

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

LINDA FLORIO ZINTEL

EXPLORING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

PHD THESIS

Academic year: 2012-13

Supervisor: Professor Andrew Kakabadse

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Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

In leadership development, an established literature and a fertile praxis fall short of clarifying how individuals may develop the many and varied capabilities that contribute to leadership processes. Literature promoting personal growth tends to reduce personal development to cognitive development or rely on broadly defined and under-evidenced notions. The adult development literature offers to this research a conceptualization of personal development as systemic qualitative change in individual sensemaking. As sensemaking develops, it progresses toward greater integration (of interdependent cognitive, emotive, purposive, and conative dimensions), sophistication, and self-determination. The research aimed to examine how changes in the sensemaking of individuals may result in developmental outcomes relevant for personal and leadership development.

This inquiry moves from a perspective idealist ontology and a social constructivist epistemology, selects philosophical hermeneutics as a research paradigm, and embraces exploratory qualitative longitudinal research. Purposive sampling guided the selection of research context, a leadership program focused on personal growth. Transcripts from 32 semi-structured constructivist-phenomenological interviews, collected from nine participants across fourteen months, were analyzed through constructivist grounded theory. Development was assessed ipsatively according to a literature-based framework. Contributions, in terms of substantive theory, are not generalizable beyond research context and sample.

This research advances the differentiation of developmental context, process and outcomes. Context is found to transcend holding environment—to be ideally conducive to a specific type of change in virtue of a distinctive emerging quality. While vector processes facilitate development, core processes (individual sensemaking) *are* development. In terms of outcomes, the research supports an association between personal development and development of leadership capabilities, but questions whether self-awareness or personality adjustments per se constitute authentic personal or leadership development.

This research exposes a pattern of seeking affirmation, associated with disproportionate identity salience of external image, which is potentially capable of hindering personal development by triggering maladaptive rather than adaptive self-reflection.

Key words: personal development, leadership development, authentic leadership development, affirmation, developmental context, developmental process, developmental outcomes, holding environment

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

This introductory chapter includes an overview of the research and focuses on its rationale (both from a personal and literature-based perspective), approach, and outcomes.

1.1 Research rationale

In this section, researcher motivation and research aims and objectives are presented. The personal perspective of the researcher is further addressed in a bracketing essay included in Appendix 8.2. In the continuation of the present section, a literature-based rationale for the research is presented and the research question is introduced.

1.1.1 Research motivation, aim and objectives

This research was motivated¹ by a desire to cultivate an understanding of the process by which individuals continue to develop and flourish in adult life and an interest in exploring the implications of this process of development for leadership. The research focused on a population of managers and examined changes in their sensemaking (see research question, section 1.1.7). From the broader aim of understanding processes of personal and leadership development and their interrelations, there resulted the following research objectives:

- To orient amongst different types of change in sensemaking (including, but not necessarily limited to, personal development) that could be identified in the instances observed during the research
- To explore what changes in the mind of individuals when a change in sensemaking takes place
- To explore in what ways changes in individual sensemaking might be relevant for leadership

¹ Research motivation is explored in greater depth in Appendix 8.2

- To familiarize with contextual as well as individual factors that facilitate or hinder change

Setting the research focus on change in individual sensemaking was based on a rationale derived from the literature. As will be identified in the chapters on literature review (sections 2.3 and 2.4) and methodology (section 3.5), change in individual sensemaking is attributed by the literature a core function in processes of development. The processes of individual sensemaking, personal development and leadership development are mentioned jointly in describing the aims of the research because they appeared to be interrelated since the literature review stage of this research. Indeed, the research did find a close interrelation among the three processes (see section 5.2 within the discussion chapter). The last of the research objectives mentioned above reflects the intention to regard context as a necessary ingredient of an unfolding process (as discussed in section 3.4.1) and to glean any novel insight on how personal and leadership development can be facilitated in adult individuals.

1.1.2 Leadership

The integration of over a century of leadership research supports that leadership is critical to a number of organizational processes: leadership inspires vision, molds strategy, colors culture, impacts performance, catalyzes development, and wrestles with ethical issues (Bass, 2008; Ciulla, 2008; Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2006; Antonakis et al., 2004b; House et al., 2004; Bass and Stedlemeier, 1999). It is still unclear, however, how individuals may develop the many and varied capabilities that contribute to leadership processes. In this thesis, capability is defined as “the ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (Jackson et al., 2003 p. 195).

1.1.3 Leadership development

A black box has been identified by the leadership development literature around the core processes of leadership development (Avolio, 2008; Allen, 2008). The field, which is characterized by a fertile literature and industry, is here reviewed by distinguishing three major approaches: the competency-based, information processing, and personal-growth approach to leadership development.

The *competency-based* approach to leadership development emphasizes the development of skills and competencies by individuals (Antonakis et al., 2004). Research conducted within the competency-based approach has produced comprehensive typologies of skills and competencies (Zaccaro et al., 2004; Mumford et al., 2004); however, it has not yet addressed the question of how skills and competencies differ from capabilities. The *information-processing* approach to leadership development emphasizes cognitive development, notably through constructive development (Kegan, 1982; Torbert, 1994), identity development (Ibarra et al., 2010; Petriglieri et al., 2011; Lord and Hall, 2005) and construction of meaning around critical life events (Bennis 2004; Shamir and Eilam, 2005). The information-processing approach has made strides in identifying the criticality of self-awareness and critical reflexivity to leadership development (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Gray, 2007); however, it has not yet explored development which transcends a cognitive dimension. Lastly, the *personal-growth* approach to leadership development emphasizes the cultivation of self-knowledge--knowledge about the deeper dimension of the self where core values (e.g., Avolio and Hannah, 2008), a sense of meaning (e.g., Shamir and Eilam, 2005) or a "true self" (Harter, 2002; in Gardner et al., 2005) are seated. According to this view, getting acquainted with the deeper dimension of the self is relevant to leadership because it fosters authenticity, which can be a powerful source of motivation and inspiration as well as an internal moral compass (Gardner et al., 2011; Avolio and Hannah, 2008; Bass and Steidlmeir, 1999). However, the personal-growth approach has also been struggling to transcend a cognitive view of development as well as to gather research evidence around its effectiveness.

In sum, a wealth of theory and growing evidence exist around competencies and cognitive processes involved in leadership development. However, little is known around which processes take place within individuals as they develop as individuals and leaders. Part of the literature strongly advocates personal development as critical to leader development (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Lord and Hall, 2005), but the notion of personal development is both under-defined and under-evidenced. In order to address this gap, some of the literature is encouraging research to connect to the field of adult development (Avolio, 2010; McCauley et al., 2006).

1.1.4 Adult development

An instance of collaboration between the fields of leadership and adult development is Constructive-Developmental (CD) theory, which has established an association between the cognitive development of individuals and a number of leadership

processes (Lewis and Kuhnert, 2008; McCauley et al., 2006; Rooke and Torbert, 1998). However, CD theory has not addressed how training initiatives can foster cognitive development (McCauley et al., 2006) and how cognitive development carries over to leadership processes.

The adult development field regards development as consisting of systemic qualitative changes in the interpretive processes of an individual: in other words, development occurs when new and qualitative patterns of sensemaking emerge (Hoare, 2009; Kegan, 1982; The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology Vol. 2, Weiner and Craighead, 2010). For this reason, this research focused its exploration on changes in individual sensemaking. Development relies on the whole of the sensemaking of an individual (Higginson and Mansell, 2008; Magnusson, 2001), which include cognitive, as well as emotive, purposive, and conative² (Basu and Palazzo, 2008) dimensions. These dimensions of sensemaking processes are functionally integrated (Magnusson, 2001), in the sense that they function and evolve in unison. Sensemaking, then, is better understood holistically rather than by focusing on an isolated dimension, such as cognition (a person-centered approach; The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology Vol. 2, Weiner and Craighead, 2010 ;Magnusson, 2001). In this thesis, two types of individual change are identified which seem to contribute to but not necessarily result in personal development: expansion of self-awareness and personality adjustment (presented in section 3.5.2). In this thesis, the term personal development is used to refer to the type of systemic qualitative change that the field of developmental psychology recognizes as development.

1.1.5 Summary of research problem

This research aims to explore the black box around core processes of leadership development by discerning in what ways changes in sensemaking of individuals may lead to developmental outcomes that are relevant for both personal and leadership development. This study intends to leverage the connection to adult development, which is equipped with relatively mature conceptualizations and methodologies.

1.1.6 The research context

² The term conative refers to behavioral disposition (Basu and Palazzo, 2008)

This research aims to observe the sensemaking of change occurring at the intersection of personal and leadership development. Like a lot of process research (Langley, 1999), this study needs to seek out a context where “the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (purposive or theoretical sampling; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 202; in Silverman, 2010, p. 141; Mason, 2002). In terms of this research, an appropriate context is one which:

- Aims to foster personal as well as leadership development
- Emphasizes a holistic consideration of the individual (encompassing cognitive as well as emotive, purposive and conative dimensions)
- Leverages psychology theory and practice

The personal growth approach is distinctive in the landscape of leadership development practice (reviewed in Section 2.3.2) because of its focus on the actualization of individuals, consideration of emotive and purposive, and reliance on intervention strategies and expertise from the field of psychology (Bass, 2009; Yukl, 2006; Kets de Vries, 2005; Joo, 2005).

1.1.7 Research question

The formulation of the research question reflects the selection of the personal growth approach as a context to this research:

Research question: In the context of a leadership development program with an emphasis on personal growth:

- a. How do participants construct change for themselves?
- b. How do participants construct any implications of change for their own leadership practice?

1.2 Research approach

1.2.1 Philosophy

This research is rooted in a perspective idealist ontology and a social constructivist epistemology (Blaikie, 2007). These ontological and epistemological assumptions are further specified within the frame of philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1900-2002), the research paradigm adopted by this study. This research subscribes to the ontological belief that there ultimately is “a truth to the matter of interpretation” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 307) and to the epistemological assumption that truths can be approximated (if not known directly) through negotiation of interpretations (Gadamer; in Blaikie, 2007). Negotiation of interpretations does not require the researcher to shed her interpretive frames (negative bracketing, Pollio et al., 1997). In fact, aiming to exclude interpretive frames from research would be naïve, because “Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something in advance” (Blaikie, 2007, p.123). Negotiation of interpretations invites a discipline of the researcher to get acquainted with her motivations and assumptions (critical subjectivity, Ladkin, 2005; reflexive intelligence, Foddy, 1994) and explicitly acknowledge her interpretive frame (positive bracketing, Pollio et al., 1997).

1.2.2 Methodology

This qualitative research examines the sensemaking of change in individuals--a complex and under-explained process which is socially and contextually embedded (Weinberg, 2008; Schwandt, 2005). According to Burgelman (2011), under-explained processes characterized by “complexity and nonlinear causation” (p. 591) are productively studied through longitudinal (or quasi-longitudinal) research: not just because such research allows one to observe the unfolding of events (Langley, 1999), but also because it supports the consideration of interdependent variables and multiple causation. Qualitative process research holds as a priority the identification of the multiple factors which are critical to the unfolding of a certain process rather than the generation of predictive statements (Burgelman, 2011). Accordingly, this research does not seek to generalize its findings beyond this research context and sample. This research aims to contribute to theory at the intersection of nascent conceptualizations of personal and leadership development and hence adopts an exploratory approach (Edmondson and MacManus, 2007) by incorporating in its methods as few a priori

conceptualizations as possible (Charmaz, 2008). To best support the observation of individual sensemaking around what may be sensitive topics of personal change (Charmaz, 2008; Higginson and Mansell, 2008; Bartholomew et al., 2000), this inquiry selects constructive-phenomenological³semi-structured interviews as a data collection method. Aiming to let an analytic structure emerge from the data, the research employed constructivist grounded analysis as the primary data analysis method. Visual mapping and matrix displays (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Langley, 1999) were used as secondary methods. Analysis unfolded through six main phases⁴: 1) organizing data, which began with line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2008) and culminated with a structure of analysis emerging from data (focused coding, Charmaz, 2008); 2) examining context, achieved through cross-sectional analysis⁵ and thematic coding; 3) examining outcomes, achieved through longitudinal analysis⁶ and thematic coding; 4) examining process, achieved through cross-sectional analysis and thematic coding; 5) seeking differences within the sample, achieved through comparative analysis⁷; 6) and, seeking relationships among areas of findings, achieved through integrative analysis. In terms of validity, this research strived to enact an epistemology of negotiation of interpretations (Gadamer, in Blaikie 2007) and satisfy criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; in Polit and Beck, 2008).

1.2.3 Limitations due to literature review strategies

One limitation of this research is connected to the literature review strategies that were adopted⁸. This investigation encompassed leadership, leadership development, adult development, sensemaking and aspects of adult learning. All of these are complex and interactive processes for which vast literatures exist. While breadth of scope is part and parcel of longitudinal qualitative research (Burgelman, 2011), it naturally is also a source of concern around the feasibility of a study. In order to

³ Interviews are constructivist in the sense that they focus on the active construction of meaning by participants (Schwandt, 2003; examples in Isabella, 1990; Sutton, 1987; Gephart, 1984). Interviews are phenomenological in that they inquire about the lived experience of participants, where the phenomenon of interest resides (Pollio et al., 1997; Pollio et al., 2006).

⁴ Following the pilot study, during which different data analysis methods were tested;

⁵ By cross-sectional analysis, I mean analysis of data across all interviews and participants

⁶ By longitudinal analysis, I mean the study of data gathered from a single participant across the time spanned by this research

⁷ By comparative analysis, I mean analysis aimed at identifying ways in which subgroups in the sample differ

⁸ Other limitations of the research are addressed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

contain the scope of literature reviews in this research, these were based on a critical review (Huff, 2008) and a personal-centered approach (Magnusson, 2001). This literature strategy was motivated by the finding from an initial systematic review (of applications of CD theories to leadership; Florio, 2007) that further systematic reviews were not going to be supported by the scope and exploratory nature of the research question. In conducting a systematic review, it is advisable to have a “very precise question” (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009 p. 683), on the basis that the narrower the review questions the more feasible and helpful a systematic review. Another conclusion from the systematic review was that focusing literature reviews on a single dimension (such as cognition, e.g. in Kegan, 1982) or variable (such as learning versus task orientation; e.g. in Avolio and Hannah 2008) would not be conducive to the examination of the phenomenon of individual development as a whole. According to a person-centered approach, individuals, the protagonists of development, function and respond to adaptive challenges not out of a single resource, but rather as integrated wholes (Bergson et al. 2002; Magnusson, 2001). Hence, a study seeking a comprehensive perspective on development is to focus on changes visible at the level of the whole individual. Applying a person-centered approach to literature reviews meant scoping evidence at the individual level. For example, the leadership field was scoped for what it said about the role of the individual in leadership processes. Next, the field of leadership development was searched for evidence around how individuals develop leadership capabilities; from there, the subfield of personal growth nudged the inquiry toward the field of adult development. The field of adult development was reviewed with the objective of understanding how personal growth manifests in the individual. A high level synthesis was obtained, at the intersection of the literatures, around patterns of personal and leadership development at the individual level. However, this approach to literature review could not and did not provide a granular view of the subtle changes that might occur in single dimensions of the individual. As a result, for example, specific methods for assessing cognitive development (such as Kegan’s subject-object interview; Torbert’s Leadership Development Profile; or, Loevinger’s Washington University Sentence Completion Test; in McCauley et al. 2006) in adults remained outside the scope of this research. In addition to a person-centered approach, the principles of critical review (Huff, 2008) were followed in this research. Critical literature reviews focus on selected literatures that directly address interrogatives central to a study. For example, rather than committing to one specific theory of adult development (e.g. Selection, Optimization and Compensation (SOC) theory by Baltes and colleagues; in Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009), the review of the adult development field sought to identify principles that could enjoy meta-theoretical support and hence be used as markers of development at the level of the individual (in the holistic sense, as discussed earlier). Consensus across different theories of development (in late teens and early twenties, e.g. in Baxter Magolda;

across adulthood and up to and including third age, e.g. in Blanchard Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009) was found around the notion that development is visible in individuals when their sensemaking shows higher levels of sophistication, integration, and self-determination (see section 3.5). Having sought a high level synthesis at a meta-theoretical level, literature reviews forming the foundations of this research remained unable to support a theoretical contribution around a specific construct or variable. The same approach combining a person-centered view and critical review was applied to literature reviews at the back end of the thesis, where findings were discussed with reference to selected relevant literature but not situated within the larger horizon of the field of psychology. The focal interest of the research shifted during the research from a main focus on leadership development to an enlarged focus on psychology. Psychology being a field relatively novel to the researcher, a comprehensive review of psychological theories was not feasible at the stage of completion of the research. Comprehensive reviews in the field of psychology, however, are seen as the starting point of future research efforts. Literature was reviewed around holding environment, specifically as conceived of in the domain of leadership development focused on personal growth (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Kets de Vries, 2007). In contrast, a full review of vector processes across the leadership development literatures was not undertaken, although also based on the rationale that descriptive reviews of methods facilitating development are already present (e.g. Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2004; Day, 2001). As a further example, a challenge present throughout this research was to understand the nature of the developmental initiative that offered a context to this research (Personal Transformation for Leaders, or PTFL. PTFL is introduced in section 1.2.3). On the whole, participants indicated that PTFL is far from being a passive form of instruction (psychoeducation, as per a categorization by the Association for Specialists in Group Work, see appendix 8.13; ASGW 2000) or group consulting (Joo, 2005; see section 3.4.4) session. Rather, participants indicated that PTFL resembles group psychotherapy. In considering how much weight to give this finding, the issue arose of evaluating what meaning is attributed to the term psychotherapy in the world of psychology. Orienting in this world turned out more challenging than anticipated: a debate is ongoing on whether it is even useful to distinguish among gradations of therapy (Coyne, 2011; Kwiatowski, 1996). In this larger debate, opinions were advanced both favorable and contrary, for instance, to a distinction between counseling and psychotherapy. This thesis has chosen to relate its findings around the nature of PTFL to the typology of groupwork offered by the ASGW 2000 standards, which do distinguish between counseling and therapy based on different levels of functionality of group members. Counseling and therapy processes ("group bases cognitive, affective, behavioral, or systemic intervention strategies"; ASGW 2000, p. 4) and their objectives (human development; ASGW 2000) might be similar; however, groupwork focused on individuals who at the most have experienced

some developmental stasis or "transitory maladjustment" is considered counseling, while groupwork focused on individuals who are subject to issues "severe and/or chronic maladjustment (ASGW 2000, p. 4) is considered therapy. The granularity of this distinction lends itself to framing the findings from this research: once considered the characteristics and experiences of the participants in the sample, PTFL may be said to be a form of counseling but not a form of therapy. The ASGW framework, it should be clarified, is used in this thesis only for the purpose of discussing findings on PTFL: not having thoroughly reviewed relevant literature, there is no intention to contribute to the larger debate on whether a theoretical distinction between counseling and therapy is called for. To return to the main point, that a strategy to literature review was adopted which was based on a person-centered and critical review approach, further examples of selective literature reviews performed at the back end of the study span the areas of individual change, psychological change, and self-affirmation.

The interest of literature on individual change is dictated by the fact that, within this field, a number of models of change have emerged that overlap to various extents with the model of the sensemaking of personal development offered in this thesis. Other psychology literature that may also be relevant to this aspect of the findings (around the sensemaking of personal development) was not reviewed: this was a deliberate choice dictated by relative inexperience of the researcher with the broader field of psychology. Indeed, in the field of psychology there are several lines of inquiry that appear interesting in light of the findings. Among these, there is the aspect of identity work in adulthood. For example, Erikson's theory (articulating four different identity statuses, of diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achieved identity; reviewed in Cramer, 2004) explicitly frames identity change as the attainment of qualitatively different responses, thus resonating with the definition of personal development as systemic qualitative change adopted in this research. Erikson's theory has been considering the role of defense mechanisms (such as denial, projection, identification) in identity work, potentially offering an alternative explanation of the seeking affirmation pattern detected by this research. Other work relevant to the findings of this research has focused on determinants and mechanisms of ego identity development. Bosma and Kunnen (2001) reviewed literature on ego identity development from different fields in the social sciences, indicating that that there is a wealth of knowledge to draw from in this area. The definition of some of the determinants of development, however, seems to remain problematic: for example, openness to experience/change (in Bosma and Kunnen, 2001) strikes as both an enabler and an outcome of development (a scaffolding effect; Hoare, 2006). I would especially like a future review of work on ego identity development to include a review of methodological considerations on how to effectively theorize about aspects of development characterized by a scaffolding effect. Additional and extensive review

work dedicated to orienting within this sub-area of the psychology field is not just of great interest to the researcher, but also looks to be a promising basis for future research: Bosma and Kunnen (2008) point out that longitudinal research on identity development in adults has not been common context and now is growing. More work around seeking affirmation seems to be also in demand. Manners and Durkin (2000) explored reasons why ego development seems to stabilize in early adulthood, but often at stages "well below the maximum potential" (p. 475). Pfaffenberger (2007, 2005), who focused on optimum development, notes that surprisingly few people seem to achieve advanced stages of development. Pfaffenberger also argues that incorporating greater acceptance of the humanistic perspective in research might in future help shed light on this type of dilemma. All of the lines of inquiry mentioned above promise to enrich the investigation of development through a greater granularity than afforded by the tools adopted in this research (e.g., the personal development framework). The reason why this research does not engage with these literatures lies in the conviction that, given the relative inexperience of the researcher in this field, this constitutes a whole new phase of work which is to focus on perspective taking in psychology.

1.2.4 Design

Personal Transformation for Leaders (PTFL)⁹, an executive leadership development program offered by the Praxis Centre at Cranfield University¹⁰, was selected as the context for this research. The PTFL program incorporates a personal development approach pioneered by clinical psychologist and psychotherapist Ido van der Heijden and aims to support senior executives in realizing their leadership potential through in-depth self-examination. PTFL consists of a main (5 days, residential) and a follow-up (2-days, residential) module. Nine volunteers from the PTFL cohorts of July and November 2010 were included in the sample. Fieldwork spanned fourteen months, and an average of eleven month per participant. During this time, four interviews were conducted with each participant¹¹. The first round of interviews was conducted in person¹² and took place just *before* participants attended the main module of the program. The second round of interviews took place just *after* participants attended

⁹ Formerly known as "Organisational and Interpersonal Skills" (OIPS), this course has been offered since 1980

¹⁰ Bedfordshire, United Kingdom

¹¹ With two exceptions: P2 and P4 dropped out of the research after completing the second interview

¹² With one exception: the first interview with P6 took place on the phone due to inability to arrange an in-person meeting within the time required by the research

the main module of PTFL. The third round of interviews took place just after participants attended the *follow-up* module¹³ of the program. The final round of interviews took place about six months after the third interview round. The level of analysis was set at the level of the encounter, resulting in 32 encounters being included in the scope of analysis¹⁴. Ahead of the main study, a pilot study took place which included interviews (one per participant) with three participants in OIPS¹⁵ (cohort of November 2009). The main contributions of the pilot study to this research were a tentative analytic structure (around context and process of development) and the opportunity to test methods of analysis and practice interviews. The design of both pilot and main study are presented in detail in Appendix 8.3.

1.2.5 Assessing development

This research faced the challenge of assessing when a change in individual sensemaking constitutes an instance of development versus when it does not. While the leadership development literature in its present state does not support this discrimination, the adult development literature offers several points of reference.

From a methodological point of view, research focusing on *intra*-individual change should favor an ipsative approach (Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009): that is, it should focus on understanding the starting point of an individual as a baseline against which to assess change. Accordingly, this research based longitudinal analysis and the assessment of developmental outcomes on a comparison between the sensemaking of each participant at the beginning and at the end of the research. This research adopted a person-centered approach to analysis: in practice, this was implemented through developing an interpretive framework for each participant (see Appendix 8.9). The purpose of interpretive frameworks was to support the researcher in as she strived to grasp the overall organization of the sensemaking of an individual at particular points in time as a means to interpreting particular expressions of that individual (an application of the hermeneutic circle; Gadamer, in Blaikie, 2007).

In substantive terms, a critical review (Huff, 2008) of adult development literature found that development follows a specific pattern incorporating an element of universality as well as an element of idiosyncrasy: the element of universality was

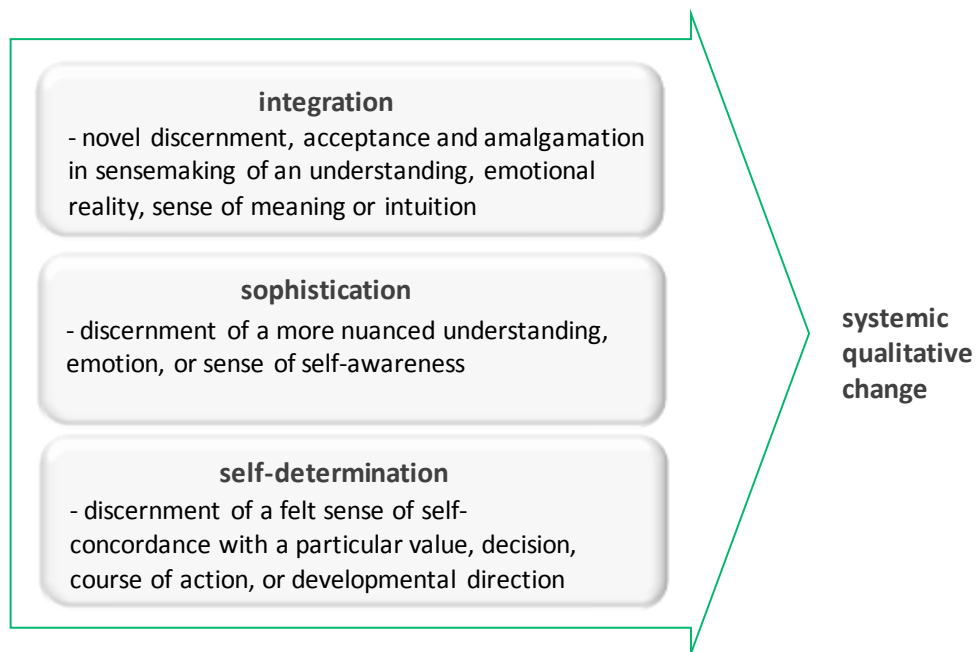
¹³ The follow-up module is scheduled approximately six week after the main module

¹⁴ Except in the case of analysis around developmental outcomes: in this case, only 28 interviews were included (interviews with the two participants who had dropped out of the research were excluded)

¹⁵ Organisational and Inter-Personal Skills, as PTFL was called at the time

identified as the development of greater integration and sophistication, while the element of idiosyncrasy was identified as the development of greater self-determination. Based on these notions, a framework was composed which identifies criteria for the assessment of personal development (Section 3.5.1).

