, after the tea-break the subject was revisited.]

**Wol?:** “If I don’t say something now I’m not going to be able to work with this group. It’s been said that Mohamoud is a poor communicator. You should consider that he speaks six languages and he does not have a communication problem. If people find it difficult to understand him it’s because they’re not being patient. I’d say it’s them who have the communication problem.”

“I’ve been observing over the weeks the body language people show to Mohamoud, how people cut him out when he talks, the ways people look impatient when he starts talking, just because he has a way of expressing something that is different from those who speak English as their first language. I’ve been thinking how the way people behave towards him would destroy his confidence. You have no understanding of the structure of Mohamoud’s first language, which will influence how he speaks English. And I feel you would have been patient if the person was French or German. So I think the behaviour displayed by the listeners was racist.”

[The other group members looked taken aback]

**Geoff sat back defensively:** “I’m not a racist.”

**Facilitator:** “Wol? didn’t say you were a racist as a person, he said that what you said about Mohamoud’s communication can be perceived as racist.”
Wol?: “Many small everyday actions and statements can feel racist, even though the person might not mean them to be.”

Sally: “Do you mean like last night in the bar, when you had to wait ages to get served? And then Matt from that other group just walked up and got served straight off.”

Comment: this form of critical self-development is qualitatively different from the traditional concept of reflection in experiential learning theory. While reflection focuses on the immediate, presenting details of a task or problem, critical reflection involves an analysis of power and control and an examination of the taken-for-granteds within which the issues are situated. The potential for critical reflection derives from the tensions, contradictions, emotions and power dynamics that inevitably exist in managers’ lives. Critical reflection as a pedagogical approach emerges on the programme because these dynamics are treated centrally as a site of learning about leading and leadership development.

In summary, the key advantages to this critical approach, is that application of theory to practice and an iteration of practice to theory are advocated throughout the programme. From the first brief papers (1000 words, staff assessed) and presentations (twenty minutes: peer assessed) that participants prepare, to the 20,000 word dissertation at Master’s level, they are tasked to relate concepts and models to live situations, and to make use of Lewin’s adage that ‘there is nothing so practical as a good theory’ (Lewin, 1951). The approach to leadership development is informed by three key assumptions about learning. Firstly, for participants to become aware of their theories-in-use. Secondly, to think critically, so becoming as Carr and Kemmis write, emancipated ‘…from the often unseen constraints of assumption, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology’. (1986:192). Thirdly, informed by Bateson’s (1973) theories of learning, tutors encourage participants to value their own experience and insights and to develop their own models; in other words, to create theory from practice, as the final participant comments now illustrate,

“By being encouraged to look at issues about my power base and my influence over others within the context of the culture of my organisation and my profession, I was moving towards a critically reflective position which began to question some of my underlying assumptions about leadership as a discipline, as well as about me as an individual. However, whilst considering issues in relation to both the personal power and position power I am able to wield, I began to reflect on how inequalities and power differences within society can be mirrored in organisations, obvious examples being in relation to equality of opportunity for staff; and the need for manager/leaders to address their personal role in perpetuating these inequalities.”

“I hope it will make me a better leader, but in a strange way that seems less important now. The main thing is that I have given myself permission to be a real live fallible person and I like myself much better for it.”
3. Discussion Points

At the start of this paper we described some of the significant changes in the way people were thinking about the practice of leadership development. We summarised these under three themes: from prescription to reflection; from an individual to a social focus; and from didactic to dialogic. While there are overlaps between these, we see them as useful as a way of distinguishing recent ‘shifts’ in thinking. In the table below we have summarised ways in which these shifts of thinking are reflected in the two approaches we have described in some detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shift in thinking</th>
<th>Narrative Approach</th>
<th>Critical Action Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From prescription</td>
<td>However useful the ideas disseminated from research and organizational practice,</td>
<td>Action learning groups work together in making sense of organizational situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to reflection</td>
<td>the emphasis here is on learning from experience and grounding ideas about leadership in that experience.</td>
<td>including the part each of them played in them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From an individual</td>
<td>The narrative approach is designed to enable participants to observe and experience social process, both in the workshop itself and drawn from the experience of the workplace. Explanatory frameworks will cover a range of perspectives but will emphasise social, political and cultural processes traditionally neglected by experience-based approaches.</td>
<td>As well as work on ‘out there’ organizational problems, the action learning group is helped to analyse the dynamics of the group itself, including the process of leadership and associated patterns of power and emotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a social focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From didactic</td>
<td>The emphasis in the workshop is that through writing and reading colleagues’ narratives based on organizational experience, ideas about leadership and the practice of leadership are negotiated collectively within a group of colleagues in a position to implement changes in practice.</td>
<td>The approach emphasises the importance of experience, not only as a vehicle for learning but supported by perspectives and ideas introduced by a facilitator, provides the basis for developing ideas and theories about leadership.</td>
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<tr>
<td>to dialogic</td>
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</table>