Figure 1. A Framework of personal development



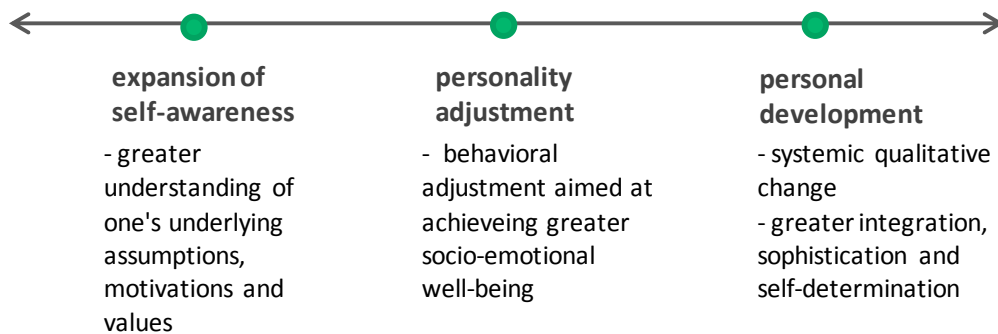
Compiled by the author

Sources: Marsick et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2009; Staundinger and Kessler, 2009; Merriam, 2006; McCauley et al., 2006; Deci and Ryan, 2006; Baxter Magolda et al., 2001; Kegan (1982; 1980)

The research was left with the residual problem of assessing change in cases where developmental change would not occur. Further review work identified two types of individual-level change which can be differentiated from each other as well as from

personal development: expansion of self-awareness (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2011; Gray 2007; Boyatzis, 2006; Argyris, 2004; Mezirow 2001; Schwandt 2003; Prochaksa et al., 1992; Kübler-Ross, 1969 in Slocum et al., 2002) and personality adjustment (Staundinger and Kessler, 2009; Hoare, 2006). This resulted in forming a non-exhaustive typology of individual change--with self-awareness towards one end, personality adjustment at a midpoint, and personal development towards the other end of a continuum.

Figure 2. A continuum of individual change



Compiled by the author.

The framework of personal development and continuum of individual change were applied during longitudinal analysis to both support and challenge¹⁶ the interpretations of the researcher around whether and what type of change was taking place.

¹⁶ This is one way in which the study strived to enact an epistemology of negotiation of interpretations

1.3 Research outcomes

1.3.1 A synthesis of findings

1.3.1.1 *Developmental outcomes and direction*

This research originally set out to observe whether, in conjunction with participation in PTFL, a process of change was observable in the sensemaking of individual participants which had implications for personal and leadership development. For all nine participants, a process of change was found to occur and expansion of self-awareness was observed. In five (out of seven)¹⁷ cases, personal development was found to occur. In the remaining two (out of seven) cases, personality adjustment was found to occur. In all five these cases where personal development was found to occur, change was also observed in terms of expanded leadership capabilities. In the two cases where personal adjustment was found to occur, change was observed in terms of behavioral adjustments in the workplace--but not in terms of expanded leadership capabilities.

1.3.1.2 *Developmental context*

This research considered context as an integral part of the research problem (Burgelman, 2011). Analysis set out to identify what may be the critical elements of developmental context and what qualities of context may make it conducive to the specific type of change that it intends to facilitate. Context emerged as a processual entity that develops from the interaction of its key elements. Four distinct elements of context were identified by this research: scope, agenda, tone¹⁸ and actual developmental context. The quality of these four elements is affected by specific characteristics of a developmental initiative: program characteristics, people, characteristics, role modeling by tutors and mirroring by group (respectively). According to most participants, PTFL as a developmental context facilitates personal development and is ideally conducive to extensive self-examination and inquiry into personal histories and limiting patterns.

¹⁷ P2 and P4 are excluded because they dropped out of the research after completing the second interview

¹⁸ The scope of PTFL is personal consulting and counselling (as needed); its agenda is one of freedom to disclose and disinterested feedback; and, its tone is one of closeness, openness and acceptance.

1.3.1.3 *Developmental processes*

Participants indicated a distinction between processes of change mainly situated in a domain external to them (*vector* processes which *facilitate* development) and processes of change mainly situated in a domain internal to themselves (*core* processes which *are* change). Three groups of *vector* processes were identified to take place in conjunction with PTFL: shared sensemaking, practicing skills and behaviors, and partaking in program activities. The interaction of vector processes with developmental context resulted in PTFL's distinctive quality: a heightened emotional charge that, according to participants, distinctively facilitated their self-examination and experience of change. In addition, four *core* processes were identified as leading to personal development. These consist of four iterative patterns of sensemaking: around self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability to change. This research finds that the extent to which new self-awareness is accepted might affect the extent to which commitment, effort (and, ultimately, change) can occur.

1.3.1.4 *Seeking affirmation*

Analysis also pursued the question of why, other things being equal, some participants attained personal development and others did not. Two subgroups in the sample consistently differed on four different themes that are salient to this research: motives, values, patterns of sensemaking and outcomes. As to motives, subgroup one¹⁹ tended to *seek affirmation* from external sources, while subgroup two²⁰ participants tended to *seek self-concordance*. In terms of values, subgroup one participants seemed to prefer training that addresses professional rather than personal topics; these same participants also emphasized the instrumental and formal value of training. In contrast, subgroup two participants seemed to prefer training that addresses personal and professional issues jointly; these participants emphasized the substantive value of training (work on the self, versus management frameworks or tools). In terms of sensemaking patterns, subgroup one tended to have a conflicted relationship with self-awareness, express commitment only tentatively and exert efforts selectively or to an insufficient extent. In contrast, subgroup two tended to accept new self-awareness, express commitment in a determined way and exert efforts sufficient to achieve the desired change. Finally, in terms of outcomes,

¹⁹ Including four of the nine participants (P2, P3, P4, P9)

²⁰ Including five of the nine participants (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8)

subgroup one²¹ seemed to be affected negatively by participation in PTFL: they reported negative emotions, a split sense of self and a weakened sense of self-worth following the program. Two participants in this subgroup dropped out of the research after completion of the second interview. Personal development was not found to occur in the remaining two cases within this first subgroup. In contrast, participants included in subgroup two seemed to be affected positively by participation in PTFL: they reported positive emotions and a strengthened sense of self-worth following the program. In the cases of participants included in subgroup two, personal development was found to occur.

1.3.1.5 *Speculating on the effects of seeking affirmation*

Subgroup one was characterized by a motive of seeking affirmation and reliance on external sources for affirmation and on external image as a source of security and confidence. In contrast, subgroup two was characterized by a motive of seeking self-concordance and reliance on internal sources (personal values and meaning) of security and confidence. A paradox was observed: participants who were *not* seeking affirmation *found it*, while participants who *were* seeking affirmation *did not find it*. Not only did they not find affirmation, they also felt somewhat dis-affirmed in the process. Yet, among the processes hosted by PTFL, the offering of affirmation to delegates is a prominent one. This thesis reviews self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988; in a review of self-affirmation theory and research by Sherman & Cohen, 2006), a theory of psychology explaining how and why individuals tend to preserve their sense self-integrity. When faced by information on a limitation of a particular domain of the self, the self draws comfort from a sense of being overall a 'good self' or of being good in a different domain than the one that has just come under threat. This affirmative loop helps reframing the newly acquired information about a personal limitation so that it is no longer defining of the self and threatening. Self-affirmation is regarded as a positive force which reduces defensive rationalizations and enables adaptive change (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). However, self-affirmation can also backfire. When self-affirmation backfires it produces maladaptive (defensive) rather than adaptive responses (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Research on self-affirmation has identified a relationship between self-affirmation and identity centrality: the more salient to identity is the domain of the self which is threatened by new information, the more critical is affirmation in order to overcome defensive reactions and the loss of

²¹ Participants P2 and P4 are excluded from considerations around outcome for subgroup one because they dropped out of the research after completion of the second interview

opportunity for adaptive change (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). This thesis speculates that when external image has a disproportionately high identity salience, then self-affirmation is more likely to backfire. Plausible reasons, derived by comparing findings from this research with evidence from self-affirmation theory, include one or more of the following: the individual is lacking the psychological resources (e.g., insufficient implicit self-esteem; in Sherman & Cohen, 2006) to process self-affirmation effectively; direct feedback (such as the feedback typically exchanged on PTFL) is counter-productive because it is perceived as disproportionately threatening; this affirmation-related maladaptive pattern is reinforced as long as it takes place unconsciously²². This thesis concludes that, other things being equal²³, personal development might be a matter of capability: a pattern such as the affirmation dynamic exposed by this research might impress a negative spin to the wheel of development and initiate a vicious rather than a virtuous circle of development.

²² Self-affirmation theory has gathered evidence that self-affirmation is mostly an unconscious process whose effectiveness is decreased when it is brought to awareness (Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

²³ Assuming intention to change and given conducive developmental context and vector processes

1.3.2 Contributions

1.3.2.1 *Theoretical contribution*

This research contributes to the field of leadership development in terms of substantive process theory: they are mid-range conceptualizations bridging between the raw complexity of phenomena and formal theory (Burgelman, 2011; Langley, 1999). Substantive contributions often look “rudimentary” (Burgelman, 2011 p. 597); however, their value lies in showing “how the complex system hangs together and its operative logic” (p. 598). Consistently with an exploratory approach, contributions are mostly framed in terms of areas for further research and exploration. In recognition of the limitations of a qualitative study focusing solely on the subjective accounts of participants, this research does not aim to generalize beyond research context and sample.

Differentiating context, process, and outcomes of development

This thesis formulates a conceptualization that differentiates interrelated but distinct elements of development (context, process and outcomes) to a greater extent than that currently available within the field of leadership development. As described below, this thesis identifies a rich landscape of research opportunities and supports that personal development can perhaps expand as an inter-disciplinary conversation between the fields of adult and leadership development.

Personal development at the core the development of leadership capabilities

The research confirms that “leader development is largely personal development. A major aspect of personal development is the process of becoming more aware of one’s self” (Hall, 2004; in Petriglieri et al., 2011, p. 430). However, this research rejects the notion that expanding awareness amounts to personal development. This research finds that self-awareness is only one of four core processes taking place within the sensemaking of individuals and leading to personal development. Moreover, this research contributes to knowledge by beginning to specify in what way personal development is connected to leadership development: proportionality was observed between the extent of personal change and extent of leadership-relevant change across participants, suggesting that personal development is at the core of the development of leadership capabilities.

Contributions around context

This research confirms that context is necessary but not sufficient for development to occur. It also extends the current understanding of developmental context as holding environment (e.g. in Petriglieri et al., 2011): context is a processual entity which develops a distinctive quality in virtue of which it becomes ideally conducive to a specific type of change. The distinctive quality of the program examined by this research seems to be a heightened emotional charge combined with permission to share and acceptance of vulnerability. With exceptions, notably that of individuals with a pattern of disproportionate seeking affirmation from external sources, the program seems ideally conducive to expansion of self-awareness, transcendence of limiting patterns, and to personal and leadership development (as defined in this thesis). An inductive model of context is proposed which identifies key design and emerging elements of context. If further refined and validated, the model could aid in the comparative study of different developmental contexts, thus addressing a knowledge gap around the conduciveness and effectiveness of different contexts (Kets de Vries, 2007; McCauley et al., 2001).

Contributions around process

This research introduces a distinction between vector and core processes of development, both necessary (if not sufficient) elements of development. Vector processes *facilitate* development by holding the sensemaking of individuals and directing it towards a developmental outcome or direction. For example, the vector processes of PTFL were identified to correspond in large part to the strategies and purposes of group counseling. By promoting shared sensemaking and the practice of exchanging active listening, empathy, and constructive feedback, PTFL vector processes facilitate the sensemaking of individuals on the path to personal development. In contrast, core processes take place within the individual and *are* development: this research identified four iterative sensemaking patterns leading to personal development (self-awareness, commitment, effort, and capability). The notion that sensemaking is the core process of personal development is supported by literature in the psychology (e.g. Boyatzis, 2006; Prochaksa et al., 1992; Kegan, 1982) and management learning (e.g. Mezirow, 2010; Argyris, 2004) areas. The inductive models of vector and core processes proposed in this thesis, if validated, would support the study of individual change and the comparative study of development initiatives.

Contributions around developmental outcomes

This thesis suggests that development cannot be reliably and accurately assessed on the basis of broad conceptualizations such as those currently available in the field of

leadership development. For development to occur, according to the more stringent measure of development sourced from developmental psychology, a systemic qualitative change in individual sensemaking must take place in the direction of greater integration, sophistication and self-determination. This research suggests that identifying developmental outcomes also requires the ability to identify and understand *non*-developmental outcomes. Different types of individual change, of both a developmental and non-developmental sort, were found to occur in this research. Correspondingly, different types of change were found to occur in terms of leadership development: it would seem that there is a degree of proportionality between extent of change in personal development terms and extent of change in leadership development terms. It is proposed that research aimed at developing typologies of change could further enhance the understanding of the relationship between personal and leadership development.

Contributions around seeking affirmation

Exploring the effects of disproportionate seeking affirmation on personal and leadership development and discussing maladaptive self-reflection in light of self-affirmation theory are perhaps two novelties introduced by this research. The leadership development field has been pondering over the reasons that might underlie adaptive versus maladaptive forms of self-reflection (Petriglieri et al., 2011; in Avolio and Hannah, 2008; Day, 2001). This research identifies a pattern of disproportionate seeking affirmation from external sources. This pattern seems connected to disproportionate identity salience of external image and appears capable of hindering personal development. The findings of this research invite research to further explore affirmation-related dynamics and their relationship with development from both the leadership development and psychology angles. In this thesis, findings around seeking affirmation are discussed in relation to self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) from the field of psychology. However, the field of psychology, whose extensive review is outside the scope of this thesis, offers additional opportunities to frame findings and build a platform for future research. Notable examples are the opportunities offered by the areas of identity work in adulthood (e.g. Erikson, in Cramer 2004), ego identity development (e.g. Bosma and Kunnen 2001), and optimum adult development (e.g. Pfaffenberger, 2007). Extensive review of these and other areas of psychology is seen by the author of this thesis as the starting point of further research (see section 3.4.8 on limitations due to literature review strategy).

1.3.2.2 *Methodological contribution*

This exploratory research faced the challenge of examining the individual sensemaking of change. The strategies that this research adopted to meet this challenge are based on research in the developmental psychology area. The first strategy consisted in applying a person-centered approach (Magnusson, 2001; rather than a variable-centered approach, Bergson et al. 2002) to the holistic study of the sensemaking of development. The second strategy consisted in composing, based on adult development literature, framework of personal development and a continuum of individual change which were utilized to analyze individual stories of participants. Future research in tight collaboration with the field of developmental psychology could aim at further defining and validating a framework for the assessment of development and a typology of individual change. Studying sensemaking holistically (Magnusson, 2001) and utilizing ipsative tools (Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009) for the assessment of development are confirmed by this research as two helpful strategies in the study of personal and leadership development.

1.3.2.3 *Practical contribution*

This thesis raises questions around what might be helpful intervention strategies to support development in individuals when maladaptive affirmation patterns are at play. Based on notions of self-affirmation theory, this thesis offers some alternative speculations of how feedback could be modulated to mitigate maladaptive responses and maximize adaptive change. To practice, this research also offers support for the design of developmental initiatives through an enhanced and granular view of how specific elements of design affect the overall quality of a developmental initiative and affect its overall conduciveness. This research begins to support a clarification in the terminology adopted to label developmental initiatives: in praxis, the term personal development is ubiquitous but not always matched by the content of a program (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Avolio, 2010). By adopting more stringent measures of development and developing typologies of change, future research could promote a better understanding and more accurate labeling within the vast and varied landscape of praxis.

2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Overview

The integration of over a century of research evidences the criticality of leadership to a number of organizational processes. Despite a fertile literature and a lucrative industry, the field of leadership development is struggling to explain how individuals may develop the many and varied capabilities that contribute to leadership processes. The focus of adult development, in the field of psychology, is on core processes of development in adults. From the adult development literature, this research draws three notions that are foundational to this research. First, adult development is related to leadership development: this link stemmed from research within a constructive-developmental framework and now invites further research that can transcend a focus on cognition development. Secondly, interpretive processes are intimately involved in processes of adult development: here termed sensemaking in accordance with the organization theory tradition, these processes both frame and enable development. Thirdly, human development is marked by a pattern of ontogenesis—that is, by elements of universality as well as idiosyncrasy, a notion that will enter methodological considerations around how to assess development²⁴.

²⁴ See Section 3.5 of the methodology chapter

2.2 Leadership

2.2.1 Significance of leadership

Leadership is not just a “phantom of our imagination” (Bass, 2008, p.150). The integration of over a century of research evidence indicates that, in organizations, leadership inspires vision, molds strategy, colors culture, impacts performance, catalyzes development, and wrestles with ethical issues (Bass, 2008; Ciulla, 2008; Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2006; Antonakis et al., 2004b; House et al., 2004; Bass and Stedlemer, 1999). Contemporary challenges pose pressing demands on leadership, requiring managers to metabolize increasingly complex realities and support rapid development in individuals and organizations (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Mumford et al., 2000; Kegan, 1994; Hatch and Ehrlich, 1993).

2.2.2 Locating the individual in leadership

In over a century of research, a range of approaches have developed focusing on different aspects of leadership²⁵. The earliest approach to the study of leadership (starting at the beginning of the 20th century) is the traits school, which evidenced a relationship between some individual differences (e.g., intelligence or personality traits) and leadership emergence and effectiveness. The behavioral school (starting in the 1950s) painted a picture of the range of styles (e.g. employee-oriented or production-oriented leadership²⁶) that are expressed by leaders. The contingency school (beginning with Fiedler, 1967; in Antonakis et al., 2004) put leadership style in context: it examined the fit between different situations and leadership styles (e.g., autocratic, consultative, collaborative²⁷). The relational school (starting in the mid-1970s) evolved to consider the relationship between the quality of leader-follower relationship and leader outcomes²⁸. The skeptics school (also starting in the mid-1970s) was critical of the view of leadership then prevalent, at times to the extent of questioning whether leadership existed. The skeptics’ approach has the merit of having illuminated the role of how followers’ expectations and implicit leadership theories generate the phenomenon of leadership. The information-processing school (starting in the mid-1980s) brought to the forefront another implicit process of

²⁵ This brief survey of leadership research is based on Antonakis et al., 2004

²⁶ Katz et al., 1951 and Stogdill & Coons, 1957 (in Antonakis et al., 2004)

²⁷ In particular, this was the line of inquiry taken by Vroom and associates (in Antonakis et al., 2004)

²⁸ Leader-member exchange theory, e.g. in Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995 (in Antonakis et al., 2004)

leadership: it focused on cognition as underlying leadership expectations as well as the expression of different leadership behaviors. The new leadership school (also starting in the mid-1980s) promoted the role of charisma in inspirational leadership and introduced the differentiation between transactional and transformational styles²⁹ of leadership. Emerging schools of leadership thought (1990s to current) include: a new traits school, working on the link between leader attributes and behaviors; approaches incorporating complexity theory, focusing on leadership as a multi-directional interaction (such as distributed³⁰ leadership and integrative leadership³¹); and approaches emphasizing the purposive dimension of leadership (such as the authentic leadership school³² and the life-story approaches³³).

2.2.3 A working definition of leadership

The brief synopsis above is a necessarily inadequate review of the vast and prolific field of leadership. However, it underscores one aspect: taken in aggregate, evidence from leadership research establishes that the individual has a central place in the phenomenon of leadership. The individual³⁴ contributes to leadership from a range of resource areas: the cognitive area, the main focus of skeptics and information-processing schools of leadership; the conative³⁵ area, through the expression of different behaviors evidenced by the behavioral and contingency schools; and, the purposive area, promoted for example by the new leadership school as well as the emerging schools of life-story approaches and authentic leadership theory. The focus on the role of the individual in leadership has been criticized as reinforcing of the heroic view of leadership (e.g., in Marturano and Gosling, 2008). This research does not regard leadership as solely a phenomenon of the individual. On the contrary, it shares the belief that leadership is a multilateral social process active at different levels in organizations (Drath et al., 2008; Antonakis et al., 2004a). However, moving from an interest in studying core processes of leadership development at the individual level, this [research](#) does select to focus on the individual level of leadership. An individual-level working definition of leadership is adopted that is consistent with the aims of this

²⁹ This differentiation, which was the basis for the full range model of leadership, originated from the work of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985); in Antonakis et al., 2004

³⁰ E.g. Spillane et al, 2004 (in Marturano and Gosling, 2008)

³¹ Drath et al., 2008

³² Based on the notion that expressing one's "true self" (Harter 2002) results in positive leadership outcomes (Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011)

³³ E.g. Bennis (2004) and Shamir and Eilam (2005)

³⁴ Whether in a formal leadership role or not, this study believes

³⁵ The term conative refers to behavioral disposition (Basu and Palazzo, 2008);

research. Borrowing from the GLOBE³⁶ project, leadership is regarded as the capability of individuals,

“to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (Bass, 2008, p.23)

Despite the wealth of leadership theories, to date it remains unclear how individuals may develop the many and varied capabilities³⁷ that are relevant to leadership processes (Gardner et al., 2011; Avolio, 2008; Allen, 2008; Bass, 2008; Murphy and Riggio, 2003); one of the key motivations behind this research is to explore how these capabilities can be developed.

³⁶ House et al. (2004) summarize in this definition the consensus over universal elements of leadership reached by 84 social scientists at the GLOBE Project meeting in Calgary, Canada (1994; in Bass, 2008)

³⁷ “Capability” is understood as “the ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (Jackson et al., 2003 p.195)

2.3 Leadership development

2.3.1 Significance of leadership development

Research has quantified that the overall influence of genetics in the expression of leadership is modest³⁸, thus assigning to nurture a significant role in the development of leadership. Leadership development praxis has evolved into a lucrative industry worldwide (Avolio, 2010; Dexter and Prince, 2007). The industry, due in part to its fragmented character, is currently unable to provide a consistent account of the benefits it delivers and the process by which it delivers them. Theory has been struggling to keep up with the growth and diversification in the industry (Avolio, 2008; Bass, 2008) and to bring into focus core processes of leadership development. In particular, the field is seeking an understanding of the core processes of leadership development as well as the methodological clarity necessary to attain it.

2.3.2 Locating the individual in leadership development

There is a wealth of literature in the field, including reviews of developmental approaches (e.g., Schwandt, 2005; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003), industry practices (e.g., Yukl, 2006; McCauley, 2001; Day, 2000), and contexts and methods associated with the development of leadership (e.g., in Bass, 2008; Day, 2001). A lot of the knowledge around leadership development can be organized based on its key assumptions. Here, the competency-based, information-processing and personal growth approaches to leadership development are reviewed³⁹.

The competency-based approach

For the best part of the last century, the competency-based view has arguably been the most authoritative and popular in both academic and practitioner circles. Contemporary formulations of this view define leadership development as an expansion in the knowledgebase of competencies, skills and behaviors (Antonakis et al., 2004; Zaccaro et al., 2004; Mumford et al., 2004). Several taxonomies attempt a

³⁸ Heritability of leadership traits is estimated at 30% based on research comparing identical and fraternal twins (Avolio, 2010; Bass, 2008).

³⁹ Practical applications in the industry are also reviewed. However, an important caveat is that practical applications often involve mixed approaches and methods and hence cannot be differentiated beyond a certain point

comprehensive account of leadership competencies. One example is the Leaderplex model: developed by Hooijberg et al. (1997; in Zaccaro et al., 2004), this model identifies three areas of leadership complexity--cognitive, social, and behavioral. According to the Leaderplex, leadership development occurs when greater sophistication and integration are achieved across these areas. A more recent example is the Strataplex by Mumford et al. (2004) which articulates the development of leadership skills around two dimensions: level of complexity and level of involvement in the organization⁴⁰. A further example of a competency-based view of leadership development is Zaccaro et al.'s integrative framework (2004): the framework identifies distal (e.g. traits) and proximal (e.g. skills) attributes resulting in leadership behaviors. Practice aligned with the competency-based view of leadership development abounds. Bass (2008) reviewed a variety of methods and strategies used in the industry to foster the development of competencies, spanning from lectures and discussion to role-playing and games, simulations and behavior modeling⁴¹. Bass also reviewed a range of leadership development initiatives which draw from a specific leadership theory and train leaders in a specific leadership style (e.g. training in democratic leadership, leader-member exchange, or transformational leadership). Overall, research evidence on this range of educational strategies is favorable and indicates that it makes an effective contribution⁴² to leadership development (Bass, 2008).

The information-processing approach

The information-processing approach⁴³ views leadership development as the evolution of cognitive structures. For example, Lord and Hall (2005) identify three stages of development (novice, intermediate and expert), where the understandings of self-identities evolves to progressively higher levels. A recent development is the focus on identity development⁴⁴ (see Ibarra et al., 2010; see also Petriglieri et al., 2011). This approach is intertwined⁴⁵ with life-story approaches, which highlight the centrality to leadership development of sensemaking about significant life experiences (Bennis 2004; Shamir and Eilam, 2005). Theories in this space tend to share an emphasis on cognition, although they are increasingly recognizing the role of emotive and purposive

⁴⁰ Depending on a distinction between junior, mid and senior roles

⁴¹ Behavior modeling is based on social learning theory and "involves instructions for mastering a skill demonstrated by a competent model (live or video)" (Bass, 2008 p. 1077)

⁴² Each in different ways: for example, role playing is found to improve the understanding and skill to deal with human relations problems; or, training based on leader-member exchange theory is found to improve the productivity, motivation and loyalty of subordinates (Bass, 2008)

⁴³ Here named after the school of leadership that originates it (see Section 2.2.2),

⁴⁴ Identity is "a theory (schema) of an individual that describes, interrelates, and explains his or her relevant features, characteristics, and experiences" (Lord and Hall, 2005 p.350).

⁴⁵ The information-processing approach also intertwines with constructive-developmental theory, which will be reviewed in a later section on adult development

dimensions in leadership development (e.g. emotional processing, in Petriglieri et al., 2011). Because of the focus on cognition, the influence of the information-processing approach on leadership development practice could be transversal in the field. Empirical studies that draw from this literature (e.g. Petriglieri et al., 2011) are beginning to gather evidence around the cultivation of cognitive development and its relationship to leadership development.

The personal growth approach

The personal growth approach to leadership development is founded on the belief that there is a deeper dimension of the self where core values (e.g., Avolio and Hanna, 2008), a sense of meaning (e.g., Shamir and Eilam, 2005) or a “true self” (Harter, 2002; in Gardner et al., 2005) are seated. This deeper dimension of the self is relevant for leadership in three major ways: first, it is thought to be the source of genuine motivation, through which leaders inspire followers (e.g., the notion of idealized influence in transformational leadership; Bass, 2008); secondly, the deeper self functions as an internal compass when navigating ethical dilemmas (Ciulla, 2008; Avolio and Hanna, 2008; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999); finally, the deeper self orients individuals towards leadership directions that are most concordant with their authentic selves (e.g. notions of self-regulation, Avolio, 2008; self-determination, Deci and Ryan, 1995; and, self-authorship, Kegan⁴⁶ 1982). The personal growth approach overlaps with the information-processing school (presented earlier) in important ways, for example in the area of cognitive development (e.g. Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Lord and Hall, 2005) and identity development (e.g. Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2010). An overlap also exists with authentic leadership theory, which emphasizes the role of “core values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings” (Avolio, 2008, p.347) in orienting individuals towards their genuine⁴⁷ development as people and leaders. In terms of leadership development practice, the personal growth approach is a direct descendent of sensitivity training. In 1946, Lewin “stumbled serendipitously into sensitivity training” (Bass, 2008 p.1079): social workers attending a leadership conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology rated as more valuable the learnings from interactions with each other than those drawn from lectures and presentations.

Two key characteristics are identified as distinctive of the personal growth approach: the belief in supporting the actualization of individuals as something worthy in and of

⁴⁶ Kegan’s work will be reviewed with constructive-developmental theory in the adult development section of this literature chapter

⁴⁷ Authenticity has been defined as “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know ‘oneself’” (Harter, 2002; in Gardner et al., 2005, p. 344).

itself⁴⁸, and the reliance on collaborative dialectic inquiry⁴⁹ as a process through which individuals can grow and develop. Sensitivity training was realized in the form of group training with unstructured facilitation⁵⁰ where individuals would exchange observations and feedback aimed at fostering greater insight into leadership processes and improving adequacy in interactions with others. At a fairly early stage, sensitivity training became instrumented and standardized, so that groups could work in absence of a trainer figure. Standardization also resulted in facilitating research: several studies on sensitivity training were carried out between the 1950s and 1980s (reviewed by Bass, 2008) and found an association with advances in self-understanding and interpersonal attitudes. In its evolution, sensitivity training began to increasingly focus on fostering self-awareness and overcoming personal limitations (Yukl, 2006). Contemporary forms of personal growth training differ from early sensitivity training: most are facilitated, have a low participant-to-tutor ratio and devote attention to single individuals rather than relying on standardization. The focus on single individual is achieved through encouraging self-directed learning: participants begin with framing individual reasons for participation and take part in psychological exercises aimed at deeper understanding of unique personal purpose (Yukl, 2006). Often, the personal growth approach will rely on a blend of theories and methods: for example, it might include facilitated group work as well as a lecture on leadership theory and a form of experiential learning such as role-playing. Yukl (2006) described personal growth initiatives by saying that they "involve strong emotional experiences and are more likely than most training programs to have a lasting effect on participants" (p. 446). Critics of the approach point out that gains from personal growth training might come at a cost: Yukl (2006) hypothesizes that there could be losses in commitment to the organization, for example if individuals adjust the life-work balance in favor of life and at the expense of work (in accord with Conger, 1993). Research on the link between personal growth training and leadership development has established an association with improvement of self-understandings and interpersonal attitudes; otherwise, it is a virtually unexplored terrain of empirical study. In theory and in practice, personal growth is emerging as a holistic approach which, through a collaborative interpretive process, aims at integrating the growth of individuals across the domains of personal and leadership development.

⁴⁸ As opposed, for instance, to views centered on developing human capital in order to meet the needs of organizations. The emphasis on actualization is an import from humanist psychology (Yukl, 2006; Conger, 1993)

⁴⁹ An area of overlap with participatory and collaborative approaches to inquiry (Bass, 2008).

⁵⁰ Mostly known as training groups or T-groups

2.3.3 A working definition of leadership development

As seen earlier, this research regards leadership as a multilateral social process active at different levels in organizations (Drath et al., 2008; Antonakis et al., 2004a). Leadership development is also understood as a process that can take place at different levels in organization. At its broadest, leadership development is an ongoing and multifaceted activity simultaneously involving individuals, dyads, groups and the whole of an organization (London and Maurer, 2004; McCauley, 2004). Consistently with the research interest, this thesis adopts an individual-level definition⁵¹ of leadership development. Drawing on the definition of leadership presented earlier, this frames leadership development as the *expansion of the capability of individuals* “to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (Bass, 2008, p.23). In defining capability, this thesis leverages a distinction (Jackson et al., 2003) between the notions of skill, capacity, and capability:

- *Skill* is “regarded as a specific expertise that can be taught”
- *Competency* is an aggregate of skills “necessary to resolve more complex problems”
- *Capability* is “the ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (p. 195)

By framing leadership development as expansion of capability, this thesis distances itself from the view that it can be reduced to the development of skills and competencies⁵². This thesis argues that at least one further level of maturity (capability) is discernible and hence that research from a developmental perspective is needed—i.e., to clarify what is involved in the development of skills and competencies versus capabilities. This issue is a particular instance of a larger knowledge gap around core processes of leadership development.

⁵¹ For example, leadership development has been defined as an “expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (Van Velsor et al., 1998, p. 4., in Avolio, 2008, p. 270). More on individual-level definitions of leadership development in Day and Halpin, 2004; Baldwin and Padgett, 1994, in Seijts and Latham, 2001)

⁵² The primary focus of the competency-based approach, as reviewed earlier

2.4 Adult development

2.4.1 Significance of adult development

Located in the greater field of developmental psychology, adult development is a sub-field of ontogenesis, which studies “the development of the individuals across the life span” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010; Vol. 2 p. 490). This exploratory research intends to leverage a connection between leadership development and adult learning and development. In contemplating a literature gap around the core processes of development, scholars have been increasingly vocalizing a need to connect to the adult development literature (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Avolio, 2010 and 2008; McCauley et al., 2006; London and Maurer, 2004; Mumford and Manley, 2003). Although tentative, this recent connection has roots in a prior collaboration between the fields of adult and leadership development—that is, the strands of research generated by Constructive-Developmental (CD) theory starting in the 1980s. CD theory (reviewed in this section) established a link between stages of adult development and different ways in which individual engage in a number of leadership processes. The field of adult development in general, and CD theory in particular, support that interpretive processes are intimately involved in core processes of development and thus bring sensemaking into the focal scope of this research.

2.4.2 A working definition of adult development

The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology (2010, Vol. 2) identifies two main views on what is adult development. An earlier view⁵³ regards development as the expression of individual variations⁵⁴. Integral part of this view is a debate around whether nature or nurture is responsible for individual variations. The later view⁵⁵ regards development as expression of individual variations *as well as* maturation of universal patterns. This view reconciles the nature-nurture debate by proposing that development occurs adaptively as individuals self-regulate in response to the environment. In accord with this systemic view, this research understands adult development as a complex adaptive process, informed by both environmental and individual factors (based on Magnusson, 2001). The following working definition of adult development is adopted:

⁵³ Which “arose from the methodological views of early twentieth-century neopositivism” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2010; Vol. 2 p. 490)

⁵⁴ Versus maturation according to universal patterns

⁵⁵ Deriving from a postpositivist methodology and systems theory (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010; Vol. 2)

“systematic, qualitative changes in human abilities and behaviors as a result of interactions between internal and external environments. Interactions and qualitative changes are influenced by genetics, by endogenous and exogenous influences, and by adaptive powers and personal interests” (Hoare, 2006 p. 8)

Moving from the interest of finding a frame of reference for discerning and understanding development, a critical review (Huff, 2008) of adult development was carried out to explore whether some universal patterns of development can be discerned from the literature. This topic and the output of the critical review are covered next.

2.4.3 Universal and idiosyncratic patterns in adult development

2.4.3.1 *Ontogenesis: transformational and variational change*

In the field of developmental psychology two core processes of developmental change are identified: transformational and variational change. Transformational change refers to the maturation, within individuals, of universal processes:

“the organism’s cognitive, affective, and motivational (i.e. psychological) processes” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 489)

Psychological processes are thought to be universal when they are “characteristic of a species as a whole” (p. 489). Psychological processes attributed to humans include:

“perception, thinking, memory, language, affect and motivation”⁵⁶
(The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 489)

⁵⁶ As opposed to “specific percept, concept, though, word, memory, emotion, motive”, which “represents a particular usage” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010, Vol. 2 p. 489)

Transformational change is found to follow a specific pattern of progression from a relatively undifferentiated state toward greater sophistication and integration:

“from globally undifferentiated—lacking self-consciousness, thought, or language—to complexly differentiated and integrated—having reflective self-consciousness, formal logical thought, and a complex language system” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 489)

The developmental direction toward greater sophistication and integration is characteristic not only of cognitive development, but also of other systems:

“Another example is the affective system, which in the newborn begins with the global differences of pleasure and pain and grows to the primary emotions of the toddler and the highly differentiated emotions of the child” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 489)

When development takes place, integration occurs within systems (such as the cognitive or affective systems), but also across systems (with cognition and affection functioning more interdependently at later stages of development). They are thought to have an adaptive function—that is, they aim:

“to increase the individual’s ability to survive in a complex physical and sociocultural world” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 489)

Finally, patterns of transformational change occur sequentially (although non-linearly) throughout the life span and tend to be irreversible⁵⁷. On the other hand, *variational* change refers to the gradual expression of individual variations:

“The acquisition of various skills and knowledge content as well as individual differences in these exemplify variational change”(The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 490)

Variational change is thought to also have an adaptive purpose. However, in contrast with transformational change, variational change is reversible as well as “quantitative, continuous, linear” (p. 490). Transformational and variational changes are related in the sense that:

“Variational change operates within the competencies afforded by transformational change” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 490)

Interestingly, then, the level of transformational maturation seems to affect the extent to which the expression of individual variations is possible. In conclusion, the field of adult development ascribes to development an ontogenetic pattern which includes an element of universality (transformational change) and an element of idiosyncrasy (variational change).

2.4.3.2 *Research evidence from the field of adult development*

To date, no dissent has emerged around the notion of ontogenesis in development as universal (transformational) patterns of change interplaying with the idiosyncratic (variational) expression of individual⁵⁸. Supporting evidence includes a review of studies conducted between 1995 and 2007 by Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas (2009): there is evidence that older adults tend to employ a greater variety of

⁵⁷ “Except in pathologies” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010; Vol. 2 p. 489)

⁵⁸ Some dissent exists over whether transformational change supports variational change (post-positivistic view) or whether it is an epiphenomenal manifestation of variational change (neo-positivistic view)

repertoires of problem-solving and emotional regulation strategies (sophistication), while also integrating the two spheres more effectively (integration). In addition, the authors review three theories of self-regulation which support that “the direction of adult development depends largely on actions an individual takes to shape his or her own development (Lerner and Busch-Rossnagel, 1981 p. 17). According to the authors, these theories are “theoretically well founded and are at a stage of theoretical refinement” (p. 17). Baxter Magolda et al. (2009) describe development⁵⁹ as a “journey toward self-authorship” (p.188). The authors also note that development occurs against a backdrop of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions that are increasingly explored (sophistication) and become increasingly interdependent (integration). Marsick et al. (2009) provide an input from the area of adult learning: although lacking a developmental perspective, they gather evidence that adult learning involves the integrated use of emotion, intuition and cognition (integration) and that adults best acquire knowledge through self-directed learning (idiosyncrasy). Another contribution from the area of adult learning is by Merriam and Clark (2006). In addressing cognitive development, the authors propose that by “integrating abstract thinking with very pragmatic life concerns, one tolerates ambiguity” and comes to think of contradictions as useful dialectic tool (Merriam and Clark, p. 33). The authors also address the role of self-authorship in learning (idiosyncrasy). Staundinger and Kessler (2009) reviewed research that associates greater maturity with increasing complexity, integration of self-conceptions (sophistication and integration) as well as self-regulation (idiosyncrasy). Finally, Sheldon (2009) reviewed self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000): research shows that, later in life, people respond better to autonomous forms of motivation⁶⁰. Sheldon, whose focus is on the study of self-generated goals, argues that people “have an innate tendency to internalize their own motivations, becoming integrated, autonomous and self-determined over time” (pp.562-563), adding that this particular hypothesis has not been extensively tested to date within life-span research. The table below summarizes evidence from the field of adult development supporting an ontogenetic pattern of greater integration, sophistication and self-determination⁶¹.

⁵⁹ In the context of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development in college years and young adulthood

⁶⁰ Both in terms of performance and affective state

⁶¹ The term self-determination will be used from now on to refer to the element of idiosyncrasy in ontogenesis

Table 1. Patterns in adult development

| Sources | Integration | Sophistication | Self-determination |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Review of adult development studies between 1995 and 2007 Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development Baxter Magolda et al. 2009 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Informal and incidental learning on the workplace Marsick et al. 2009 | ✓ | <i>Not in scope</i> | ✓ |
| Nature of connection between adult learning and development Merriam and Clark, 2006 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Changes in goal-striving across the life span Staundinger and Kessler, 2009 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Self-determination theory e.g. Deci and Ryan, 2000; in Sheldon, 2009; | <i>Not in scope</i> | <i>Not in scope</i> | ✓ |
| Self-generated goals Sheldon, 2009 | <i>Not in scope</i> | <i>Not in scope</i> | ✓ <i>(limited evidence)</i> |
| Constructive-Developmental (CD) theory e.g. Kegan, 1994; Torbert, 2004; | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Compiled by the author.

Finally, as included in the table above, the aggregate of research conducted within the constructive-developmental framework (reviewed next) evidences patterns of greater integration, sophistication and self-determination⁶² in adult development.

2.4.4 Constructive-Developmental (CD) theory

2.4.4.1 *Origins and essence of CD theory*

CD theory represents a precedent of the collaboration between the fields of psychology and leadership development. The foundations of CD theory lay in the work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1954) on “genetic epistemology”⁶³. Piaget looked at how different ways of understanding evolve throughout childhood: the way individuals construct sense changes *qualitatively* with progressively more advanced stages of

⁶² In two successive phases, self-regulation and self-authorship

⁶³ Genetic epistemology refers to the genesis of the understandings of individuals about themselves and the world

development. A qualitative change implies that, at every successive developmental stage, a more encompassing system of understandings emerges which transcends the prior system. As this process takes place, new interpretations become available (about the self, relationships and reality). Building on Piaget's work, CD theory posits that this progression in personal epistemology underlies the full actualization of an individual's potential (McCauley et al., 2006). On these foundations, developmental psychologist Robert Kegan (1980; 1982) developed the theory of adult development known as constructive-developmental. The term *constructive*⁶⁴ underscores a focus on the evolution of sensemaking in individuals. It also implicitly recognizes the role of social interactions and context in supporting development (a social-constructivist assumption). The term *developmental* underscores the focus on psychosocial growth of individuals. Kegan defines six progressive stages (orders of consciousness) of development. The denomination of each stage indicates the distinctive and qualitatively different way of making meaning of reality which characterizes it.

Figure 3. CD Theory: Six orders of consciousness



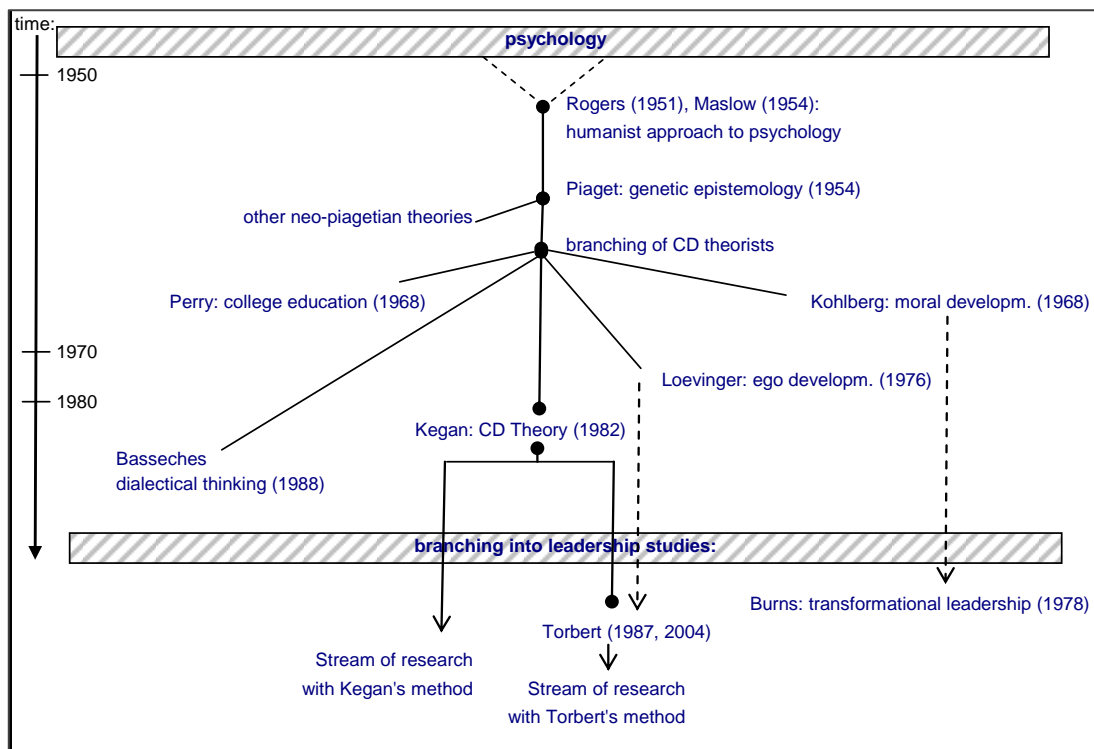
Compiled by the author. Source: Kegan, 1982

According to Kegan (1982), orders of consciousness do not strictly depend on biological age: variable spans of time are employed by different people, in different circumstances, to fully develop a specific order of consciousness. Moreover, constructive development is not a necessary process: individuals might also not develop beyond a certain order. The experience of development is inherent challenging: change amounts to a 're-drawing' of the self where both cognitive and emotional processes are involved (Torbert, 2004). Hence, aspects of the surrounding context can be critically supportive or unsupportive of development. Kegan (1980; 1982) emphasized that the purpose of CD theory is not to assess or evaluate orders; rather, it is to understand the experience of development in order to best support individuals as they undergo change. The work of Kegan has given rise to a range of

⁶⁴ This theory builds on a constructivist assumption: the lens through which reality is known and interpreted is socially constructed by the individual (see also Section 3.2.2)

research directions (see figure 4 below). For example, Kohlberg (1969, in McCauley et al. 2006) developed the renowned model of moral development⁶⁵. Loevinger's (1976, in Torbert 1987) framework of ego development has produced the WUSCT (Washington University Sentence Completion Test) personality assessment tool, still widely used in psychology. Basseches (1988, in Taylor and Marienau, 1997) elaborated on developmental order and dialectical thinking. Finally, Perry (1968; in Taylor and Marienau, 1997) contributed to the field of education with a framework of ethical and intellectual development during the college years.

Figure 4. Lines of evolution of CD Theory



Compiled by the author. Sources: Price, 2008; McCauley et al. 2006; Torbert, 2004, 1987; Kegan, 1982.

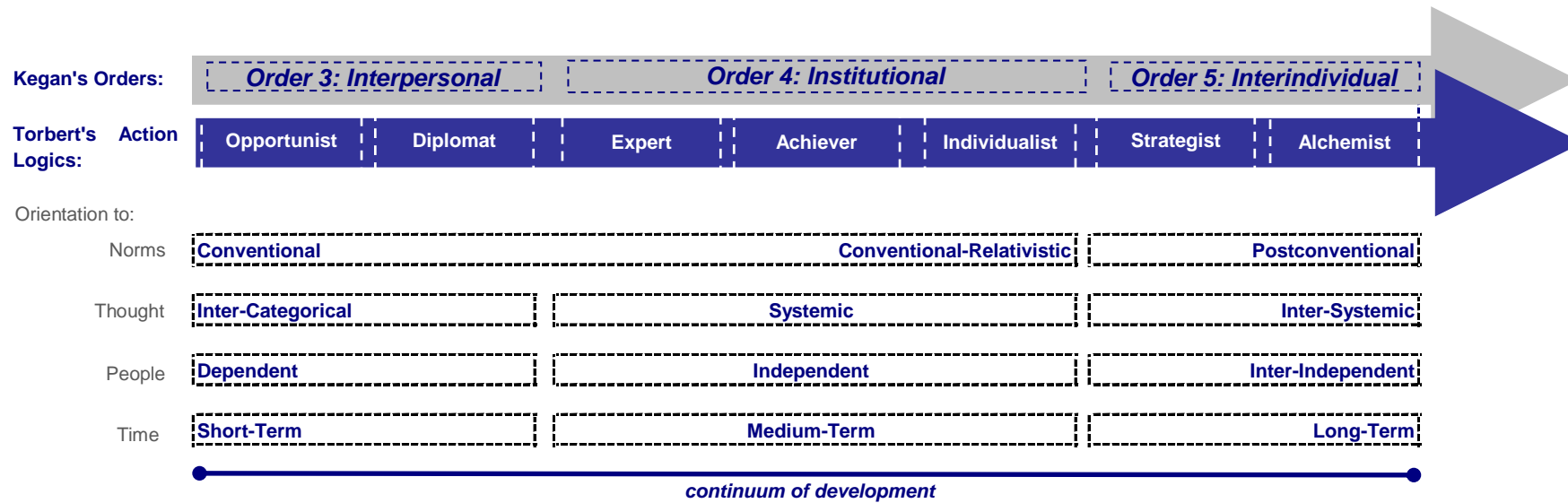
In addition, some of the research done within CD theory has substantiated a link between adult and leadership development. Evidence in this respect is reviewed next.

⁶⁵ In leadership, Kohlberg's model of moral development has had implications for the discussion of the moral element of transformational leadership (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999)

2.4.4.2 *Relationship with leadership development*

The work of Kegan (1994; 1982; 1980) and Torbert (2004; 1987) in particular have highlighted a pathway connecting adult and leadership development. Kegan focused on constructive development in a more general sense and underscored implications for adult professionals (1994). Torbert focused more on the development in individuals of different managerial action logics at different stages of development. Given his interest in an adult population, Torbert concentrated only on the last three of Kegan's orders (Interpersonal, Institutional and Interindividual—see figure below). Within each of Kegan's orders Torbert has added granularity by identifying further distinct sub-orders. The figure below is a comparison of Kegan's orders of consciousness and Torbert's action logics along a multi-dimensional continuum of development.

Figure 5. Comparison of Kegan's orders of consciousness and Torbert's action logics



Compiled by the author. Sources: McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert, 2004,1987; Kegan, 1994,1982.

Of the four dimensions (orientation to time, others, thought, and norms), of development highlighted in the figure above⁶⁸, the one marking a shift from conventional to post-conventional thinking is especially relevant to leadership. This dimension describes a shift from reliance on external sources of norms of conduct to self-determination (Torbert 2004). It is in this sense that CD theory provides support for an ontogenetic pattern of universality and idiosyncrasy in adult development (see Section 2.4.3). Earlier conventional stages are devoted to the development of independence and the ability to conform to social requirements. Then, the shift to post-conventional stages marks the passage to self-determination. Individuals at post-conventional stages will be increasingly capable of choosing and behaving according to autonomously created principles and will have more diversified and complex. A systematic review⁶⁹ of research conducted between 1980 and 2008 within CD theory (Florio, 2008) found that a link between adult and leadership development has been established. In particular, there is evidence relating developmental order to different styles of handling of ethical dilemmas and the expression of decision making styles (in McCauley et al., 2006a), managerial effectiveness (Merron et al., 1987), and the framing of managerial problems (Bartunek et al., 1983). In addition, post-conventional logics have found to be associated with more transformational styles of leadership. For example, a ten year longitudinal study by Rooke and Torbert (1998) found that higher orders of development are more likely to be associated with successful organizational development initiatives. Another study by Wheathersby (1993; in McCauley et al., 2006) found an association between post-conventional logics and change-oriented leadership, although a later study (Mehltretter, 1995; in McCauley et al., 2006) found no association. Other studies have found associations with inspirational leadership (Steeve, 1997; in McCauley et al., 2006), effective delegating (Hirsch, 1999; in McCauley et al., 2006), influencing (Fisher and Torbert, 1991), and collaborative framing (Fisher et al., 1987). More recent work is seeking to further explore a link between developmental orders and transactional versus transformational styles of leadership (Harris and Kuhnert, 2008).

⁶⁸ These dimensions were derived from the work of Kegan (1994; 1982) and Torbert (2004; 1987)

⁶⁹ Denyer and Tranfield, 2006; Tranfield et al., 2003;

2.4.4.3 *Conclusion*

The aggregate of research conducted within CD theory has evidenced a relationship between developmental stages and a number of leadership processes. However, as stressed by McCauley et al. (2006, p.647) ‘there is almost no research that examines how training, development or coaching programs impact participants’ order of development’; in particular “there has been no research that examines the features of these interventions that support development” (p.642). Moreover, challenges of contemporary organizational life seem to require a post-conventional logic: but, Kegan argued (1994), the widespread contemporary feeling of being “in over our heads” might be related to the complexity of reality surpassing our collective stage of development. The research program of Kegan and associates (1994) composed a picture of the distribution of adult professionals among orders of consciousness whereby only a minority (6%) was found to have developed beyond Kegan’s fourth order of consciousness--and hence beyond conventional stages⁷⁰. Hoare (2009) discussed how, for the better part of the last two millennia, adulthood has been assumed to be a phase of developmental stasis: the adult has been mostly considered as a “ripened” (p. 71) individual, and “the middle of the 20th century would have to arrive before influential thinkers began to consider the grown person as one who also changed considerably, frequently positively, during the young, middle, older, and aged years of life” (p. 74). Developmental psychology research has been making leaps forward in the understanding of adult development and, hopefully, is gradually influencing society toward the notion of nurturing development in adults. This review finds that the wealth of knowledge in the adult development literature could provide theoretical platforms for the understanding of core processes of development in the management and leadership areas.

2.4.5 **The role of sensemaking in adult development**

2.4.5.1 *Significance of sensemaking*

One overarching pattern in the review of adult development theories is that interpretive processes emerge as intimately involved in developmental processes. Development both relies and feeds into interpretive processes: it relies on interpretive processes in the sense that a developmental situation is significant “particularly as it is

⁷⁰ A majority (67%) was found between order three and order four. According to Kegan (1994), it is rare to see people developing beyond order four—and never before their forties.

interpreted by the individual”; development feeds into the interpretive process in the sense that this it “offers possibilities and constraints for adaptive responses” (Magnusson, 2001 p. 154). This review argues that the field of adult development has as its main object of study the development of sensemaking⁷¹ at the individual level. Next, evidence is reviewed which supports this notion and a working definition of sensemaking is presented.

2.4.5.2 *Sensemaking in the adult development literature*

From the angle of developmental psychology, change involves a system of “cognitive, affective, and motivational (i.e. psychological) processes”⁷². This definition strikes as necessarily involving a change in interpretive processes. As seen earlier, development occurs as this system shifts from a relatively undifferentiated state and toward greater integration, sophistication and self-determination. Higginson and Mansell, (2008) set out to identify psychological change in psychotherapeutic settings by studying participants’ “construction of meaning” (p. 312), which they describe as a complex person-centered process. Furthermore, in describing development, Magnusson (2001) refers to a “mental appraisal” involving “an integrated cognitive process, including values and emotions attached to the cognitive content” (p. 154) and highlights that interpretive processes both frame and enable development. Finally, the aggregate of CD theories (considered next) is testament to the central place that the adult development literature assigns to sensemaking.

2.4.5.3 *Sensemaking in CD theory*

CD theory equates development with changes in sensemaking (qualitatively different orders of consciousness). Moreover, further analysis of Kegan’s work (1982) reveals that at the heart of the change in sensemaking there is a sensemaking dialectic between subject and object. Gradually, aspects that were at first defining of the self (subjects--for example, in early teenager years the self tends to *be* its interests and desires) become things that the self has perspective over (objects--for example, in later teenager years, the self begins to *have* interests and desires). According to Kegan (1982), development is triggered when a person’s current meaning-making is

⁷¹ Although it does not necessarily refer to the term sensemaking (a term originated in organization theory)

⁷² The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2010, Vol. 2, p. 489 (see Section 2.4.3.1)

challenged, for example by the occurrence of some external event that puzzles the current logic. Kegan recognizes that constructive development is an ongoing process, but suggests that phases of relative stability are identifiable, where a given system of meaning organizes “our thinking, feeling and acting over a wide range of human functioning” (1980b). In fact, in their analysis of how CD theory might support the study of leadership development, McCauley et al. (2006) explicitly acknowledge the role of sensemaking within CD theory. In fact, they promote CD theory as having “the potential to act as an integrative framework “because “it deals with [...] the generation and development of meaning for individuals and social systems” (p. 650).

2.4.5.4 *Sensemaking in the management literature*

Sensemaking has had a central role in the management learning literature, where it is broadly understood the ongoing process whereby a person creates the organizing principles that will serve as basis for interpretations and actions (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Schwandt, 2005). The term sensemaking emerged from organization theory and the work of Weick (1995). Weick defined sensemaking as “the process of social construction that occurs when discrepant cues interrupt individuals’ ongoing activity, and involves the retrospective development of plausible meanings that rationalize what people are doing” (Weick et al. 2005, in Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010 p. 551). Due to its nature as a social construction process, sensemaking functions as interface between the individual and the organization (Weick et al., 2005). In addition, sensemaking serves an adaptive function: while ongoing, but it receives new impulse “whenever the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world” (Weick et al., 2005, p.414). Due to its processual nature and adaptive function, sensemaking has served as the lens and focus for research on organizational change: at evolving interpretations of managers during organizational change (Isabella, 1990): organizational death (Sutton, 1987), fast decision-making in executive teams (Eisenhardt, 1989), strategic change (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), and organizational crises (Weick, 1993; 1990; 1988; in Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Recent applications of sensemaking include the study of corporate social responsibility (Basu and Palazzo, 2008).