These alternative approaches to leadership development reflect concepts and perspectives both through the ideas they introduce and through the methodologies which reflect these perspectives. They also stress the importance of context and that situations constantly change. What implications does this have for those of us responsible for designing and running leadership development programmes?
Implications for Educators and Learners

So far we have identified some of the ways in which the core facets of alternative experiential leadership pedagogies can be developed. So what does this demand of tutors and students? This is a question we turn to in this concluding section. We also need to consider the responsibilities of course tutors when initiating a process of experiential learning. We do not aim to offer a prescription, but present a set of ideas which include: the importance of design in relation to content and process; the role of the facilitator; tutor reflexivity; student voice; and the institution’s capability to support such learning.

A central aspect of experiential approaches is the systematic examination of a commonly shared experience by students as they work on a group task or project. This is the ‘group dynamics’ or process phase of learning in which the participants talk through issues related to the task and explore interpersonal relations within learning groups.

Staff Role

Process Consultancy is where the facilitator helps the learning group to work on process issues and solve its own problems by helping participants become aware of group processes, of the likely consequences of patterns of behaviour, and of techniques for accomplishing objectives. The facilitator is concerned with passing on the approach, methods and values of process-consultancy so that the participant and the learning group can diagnose and remedy their problem.

The ownership of the learning, the diagnosis of issues or problems, and the solutions to issues and problems are central to the facilitator role. The degree of expertise required to complete the task effectively and the range of competencies residing in a learning group will determine the nature and ownership of the issues and problems. In short, such issues are part of a negotiating process that involves all participants. In this way the teaching/learning strategy seeks to integrate the educational-based activities with the participants’ work and personal experiences and to instil in participants the desire and ability to take responsibility for her/his own learning.

The application of theory to practice and an iteration of practice to theory are also central in the design stages and could be developed in the following manner.
Experiential Learning and Praxis

Our experience reminds us of the power that lecturers can have to influence students’ lives, which clearly places a responsibility on us to question our own intentions, motives and practices. Tutors have to be prepared for emotionality and conflict, and be aware of their own needs and impetuses. It is also incumbent upon us to be aware of, and be reflective about, the ‘expert practitioner’ label, which students often fix upon us, to query the roots of our own assumptions and to be reflexive about our own awareness and practice concerning leadership issues.

Diversity in a staff group is therefore essential, to straddle the literature that can be offered, to be present as heterogeneous individuals that different students can approach, and also to challenge and stretch each other. We need to be constantly developing ourselves, in a sense mirroring the risk-taking we ask course participants to engage in. Just as we ask of our students, we also need to engage in reflexive practice.

Establishment and facilitation of the sets is therefore of great consequence, and demands skilled facilitators with group work skills and insight into the social dynamics of diverse groups. This is an important challenge for us as tutors, as well as for the educational institution in which the programme resides.

Despite these challenges, working with alternative approaches to leadership pedagogies provides a unique opportunity to incorporate experiential learning approaches that engage students in a process of drawing from critical perspectives, to make connections between their learning, work and life experiences and to understand and change interpersonal and leadership practices.

In addition, these approaches and methods can be applied in a variety of educational, (undergraduate/postgraduate) and organizational settings.

More importantly though, they address the changing culture of learning in the learning and skills sector to increase the transferability of learning and skills development between educational institutions and sponsoring organizations in developing leadership capability.
Bibliography


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We recognise that there are many innovative and effective leaders and leadership practices in the Sector that warrant investigation, analysis and wider dissemination of best practice. We would like to engage with existing networks within the Sector and develop a wider practice-led research community contributing to current debates on leadership and other related issues.

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