From a leadership perspective, leadership capabilities seem to hinge crucially on the sensemaking of managers. Whether explicitly or implicitly, managers constantly rely on their own sensemaking when they acquire and organize new knowledge (Schwandt, 2005; 1978; Argyris, 1991), develop or deploy skills and behaviors (Lord and Hall, 2005; Mumford et al., 2007; Jackson et al., 2003), navigate organizational change (Lüscher

and Lewis, 2008; Mumford et al., 2007; Isabella, 1990), and influence organizational processes (Plowman et al., 2007; Maitlis, 2005; Smircich and Morgan, 1982). Hence, the heightened demands on sensemaking in unfamiliar or fast changing circumstances (Kegan, 1994; Basu and Palazzo, 2008). Across the management area, the focus has traditionally remained on the cognitive dimension of sensemaking. There are, however, recent exhortations to expand the notions to other dimensions, for example the social and affective (Weick, 2010; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010) and embodiment (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010).

2.4.5.5 *A working definition of sensemaking*

Sensemaking occurs as people continuously weave in their minds a fabric made of interpretations. However, sensemaking is not a phenomenon confined to the mind: through interpretations, individuals organize knowledge of reality, but also reality itself (the notion of enactment, Weick, 1995; Smircich and Stubbart, 1985). Individuals develop plausible understandings about reality which become embodied in concrete courses of action (Weick et al., 2005). In composing a working definition of sensemaking this thesis attempts to leverage different sources: the holistic understanding derived from the field of psychology, whereby interpretive processes occur through the functional integration of cognitive, emotive, and behavioral dimensions; the purposive aspect, highlighted by work focusing on self-determination and including deeper aspects of motivation and sense of purpose; and, the aspects of enactment and embodiments underscored in the sensemaking tradition in the field of organization theory. In addition, consistently with the focus of this research, sensemaking is considered at the individual level. Sensemaking is understood as a dynamic process of construction of sense which involves functionally integrated cognitive, affective, purposive, and conative dimensions and attends to inextricably linked processes of individual development, establishment of meaning, and exchange with the environment.

2.4.6 **Summary**

While the field of adult development is relatively young (Hoare, 2009 p. 75), there is no longer doubt that meaningful and positive development can occur also in adulthood and across the life span. Development occurs through qualitative transformations of the interpretive processes of individuals and hence affects the ways in which

individuals are capable of interacting with the environment. The relevance of adult development to leadership has been established by research conducted within CD theory. Further research is needed to understand how development can be fostered within leadership development initiatives. Finally, sensemaking emerges as intimately involved in core processes of development and, as such, will enter the focal scope of this research.

2.5 Conclusion: research problem and research questions

A critical review (Huff, 2008) of the leadership, leadership development and adult development literatures as well as a systematic review (Denyer and Tranfield, 2006; Tranfield et al., 2003) of applications of CD theory to leadership development revealed the contours of a knowledge gap around the core processes of leadership development. This exploratory qualitative research aims to contribute to theory building efforts focused on the core processes of leadership development and to examine how the sensemaking of individuals may result in developmental outcomes relevant for personal and leadership development. Building on the notions that personal and leadership development are interrelated and that sensemaking is critical to both processes, this research seeks to answer the following research questions:

Research question: In the context of a leadership development program with an emphasis on personal growth:

- a. How do participants construct change for themselves?
- b. How do participants construct any implications of change for their own leadership practice?

3 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the philosophical premises of this research and locate them in the greater landscape of research approaches. I then review key methodological choices that shaped this research as well as their justifications based on methodology literature and the nature of this research. I describe in detail the research context, a leadership development program with a focus on personal growth. Finally, I present the approach, derived from the field of adult development, that was adopted by this research to guide the assessment of individual change and development.

3.2 Research philosophy

3.2.1 A perspective idealist ontology

3.2.1.1 *A realism-idealism continuum*

In the context of social research, ontology refers to assumptions around the existence, nature and characteristics of aspects of social reality⁷³. The range of ontological positions in social research can be illustrated through a continuum between realism and idealism (Blaikie, 2007). Parallel terminologies have been used to describe essentially the same continuum with different labels, such as positivism versus interpretivism (e.g., in Blaikie 2003) or constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). However, this thesis prefers to adopt the realism-idealism as used in Blaikie (2003), on the basis that it facilitates a distinction between philosophy and methodology. Along a realism-idealism continuum, it is possible to trace affiliations of methodologies to different philosophical systems and articulate a nuanced differentiation of methodologies⁷⁴. Such a differentiation is attempted in the landscape of research approaches in figure 6.

3.2.1.2 *Realist and idealist ontologies*

Realism ontologies are rooted in the tradition of natural sciences and express a belief in the existence of an external social reality which is, at least in part, objectively observable. In contrast, idealist ontologies assert that social reality is constructed by human minds. Both realist and idealist ontologies exist in different nuances. *Naïve realism*, at an extreme realist end of a continuum, asserts that there is nothing more to social reality than what there is in plain view. A less extreme view, *cautious realism*, introduces the notion of perceptions: perceptions are responsible for bias distorting the view of objective social reality. Further away from extreme realism, *depth realism* divides social reality into layers: surface layers which can be objectively seen, and deeper layers which are hidden from view and can only be inferred from their surface

⁷³ A narrow interpretation of ontology, as opposed to ontology as concerned with “being” itself (Richardson, 2009)

⁷⁴ Including methodologies widely referred to as interpretivism and constructionism, two labels that at times are used to indicate an epistemological stand

manifestations. Bridging realism and idealism, *conceptual realism* proposes that social processes are an objective reification of subjective thought processes. There follow three moderate idealist ontologies, which retain the belief that to some extent an external reality does exist: constrained, subtle, and perspective idealism⁷⁵. The mildest form, *constrained idealism*, asserts that different perspectives are created through interaction with structure (objective social reality). *Subtle realism* posits that social reality can be known by interpreting it and factoring out biases and limits of interpretations. In contrast, *perspective idealism* promotes negotiation of interpretations, claiming that the factoring out of interpretations cannot be possibly achieved. *Agnostic idealism* questions the relevance of establishing whether an objective external social exists, and only occupies itself with how reality is perceived. On the extreme idealist end of the continuum, *atheist idealism* pronounces that an external social reality does not exist and that subjective and contextually-bound knowledge is all that matters.

3.2.1.3 *A perspective idealist ontology*

This research aims to observe how individuals make meaning of their experience of change; also, to observe if implications of this sensemaking reverberate externally to the individual (for example, in their professional context). Naturally, sensemaking does not manifest itself only in mindful and transparent forms. Part of sensemaking is always “pretheoretical” and “inexplicit”: engaging in life experience (“coping”) often precedes theorizing about it (Weinberg, 2008, p. 30). A belief central to this research is that there is a ‘truth’ about how individuals give meaning to their actions and their life. Such truth might be subjective and fleeting, but at a particular point in time it is a truth which animates as well as emanates from the sensemaking of individuals. Research strategies affiliated with atheist or agnostic idealism are mostly “mute or agnostic on matters of ontology” (Gergen, in Schwandt, 2003, p. 306). In contrast, the ontological belief characteristic of perspective idealism is that there ultimately is “a truth to the matter of interpretation” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 307) and that “it is neither necessary nor desirable” to draw “relativistic, suspicious (or, worse, nihilistic), conclusions from the fact that knowledge of others is always dependent on a background of understanding” (Schwandt, 2003, p.313). A perspective idealist ontology supports this research in the sense that it does not renounce the notion that truths exist.

⁷⁵ The more extreme the form of idealism, it seems, the more ontology and epistemology collapse together

3.2.2 A social constructivist epistemology

3.2.2.1 *An empiricism-constructivism continuum*

Epistemology refers to assumptions around what can be known and how knowledge can be obtained. Consistently with the method used to examine ontology, this discussion examines epistemology based on terminology by Blaikie (2007): epistemological stands can be understood as ranging from empiricism to constructivism. In essence, the difference between empiricism and constructivism lies in two different ways of relating to reality: empiricism (originating from natural sciences) aims at explaining social phenomena (Erklären); in contrast, constructivism aims at understanding (Verstehen) social phenomena (Schwandt, 2003; Blaikie, 2007). Ontological and epistemological assumptions are closely related and are here considered together. Naïve realist ontologies tend to rely on a *representationalist* epistemology: the assumption that a truthful portrayal of reality can and should be achieved. Cautious realist ontologies tends to embrace a *falsificationist* epistemology: the belief that science can advance understanding by striving to adhere to empirical reality and eliminate bias and logical contradiction. Depth realist ontologies tend to rely on an *epiphenomenalist* epistemology: the assumption that knowledge of deeper layers of reality can be inferred from the study of its surface manifestations. Conceptual realist ontologies tend to rely on a *rationalist* epistemology: the notion that absence of logical flaws warrants cognitive validity. A number of idealist ontologies (constrained, subtle, perspective, and agnostic idealism) rely on some form of social constructivist epistemology: that is, on the assumption that people are actively engaged in constructing meaning (Weinberg, 2008; Schwandt, 2005). However, these three ontological stands see social constructivism in three slight different ways. Constrained idealist ontologies tend to adopt *constructionist* assumptions, whereby reality is understood as an interaction of agency and structure. Subtle realist ontologies tend to adopt *interpretivist* assumptions: reality is subjective but it is possible to strive towards an objective portrayal of subjectivity (through exposing limitations and factoring out elements of bias; negative bracketing, Pollio et al., 1997). Perspective idealist ontologies tend to rely on *negotiation of interpretations*: because there is not presuppositionless way of knowing (Blaikie, 2007) interpretive frames cannot be factored out; on the contrary, they are the primary tool for understanding reality (positive bracketing; Pollio et al., 1997). The epistemology of perspective idealism essentially is the epistemology of philosophical hermeneutics, the research paradigm adopted by this research (discussed in the next section). Agnostic idealist ontologies tend to focus on the in-depth understanding and description of

different interpretive frames. Finally, atheist idealist ontologies tend to rely on *conventionalism* or *pragmatism*: the notion that, there being no truth the best that can be achieved is to find out what works in different contexts.

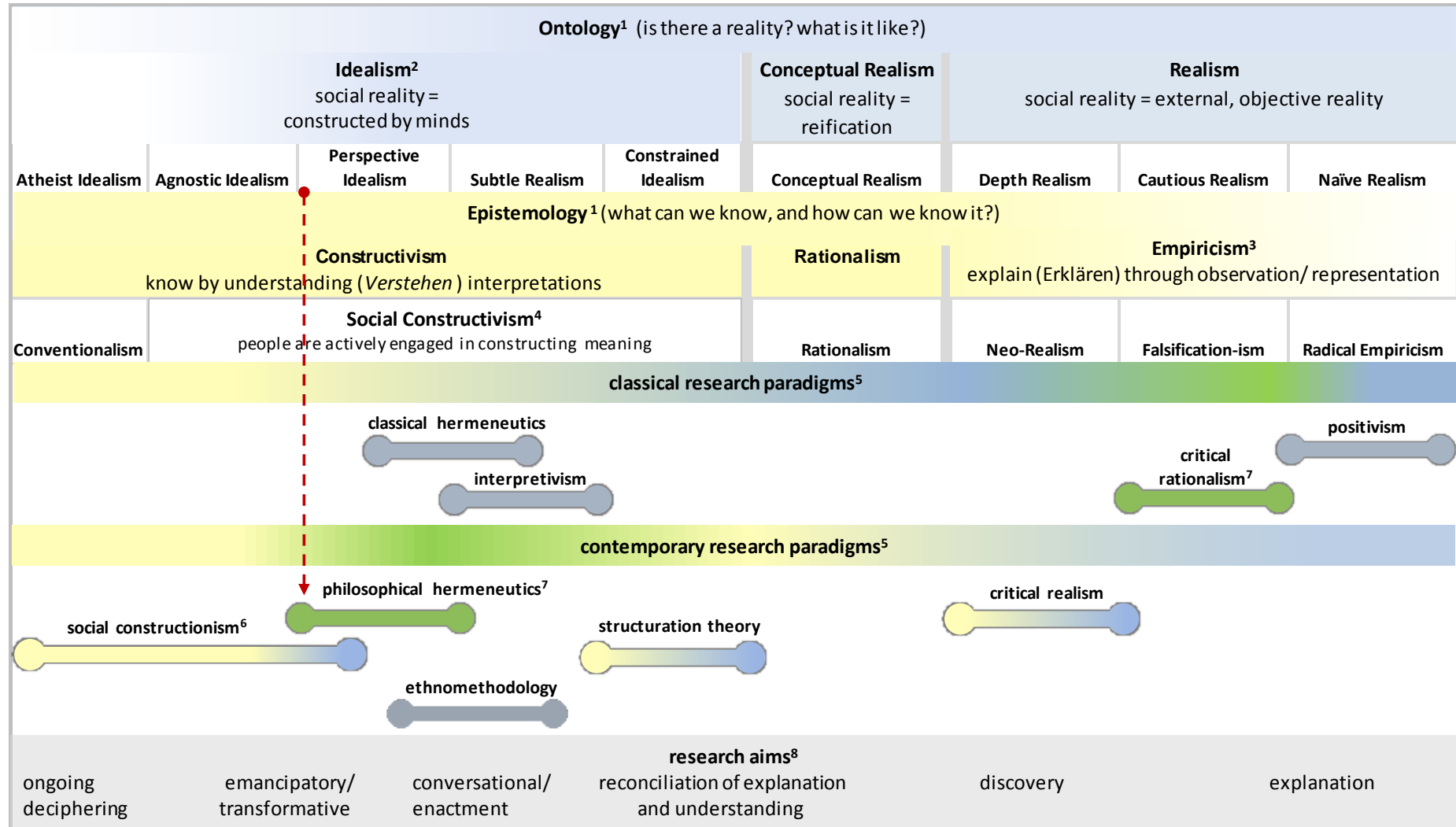
3.2.2.2 *Variations within a social constructivist epistemology*

Social constructivism originated as a psychological theory of social learning. Vygotski (1934-1987) theorized that all learnings are acquired or refined in social interaction; by doing so, he added the social dimension to Piaget's (1896-1980) constructivist notion of active sensemaking by individuals (Scott et al., 2007). Contributing to quite some terminological confusion, today the term constructivist ('social' is often left implicit) is used at times to refer to a *research paradigm* (e.g. in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hepburn, 2003) and at times to refer to an *epistemology* (e.g. in Schwandt, 2003; Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve, 2003). On a *paradigm level*, Hepburn (2003) identifies that constructivism focuses on mental constructions while constructionism focuses on social discourse. On an *epistemological level*, the term really just captures assumptions of "an everyday, uncontroversial, garden-variety constructivism". In the words of Schwandt, "In a fairly unremarkable sense, we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge" (2003, p. 305). Adding to confusion, the term constructivism (as an epistemology) has been used to indicate a basis (Schwandt, 2003) or a subset of constructionism (Blaikie, 2007), and has been used interchangeably with interpretivism (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Lodico et al., 2010) and constructionism (Charmaz, 2005). This research refers to social constructivism as an epistemological stance and subscribes to its basic assumptions that people actively contribute to the making of social reality and that there are different views of the world (Weinberg, 2008; Schwandt, 2005). The epistemological assumptions at the basis of this research are further specified within the frame of philosophical hermeneutics (discussed next).

Figure 6. A landscape of research approaches

| Ontology ¹ (is there a reality? what is it like?) | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|---|--|
| Idealism ² social reality = constructed by minds | | | | | Conceptual Realism social reality = reification | Realism social reality = external, objective reality | | |
| Atheist Idealism | Agnostic Idealism | Perspective Idealism | Subtle Realism | Constrained Idealism | Conceptual Realism | Depth Realism | Cautious Realism | Naïve Realism |
| External world inexistent or irrelevant | World = only interested in how it is perceived, whether it exists or not | World = external social reality, always seen through some perspective | World = external, social reality always interpreted (not directly observable) | World = external social reality, significantly affecting perspectives | World = social processes, reified through shared thought processes | World = different layers, some objective and observable; some subjective and unobservable | World = what objectively observable--but different perceptions (biases) exist | World = what objectively observable |
| Epistemology ¹ (what can we know, and how can we know it?) | | | | | | | | |
| Constructivism know by understanding (<i>Verstehen</i>) interpretations | | | | | Rationalism | Empiricism ³ explain (Erklären) through observation/ representation | | |
| Conventionalism | Social Constructivism ⁴ people are actively engaged in constructing meaning | | | | Rationalism | Neo-Realism | Falsification-ism | Radical Empiricism |
| there is no truth, one can only know what works for somebody in a give context (pragmatism) | know different perceptions by truly understanding them and accurately describing them | know aspects of truth through negotiation of interpretations | know subjective truths objectively, by observing typicality and constructing models which acknowledge their limits | know social reality as a realistic interaction between agency and structure; issue context- specific statements | know by observing shared thought processes; absence of flaws in logic is a warrant of cognitive validity. | know underlying mechanisms by observing patterns and regularities, seek signs of actual dependence of events from underlying mechanism | know reality by disproving and advancing theory empirically; absence of logical contradiction and correspondence to empirical reality as epistemic warrants | know reality through observation; truthful representation as epistemic warrant (representationalism) |

(continued) Figure 6 A landscape of research approaches



(continued) Figure 6 A landscape of research approaches

Notes to the diagram 'A map of research approaches'

- (1) The range of ontological and epistemological stands is from Blaikie, 2007;
- (2) The belief that an objective reality actually exists fades in radical idealist ontologies;
- (3) The belief that interpretation is a lens over reality fades in radical empiricist epistemologies;
- (4) Social constructivism is intended as the epistemological stance which assumes that people are actively engaged in constructing meanings (Schwandt, 2003);
- (5) The distinction between classical and contemporary research paradigms is from Blaikie, 2007;
- (6) Social constructionism is intended as a research paradigm including different approaches, for example critical theory and some feminist approaches (Schwandt, 2003);
- (7) Both philosophical hermeneutics and critical rationalism believe that a truth exists; also, that it can only be known through the lenses of some theoretical understanding. In contrast, other approaches tend to seek an objective understanding (e.g. interpretivism and moderate social constructionist approaches) or are skeptical that a truth exists (e.g. radical social constructionist approaches). Sources: Weinberg, 2008; Blaikie, 2007; Schwandt, 2003;
- (8) The range of research aims is from Schwandt, 2003 and Weinberg, 2007.

Compiled by the author.

3.3 Research paradigm: philosophical hermeneutics

3.3.1.1 *Locating philosophical hermeneutics*

Philosophical hermeneutics is one approach in the broader landscape of contemporary (Blaikie, 2007) qualitative constructivist inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Schwandt, 2003). Philosophical hermeneutics moves from a perspective idealist ontology (Blaikie, 2007) and a moderate social constructivist epistemology (Schwandt, 2003). In this section, philosophical hermeneutics is contrasted with two other approaches with which it shares some of its epistemological assumptions: interpretivism and social constructionism.

Classical hermeneutics (Schleiermacher, 1768-1834; Dilthey, 1833-1911; in Blaikie, 2007) developed in response to the challenge of understanding texts emerging from different historical and cultural contexts (Blaikie, 2007). Classical hermeneutics addresses this challenge through the hermeneutic circle, an iterative procedure of relating parts of a text to its whole--"endeavouring to grasp the unknown whole in order to understand the known parts" (p. 18). Having intersected with phenomenology (Brentano, 1838-1917; Husserl, 1859-1938; in Blaikie, 2007), classical hermeneutics came to embrace the idea that in order to effectively implement the hermeneutic circle and grasp the truth, a radical disengagement with the world is needed. Disengagement can be obtained through transcendental epoché--the bracketing or suspension of all beliefs and pre-judgments.

The shift from classical to contemporary (philosophical) hermeneutics occurred when Heidegger (1889-1976; in Blaikie, 2007) turned the notion of bracketing on its head. Heidegger pointed out that, "Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something in advance" (Blaikie, 2007, p.123). Hence, the goal of suspending beliefs and pre-judgments is not a realistic one. Heidegger attributed to understanding (Verstehen) an ontological quality: understanding is a mode of being, distinctive of humans; through understanding, humans bring to light the meaning implicit in their life experience. Later, Gadamer (1900-2002; in Blaikie, 2007) built on this very point: the search for objective knowledge of social life is naïve and amounts to an "illusion of objectifying thinking" (Blaikie, 2007 p. 152). Gadamer claimed that understanding cannot but occur through interpretation: the interpretive frames of an interpreter are not something one "must strive to get rid of or manage in order to come to a clear understanding" (Schwandt, 2003, p. 301). All the opposite, interpretive frames are an indispensable tool brought to the task of Verstehen.

3.3.1.2 *Negotiation of interpretations*

Philosophical hermeneutics examined the issue of *Verstehen* and of interpretation in great depth by exploring questions of how *Verstehen* is possible and what kind of knowledge it can produce. The distinctive epistemological feature of philosophical hermeneutics is the belief that individuals can get to know approximations of truth by negotiating their interpretations with other individuals. According to Gadamer, each individual is inevitably a product of their historical tradition and thus understands through a given 'horizon of meaning'. By negotiating interpretations, individuals can achieve 'fusion of horizons'. A fusion of horizon can be transformative: parties engaged in the negotiation come to realize some of their own deep-seated assumptions. A fusion of horizons does not amount to discovering truth: rather, it amounts to opening further windows of *Verstehen* and an approximation of truths⁷⁶. The product of interpretation is never truth itself; rather, it is a refined understanding of a truth. The notions of interpreting as understanding, and of negotiation of interpretations, set philosophical hermeneutics apart from other social constructivist paradigms; in contrast, interpretivist epistemologies tend to pursue objective knowledge of subjective truths and social constructionist epistemologies tend to believe that knowledge is a fabrication not necessarily underpinned by a truth (Schwandt, 2003).

3.3.1.3 *Verstehen and the hermeneutic circle in qualitative inquiry*

Philosophical and methodological terms reflect only temporarily the meanings assigned to them by current discourse. According to Bernstein (1986; in Schwandt, 2003), labels in philosophy project an illusory sense of continuity and hence are at the same time a remedy and a poison. Labels are necessary "to help identify a style, a temperament, a set of common concerns and emphases" (Bernstein, 1986; in Schwandt, 2003, p. 292); at the same time, however, they can blind from the fluid nature of thought. For example, an inquiry could claim a social constructivist approach aimed at reaching *Verstehen* through the hermeneutic circle. This description clarifies some methodological choices but falls short of specifying if the inquiry is adhering to a particular philosophy among those that support these choices. One reason is that each of these terms originated in a particular school of thought, but later became relevant,

⁷⁶ Whitehead (in Pavlov, 2010) also believed that there is no presuppositionless way of knowing and proposed abstraction (as opposed to negotiation of interpretation) as a way of approximating truths

with varying connotations, to different approaches in the qualitative range of social research.

Verstehen

The concept of Verstehen stemmed from a philosophical distinction between natural and social sciences (Schwandt, 2003; Blaikie, 2007): while the object of natural sciences is to explain (Erklären) natural phenomena, the object of social sciences is to understand (Verstehen) social intricacies. A generic affiliation with Verstehen often embodies a reaction to positivist and post-positivist epistemologies; as such, it can be said to characterize all qualitative inquiry (Schwandt, 2003). There are, however, different versions of Verstehen. In classical hermeneutics, the empathic Verstehen of Dilthey describes a perceptual reliving, by the interpreter, of the psychological experience which originated a particular objectification of meaning (Blaikie, 2007). After Dilthey, Verstehen became irreversibly implicated with Husserl's phenomenological method: according to Husserl, Verstehen requires the suspension of all preconceptions (epoché, or bracketing). As seen earlier, Heidegger absorbed but reversed the notion of bracketing: he refuted that suspension of preconceptions is possible and thought that interpreters can pursue Verstehen by acquainting themselves with their lens over the world ('positive' bracketing, Pollio et al., 1997). Gadamer embraced this view and, as seen earlier, promoted an epistemology based on negotiation of interpretations. While the Verstehen of Dilthey and Heidegger has influenced two different strands of interpretivism, Gadamer's Verstehen is the epistemological basis of philosophical hermeneutics (Blaikie, 2007).

Hermeneutic circle

Hermeneutic circle broadly indicates the process of interpretation of a text by referring in iterations to its parts and its whole (e.g. in Pollio et al., 1997). This exegetic function has been characteristic of hermeneutics since its ancient applications. In contemporary qualitative inquiry the hermeneutic circle takes on the expanded meaning of grasping a thought or action, "in terms of the system of meanings to which it belongs" (Schwandt, 2003, p.296). The hermeneutic circle itself, however, is interpreted differently by different approaches. In interpretivist research a knower-inquirer is "standing over and against" (Schwandt, 2003, p.300) an actor-object; the hermeneutic circle is a tool utilized to extract objective truths from the reality of social actors. For social constructionism, reality is a social invention, and to apply the hermeneutic circle is "to play with the possibilities and practices that are made coherent by various forms of relations" present in the web of social narratives (in Schwandt, 2003, p. 307). In philosophical hermeneutics, interpreter and texts are expression of a social context (Gadamer's 'historical tradition', in Blaikie, 2007): hence, the hermeneutic circle is

about negotiating the frames of reference of both interpreters and context. This research strives to pursue Verstehen through the hermeneutic circle in the way intended by philosophical hermeneutics: for example, by negotiating interpretations of the researcher with those of the participants⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ See Section 3.4.5 on the interview method adopted

3.4 Methodological choices

3.4.1 Longitudinal qualitative research

Burgelman (2011) asserts that the critical value of longitudinal (or quasi-longitudinal) qualitative research is to support the study of “social systems characterized by complexity and nonlinear causation” (p. 591) through grounded theorizing. Longitudinal qualitative research builds substantive theory around such systems; qualitative research performs a theory-bridging role between empirical reality and formal theory.

3.4.1.1 *Affinity between longitudinal qualitative research and the modern approach to the study of history*

In explaining why a longitudinal qualitative research approach is apt to the study of complex, embedded, and multi-level social processes, Burgelman compares it to the modern approach to the scholarly study of history. Both approaches share a focus on social processual realities as well as a high tolerance for complexity. While other approaches might aim to study specific variables in isolation, these two approaches assume that key variables at play are interdependent⁷⁸. While other approaches might aim to generalize across contexts, these two approaches regard context as a necessary ingredient of an unfolding process⁷⁹. While other approaches might aim to form predictive explanations based on a snapshot of reality, these two approaches focus on retrospectively identifying which elements were necessary (if not sufficient) for a specific process to unfold in the particular way it unfolded⁸⁰. Finally, while other approaches might seek to isolate a single relationship of causation⁸¹, these two approaches embrace “parsimony in consequences, but not causes (i.e., multiple identified causes must converge upon a particular consequence)” (Gaddis, 2002; in Burgelman 2011 p. 597)⁸².

⁷⁸ According to an ecological view (Burgelman, 2011 p. 594)

⁷⁹ Based on Gaddis 2002 (Burgelman, 2011 p. 595)

⁸⁰ Post hoc criticality (Burgelman, 2011 pp. 594-595)

⁸¹ These other approaches “consider overdetermined events inadequately explained” (Burgelman, 2011 p. 595)

⁸² Overdetermination is considered as an adequate theoretical contribution when several interdependent variables are examined and as long as generalization is not extended to a population.

3.4.1.2 *Substantive theory*

Longitudinal qualitative analysis is equipped for the study of complex and little understood social processes and contributes to advancing knowledge through substantive theory. Substantive theory provides conceptualizations which are “parsimonious” in comparison with the raw complexity of the phenomena that they examine and thus enable further research and theorizing⁸³. Substantive theory is often “rudimentary” (Burgelman, 2011 p. 597) in character: it involves frameworks that are “boxes-and-arrow charts”, but “show how the complex system hangs together and its operative logic” (p. 598). Conceptual frameworks derived from substantive theory preserve a close link to data and hence help prevent that formal abstraction take off too early and in empirically unwarranted directions. Substantive theory, also known as mid-range theory, provides an intermediate step toward formal theorizing.

3.4.1.3 *Implications for this research*

Sensemaking, the focal point of the research question, is “messy” and involves “multiple levels and units of analysis whose boundaries are ambiguous” (Langley, 1999, p. 296). This research aims at examining a complex social process (such as those described by Burgelman, 2011), where context (as well as other variables) is expected to interplay in co-determining a range of outcomes that cannot be predicted as of the start of the research. Hence, this research embraces a search for criticality (Burgelman, 2011) as well as the aim of contributing to substantive theory. Contributions will be within the constraints of process theory (Langley, 1999)⁸⁴: building process theory is done by extending observations of one instance of a process to other instances of the same process and does not seek to generalize to a population.

3.4.2 Exploratory research

Edmondson and McManus (2007) argue that exploratory research is a good methodological fit when the aim is to contribute to nascent theory. This research joins

⁸³ In contrast, formal theory “uses more general concepts to capture the more general phenomenon of which the particular ones are distinct manifestations” (Burgelman 2011, p. 593)

⁸⁴ In contrast, the aim of variance theory is to describe relationships of “constant conjunction” between variables (Blaikie, 2007, p. 111) that are typical of a certain population

an inquiry that sits at the intersection of nascent conceptualizations of core processes of adult development and leadership development. Because there is little certainty around what takes place at this particular intersection, this research favors a wide exploratory scope (“avoiding preconceptions”, Burgelman 2011 p. 592), which will allow for inductively identifying relationships and patterns that are empirically relevant. This is in contrast to a narrower scope, which would likely adopt a theory-derived construct and seek patterns within its frame of reference.

3.4.3 Purposive sampling

Purposive (or theoretical) sampling involves “selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position and analytical framework, your analytical practice, and most importantly the argument or explanation that you are developing” (Mason, 2002 p. 124). This section analyzes in what ways purposive sampling as employed in this research satisfies a criterion of relevance with regard to research questions, theoretical position and claims to knowledge.

Research questions

The questions that this research seeks to address are repeated below:

Research question: In the context of a leadership development program with an emphasis on personal growth:

- a. How do participants construct change for themselves?
- b. How do participants construct any implications of change for their own leadership practice?

The questions above pivot around three areas--context, process, and outcomes. One of the aims of this research is to empirically derive a basis to differentiate these three areas. In terms of outcomes, the aim of this research is fourfold: to grasp any change which may take place in the experience of participants; to understand different types of change that might be taking place for different participants; to discern whether change constitutes development (as defined in adult development, see Section 2.4.2); and, to discuss whether change has ramifications in terms of leadership development. These aims intersect issues of personal development with issues of leadership development; hence, sampling must be concerned with selecting individuals who are being exposed to a developmental initiative aimed at personal but also at leadership development. In terms of process, the research questions indicate a focus on

'construction'. This research aims at studying core processes of development⁸⁵ and, as reviewed earlier (Section 2.4.5, on the role of sensemaking), construction of sense is found to be intimately connected to processes of development. Finally, context is described in terms of a leadership development program *with an emphasis on personal growth*: the personal growth approach to leadership development (reviewed earlier, Section 2.3.2) is characterized by a focus on the actualization of individuals through facilitation of a greater understanding of a deeper self and reliance on collaborative dialectic inquiry. Sampling, then, will occur within the boundaries of a program that corresponds to the characteristics just described. A presentation of PTFL, the program which serves as context to this research, is included in the next Section (3.4.4).

Theoretical position

Theoretical position is discussed here with reference to the epistemological aims of process theory and qualitative research. As seen earlier (Section 3.4.1), the aim of process theory is to describe patterns typical of a certain process. Hence, process research employs purposive sampling deliberately in order to incur into instances of the process that it wishes to examine (Burgelman, 2011; Langley, 1999). This lends support to the choice of sampling from a pool of delegates attending a leadership development program with an emphasis on personal growth. Consistently with this sampling choice, findings from this research will be "illustrative" (Mason, 2002 p. 126): observations resulting from this research may be extended to other instances of the same process, but will not be extended to a broader population (Bryman, 1988 in Silverman, 2010). In addition, the aim of qualitative research is to understand and explain a "social process or meaning or experience [...] in a rounded way, rather than by attempting to understand, for example, causal patterns by analyzing connections between static or snapshot variables" (Mason, 2002 p. 134). As such, sampling in qualitative research must allow for rich and sophisticated descriptions to emerge. The social process here examined is one currently under-explained by the literatures supporting this research (nascent theory, Edmondson and MacManus, 2007): the theoretical basis is lacking to identify, ahead of the field work, meaningful typologies of participants on which to compose the sample (Silverman, 2010). In terms of this research, this translates into including volunteers as participants. This choice does introduce into the research the risk of self-selection bias: in the words of Bryman (1988, p.88), "How do we know... how representative case study findings are of all members of the population from which the case was selected?" (1988; in Silverman,

⁸⁵ In aiming to the study of the core processes, I intend to seek out the most fundamental level of change and development processes that I am capable to discern within this research

2006, p.249). By relying on volunteers, the research is likely to include individuals who start off with a positive attitude toward the program as well as the research, a consideration which would inevitably taint the validity of statistic generalizations. However, this research does not intend to claim statistical significance or to generalize findings to a population. As long as claims to knowledge are within the boundaries afforded by the methodology of this research, self-selection bias is not invalidating (Mason, 2002).

3.4.4 The research context

PTFL⁸⁶ is an executive leadership development program offered by the Praxis Centre at Cranfield University⁸⁷. Within the School of Management the Praxis Centre focuses on the design and delivery of executive development initiatives with a focus on personal growth. The PTFL program aims to support senior executives in realizing their leadership potential through in-depth self-examination and incorporates a personal development approach pioneered by clinical psychologist and psychotherapist Ido van der Heijden. The personal development approach involves supporting participants as they connect with their unique story and life experiences, explore deep-seated attitudes and beliefs, uncover limiting patterns and surpass these patterns by forming alternative responses. The program tends to be experienced as emotionally demanding and rewarding by its participants.

Each cohort⁸⁸ is composed of an average of ten participants and is led by Ido and a second tutor. The program relies extensively on facilitated group work. A distinctive characteristic of PTFL is that it does not rely exclusively on any single coaching, counseling or psychotherapy framework. Rather, the program aims to address the specific needs of every individual through peer coaching as well as the psychotherapeutic expertise of the tutors.

One question pertinent to the framing of PTFL as a context for the research is around the extent to which psychotherapy methods are employed on the program. As argued by Joo (2005), the landscape of executive coaching initiatives⁸⁹ is as vast and varied as

⁸⁶ Formerly known as “Organisational and Interpersonal Skills” (OIPS), this course has been offered since 1980

⁸⁷ Bedfordshire, United Kingdom

⁸⁸ The program currently runs three times a year

⁸⁹ Defined as “consultation focused on managers and senior leaders in organizations” (Kilburg, 1996; in Joo, 2005). In 2005, the global market for executive education is estimated around US\$ 1 Billion and was expected to double in size within two years (Joo, 2005)

it is little understood. Coaching approaches share a number of underpinning theories from different disciplines and manifest themselves in a variety of forms. At the same time, research on executive coaching is under-developed and has not yet produced a systematization of the field. In his review of literature on executive coaching, Joo introduces a continuum spanning from *consulting* to *counseling* approaches. Both approaches “help individuals enhance self-awareness and learning, and both are conducted by professionals who establish strong alliances of trust with their clients” (Hodgetts, 2002; in Joo, 2005 p. 469). *Consulting* is focused on “defining competencies, identifying the style and social motives of the individual, providing ongoing feedback and coaching for individual performance” (Diedrich, 1996; Orenstein, 2002; in Joo, 2005 p. 470). Practitioners with a consulting orientation tend to embody behaviorist approaches to individual change and often have backgrounds in “management, HR management and/or development, or industrial and/or organizational psychology” (p. 469). In contrast, *counseling* refers to intervention strategies rooted in a range of psychological approaches: counseling tends to transcend the dimension of coaching for performance by supporting the actualization of individuals. Practitioners with a counseling orientation tend to (and should, as argued by many including Joo) have a background in clinical or counseling psychology. In Joo’s discussion, the terms counseling and therapy are used interchangeably and include intervention strategies aimed at remediation. Based on the information available at the beginning of this research, it was not possible to determine whether and to which extent PTFL engages with remediation. However, the in-depth personal development method employed by PTFL does seem to transcend the purposes of consulting. Hence, the PTFL program is tentatively located close to the counseling end of the consulting-counseling continuum.

Figure 7. A continuum of executive coaching initiatives



Compiled by the author. Source: Joo, 2005

As discussed earlier, this research examines core processes of personal and leadership development as well as their interrelations. The PTFL program was selected to serve as context to the research according to principles of purposive sampling. Because it

addresses population engaged in leadership and it emphasizes personal development, PTFL represents a context where the processes that this research aims to examine are likely to occur. The choice to conduct the research on a Praxis course, however, was not determined solely on the basis of access to data: it is believed that Praxis' unique approach, focused on personal development and connected to psychodynamics, truly and decidedly embodies the characteristics of a contemporary personal growth approach to leadership development (as reviewed in Section 2.3.2). The selection of the PTFL program involved the comparison with a different Praxis program which adopts a different approach to in-depth personal development. The comparison involved informational interviews with program directors and tutors, a pilot study (presented in Section 3.6.1) as well as direct participation of the researcher in the alternative program. From the perspective of this research, PTFL was selected not only because it embodies a personal growth approach to leadership development, but because it was also found to embody a person-centered approach to development in general (Magnusson, 2001): the program aims to facilitate the idiosyncratic path of change of single individuals⁹⁰, the PTFL program is closer to the platform of adult development theory which informs this research. The following table summarizes relevant characteristics of the PTFL program as well as additional information around program content and structure. The design of both pilot and main study are presented in detail in Appendix 8.3.

⁹⁰ Different frameworks may be applied within PTFL according to individual needs. In contrast, the alternative program pivots around a specific coaching framework through which it facilitates expansion of self-awareness within delegates

Table 2. The research settings: the PTFL program

| The Personal Transformation For Leaders (PTFL) program | |
|---|--|
| Offered by | The Praxis Centre, Cranfield School of Management (UK) |
| Director | Ido van der Heijden |
| Lead tutors | Ido van der Heijden (Clinical psychologist and psychotherapist) Daniela van der Heijden (Psychiatrist) |
| Type | Open enrolment, residential |
| Frequency | Typically three times per year |
| Audience | Senior executives |
| Cohort size | 10 delegates in average |
| Tutors per cohort | Two |
| Aims | To support senior executives in realizing their leadership potential through in-depth self-examination |
| Approach | Personal development Group work Open to counseling (consulting versus counseling coaching continuum, Joo 2005) |
| Frameworks | None exclusively. A range, including psychodynamics, notions of existential philosophy (e.g. Yalom 2008), Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), bioenergetics, and Pessio Boyden Psychomotor |
| Content | Core content: Individual life histories and limiting patterns, implications for professional life; live interactions among delegates; Supporting content: limited theory on human development and leadership development |
| Structure | Main module: Five days, residential. One day for introductions, induction and buddy preparation work. Three days on group work focused on individual sessions (life histories and limiting patterns). Closing day on conclusions and plans going forward. Follow-up module (six weeks later): Two days, residential. One day for individual sessions (report back, additional group work), one day for conclusions and plans going forward. |

Compiled by the author.

3.4.5 Constructivist-phenomenological semi-structured interviews

The interview method was chosen because of its conduciveness to negotiation of interpretations, an epistemological requirement of this research (see Section 3.3.1.2): within interviews, it is possible to accommodate a dialogue between participants and researcher. Interviews are recognized in qualitative psychology research as facilitating the exploration of construction of meaning (Charmaz, 2008; Higginson and Mansell, 2008; Bartholomew et al., 2000). In addition, exploratory semi-structured interviews have been employed in psychology and management research to draw out construction of sense by participants about an experience of change (Charmaz, 2008; Langley, 1999; Higginson and Mansell, 2008; Bartholomew et al., 2000).

3.4.5.1 *The interview method*

The interview, as any method, can take a different flavor depending on the epistemological positions of a study. Oppenheim (2001) distinguishes between two extreme ends of the interview method—exploratory and standardized interviews. Exploratory interviews are typical of a “research and development” (p. 66) phase of research, where the aim is to collect ideas around a phenomenon which is little understood. Standardized interviews, in contrast, are usually employed at a “mass-production” (Oppenheim, 2001, p. 66) stage of theorizing, when the aim is to collect data on already well-established dimensions of a phenomenon. The same distinction is operated by others in the methodological literature: Kvale (1996) refers to metaphors of the interviewer as traveler (in exploratory research) and miner (in standardized research). Pollio et al. (1997) discuss non-Cartesian and Cartesian approaches to interviewing. A non-Cartesian researcher typically seeks interpretations of experience: using Kvale’s (1996) language, this type of researcher would use the interview to ‘travel’ through the experience of interest jointly with the interviewee and later would relay an understanding of this journey. In contrast, a Cartesian researcher is typically in pursuit of objective and decontextualized truths: this type of researcher would interview to mine ‘gems’ of truth from the minds of participants and would labor to polish interpretations off of the data. This research aims to develop theory in a nascent area and about a process which is under-explained and subjective (individual change): as such, this research needs to travel through the experience of change of participants to gather some sense of what is happening (Charmaz, 2008).

Despite a history of widespread use, the interview method encounters serious criticisms in the methodological discourse, where concerns of interviewer bias and arbitrary fabrications of reality (e.g. in Fontana and Frey, 2005), self-description bias (e.g. in Pollio et al., 1997), and social desirability bias (Oppenheim, 2001) are raised. Concerns of interviewer-bias are essentially concerns about interviewer awareness: the methodological literature exhorts researchers to engage in critical subjectivity (Ladkin, 2005) or reflexive intelligence (Foddy, 1994). This research subscribes to this exhortation and, in accord with a philosophical hermeneutics perspective, argues that the interpretive mindset of the researcher is a valid source of *Verstehen* rather than of bias. This represents a point of difference with interpretivist approaches (see Section 3.2.2.1) requiring that interpretive mindset is factored out of research (negative bracketing). In this research, negative bracketing is regarded as both unlikely and undesirable: unlikely because “interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something in advance” (Blaikie, 2007, p.123); undesirable because deducting the researcher from the conversation would mean disabling the negotiation of interpretations that, it is believed, are essential to enhance understanding (see Section 3.2.2.1). Rather, this research embraces the notion of positive bracketing (Pollio et al., 1997) through a bracketing essay exploring the assumptions and motivations of the researcher (included in Appendix 8.2).

Perplexities around arbitrary fabrications of reality (in Fontana and Frey, 2005) are dismissed by this thesis on the basis that they are consistent with either objectivist or agnostic stands: if the belief is that the subjective is not real or that meanings refer to no reality at all, then an account of a subjective experience is bound to be received as fiction. This thesis, in accord with in philosophical hermeneutics as well as in other constructivist approaches regards the subjective as both real and a legitimate source of knowledge. Lastly, social desirability bias is a concern across epistemological approaches. Arguably, social desirability affects this research as much as it affects any conversation, whether situated within research or not. In order to mitigate social desirability effects, the researcher strived to communicate to participants that the researched aimed at understanding their individual experience and was not seeking ‘right answers’. Testament to this intent, research questions tended to be very open and exploratory. The researcher also strived to maintain a level ground in interviews: to allow negotiation of interpretations but also to mitigate the extent to which participants accounts’ would be painted optimistically. As a further measure against social-desirability bias, the researcher strived to implement the hermeneutic circle (Section 3.3.1.3)—that is, to interpret participants’ texts through part-whole iterations of analysis aimed at eliciting meaning underneath words. The focus of this research solely on the subjective experience of participants raises the level of concern around social-desirability bias; however, it is also what allowed the in-depth exploration of

sensitive personal topics. Further research addressing the aspect of triangulation of participants' experience might be able to further mitigate the phenomenon of social desirability.

3.4.5.2 *Constructivists-phenomenological interviews*

I have come to describe my interviews as exploratory in nature and as constructivist-phenomenological in approach. Interviews are exploratory in the sense that they include a minimalist structure and little input from the literature; interviews are constructivist because they focus on the active construction of meaning by participants (Schwandt, 2003; examples in Isabella, 1990; Sutton, 1987; Gephart, 1984). Interviews are phenomenological in that they inquire about the lived experience of participants--where the phenomenon of interest resides (Pollio et al., 1997; Pollio et al., 2006). A more detailed description of what this has meant for the practice of interviewing in this research is presented in Appendix 8.7.

3.4.6 **Constructivist grounded theory**

Langley (1999) noted that grounded theory tends to be most helpful for research focusing on a micro-level of analysis. Grounded theory is also well suited to inductive research efforts aimed at theory-building and facilitates the handling of large amounts of ambiguous process data and the study of meaning at a micro-level of inquiry (Creswell, 2007). After considering a range of alternatives, this research adopted a constructivist grounded theory strategy for data analysis (Charmaz, 2008). A more detailed description of what this means for the practice of analyzing transcripts is presented in Appendix 8.8.

Alternative data analysis strategies

Alternative strategies that are also compatible with qualitative process research were examined and declined for different reasons. For example, template (King, 2003) and alternate template methods (Langely, 1999) prescribe that a coding structure is developed based on one or more predetermined theories; template strategies were declined because of the scarcity of theory informing this research. The narrative approach (Langely, 1999) pursues a rich research account at the expense of abstraction and theorization; the narrative strategy was declined in view of the aim of this research to contribute to substantive theory (Burgelman, 2011). Quantification strategies seek to identify quantitative series in qualitative accounts (Langley, 1999);

quantification strategies were declined in view of the aim of this research to explore qualitatively the process of change. Synthetic strategies (Langley, 1999) set process as the unit of analysis in order to relate it to other variables (e.g. change); synthetic strategies were declined on the basis that this research seeks primarily to understand intra-individual change and hence sets the level of analysis at each encounter⁹¹ with each participant.

Alternative analytic approaches within grounded theory

A range of approaches is available also within grounded theory, reflecting variations in epistemology ranging from positivistic to postmodern. Three different approaches to grounded theory were considered: analytic (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, in Creswell, 2007), situational (Clarke, 2005), and constructivist (Charmaz, 2008). The analytic approach, closest to the original formulation of grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin (1998), reflects an affinity with objectivistic epistemologies. The analytic approach prescribes the adoption of axial coding, which is meant to organize data in predetermined categories⁹². In view of its exploratory nature, this research declines analytic grounded theory and rather elects to let a structure emerge from the data. The situational approach, developed from the standpoint of critical theory, utilizes situational mapping to highlight the embeddedness and politicization of social processes (Clarke, 2005). Although this research recognizes the embeddedness of the processes that it examines, it does not regard either embeddedness or critical inquiry as being its primary focus. Constructivist grounded analysis (Charmaz, 2008; 2007; 2006; 2005; 2003; 2002) occupies, as the name implies, a middle ground between grounded theory of positivistic and postmodern leanings. Researchers who adopt this approach work with very little a priori structure: “what they do, how they do it, and why they do it emerge through interacting in the research setting, with their data, colleagues, and themselves (Charmaz, 2007, pp. 397-398). Analysis proceeds by ‘interrogating’ each line of the text (by asking questions such as “What is going on?”, “What do these actions and statements take for granted?”; in Charmaz, 2008 p. 95) and hence allows for theoretical structures to emerge from the data. Constructivist grounded theory recognizes that the process of analysis transforms the data: conceptualizations are not just emanating from the data or methodological procedures, but develop through the researcher’s worldview and interpretations

⁹¹ That is, at each interview encounter with each participant—amounting to four encounters per participants and a total of 32 encounters (seven participants took part in the whole study, while two dropped out after the second encounter)

⁹² These predetermined categories are: causal conditions, ensuing strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences (Charmaz, 2008; Creswell, 2007)

(Charmaz, 2006, p.179)⁹³. In grounded theory, data collection happens simultaneously with data analysis (Charmaz, 2008): accordingly, analysis of the pilot study (see Section 3.7.1) informed the first interview guide for the main study; and, analysis of each interview round in the main study informed the following interview guide⁹⁴. Analysis also contributed to ongoing judgments on sample size. Following a pilot study the decision was made to add a further round of interviews in the main study: the three rounds originally were no longer deemed to be sufficient for reaching theoretical sampling (Mason, 2002).

Supporting analytic strategies

Langley (1999) discussed how a number of data analysis strategies can be used in combination, depending on the needs dictated by different types of inquiry. Visual mapping, matrix displays (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Langley, 1999) as well as features of the phenomenological method (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008) were selected as auxiliary tools. Interpretive-phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith and Osborn, 2008) requires identifying units of meanings in the transcripts by drawing a mark where switches in meaning are apparent. This type of analysis, tested in the pilot study, turned out to be not fine-grained enough: at times an entire paragraph could be reviewed without a switch in meaning becoming apparent. With grounded theory, the same paragraph could be organized into a number of useful codes. Phenomenology also requires that each unit of meaning is paraphrased in a way that makes its psychological meaning explicit. This forms a departure point from the data: starting from this point, a series of abstractions leads to the identification of broader themes. When applied to the pilot study, this method resulted in a premature loss of connection with the data: I noticed myself abstracting from my own abstractions (rather than the participant's) too early in the process, thus channeling the analysis too early in one direction. IPA (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008) was declined as a main method, but one of its features was retained as auxiliary. An initial phenomenological reading of the text (before engaging in line-by-line coding as required by constructivist grounded theory) better enabled the researcher to grasp the overall sense conveyed by the participant⁹⁵.

⁹³ This is in harmony with the epistemological stand of philosophical hermeneutics

⁹⁴ Interview guides for the main study are included in Appendix 8.5

⁹⁵ In contrast, when I began with line-by-line coding I would easily lose perspective on the overall text.

3.4.7 Ethical implications

The present section draws from Hammersley and Traianou (2012) and discusses five key ethical implications of this research: minimization of harm, respect for autonomy, protection for privacy, and commitment to developing and appropriately evaluating knowledge.

Minimization of harm

The issue of minimization of harm is relevant to this research to the extent that participants might have perceived pressure to disclose personal information beyond what was reasonable and needed to the end of the inquiry. To this point it is important to clarify that the focus of the inquiry was *understanding*, as opposed to *facilitating*, change in individuals. Had the research focus been facilitating change, a higher level of intervention-related skills would have been required of the researcher (Kakabadse, 2007) and the research would have been best framed within a participatory methodology (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Interviews intended to facilitate change would have had to include intervention-oriented questions: for example, questions that would elicit the re-experiencing of personal histories and root causes of limiting patterns. The purpose of such questions would have been to enable the making of new and more effective sense of the original events experience by a participant, by drawing on the support and novel inputs available in the therapeutic setting (Basseches, 1997). In this research, interviews focused on understanding change and did not include intervention-oriented questions. Notwithstanding this caution, the personal and sensitive nature of topics discussed with participants meant that the inquiry was likely to inadvertently enter the territory of intervention at any time. To address this risk, extreme care was exercised during interviews to prevent signaling that further personal information was expected; also, to avoid soliciting strong emotions connected to the more sensitive aspects of the stories. Whenever relevant, explicit mention was made to participants that further personal information was not required. For example, P1 was explicitly invited to not disclose the details and circumstances of her difficult childhood, but rather to describe their implications in present personal and professional life. A similar example was the case of P5: P5 was never asked to disclose the specific distressing situations that she seemed to have processed on PTFI; rather, she was asked to describe in what ways her current experience of personal and professional interactions had been affected. P2, P3, P8 and P9 seemed to regulate themselves as to the extent of disclosure: each of these participants spontaneously shared one detail of their story and explained how that

detail was related to their current limiting patterns. These participants were not requested to and did not provide information beyond this initial detail. P4 and P6 both mentioned that they had had, to that point, mostly a privileged life experience, free from extremely challenging circumstances. Despite all efforts to prevent undue pressure, it is still possible that participants felt some form of uneasiness at some point during interviews. In fact, the two remaining participants, P2 and P4, dropped out of the research after the second round of interviews, although for unknown reasons. This suggested the idea of inviting the other participants, during the third round of interviews, to describe how they were experiencing interviews. Answers of participants did not reveal uncomfortable levels of stress, but rather an appreciation of interviews as further opportunity for reflections. Participants indicated that some interview questions were thought-provoking but that overall interviews were a positive experience.

Respect for autonomy

The autonomy of participants was respected through the provision, in the informed consent form, of the possibility to withdraw at any time from any interview question or from the research altogether. It is believed that participants availed themselves of this option as needed. For example, P6 declined to disclose the extent of his budget responsibility. As mentioned earlier, P2 and P4 dropped out of the research after the second interview for reasons unknown.

Protection of privacy

Protection of privacy was implemented in two main ways: through informed consent in compliance with the Data Protection Act (DPA 1998) and through anonymization. The DPA 1998 requires compliance with eight principles⁹⁶. The first principle mandates that personal data be processed fairly and lawfully. This principle is considered satisfied if informed consent has been obtained appropriately. According to the DPA 1998, informed consent requires the disclosure of: the identity of the researcher and

⁹⁶ The Data Protection Act (1998), <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents>, last accessed March 28, 2013. Another source that was utilized is a summary of implications of the DPA 1998 for research maintained by Lancaster University on the website 'Core Issues: The Data Protection Act 1998' (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/researchethics/1-7-dataproact.html>).

affiliation with a university department; the purposes that the data will be used for; and the identity of other individuals who will have access to the raw data (in the case of this research, the supervisor). The informed consent form handed to participants (Appendix 8.4) included this information, as well as a brief description of the rationale for the study and the research process. All participants were instructed to carefully read the information provided and ask for any clarification prior to signing and returning the consent form. All participants in this research returned a signed consent form. As an additional measure intended to safeguard this first principle that data are obtained fairly and lawfully, approval for the different phases of the research project was sought and obtained for the Research Ethics Committee within the Cranfield School of Management. The second principle of the DPA 1998 is that data be analyzed only with respect to the purpose or purposes specified in the informed consent procedure. Accordingly, data gathered in this inquiry was analyzed only to the end of producing the findings presented in this thesis; as disclosed on the informed consent form, any future analysis will be limited to the end of disseminating the same findings as presented in this thesis in the context of conferences or publications. The third principle of the DPA 1998 requires that data be not collected in excess of what is adequate and relevant given research scope and purpose. Adherence to this principle was sought by limiting the scope of interviews to questions aimed at understanding (versus facilitating) change, as discussed in the earlier section addressing minimization of harm. The fourth principle of the DPA 1998 is about safeguarding the accuracy of data. The researcher strived to gather data in a reliable way during the inquiry and to report data accurately during the writing of this thesis. A limitation to accuracy was imposed by the safeguarding the privacy of participants (the sixth principle of the DPA 1998, presented below). The fifth principle of the DPA 1998, which requires that data are not kept for longer than necessary, does not apply to research. The sixth principle of the DPA 1998 is concerned with the privacy of participants: data reported must be made completely unidentifiable or must be approved by participants prior to publication of the thesis. In consideration of the personal and sensitive nature of participants' accounts, reported data have been made unidentifiable in this thesis. Demographics were excluded from the thesis (with the exception of a generic overview of characteristics of the participants group, available in Appendix 8.3.2). Details that would potentially lead to the identification of participants (such as work title, denomination of prior employers, or place of residence) were omitted whenever possible and modified whenever they were needed to maintain a meaningful presentation of the analysis. The seventh and eighth principles of the DPA 1998 are concerned with the secure storage of data: data should be protected from unauthorized access and its transfer should be prevented to any territory where adequate legal protection of privacy is not available. Data gathered from participants

in this research has been stored in password-protected computers. Data in print form has been destroyed or kept in a locked location.

Production and evaluation of knowledge

Hammersley and Trainou (2012) stress the importance of attending to the principal objective of research: that is, producing and appropriately evaluating knowledge. Appropriate evaluation of knowledge, according to the authors, should be guided by evaluation criteria generally accepted in the topical and methodological fields where the research situates itself. This thesis evaluated the contributions and limitations of the research according to a framework of validity of qualitative research (by Lincoln and Guba, 1985; in Polit and Beck, 2008) and discussed nature of contributions and researcher bias according to the epistemological frame of reference of philosophical hermeneutics. The researcher strived at all times to accurately render, through choice of language, the level of confidence in the different areas of findings and contribution.

3.4.8 Researcher bias

Researcher bias has been defined as the tendency “to opt for or against particular possibilities because of false prior assumptions or pre-existing preferences” (Hammersley and Trainanou, 2012 p. 48). Because bias operates in the interpretive processes of the researcher, it is bound to be especially a concern in qualitative inquiry: qualitative inquire engages with making sense of the sensemaking of participants (Smith and Osborne, 2003). The very nature of bias implies that at any point in time its effects are likely to be farther reaching than can be discerned by the researcher. If researchers inevitably operate through a personal perspective (as argued in the section on research philosophy section 3.2), how can the risk be minimized that participants are led in their responses? Or, that participant stories are misrepresented? Or, that interpretive conclusions are drawn arbitrarily? Researchers adhering to a realist ontology are likely to approach the task of bias mitigation by striving to eliminate bias and pursuing objectivity (Schwandt, 2003). Objectivity, here meant as the containment of the effects of false prior assumptions or pre-existing preferences, would be pursued through forming literature-based hypotheses, propositions, and analytic structures; also, through methods such as triangulation of evidence (Creswell, 2003). For researchers moving from an idealist ontology and conducting largely grounded research, a further specification about bias is arguably necessary: having a personal perspective does not per se equate bias; rather, it is having an unexamined personal perspective which gives rise to bias (Ladkin, 2005). Therefore, from an idealist

viewpoint, mitigating bias involves ongoing self-examination towards the ideal of transcending personal perspective: for example, through negotiation of interpretation (Gadamer; in Blakie, 2007; discussed in section 3.3. on philosophical hermeneutics), positive bracketing (discussed in section 3.4.5 on the constructivist-phenomenological semi-structured interview), or the pursuit of critical subjectivity (Ladkin, 2005; see section 3.4.5). In this inquiry, the researcher strived towards a level of transcendence of personal perspective (full attainment of transcendence of personal perspective is believed to be an unattainable ideal) in two main ways. First, the researcher committed to developing her own awareness. Secondly, she anchored a part of data analysis that was particularly prone to the risk of arbitrary judgment (the assessment of personal development) in a literature-derived framework. Both these measures are described in further detail in the following paragraphs.

Researcher awareness

Hammersmith and Traianou (2011) describe “distinctive virtues” (p. 383) that researchers are recommended to develop in order to conduct themselves professionally as well as ethically during their work. The first of these virtues is dedication, intended as a high degree of commitment to the research. A second virtue is objectivity, in the sense of minimization of interpretive interferences arising from personal perspective. A third virtue is independence, intended as maintaining a degree of intellectual autonomy and taking responsibility for decisions around appropriate ways to conduct the research. These first three ‘virtues’ are not discussed here in further detail (however, objectivity is discussed in section 3.4.7 on ethical implications). Hammersley and Traianou have identified a further virtue: the dedication to pursuing relevant knowledge: that is, any knowledge that is needed to conduct a specific research project in an ethical manner (2012 p. 46). One particular aspect of relevant knowledge is regarded to be especially salient to this research: the researcher’s knowledge of herself. Researcher awareness was to be critical to the progress and quality of this investigation. One reason is related to access to information: given interview questions that were both open and concerned with sensitive personal topics, there was considerable scope for participants to range breadth and depth of disclosure depending on their perceptions of the researcher and interview experience (Kvale, 1996). A second reason lies in the intention to calibrate the inquiry so that it would focus on understanding rather than facilitating change in participants: in order to carry out this intention, interviews would have to avoid demanding answers, whether explicitly or implicitly, to intervention-oriented questions (this was discussed in section 3.4.7 as a key ethical implication of the research). Striking an appropriate tone and conducting informative and non-intrusive

conversations would require the researcher to engage in interviews in a particular way. For example, the researcher would need to perceive subtle clues about the emotional implications of potential directions of conversation; remain alert to varying levels of comfort of participants with different questions; empathize with participants in a genuine way but without losing her sense of the interview direction; and acquire as much awareness as possible of her own interpretive frames (especially around herself, PTFL, and personal and leadership development) in order to actually negotiate such frames with the interpretive frames of participants. In other words, it was believed, the researcher would have to acquire a first-person experience of personal development. The researcher's determination to work toward her own personal development was pursued in a number of combined ways. These included: conversations with Praxis directors and tutors around the appropriate tone to be held by the researcher in interviews⁹⁷; attending PTFL as a participant prior to commencing fieldwork; follow up one-on-one conversations with the lead PTFL tutor around the researcher's own personal development; an additional experience of group therapy (a group session with Al Pesso, founder of the Pesso-Boyden system); writing a personal statement on key aspects of personal development and research motivation (included in Appendix 8.2); and progress reviews with an expert academic panel at Cranfield University.

The researcher especially welcomed the opportunity to take part in PTFL as a participant and approached the experience with a genuine intention of working on her own personal change. When attending program, she reflected on her story, battled with her own limiting patterns, and explored alternative ways of making sense of her experience just as any other participant. This experience, it is believed, has set into motion a process of expanding self-awareness and personal development that has been cultivated since. It should be noted, however, that attending PTFL had implications for researcher's role. Breen (2007; in Unluer, 2012) identified an insider-outsider spectrum of researcher role: on one end of the spectrum, insider researchers study a group that they belong to; on the opposite end of the spectrum, outsider researchers study a group to which they are extraneous. Having taken part in PTFL, the researcher became an insider to the larger population of PTFL participants. However, the PTFL iteration attended by the researcher was separate from those attended by the research participants: hence, the researcher remained an outsider with regard to the specific intervention groups that composed the sample. The research was able to

⁹⁷ Consensus arising from these conversations was that it would be best for the researcher to keep a generally supportive and compassionate tone during interviews, in consideration of the transformative experience that participants were undergoing at the time of the research.

leverage some advantages associated with an insider perspective: “(a) having a greater understanding of the culture being studied; (b) not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally; and (c) having an established intimacy which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth” (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002; in Unluer, 2012 p. 1). An obvious drawback following from these advantages is potential loss of objectivity. As mentioned, the mitigation of loss of objectivity was pursued through the researcher’s efforts to develop her own self-awareness and sensitivity and through anchoring part of the analysis in literature-based frameworks. In order to counteract loss of objectivity, however, it was also important that the researcher did remain an outsider to the particular PTFL groups of research participants: based on personal experience, delegates attending a PTFL iteration often grow developmental relationships and an empathic vicinity which would have not been conducive to the inquiry.

Anchoring in the literature interpretations around personal development

Early during the analysis phase, it became obvious that the judgment of the researcher on the extent of personal development occurring in the cases of single participants was especially prone to be swayed by bias. For example, compassion was felt in sensing the conflicted tone of P3’s narrative; together with compassion, a preference arose for assessing his case as personal development. As a further example, some frustration arose during the analysis of somewhat erratic segments of interviews with some other participants; in these cases, impatience was felt to conclude the analysis expediently; with it, the temptation was felt to avoid diving into challenging text to understand the efforts of participants from their point of view. Having experienced these challenges, the researcher eventually resolved to depart from grounded analysis in the area of analysis dedicated to assessment of personal development. Two literature-derived frameworks were developed and a systematic procedure was adopted. The literature-derived frameworks are a continuum of individual change and a framework of personal development (presented in section 3.5 of this thesis). In terms of systematic procedure, interpretive frameworks⁹⁸ (in Appendix 8.9) were developed for every participant. The very process of developing these frameworks forced the researcher to seek out the most salient aspects of each individual's story. Interpretive frameworks were verified with the participants during the third round of interviews (Appendix 8.6). After completion of interviews, each participant case was

⁹⁸ Interpretive frameworks are a high level synthesis of the story of change of each participant from the beginning to the end of the research.

evaluated in light of the literature-derived frameworks (applications are disclosed in section 4.2, dedicated to findings on developmental outcomes), with interpretive frameworks functioning as a navigational device guiding deeper dives into the rich data available for each participant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, no definitive statement from part of the researcher is possible around the extent to which researcher bias was contained. Nevertheless, the researcher's efforts to mitigate bias seemed to bear some fruit. As discussed above, the use of literature-based frameworks and interpretive frameworks helped guide assessment of personal development. Perhaps due to the expansion of researcher awareness, it was possible able to recognize some situations during interviews where hidden assumptions were clouding judgment. For example, early during the second round of interviews, the researcher realized that she often assumed that other participants would be experiencing a specific aspect of the program in the same way she had experienced it. A second example of a hidden assumption that was unveiled and modified during the research is the realization of the assumption that individuals with a challenging personal history would empathize to a greater extent with the life stories of others compared to individuals with a less challenging personal history. A further example relates to the assumption that PTFL tends to impact positively on the emotions of its participants⁹⁹. Whenever assumptions of this type became apparent during interviews, the researcher made an effort to disclose them to participants in order to invite alternative views. This was motivated by a genuine curiosity to attain a better understanding of the experience of participants, and not just by the commitment to pursuing negotiation of interpretations (part of the epistemological approach of this research, as discussed in section 3.3). The above is an indication of how the personal perspective of the researcher's has emerged and evolved through the research: in a sense, the unfolding of this research has also been the unfolding of the researcher's development.

3.4.9 Validity

⁹⁹ Based on the findings of this research, some people seem to become PTFL enthusiasts (for instance, P7 and P8). Others might be generally appreciative but preserve a sceptical distance (for example, P6). Others yet might have a conflicted experience of the program (for example, P3).

The validity of conclusions drawn from research should be assessed against criteria that fit the nature of the research (Johnson et al., 2006). This thesis adopts a framework of validity of qualitative research by Lincoln and Guba (1985; in Polit and Beck, 2008) that is based on four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The following table summarizes definitions and implications of each of these criteria. The table also briefly addresses the ways in which criteria of validity are addressed in this research, an aspect that will be discussed in greater detail in the section on validity at the conclusion of this thesis (Section 6.3.1.1).

Table 3. A framework of validity of qualitative research

| Criteria* | Definition | How to address validity criteria | Validity criteria as addressed in this research |
|------------------------|--|---|--|
| Credibility | “refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations of them” (p. 539) | By “carrying out the study in a way that enhances the believability of the findings” (p. 539) | Negotiation of interpretation (level field in the interviews, verifying interpretations during interviews, engagement with PhD review panel) |
| | | By “taking steps to demonstrate credibility to external readers” (p. 539) | Transparency and disclosure |
| Dependability | “refers to the stability (reliability) of data over time and over conditions” (p. 539) | By considering questions such as: “would the findings of an inquiry be repeated if it were replicated with the same (or similar) participants in the same (or similar) context?” (p. 539) | Research does not generalize beyond research sample and context Ethical considerations appropriately limit research to informed consent |
| Confirmability | “concerned with establishing that the data represent the information participants provided” (p. 539) | By addressing the biases of the researcher | Bracketing essay Literature-based framework of personal development Interpretive frameworks for each participants |
| Transferability | Refers to “the generalizability of the data, that is, the extent to which the findings can be transferred to or have applicability in other settings or groups” (p. 539) | “Provide sufficient descriptive data in the research report so that consumers can evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts” | Research does not generalize beyond research sample and context—contributions are presented as areas for further exploration and models and definitions are proposed for validation through future research Rich descriptive data provided in this thesis |

Compiled by the author. Based on the framework of validity of qualitative research by Lincoln and Guba (1985; in Polit and Beck, 2008)

3.5 Assessing developmental outcomes: a framework of personal development

This research faced the challenge of assessing whether change at the individual level constituted an instance of development or not. In this respect, this research could not find guidance in the leadership development literature and hence turned to the field of adult development with two questions: How can development be recognized? Aside from development, what other types of change can take place at the individual level? The present section describes how these two questions were addressed during the research.

3.5.1 Assessing developmental change

Ipsative assessment

Some clue around how to assess development can be found in the methodological literature in the field of adult development. Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas (2009) propose that an ipsative rather than a normative approach is more conducive to the assessment of *intra*-individual change. Ipsative assessments focus on understanding the starting point of an individual as a baseline against which to assess change (also in Avolio, 2008). In contrast, normative approaches assess different individuals against some standard measure and are better suited for studies of *inter*-individual change (Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009)¹⁰⁰. Because of its interest in intra-individual change, this research addressed development through an ipsative approach: the basis for determining whether development had occurred or not in the sample was longitudinal analysis whereby the sensemaking of each participant at the beginning and end¹⁰¹ of the research was compared.

A person-centered approach

¹⁰⁰ Examples of normative approaches include the development assessment tools developed within CD theory—e.g., Kegan’s Subject-Object Interview (1982) and Cook-Greuter and Torbert’s Leadership Development Profile (in Torbert, 1987). An ipsative application of these tools could involve testing at different points in time. However, these tools emerge from a cognitivist approach and are not necessarily geared for the holistic assessment of development sought by the personal-centered approach and by this research

¹⁰¹ As well as at two intermediate points

As reviewed earlier, according to a person-centered view of development, development occurs across functionally integrated cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral dimensions (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010, Vol. 2; Magnusson, 2001). This view invites transcending a variable-centered approach (Bergson et al., 2002) in order to consider development holistically: because the dimensions of development are functionally integrated, observing development across them is actually more feasible than trying to assess development based on the observation of just one dimension (such as cognition) or variable (such as learning or task orientation, e.g. in Avolio and Hannah, 2008) in isolation (Magnusson, 2001). This research adopted a person-centered approach by striving to apply principles of the hermeneutic circle: by trying to grasp the overall organization of meaning (sensemaking) within an individual as a means to interpreting expressions of that individual. At the micro-level, this meant trying to grasp the overall sensemaking of an individual in one interview in order to interpret a single passage of that interview. At a more macro-level, this meant trying to grasp the overall sensemaking of an individual across the research in order to understand their sensemaking at each encounter. By doing so, this research developed interpretive frameworks for each of its participants (visible in the individual stories of change, Section 4.2.2 and Appendices 8.9 and 8.10)

Patterns typical of adult development

A review of the literature of adult development (summarized in the table below) resulted in the identification of an overarching pattern of development: development is characterized by an element of universality (integration and sophistication) and by an element of idiosyncrasy (self-determination).

Table 4. Patterns in adult development: a summary of evidence

| Sources | Integration | Sophistication | Self-determination |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Review of adult development studies between 1995 and 2007 Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development Baxter Magolda et al. 2009 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Informal and incidental learning on the workplace Marsick et al. 2009 | ✓ | <i>Not in scope</i> | ✓ |
| Nature of connection between adult learning and development Merriam and Clark, 2006 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Changes in goal-striving across the life span Staundinger and Kessler, 2009 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Self-determination theory e.g. Deci and Ryan, 2000; in Sheldon, 2009; | <i>Not in scope</i> | <i>Not in scope</i> | ✓ |
| Self-generated goals Sheldon , 2009 | <i>Not in scope</i> | <i>Not in scope</i> | ✓ <i>(limited evidence)</i> |
| Constructive-Developmental (CD) theory e.g. Kegan, 1994; Torbert, 2004; | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Compiled by the author.

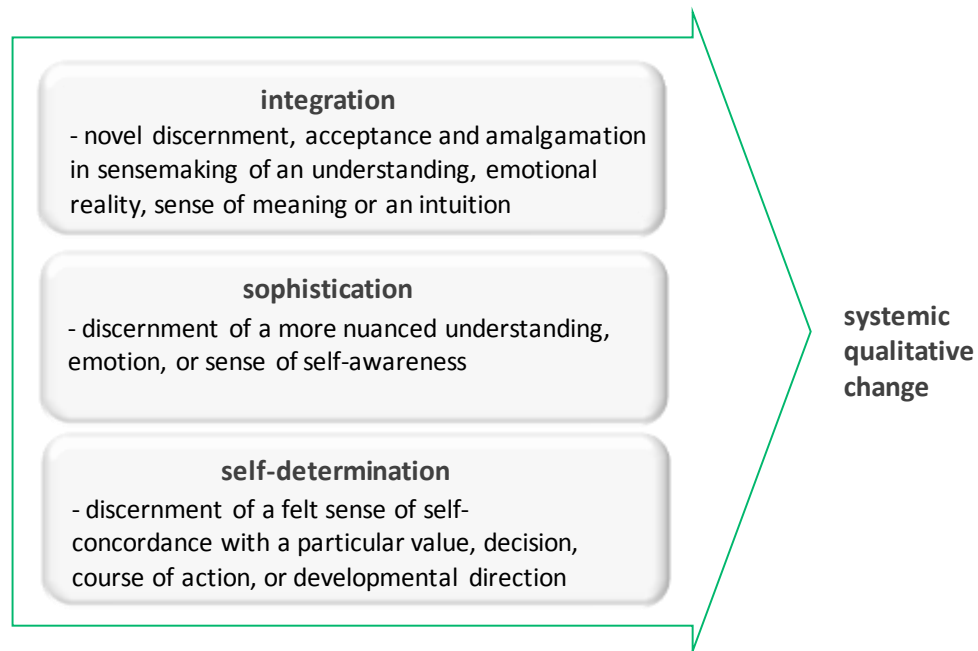
Based on the evidence above, a framework of personal development was composed, which includes integration, sophistication and self-determination as criteria to assess development. According to the framework, the following signs are visible in an individual's sensemaking which indicate that development has taken place:

- Greater integration: novel discernment, acceptance and amalgamation in sensemaking of an understanding, emotional reality, sense of meaning or an intuition; *and*, its integration through rational thought into new and qualitatively different sensemaking¹⁰²
- Greater sophistication: the discernment of a more nuanced understanding, emotion, or sense of self-awareness; *and*, its integration through rational thought into new and qualitatively different sensemaking
- Greater self-determination: the discernment of a felt sense of inner concordance with a particular value, decision, course of action, developmental direction; *and*, its integration through rational thought into new and qualitatively different sensemaking

¹⁰² As discussed earlier (Section 2.4.5), sensemaking also encompasses a conative dimension (behavioral disposition). Hence, it is argued, a change in interpretations results in the basis for alternative behavioral dispositions—in other words, it can be visible in words as well as in action

The guidelines above (captured in the figure below) were used during longitudinal analysis to assess whether personal development had taken place.

Figure 8. A Framework of personal development



Compiled by the author. Sources: Marsick et al.2009; Sheldon, 2009; Staudinger and Kessler, 2009; Merriam, 2006; McCauley et al., 2006; Deci and Ryan, 2006; Baxter Magolda et al. 2001; Kegan 1982, 1980.

At the beginning of the research, according to the emphasis of the literature on holistic development and functional integration, it was hypothesized that positive change in any one of these dimension is accompanied by positive or neutral (but not negative) change in the other two dimensions.

3.5.2 Assessing non-developmental change

Having defined a method for assessing developmental change, this research was left with the residual problem of assessing change in cases where developmental change did not occur. This research was unable to recruit a systematic framework outlining the types of change that can occur at the individual level, hence it resorted to considering two alternative constructs that are well-evidenced in the adult and leadership development literatures: self-awareness and personality adjustment.

3.5.2.1 *Self-awareness*

A significant amount of the leadership development literature within the personal growth and information-processing approaches (see Section 2.3) is rooted in the classic self-developmental school which began in ancient Greece when Socrates raised the interrogative of “what ought one to do” (Kakabadse, 2000 p. 8): in absence of a universal truth, to what extent are individuals capable of intentionally endorsing the courses of action that they take? Given the critical role that leaders have in shaping organizations and the larger community, for them to engage in self-examination is not just a matter of personal actualization, but also of paramount importance for society as a whole. Not surprisingly, self-awareness has been called “leadership’s first commandment” (Collingwood, 2001 in a special issue of the Harvard Business Review; in Petriglieri et al., 2011 p. 430). Petriglieri et al. (2011) review modern and contemporary scholarly literature, spanning identity development, individual change, CD theory and leadership development, emphasizing that self-awareness is the most crucial leadership ability (and, perhaps, also the most challenging to develop). The area of management learning has also stressed the importance of self-awareness by emphasizing that at any point in time behavior is driven by underlying assumptions: in this sense, developing awareness means making explicit assumptions that were previously implicit and taken-for-granted (e.g., critical reflexivity, Gray 2007; double loop learning, Argyris 2004; transformative learning, Mezirow 1991; managers as philosophers, Schwandt 2003). In the literature on individual change, a number of models regard self-awareness as the first step of change (Boyatzis, 2006; Prochaksa et al., 1992; Kübler-Ross, 1969). Self-awareness has a central role also in developmental psychology. As seen in Section 2.4.4, CD theory (Kegan; 1982) defines development as successive cognitive shifts whereby things that were at first held as ‘subjects’ (defining of identity) become seen as ‘objects’. Developmental psychology generally considers self-awareness as a mark of adult development, stressing that self-awareness does not happen necessarily (Taylor, 2006) and hence needs to be cultivated and is a mark of wisdom (Ardelt and Jacobs, 2009). Based on this literature, self-awareness is inevitably related to personal development. However, self-awareness can also be differentiated from personal development. Personal development might not take place without self-awareness, but self-awareness is not necessarily development: according to psychology literature, for development to occur a systemic qualitative change in sensemaking toward specific directions (integration, sophistication, self-determination) needs to also occur.

3.5.2.2 *Personality adjustment*

This research considered the possibility that change might take place which transcends self-awareness but does not satisfy the definition of personal development. Not all change can be systemic and qualitative (Hoare, 2006): in the words of Staundinger and Kessler: “not necessarily can any personality change occurring during adulthood and old age be interpreted as maturation” (2009, p. 241). Staundinger and Kessler introduced a distinction between personality adjustment and growth. Personality adjustment is “an obligatory task throughout the life course” (p. 242) which attends to “socio-emotional well-being” or “how good one feels about the self (in a world of others)”, (p. 241). In contrast, growth includes “cognitive, emotional and motivational facets that entail: (i) deep and broad insight into self, others and the world, (ii) complex emotion-regulation (in the sense of tolerance of ambiguity), and (iii) a motivational orientation that is transcending self-interest and is investing in the well-being of others and the world” (2009, p. 242). Staundinger and Kessler gathered from the literature a number of well-evidenced personality concepts (such as the Big Five personality traits or self-concept maturation) and articulated the difference between adjustment and growth across a number of constructs and criteria (see table below).

Table 5. Selected indicators of personality adjustment and growth

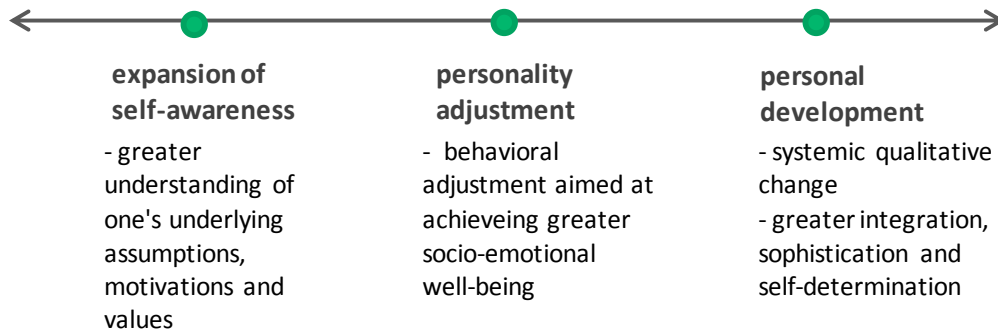
| Personality concepts | Indicators of adjustment | Indicators of growth |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Big Five | Emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness (social) | Openness to experience, (social vitality) |
| Psychological well-being | Environmental mastery, self-acceptance | Personal growth, purpose in life |
| Self-concept | Medium level of complexity of self-conceptions, associated with high level of self-concept integration | Medium complexity, self-enhancing values, high self-esteem |
| Self-concept maturity | Medium level of complexity of self-conceptions, associated with high level of self-concept integration | High complexity, self-transcendent values, moderate self-esteem |
| Personal wisdom | Medium ratings on the two criteria of self-insight and heuristics for growth; low ratings on interrelating the self, self-relativism, tolerance of ambiguity | High ratings on all five criteria: rich self-insight, heuristics for growth and self-regulation, interrelating the self, self-relativism, tolerance of ambiguity |

Compiled by the author. Adapted from Staundinger and Kessler, 2009.

The definition and indicators of *growth* adopted by Staundinger and Kessler are akin to the concept of personal development: qualitative systemic changes (involving cognitive, emotional and motivational facets) in the direction of greater sophistication (e.g. high tolerance of ambiguity, high complexity of self-concept maturity), integration (e.g. interrelating the self), and self-determination (purpose in life, self-enhancing and self-transcended values). In contrast, the definition and indicators of *personal adjustment* indicate a type of change aimed at adjusting behavior to achieve greater harmony with the environment (socio-emotional well-being) but not necessarily expanding integration (low rating on interrelating the self), sophistication (medium level of complexity of self-conceptions, low ratings on tolerance of ambiguity and on self-relativism), or self-determination (focus on environmental mastery and self-acceptance versus on purpose of life). Personal adjustment strikes as different from self-awareness in that it includes a dimension of behavioral change; however, it also strikes as different from personal development in the sense that it is not accompanied by an increase in integration, sophistication and self-determination. Hence, this research adopts personal adjustment as an intermediate type of change between

expansion of self-awareness and personal development. The figure below portrays the three types of individual change identified here on a continuum.

Figure 9. A continuum of individual change



Compiled by the author. Sources: Petriglieri et al., 2011; Marsick et al. 2009; Sheldon, 2009; Staudinger and Kessler, 2009; Merriam, 2006; McCauley et al., 2006; Deci and Ryan, 2006; Baxter Magolda et al. 2001; Kegan 1982, 1980;

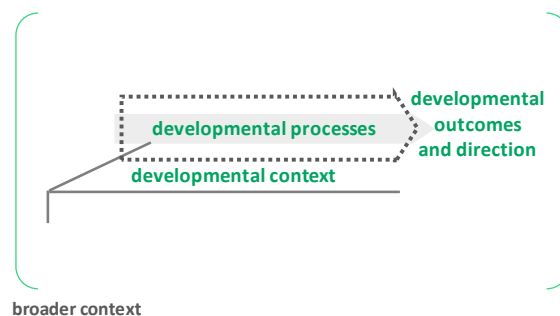
The continuum above is far from an exhaustive typology of individual change: it only aims to provide a literature-based reference point to anchor the part of analysis aimed at assessing developmental and non-developmental outcomes.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

In this chapter, I first present findings on developmental outcomes and directions, developmental context and developmental processes. The figure below is a high level map of these findings that aims to illustrate how these areas are interrelated.

Figure 10. An integrative model of personal development



Compiled by the author.

In the remainder of this chapter I present findings from comparative and integrative analysis. The following is an overview of the sections included in this chapter and of their content.

Developmental outcomes and direction

The next section (4.2) of this chapter on findings focuses on the range of developmental outcomes and directions observed in the sample. A synthesis of the individual story of change is presented for each of the nine participants in this research. For all nine participants, a process of change was found to occur. In the sample, there were nine (out of nine) cases of expanded awareness, seven (out of seven) cases of personality adjustment and five (out of seven) cases of personal

development¹⁰³. In all five cases where personal development was found to occur, an expansion of leadership capabilities across a range of professional situations was also found to occur.

Developmental context

The third section (4.3) of this chapter describes key elements of PTFL as a context. Four key elements of context emerge from this research: scope, agenda, tone¹⁰⁴ and overall quality of developmental context. These elements, which are affected by specific characteristics of a developmental initiative, interact and concur to forming a platform that is distinctively conducive to a certain type of change effort. As a developmental context, PTFL is ideally conducive to extensive self-inquiry into personal histories and limiting patterns. According to participants¹⁰⁵, the PTFL context distinctively facilitated, accelerated and deepened their experience of change. In terms of broader context (including personal background, work and personal environments)¹⁰⁶, there is contrasting evidence around its effects on the capability of participants to achieve change.

Developmental processes

The fourth section (4.4) of this chapter begins with a distinction between processes that *facilitate* (vector processes) and processes that *are* development (core processes).

A number of vector processes are identified as characteristic of PTFL. According to participants, vector processes distinctively facilitated their self-inquiry and experience of change. Vector processes are found to interact with developmental context to result in the distinctive quality of a developmental initiative: in the case of PTFL, this distinctive quality was a heightened emotional charge.

Four core processes are identified which seems to lead to personal development. These processes, which take place at the level of the individual, consist of four iterative patterns of sensemaking: around self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability. In

¹⁰³ For the purpose of assessing personality adjustment and personal development a reduced sample (N=7) was considered, given that two participants dropped out of the research after their second interview.

¹⁰⁴ The scope of PTFL is personal consulting and counselling (as needed); its agenda is one of freedom to disclose and disinterested feedback; and, its tone is one of closeness, openness and acceptance.

¹⁰⁵ According to all except one participant identified PTFL. As per the prior footnote, P3 fundamentally rejected that work done on personal development might be useful in the professional domain.

¹⁰⁶ Two participants with challenging contextual conditions (P1 and P5) seemed to attain personal development just as well as other participants who had favorable contextual conditions (e.g., P8). In contrast, one participant (P9) with relatively supportive contextual conditions seemed unable to attain personal development within the timeframe of this research.

particular, one relationship among these patterns is highlighted: the extent to which new self-awareness is accepted might affect the extent to which commitment, effort and, ultimately, change can occur. Hence, in addition to the appropriate developmental context and vector processes, for personal development to take place there also needs to be the active engagement of sensemaking from the part of an individual.

Findings from comparative analysis

The fifth section (4.5) in this chapter is a comparison between two subgroups in the sample. A division within the sample emerged because the two subgroups consistently differed with regard to four themes salient to the research: *motives* (what seemed to energize their behaviors); *values* (in particular, around preferred forms of personal and leadership development training); *patterns of sensemaking* (the way participants engaged with core processes of development); and, *outcomes* (in particular, the effects of PTFL on affective states and sense of self-worth). As to motives, subgroup one participants tended to seek affirmation from external sources, while subgroup two participants tended to seek self-concordance. In terms of values, subgroup one participants seemed to prefer training focused on professional development; subgroup one also emphasized the instrumental and formal value of training. In contrast, subgroup two participants seemed to prefer training that addresses personal development; subgroup two also emphasized the substantive value of training (work on the self rather than management frameworks or tools). In terms of sensemaking patterns¹⁰⁷, subgroup one tended to have a conflicted relationship with self-awareness, express commitment only tentatively and exert efforts selectively or to an insufficient extent. In contrast, subgroup two tended to accept new self-awareness, express commitment in a determined way and exert efforts sufficient to achieve the desired change. Finally, in terms of outcomes, participants included in subgroup one seemed to be affected negatively by participation in PTFL, in terms of emotions and sense of self-worth. In contrast, participants included in subgroup two seemed to be affected positively by participation in PTFL, in terms of emotions and sense of self-worth.

Findings from integrative analysis

The sixth section (4.6) of this chapter integrates findings from comparative analysis (Section 4.5) with findings on developmental outcomes (Section 4.2) and core developmental processes (Section 4.4.4). Adding to other differences between the two

¹⁰⁷ Specifically, the four iterative sensemaking patterns (loops) highlighted in the prior section as core processes of personal development

subgroups in the sample, personal development did not occur for subgroup one while it occurred for subgroup two. A pattern of internal consistency within each of the two subgroups is highlighted: subgroup one is characterized by a motive of seeking affirmation and by reliance on external image as a primary source of security and confidence. In contrast, subgroup two is characterized by a motive of seeking self-concordance and a reliance on internal sources of wisdom (personal values and meaning) as a primary source of security and confidence. Given the nature of the personal development work done on PTFL¹⁰⁸, it is likely that the program was perceived as threatening (the contrary of affirming) by participants included in subgroup one. In this case, it is possible that defensive mechanisms¹⁰⁹ were triggered—for example, the screening out of new awareness. On the other hand, it is likely that the program was perceived as a helpful to the end of pursuing greater self-concordance by participants included in subgroup two. Participants included in subgroup two did not seem threatened by the feedback received¹¹⁰ and accepted new self-awareness. It is speculated that that motive (seeking affirmation versus self-concordance) might be able to give a (negative or positive) spin to the wheel of change, potentially generating vicious and virtuous circles of personal development.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is highlighted that, other things being equal¹¹¹, personal development might be a matter of capability. Indeed, at a deeper level, motive orientation itself might also be a matter of capability. This research found that a PTFL-like initiative was optimally conducive for people who were seeking self-concordance. However, some individuals might have an internal capability barrier orienting them toward disproportionately seeking affirmation rather than self-concordance. A PTFL-like initiative might be counterproductive for such individuals in as much as it triggers the very defensive mechanisms that are at the heart of the hypothesized capability barrier. The aim of this speculation is to highlight an opportunity¹¹² for further research: around effects of seeking affirmation on personal development and around developmental initiatives appropriately conducive in cases where seeking affirmation is underpinned by a capability barrier.

¹⁰⁸ PTFL encourages extensive self-inquiry, including through direct feedback around limiting patterns

¹⁰⁹ At the level of unconscious sensemaking

¹¹⁰ Although they did consider the feedback carefully

¹¹¹ Assuming intention to change and given conducive developmental context and vector processes

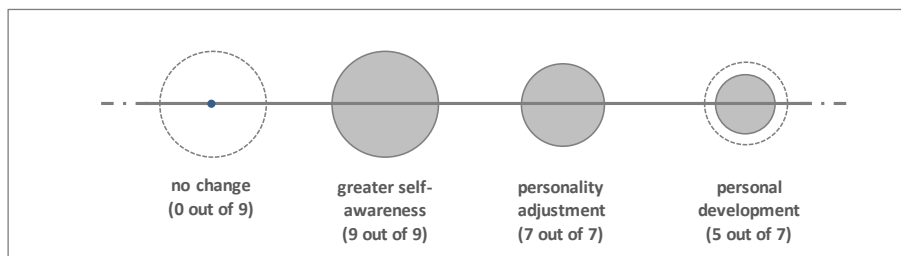
¹¹² Relevant to both the fields of adult and leadership development

4.2 Developmental outcomes

4.2.1 Introduction

Findings on developmental outcomes and direction were derived from a phase of longitudinal analysis¹¹³. This phase of analysis had two aims: to grasp the experience of change for each of the nine participants in the study; and, to establish whether the change observed has contiguity with personal development¹¹⁴. For each participant, analysis began with an examination of salient aspects of context (work and home) and outlook (on PTFL and, more broadly, on personal change). The analysis then focused on the sensemaking of participants at each of four points of contact during the research. Developmental outcomes for each participant were identified on the basis of a comparison of their sensemaking at the beginning and end of the research¹¹⁵. Development was assessed based on literature-based frameworks (personal development framework and continuum of individual change--presented in Section 3.5). Accordingly, change was categorized as personal development if a qualitative systemic change in sensemaking was observed in the direction of greater integration, sophistication, and self-determination. Change was categorized as personality adjustment if it corresponded to a behavioral adjustment but was not accompanied by systemic change. Two additional categories were considered: one concerned the expansion of self-awareness; the other accounted for the possibility that no change would take place.

Figure 11. Developmental outcomes: number of cases for each category



Compiled by the author.

¹¹³ By longitudinal analysis, I mean the study of data gathered from each participant across the time spanned by this research.

¹¹⁴ On the basis of the personal development framework presented in the methodology chapter

¹¹⁵ A more detailed presentation of methods of analysis is included in the methodology chapter

The figure above illustrates the distribution of the sample around the major types of developmental outcomes considered in this thesis. In summary:

- In all nine cases there was evidence that some form of change had taken place
- In nine out of nine cases there was evidence of expanded self-awareness
- In seven out of seven cases¹¹⁶, there was evidence of personality adjustment
- In five cases out of seven cases, there was evidence of personal development. In the remaining two cases there was no evidence of personal development.

The analysis aimed also to identify if the change experienced by participant had ramifications for their leadership practice. In the five cases in which personal development was found to occur, an expansion of leadership capabilities¹¹⁷ was also observed: participants reported that their ability to modulate the application of their competencies¹¹⁸ based on the assessment of what is required by different situations. In the two cases where personality adjustment was found to occur, some behavioral adjustments took place in the workplace but expansion of leadership capabilities was not observed.

Longitudinal analysis provided the first building block of interpretive analysis of evidence gathered in this research. The in-depth examination of the stories of nine individuals resulted in forming as many interpretive frames, which became integral part of further analysis. The conclusions of this thesis ultimately rest on the sense that was made of each of these individual stories of change.

4.2.2 Nine individual stories of change

For each participant, I include a summary of findings as well as an analysis through the lens of the framework of personal development. Because a great level of detail is involved in the full presentation of these stories, the integral version of the nine stories is only included in appendix (8.10).

¹¹⁶ Two participants discontinued (for unknown reasons) their participation in the research after the second interview. Due to insufficient data, their cases were not categorized with regard to development direction.

¹¹⁷ Capability is “the ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (Jackson et al., 2003 p. 195)

¹¹⁸ Competency is an aggregate of skills “necessary to resolve more complex problems” (Jackson et al., 2003 p. 195)

4.2.2.1 Participant 1, Female

Summary

Background. This first story started with Participant 1 (P1) acknowledging a void in confidence. Her confidence was undermined by a belief that she is not as deserving as others. This belief led her to unconditionally provide support and service to others but to feel that she always had to cope on her own. P1 felt that she yielded to other people too easily, a pattern that tended to be at its strongest when interacting with male authoritative figures. Also, she had been feeling easily overwhelmed by what happened around her. Perhaps, for P1 this inner dynamic was rooted in a feeling of not being accepted: at PTFL, she essentially received acceptance and validation by the group and tutors.

Developmental outcomes. While at the course, P1 was able to identify within herself a personal source of strength. She described finding a sense of a strong core (an *“iron core”*, P1_R2). While P1 never really believed herself to be undeserving, at the course she was able to experience herself as equally deserving compared to her peers (*“feeling it with them made the difference”*, P1_R2). This allowed her, once returned to her life, to establish a more level field in her relationships with others and to more easily assert her needs.

P1 seemed to have a high level of self-awareness to start with. On the course, self-awareness of her positive attributes was expanded as a result of the validating feedback that she received from the group. P1 felt that a sense of strength and confidence was restored within herself. She also described connecting to her inner core. As presented in the table below, these are seen as signs of integration. P1 also moved from valuing self-sufficiency to understanding the limitations of being completely self-sufficient; she then developed a greater appreciation for exchanges with other people. This is seen as a sign of greater sophistication. Finally, P1 has been able to tune into her sense of what is good for her and incorporate that in some key career and life choices. This is seen as a sign of greater self-determination. P1’s case demonstrates progress because in all three the dimensions of personal development, hence I categorize her progression as personal development¹¹⁹.

Implications for leadership practice. The issue with confidence also meant for P1 a difficulty in holding (and asserting) adequately high expectations of people

¹¹⁹ These changes trickled down in a number of personality adjustments that P1 started to make both in her personal and professional contexts.

accountable to her. After the course, she reported being able to be more decisive and clearer in her communications. Previously under the impression that she always had to cope by herself, P1 used to value self-sufficiency. After the course, P1 was able to also see a limitation of self-sufficiency in that it tended to isolate her from other people. Because of this realization and her efforts to balance her relationships with others, she was able to better allow and appreciate exchanges with other people. At work, she became better able to delegate.

Context. For the duration of the research, P1's context was a source of definite challenge rather than support. At home, P1 was enduring the emotional turmoil and legal proceedings involved in a difficult divorce. Against this backdrop, her professional role was being experienced as a source of anxiety. P1 eventually switched to a different role that she found was better suited to her skills and inclination. Before the transition to the new role, the security of her employment was put at risk twice due to ongoing reorganization.

Outlook. P1 has a background as psychology professional. She selected PFTL because she was seeking training that would focus on the person, rather than on delivering knowledge. Her theory of change seems to revolve around removing inner blockages: she explained that inner limitations reduce the extent to which one can absorb and leverage new learning. There was one additional and stark theme in P1's theory of change: because she views herself as the same person at home and at work, any progress she can make as a person is also relevant for her leadership practice.

Interaction with me. In all rounds of interviews but the fourth, P1 was the first participant I talked to. Despite my relative inexperience, we quickly developed a dialogue within which we were able to share reflections and opinions to an extent that was unique in the sample. For me, this meant that interviews with P1 were a great learning ground and experience.

Table 6. Developmental outcomes: P1's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|--|--|--|----------|
| Integration | P1 feels a void in confidence. She does not feel that she is as deserving and authoritative as other people are. | P1 has internalized the validation received on the course. She feels stronger (as having an “ <i>iron core</i> ”, P1_R2) and in touch with her core self. P1 acknowledged that she had been carrying a lot of anger because of what she had been experiencing. | P1 realized and integrated a sense of strength and core self P1 accepted her feelings of anger and has been able to better channel and process them. | SA PD |
| Sophistication | Two implicit operating assumptions of P1 had been that: 1) she should unconditionally serve and support others (who are more deserving than she is); 2) she must be self-sufficient and cope by herself. | P1 made these assumptions explicit and revised them: 1) she is as deserving as others and deserves to get certain responses from others; 2) It is okay to expect others to take responsibility; 3) it is okay to ask for and accept help; | There is a shift from an internal imperative to serve others to a more sophisticated view which now includes room for herself and her needs. P1 also removed the generalization that others are unconditionally deserving of and/or needing help. Finally, the new view incorporates the realization that being self-sufficient is only a building block compared to being able to be self-sufficient <i>and</i> rely on other individuals | PD |
| Self-determination | P1 often doubted herself. She had been remaining in personal and work situations that were not favorable to her. | P1 expanded her understanding of what her strengths and needs are. By the end of the research, P1 pursued some key decisions such as rejecting contact with her ex-husband (who had been harassing her) and changing her job to a role that better fit her inclination and preferences | P1 is now considering her own good and her needs with respect to life and career choice. She has made some life and career decisions that are better aligned with her skills, values and needs. | PD |

*SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.2 Participant 2, Male

Summary

Background. The story of Participant 2 (P2) revolves around self-awareness. At the time of interview one, P2 was manifestly not aware of a particular aspect of himself which he could have benefited from working on while at PTFL. In the course of the interview, P2 identified some challenges that he was experiencing. However, these belonged mostly to the external world: for example, work pressure and conflicts in the workplace.

Developmental outcomes. Interview two (right after PTFL) marked a stark contrast compared to interview one: P2 did not hesitate to talk about himself in a very direct way. He identified, in hindsight, that his boss must have referred him to the course to help increase his self-awareness. P2 described his blind spot as one about the effect that he might have on others. After the course, P2 ascribed to himself a personality “*larger than life*” with which he “*can smother people*”. According to P2, this awareness call prompted by the unanimous feedback of the other 11 people in the PTFL group had a profound effect on him:

“So... It had a profound effect, hem... On myself. And I mean, it’s only a week after the course so I continue to work on it, continue to observe. And people are noticing a difference in me. (P2_R2)

Even while at the course, he started practicing holding himself back in order to make more space for other people and better listen to others.

Clearly, P2’s change demonstrates an expanded self-awareness. However, because P2 dropped out of the sample after interview two, there is insufficient data for drawing further conclusions around developmental outcomes.

Implication for leadership practice. While there are potential implications for leadership practice of the change experienced by P2, there is insufficient evidence to comment on this topic.

Context. Based on P2’s comments, there seem to be no major issues in either his personal or professional life. Having heard quite the opposite from another participant (who was P2’s buddy during the course), I treat as inconclusive the evidence gathered from P2 around his context.

Outlook. P2 mentioned as a main reason for attending PTFL that he wished to formalize his professional experience in view of a potential promotion. During our first

interview, it was particularly challenging to focus the conversation on P2 himself. Because he rather spoke about external circumstances, I am hardly able to describe his outlook on personal change, except by underscoring that he initially could not think of anything in himself that he could have benefited from working on. During the second interview, a dual theme emerged around P2's view of personality. His description of personality (his as well as of others) relies on the image of a *"two-piece person"*, with an outer facade that is relatively unproblematic and an inner person where any issues are seated and can be kept from view.

Interaction with me. Conversations with P2 were friendly and a source of useful information, which was especially helpful in making sense of PTFL as a developmental context. However, our interaction often caused me to feel frustration as I perceived a general difficulty in our communication. One aspect of challenge was the initial difficulty in focusing the conversation on P2 rather than on external circumstances. Another aspect was the frequent occurrence of lengthy detours taken by P2 in responding to interview questions. In addition, a theme emerged for me about P2's self-narrative emphasizing praise-worthy aspects of his own accomplishments and personality.

Table 7. Developmental outcomes: P2's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|---|---|--|----|
| Integration | Self-awareness blind spot: what effect on others? | Realization that he had not been aware of what effect he has on others. Realization that his personality can be <i>"smothering"</i> (P2_R2) | Expanded self-awareness; No data to draw conclusions around personality adjustment or personal development | SA |
| Sophistication | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | No data to draw conclusions around personality adjustment or personal development. | - |
| Self-determination | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | No data to draw conclusions around personality adjustment or personal development. | - |

*SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.3 *Participant 3, Male*

Summary

Background. In its unfolding, P3's story became labyrinthine. His case certainly provided one of the most challenging areas of my data analysis. P3's story started in a puzzling way: during the first interview, I could virtually gather no clue of what P3 was going to work on during PTFL. When asked directly, P3 listed things such as the financial downturn, change management, organizational confrontations, networking, and emotional intelligence. These are all topics certainly relevant to P3's role, but at the same time they are also relatively impersonal statements and outwardly oriented notions. In all of interview one, I was not able to bring into focus any more specific or self-oriented explanation.

Developmental outcomes. On the PTFL program, P3 "*worked hard on self-awareness*" (P3_R2). Part of P3 appreciated that the experience brought about a "*period of reflection*" (P3_R4) which, he said, helped him grow as a person. However, a part of P3 strongly resented undergoing an intervention which he compared to a "*bad surgery*" (P3_R2) unnecessarily attempting to undermine his credibility. After the week, P3 felt "*sadder*" (P3_R2) and "*pissed off*" (P3_R4) as he struggled to make sense of the feedback received. People on the course pointed out to P3 that some of his habits were making it difficult for them to relate more closely to him: he was obfuscating his speech with an overly marked regional accent and the frequent use of medical jargon; also, he seemed to be acting in a role of 'entertainer' ("*court jester*", P3_R4), rather than being one of the participants—for example, with his continuous interruptions and interjections and with his choice of "*flamboyant dressings*" (P3_R2).

The piece of feedback that P3 did find fair is the one around his habit of interrupting other people—something, he noted, that "*probably pisses them off*" (P3_R2). Already at the program and in our second interview, P3 began training himself out of this habit. By the time of our last interview, he felt that he was becoming a better listener and that there were observable positive ramifications of that in his personal relationships. However, this was not entirely uncontroversial: a bit cheekily, P3 commented that he was working on shedding the old habit "*even though I interrupt [people] because I know they are wrong [laughs]!*" (P3_R3). He also pointed out that better listening is not as applicable in his areas of his work context, where "*I probably actually need to be more aggressive and more cut and thrust to get what I want, rather than the softer option*" (P3_R3).

P3 eventually dismissed the rest of the feedback received on the program, on the basis that "*the difference between madness and genius is results*" (P3_R3). P3 never fails to

deliver results, “no matter what can of worms I am given” (P3_R2), hence “matter is not whether I am perfect, but my strategic objectives, there’s ten pages of them, and I am the only director who returned all of them completed” (P3_R2). In fairness, the literal feedback about his style was probably not as salient (especially considering that P3 does not seem to lack the ability to flex style according to circumstances): likely, it was offered to point out a blind spot in how P3’s style and behavior could impact on other. However, P3 did not mention (and certainly did not seem to have appreciated) that the feedback he received might have had this type of purpose.

Developmental outcomes. As of the end of the research, P3 had trained himself to mitigate his habit of interrupting and interjecting. He found that that was making him a better listener, especially in personal relationships. He did not find that not interrupting was as relevant in some of the more confrontational interactions (part of his role) that he had at work. P6 had also made efforts to make more time for him and his wife to share experiences together.

In the research there is definite evidence that P3 expanded his self-awareness, in particular about his pattern of interrupting and interjecting. The fact that he actually decreased that habit offers evidence of a personal adjustment. There is also some evidence that deeper levels of introspection and change were somewhat active (or activated) after the course. For example, did acknowledge, if indirectly, an uneasy relationship with self-awareness: near the close of our last interview, he commented about PTFL: “it’s not that I didn’t like [the course] so much... it’s a personal thing for a jumped-up Jock¹²⁰ [chuckles]!” (P3_R4). Overall, however, the evidence beyond expanded self-awareness and personality adjustment and in favor of personal development is mostly inconclusive. There is no uncontroversial sign of significant integration, sophistication or self-determination having occurred within the span of the research.

Implications for leadership practice. This is another controversial area in P3’s case. P3 excluded that the course had been significantly helpful to him professionally. While he admitted to having become more considerate and a better listener also on the workplace, he commented that more rather than less aggressiveness was needed in a number of his workplace interactions.

Context. It is difficult to understand to which extent work and personal context are a source of support or challenge for P3. He described his professional role as requiring of him a lot of confrontation. Career, professional achievements and professional context

¹²⁰ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘Jock’ is an informal, often offensive, form of address indicating a Scotsman. Copyright © 2012, Oxford University Press.

are very salient to P3, who recalls how he advanced his career after a start as a manual worker in his youth. P3's background includes adversity: the early loss of his father and the economic difficulties that his family experienced. On one hand, P3 seems very satisfied of his career achievements and work performance. On the other hand, he noted that he had been prioritizing career over his personal life and his relationship with his (equally career-oriented) wife. This indicated that, perhaps, the workplace is a less than ideal place for P3 to practice what he learned on PTFL. P3's personal life seems rewarding in many respects; however, he mentioned his disappointment in not having had children.

Outlook. Overall, there is something controversial and conflicted in the way P3 related to PTFL, his process of change, and even to himself. This is well exemplified by his burst of resentment toward PTFL: *"[The course's] therapy is for fucked up fuckers"* (P3_R2). P3 explicitly said that he would have preferred training focused on management techniques rather than on personal issues. Generally, P3's sensemaking seemed to be pivoting around a firm separation between the professional and personal worlds. When exploring his approach to personal change, the language that emerged was about 'chasing away' issues; or, about 'ghosts' having already been 'put to rest'. At some point, in a loose reference to the Change Curve developed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, P2 expressed skepticism around the necessity, in order to come to terms with issues, of intermediate steps such as denial or depression. Giving the example of when he lost an arm in an accident, P2 said his approach is rather to *"cut the four stages and come to the same end point [acceptance]"* (P3_R2).

Interaction with me. As a general observation, P3 seemed most comfortable with an image of himself as a strong leader, a relentless achiever and a stoic fighter; his narrative comes across as often self-affirming in this sense. PTFL is unlikely to have left that self-image unshaken. It was humbling for me to witness the resulting struggle that at times came through raw in interviews. P3's transcript texts are riddled with paradoxes: his language can be at the same time polished and crude and his account is punctuated with strong images presented side by side with neutralized rationalizations. By the end of the research, I certainly got to care about P3. This is in part due to the extensive time that I invested in studying his transcripts; but it must also be because of the flashes of disarming candor interspersed in his account and the times when he reversed the direction of the interviews by asking me questions that seemed borne of genuine care. I cannot hide, however, some frustration felt during interviews and due to difficulties in communication, including often a bad line, my challenge in understanding his accent, but also a resistance to attempts to focus conversation on him rather than on external challenges.

Table 8. Developmental outcome: P3's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|---|---|---|----------|
| Integration | During interviews, I encountered difficulty in focusing the conversation on P3 himself. Issues discussed tend to refer to external challenges (financial downturn, change management) or be formulated in generic and impersonal terms (networking, emotional intelligent) | P3 accepts the feedback that his excessive interrupting and interjecting affects others negatively. However, he distances himself from the rest of the feedback received. He also distances himself from the program's emphasis on personal development, at times by harshly criticizing those who on the program explored personal issues. | P3 "worked hard on self-awareness". Also, he integrated feedback around his pattern of interrupting, which he began to address and mitigate both in his personal and professional relationship. A degree of integration has taken place in that P3 seems to consider himself more as part of an equation of change than he used to. However, at least in interviews, P3 tends to deflect invitations to share deeper reflections. In addition, he upholds the separation between the professional and the personal until the end of the research. | SA PA |
| Sophistication | Professional training is seen as and preferred to be in terms of delivery of management tools, techniques and frameworks. | Inconclusive evidence about change | P3 seems to be remaining mostly within his original framework of understandings | - |
| Self-determination | P3 is a self-made man who, working hard since his young age, was able to surpass the economic difficulties of his family of origin and, in many ways, also his early experience of adversity. P3 possibly already is in the type of role and profession that does best suit his inclinations. | As noted by P3 himself, he has so far prioritized professional accomplishments over a key personal relationship such as that with his wife. P3 seems more aware of how meaningful personal relationships are to him. | Having acknowledged that he values some of his key personal relationships, P3 seems committed to invest in those to a greater extent and with better quality efforts than he did in the past (listening to friends more and better, surpassing the disconnect in his marriage). There is inconclusive evidence, however, on what type of change was actually being realized. | PA |

*SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.4 *Participant 4, Male*

Summary

Background. P4's story seemed to be mostly about self-awareness. His awareness was raised at the course in terms of his need to listen and reflect more in work interactions in order to not alienate others. In addition, a takeaway from the course was a realization that he operated a stark separation between the personal and professional domains. On the course, it was pointed out to P4 that, although he seemed to be a fundamentally warm, caring and fun person, in the workplace he was being perceived as impassible and overly serious—that he seemed to leave his more personable side outside of the office.

Development outcomes. P4's case well exemplifies the acquisition of greater self-awareness. However, because P4 dropped from the research, no information is available on the extent to which P4 might have carried forward other changes that were discussed in our second (and last) conversation.

There is insufficient data for drawing conclusions around developmental outcomes beyond P4's gain in self-awareness.

Implications for leadership practice. On the course, P4 received the recommendation to bring more of himself into his workplace. His being "*quite deadpan*" (P4_R2) had been limiting his effectiveness, for example in relating with his boss, motivating or exercising influence on the other managers in the business. At the time of interview two, P4 was beginning to implement this recommendation. At PTFI, P4 also acquired a distinction between management and leadership and a more sophisticated view of his role as a leader. However, no information is available on how his effort might have continued following the second interview.

Outlook. Similarly to P2, P4 was originally seeking training mainly for its instrumental value: he needed to formalize his work as a "*stepping stone*" (P4_R1) toward an upcoming promotion to director. P4 did also mentioned being curious to learn more about how he is perceived by others. When, in interviews, I was trying to explore his outlook on change, a conception of leadership as a "*game of chances*" (P4_R1) emerged: in retrospect, P4 did not think he had personally changed much compared to when he took up his first leadership role ("*I do things in the same way*", P4_R1). P4 tended to discuss change mostly in terms of outwardly evident career progression. Another theme that emerged is that of P4's view of the person as a two-piece entity (again, similarly to P2), with an exterior façade and an inner person where issues tend to be dealt with.

Interaction with me. Interviews with P4 were informative especially in terms of his descriptions of PFTL as a developmental context. They were also challenging, due to a difficulty to focus the conversation on P4 rather than on external circumstances. Moreover, P4 and I seemed to hold contrasting assumptions of what would be relevant to discuss during the interviews: P4 was focusing on aspects of his professional situation while I was trying to inquire into his personal outlook. Perhaps because of this difference, there was the sense during interviews that we often missed each other's meaning.

Table 9. Developmental outcomes: P4's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|---|---|---|----|
| Integration | P4's sensemaking is focused on the dynamics of his workplace and the path to his promotion to director. He identifies mostly external challenges as the reason for attending PTFL and seems more at ease when the focus of the conversation shifts away from himself. | At the course, it was pointed to him that he seems to be a warm, caring and fun person; however, in the workplace he is perceived as a completely different person—impassive and overly serious. A recommendation for P4 is that he tries to bring more of himself in his work environment. | A major change for P4 was in terms of self-awareness. As of interview two, P4 was trying to implement the recommendation of integrating these two sides of himself. P4's participation in the research ended at that point: no information is available around the extent to which P4 might have carried this integration forward. | SA |
| Sophistication | P4 suspects that at work he might be overly focusing on "knowing what is right" and hence on imparting his view on others. This might be limiting his effectiveness in implementing things and getting the most out of people. | P4 acquired a key distinction between management and leadership. In his role as a leader, it was important that he listened more than giving instructions—to allow ideas to surface and people to engage with their work. Also, it was important for him to be more thoughtful in terms of the implications of decisions that he is making. | P4 acquired a more sophisticated view of leadership, in terms of its purpose (facilitation of people versus task completion) and process (relational and reflective versus organizational and directive). No information is available around the extent to which P4 might have implemented this distinction in his leadership practice. No data to draw conclusions around personality adjustment or personal development. | - |
| Self-determination | No relevant information available | No relevant information available | No data to draw conclusions around personality adjustment or personal development. | - |

*SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.5 *Participant 5, Female*

Summary

Background. The focal issue in P5's story seemed to be a gap between P5's self-perception (as high-aiming and hard-working) and others' perception of her (as exceedingly demanding, "scary" and "ruthless", P5_R4). PTFL helped P5 gain awareness of a limiting pattern: her tendency to be extremely self-critical. From this tendency stems P5's inability to feel pleased with any accomplishment and a drive to incessantly do more and be better. Her self-critical attitude also has effects on others: both at work and at home, people tend to feel that P5 sets for them unachievable standards. P5 also tends to appear unsurpassable and not in need of any support. P5's harshly self-critical attitude might be linked to her early years, the recounting of which was described by another participant as "*heart-wrenching*" (P7_R2).

Development outcomes. When describing her change, P5 referred to wanting to do with others not as it was done to her, but how she *would have liked* it to be done. P5 started to carry out this determination both at work, with her team members and co-workers, and at home, with her two children. Some benefits of this new approach promptly ensued: at work, people seemed to be warming up to her and, at home, she was having a more pleasant time with her children and noticing that they seemed happier. P5 acquired a new confidence in her ability to contribute to the system where she operates (whether at home or at work) which she describes through the self-image of a tree—equally supported by and contributing to its surroundings.

Development direction. Integration is evidenced by P5's shift from focusing on the professional sphere only to encompassing her personal sphere as well; also, by her integrating the new behaviors across the two. Greater sophistication is visible in P5's new understanding of herself and her initial issue: the earlier image of a gap (between self-perception and perception by others) was surpassed and replaced by the image of a tree—a system interconnected with other systems. Finally, self-determination is demonstrated by P5's recognition and pursuit of what she really values in relationships: bringing people along versus growing distant to them. Her commitment to doing better to others than it has been done to her is testament to this. For the purposes of this research, I categorize P5's story as a case of personal development.

Implications for leadership practice. Following the course, P5 began practicing flexing her style to better support others in delivering on her expectations. She described some positive reactions and gave the impression that people were more likely to be leaving her office "*in a good state*" (P5_R2). She also felt she could more easily request and accept support from others.

Context. P5's story stands against the backdrop of relatively challenging circumstances: at work, she has a complex role requiring her to constantly exert influence and frequently face confrontation; and, at home, she is a single mother of two young children.

Outlook. P5 has a background as a psychology professional. She was looking for a training opportunity like PFTL precisely because she wanted to achieve *“an in-depth understanding of how my background impacts on my role as a leader [and] enable an understanding of my limiting patterns”*¹²¹. She came across as very motivated to talk about herself on the course, to achieve a change, and to remain mindful what she needed to do to maintain that change. P5 also was clear in her need to have an active role in making sense of what she was going to learn on the course in order to achieve a change.

Interaction with me. P5 expresses herself in a precise manner and her clarity of thought around what she expected from the course came through since the very beginning. Interviews with P5 were also, in a way, hard work: I had the feeling that I had to ask precisely the right questions in order to get answers--that additional information would not be volunteered. Having said that, once I asked the right questions P5 tended to be very forthcoming and transparent about what she wanted to say. Because of her clear speech and also because of her professional expertise, interviews with P5 ended up being very informative.

¹²¹ Extract from P5's summary of pre-program expectations, which she filled out on the Praxis' application form and forwarded to me in response to my interview question around expectations

Table 10. Developmental outcomes: P5's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|---|---|---|----------|
| Integration | P5's focal issue is coming across as exceedingly demanding (in her professional context) | P5 comes to acknowledge that the focal issue bears on her whole life: it affects how she relates not just with people at work, but also with her children at home and with herself | There is integration between the personal and professional sphere, in recognition that the same issue has the power to affect both spheres; also in recognition that the same shift towards a gentler attitude is able to benefit both personal and professional relationships. | SA PD |
| | There is a gap between self-perception (high-aiming and hard-working) and perception by others (exceedingly demanding). | A link is unearthed between how P5 perceives herself and how she handles herself with others. P5's recognition that her attitude towards herself is very self-critical is joined with the realization of the pressure that this puts onto others as well. | There is a higher degree of sophistication in P5's sensemaking around the issue of the perception gap. Initially, she tended to form relatively polarized interpretations ("me versus others", "me versus men"). Later, she describes a limiting pattern and how it affects her inter-relational dynamics. | PD |
| Sophistication | P5's emotional strength and continuous accomplishments seem to have exacerbated the perception gap. People would feel that P5 does not need any support for them or that unattainable standards are being set. | P5 develops a self-image of a tree. She now sees herself as accepting the support of others and able to contribute to them. | Increased sophistication is evident in the passage from an image characterized by dualism and rupture (gap) to an image recalling interconnected systems (tree). Greater sophistication is also exemplified by the broadening of P5's 'leadership toolkit': at work, P5 is now able to flex into more and different responses to other people, depending on personalities and circumstances involved. | |
| Self-determination | The compounding of the perception gap described above with P5's self-criticism had undermined her confidence in her ability: she doubted that in and of herself she could be bringing a positive contribution in the workplace. | P5 is recognizing her talents and strengths, instead of focusing on the negatives. She is able to let others in more into what she thinks and of who she is. As a consequence, others have been warming up to her. | P5 values bringing people along and doing better with them than it has been done to her. She has been able to make this more manifest in her relationships at work and at home. | PD |

SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.6 *Participant 6, Male*

Summary

Background. P6 comes across a confident person, who is clear-minded about what is meaningful for him and quite on course with living out his personal and career aspirations. In the workplace, P6 is a supportive and empathetic leader with an ability to facilitate constructive collaboration in complex team environments. In heading a special project within the organization, he has encountered a new leadership challenge revolving around enlisting real support from those team members who are functional experts temporarily staffed from other department. One hypothesis by P6 is that being a more decisive leader could help addressing this type of challenge.

Development outcomes. At the course, P6 received consistently positive feedback around how his outlook and efforts are perceived by others, which had the effect of validating his self-confidence. He also received and welcomed feedback around his somewhat understated physical presence, which would benefit from strengthening through improved posture, presentation skills and vocal projection. In hearing the stories, at times problematic, of other delegates on the course, P6 felt very empathetic. He also had a realization around the diversity of perspectives that people have, and the diversity of experiences that might have informed their perspective. Following the course, P6 found that he was able to empathize with others at a deeper level.

Development direction. At PFTL, P6 received a confirmation that his self-confidence was warranted. He seemed to promptly integrate this into his self-concept. Greater sophistication is visible in the leadership applications of P6's realization around multiple perspectives; also, in his the forming of a more nuanced understanding of leadership styles (can be flexed as needed) and his own role (advisor rather than technician). In P6's story, a change in terms of self-determination is not particularly evident. However, that is primarily because a change in this respect was not needed: since the beginning of the research, P6 seemed deliberate and intentional about his conduct in major areas of his life—his career orientation and personal relationships. Because P6 seemed to value self-improvement and trusted the feedback received on PFTL, a manifestation of self-determination could be read in P6's choice to take up suggestions to strengthen his physical presence through improving posture and doing presentation and vocal coaching. For the purpose of this research, I categorize P6's case as an instance of personal development.

Implications for leadership practice. There were many applications of P6's change on the workplace. Informed by a greater awareness of the needs, frames of reference,

feelings and viewpoints of others, he made an effort to be more empowering toward his team members, more constructive toward his line manager, and more resourceful in demanding negotiations. P6 formed a more nuanced view of leadership style, according to which appropriate responses also depend on the situation and the needs of others. He reframed his own leadership function, emphasizing his role in upholding principles and preserving relationships rather than providing technical advice. P6's case, I believe, is a stark example of how personal and leadership maturation do not run on separate tracks, but rather go hand in hand.

Context. Both work and personal context are elements of support for P6. He seems to thrive in his professional role and to be pleased with the organization he works for. Personally, he seems to share a rewarding life with a compatible partner.

Outlook. P6 approached the course because of his interest in addressing a specific leadership challenge but also because of his general interest in gaining perspective over his default responses in leadership situations. Although quite a rational and generally maintaining a *"healthy degree of skepticism"* (P6_R2), he appreciated the intense *"soft skills"* (P6_R2) orientation of PFTL.

Interaction with me. P6's communication style tends to be clear, concise and on point. At times, early in the interviews, I mistook this for a degree of reserve. Discussing with P6 was intellectually engaging and his critical outlook helped me improve my understanding of PFTL also of my own approach to the research.

Table 11. Developmental outcomes: P6’s story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|---|--|--|----------|
| Integration | P6 had experienced challenges as the leader of a special project and wanted to explore whether there was something he could have been doing better. In particular, he was pondering on how he could enlist more commitment from a cross-functional team and whether he should be a more directive leader. | P6 received very positive feedback at PTFL, around his personable and trust-inspiring presence. | P6 acknowledged the positive feedback received and integrated the validation into his self-concept. | SA PD |
| Sophistication | P6 has an inclination for an affiliative style of leadership. He thinks that being directive is not natural for him. Also, that it is a less compassionate way of approaching others. | P6 acquired a new distinction: being directive does not necessarily amount to being dictatorial. Being directive could also mean being willing to provide instruction or advice to those who need that. P6 also reframed his role, from considering himself an “ultimate technician” (P6_R2) to being willing to “advise, steer, guide” (P6_R3). | P6’s thinking around leadership styles increased in sophistication: instead of a dualism (affiliative versus directive) he thinks of a range of responses that could be suited in different situations. | PD |
| Self-determination | Since the start of the research, P6 seemed clear minded around his values, priorities and preferences. Both his professional and lifestyle were intentional and deliberate. P6 had also deliberately looked for the type of training offered by PTFL. | The group found that P6’s physical presence was a bit shy and advised him to put himself more “out there” (P6_R2)—through a better posture, projecting his voice more loudly and generally developing his physical presence. | P6 seemed to value self-improvement and to trust the feedback received on the course. He followed suggestions received around strengthening his physical presence (for example by improving his posture and doing some training on presentation) | PD |

SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.7 *Participant 7, Female*

Summary

Background. P7's story is about surpassing a taboo: for 20 years, she has been living with a serious illness, here undisclosed, and feeling that if others realized her health condition then her career would be hindered as a result. Benefiting from supportive personal and work circumstances, P7 has been able to keep the illness to herself and maintain a high level of engagement both at work and in pursuing further education. She is an accomplished manager with an inclination for developing her people and a sensibility to look after them. Her day-to-day had been becoming increasingly burdensome because of a persistent insomnia and because of her feeling overextended. Among the consequences, an underlying sense of worry and anxiety and the perception by others that she might not be as self-confident as she feels she is.

Development outcomes. At PTFL, P7 realized the awareness that holding a taboo around her illness and compensating by being a “*workaholic*” (P7_R2) was actually damaging her health and, prospectively, also her career. She started making practical changes in her lifestyle to better support her health. Most fundamentally, she confronted her deeper fears around the condition and its possible consequences and eventually discarded the assumption that admitting to her illness could be damaging to her career. She began to reclaim time for herself so that she would be able to attend to her many activities in a way that is more respectful towards herself. Eventually, she matured a sense of inner calm and peace which restored her ability to rest better at night. In the end none of these changes required her to decrease her dedication to work. Interestingly, the changes almost never required to actually disclose her illness which simply seemed to have become less relevant.

P7's initial situation as that of a downward spiral, originating from the perceived need to keep her illness concealed to protect her career potential. P7 described her change as having accepted that health is a part of her life and that having to deal with the illness is a part of her psychology. This was seen as a sign of integration. There is evidence of greater sophistication in the way she understands her situation. Also, underlying the way she began to relate with others at work (less defensive, more tolerant): P7 realized that nobody can be held accountable to have any answer at any point in time; also, that there is a multiplicity of views and background behind the ways people react. P7's case is a clear example of self-determination—having understood that she was damaging her health and career, while valuing both, P7 started to make pragmatic changes in her life that would optimize her health condition.

Implications for leadership practice. At work, P7 found that taking time to think about things eliminated her anxiety about being found without an answer. Having become more inclined to involving others in the process of reflection, she perceived an improvement in her relationships with both her team and bosses.

Context. Both personal and work contexts seem very supportive of P7. Within her organization, P7 is engaged in ways that she appreciates and fully supported in her personal and professional development. Personally, she enjoys a rich and fulfilling relationship with her husband.

Outlook. P7 was recommended PTFL by her Chairman, who had previously attended the course. Unsure of the motivation behind this recommendation, P7 was nevertheless enthusiastic about the opportunity and committed to leveraging it for her growth. In terms of outlook on change, P7 demonstrated a pragmatic approach: moving from the consideration that everyone has issues, she identified the solutions that would work for her in addressing her issue and simply took action to implement them.

Interaction with me. P7 came across as extremely kind and thoughtful and all conversations with her were pleasant. At first, there was a sense that some of my more exploratory (wondering) questions triggered a defensive response in her. However, we soon negotiated a relatively comfortable style of dialogue and were able to have very informative exchanges.

Table 12. Developmental outcomes: P7's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|---|--|---|----------|
| Integration | A number of issues are considered but the illness is never discussed. | P7 now considers health as part of her life, and her having to deal with a serious illness as part of her psychology. | P7 integrated in her sensemaking the concept of having to live with a serious illness | SA PD |
| | Issues discussed included a contradiction around self-confidence and insomnia. These issues were originally presented as unrelated. | P7 uncovers the link between the issues previously presented: trying to live life as if she did not have an illness, and not taking sufficient care of herself, had been stoking a sense of anxiety within her, which manifested itself in the form of wavering self-confidence and a difficulty to rest. | | |
| Sophistication | The issue around self-confidence is presented as a gap between self-perception and perception by others. | There is now a chain of reasoning linking and underlying both issues. Due to the assumption that disclosing the illness would damage P7's career potential, she was feeling a sense of taboo around the illness, and perceived a need to prove herself through overcompensating with work. The hectic lifestyle that resulted was further undermining her physical and psychological health. | A more sophisticated understanding emerged which replaced denial | PD |
| Self-determination | The issue around insomnia was presented as self-standing. P7's lifestyle was significantly dictated by the implicit assumption that admitting to her illness would be damaging to her career potential. | P7 revisited the initial assumption. She realized that she values both her health and career and accepted that the better care she takes of herself, the less negative impact the illness will have on her life. | The downward spiral described by P7 was reversed to the benefit of both her health and career | PD |

SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.8 *Participant 8, Male*

Summary

Background. P8 started out by identifying that he wanted to work on himself. He believed that his personality is the key to understanding his leadership responses. Hence, it is the key to understanding how to deal with leadership challenges more effectively. After the course, P8 shared additional information which was at the core of his story: during teenager years, he had resolved to not reveal his homosexuality outside of his closest personal circle, in order to protect himself and his image from discrimination. In time, this had resulted in a widening gap between P8's professional and personal selves. Maintaining that separation was undermining P8's confidence: he knew that the good professional reputation that he enjoyed as a lecturer and a manager was based not as much on who he really was, but rather on who he was portraying to be.

Development outcomes. At the course, P8 received a lot of positive feedback as well as encouragement by his peers that he was perfectly fine as himself, that his accomplishments were real, and that his homosexuality was fully accepted. Following this response by the group, P8 felt immediate relief and validation. He fully embraced the idea that he could only be more effective and more inspirational (a theme that was important to him) if he started to *"make it real"* (P11_R3). He began to speak his mind more rather than responding to situations as a *"social chameleon"* (P11_R3). When necessary, he confronted people. Following reflection on which parts of his professional persona were truly meaningful to him, he terminated his lecturing commitments and focused more on strategy and team development. Having always reacted with brusque manners to compliments, which were challenging for him to accept, he made it a point to listen and explicitly show gratitude whenever receiving a compliment. He also became more at ease with public speaking. In essence, P8's change was a determination to *"expose that person, and I let other people see that person"* (P8_R2) that he really is, otherwise *"how can I build the confidence because nobody would ever see it. [...] if I kept that real person in the shadow, I would never... People would never know who I really am"* (P8_R2). More changes ensued from P8's determination which are described below among implications for leadership practice.

Development direction. I believe that P8's case is a particularly clear example of integration: at the core of his change is the rejoining of his self-concept across the personal and professional context. Greater sophistication is also evident in a more nuanced understanding of leadership, based on the realization of multiple perspectives. P8's story is also a clear example of self-determination: after PFTL, P8

started discarding aspects of his professional persona that were not meaningful to him (the lecturing) and rather began to engage in other functions (as strategist and as mentor) that are more meaningful. P8 was receiving positive feedback in response to these efforts. I categorize P8's as an example of personal development.

Implications for leadership practice. At the course, P8 realized that other people's responses are informed by a multiplicity of perspectives. At work, he began to integrate this realization in his interactions: for example, he started to reflect more over the implications and stakes of others before reacting to situations. Overall, P8 thought that his relationships (with his team and bosses) were evolving into a more constructive and effective form as he strived to be more genuinely himself. P8 started to discard features of his professional persona that were really not meaningful for him—for example, he started to phase out his lecturing assignments. In place of lecturing, he was dedicating more time and energy to strategy, which is what he feels most inclined to do. In addition, having uncovered an inclination for helping others develop, he began to take up more roles as coach or mentor within the organization. P8 was receiving positive feedback around his efforts, including more requests from people in the organization to be assigned to his team.

Context. Professionally, P8 is a well-known and respected lecturer and successful manager. In his private life, he is happily settled in a long term relationship.

Outlook. From the beginning of our conversations, P8 expressed his preference for a form of training that would focus on him and his personality, as opposed to training delivering management models and checklists. P8 seemed a firm believer in his active role in the change process: *"I mean, my role has actually... Been **to** change"* (P8_R2): he pointed out that if he did not build on his novel realizations by consciously making changes, then nothing would really happen. As an additional significant theme, P8 strongly asserted his belief¹²² that *"You are not two people. A person isn't a person in their private life and another in their work life. You are fundamentally one person"* (P8_R2).

Interaction with me. A main aspect of the interview interactions with P8 is that (at least from my point of view) we developed an affinity and I became a fan of his story. Conversations tended to unfold smoothly and to be entertaining. All throughout interviews, P8 engaged me quite actively by asking questions back. It felt like P8 shared my interest in understanding complicated things. He seemed to enjoy considering a new thought or exploring a paradox. For example, P8 is the only participant with whom I discussed two particularly puzzling questions that recur in my thoughts,

¹²² Especially after his experience on the course

studies and lectures¹²³. Finally, in many ways P8's story looked like the epitome of the change that I have been seeking to study and describe. This 'good chemistry' was also a source of concern because I started to question my judgment in analyzing his story. Probably, P8's story has more limitations to it than I realize. P8 himself pointed out to me that he is a good storyteller (from his lecturing experience). He also reminded me that his change was in progress: *"I am feeling pretty good. I still... At times I still get, although nobody would notice it externally, but internally I get the old wobble now and again"* (P8_R3).

¹²³ These two issues are: a paradox between being authentic and being political; and, the moral dimension of authentic leadership (in short, were Gandhi and Hitler equally authentic leaders?)

Table 13. Developmental outcomes: P8's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|--------------------|---|---|---|----------|
| Integration | P8 maintained a separation between his personal and professional life. This separation was long held and a salient one: it had been instated when P8 was a teenager and had decided to avoid disclosing his homosexuality outside of his closest personal circle. | P8 is letting go of the separation between his professional persona and his "true self" (P8_R2). He believes he can be more fulfilled and also more effective by being himself across contexts. At work, he decides to "lead as myself" (P*_R3). He feels increasingly confident as he receives positive feedback that he knows is based on having acted out of his true self rather than out of the persona. | P8 integrated his full self-concept across his personal and professional contexts | SA PD |
| Sophistication | P8 started off with a personal set of notions and intuitions about leadership. He believes that the human aspect is central to leadership. Hence, understanding himself and his personality are key to understanding his leadership responses. | Having connected with the realities of other delegates on the course, he became more aware of the multiple perspectives that inform the responses of other people. He began reflecting (e.g. about the viewpoints and stakes of others) more before acting in work interactions. He felt that overall he was being able to respond more genuinely and contribute more constructively. | P8 formed a more nuanced view of leadership and began modulating his responses | PD |
| Self-determination | P8 was maintaining a professional persona (authoritative lecturer and successful manager) as a strategy to wall off and protect his personal life. | P8 began to discard features of the professional persona, to the extent that they were not truly meaningful to him (e.g. phasing out lecturing assignments). He realized that working in strategy and helping others develop resonates more with him and began focusing more on these types of roles. | P8's is pursuing what is more meaningful to him and letting go of what is not meaningful to him | PD |

SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.2.9 *Participant 9, Male*

Summary

Background. P9 was concerned about a lack of confidence as well as his tendency, on the workplace, to over-prepare and under-communicate. Related to this, was a tendency to focus on the details at the expense of the big picture. An accomplished functional expert, P9 was starting to have more leadership-oriented roles within his organization and noticing that bringing the team along was challenging for him. At PTFL, P9 became aware of a tendency driving him to seek positive affirmation from external sources. In his explanation, this focus on external validation was at the root of why he was overly preoccupied with appearing prepared (or perfect, ideally) in the eyes of others.

Development outcomes. Right after PTFL, P9 seemed greatly energized by the idea of changing. P9 identified some practical ways to change his communication patterns and make his routines more efficient. He intensified meetings with his team and bosses and practiced showing up (relatively) unprepared to make larger room for conversations. He also strived to focus more on a high level view of the deliverables his team was accountable for. Later, however, P9's morale about what he was accomplishing began to decline and did not seem at all to recover before the end of the research. In interviews three and four, P9 stressed that he had not done enough on virtually all the lines of change he had been pursuing. He also noted that, perhaps because of PTFL, new lines of change had been introduced. Notably, he had started to question what type of career would be most meaningful for him. P9 discussed openly his feelings of being overwhelmed: his difficulties with taming his workload, keeping at bay the pattern of seeking affirmation, and contemplating bigger interrogatives about his deeper values and the future. From the interviews, it seemed possible that P9 was prone to cyclical waves of demoralization¹²⁴. Perhaps P9 was not doing as bad as he assessed by himself. HE seemed not able to easily feel satisfied with his efforts: not feeling pleased with himself perhaps caused a negative spiral by diverting him from his efforts (perhaps because of a pattern of seeking affirmation from external sources, discussed in section 4.5).

Development direction. Within the span of the research, P9 was able to make some personality adjustments (described above). However, P9 himself was generally not

¹²⁴ P9 seemed overwhelmed by emerging challenges and external pressure: he was often *“getting lost and losing perspective”*, rather than *“keeping that positive outlook and not getting buried down in the detail”* (P9_R3).

convinced that the change achieved was sufficient or sticking. P9 did not think that he had been able to overcome his need for positive affirmation: poignantly, he described his struggle in identifying and relying on an internal source of validation and authority. Perhaps this struggle was inevitably a part of his battle; perhaps, in terms of personal development, perhaps a large scale change effort was underway. For the purpose of this research, his case is categorized as personality adjustment because no observable development seemed to be realized (in terms of integration, sophistication, or self-determination) within the scope of the research.

Context. P9's personal context seemed to be fully supportive of P9. However, as the research unfolded, his work context was becoming increasingly characterized by instability: his role was shifting towards more of a leadership function; workplace demands seemed to increase uncomfortably; and, he had started considering a career change.

Outlook. P9 proactive in his attitude towards change: for example, already before PTFL, he had studied and begun to implement a methodology¹²⁵ to make his work routines more effective. P9 also made several comments which underscored that he believed to have an key role in attaining change. However, as described above, the initial momentum (just after PTFL) was followed by a decline in morale: P9 tended to be underwhelmed by what he was achieving.

Interaction with me. An interesting aspect of my interaction with P9 is that I often took up the role of encouraging him. In the first interview, I proposed that maybe he over-prepared because he wanted his team to feel they had all the information they needed. In the second interview, following PTFL's main module, I prompted him to say whether the group had given him any positive feedback. In the third interview, I acknowledged his comments that he had had an extremely taxing time at work and said I would keep some questions for our next interview. Finally, in the fourth interview, I distinctly perceived his disappointment and did what I could to convey that transition can feels uncomfortable and that I believed he was going to do well. As a pattern, at every interview P9 seemed to make himself less and less—and I responded by trying to lift his morale. Interestingly, this looks like a pattern of seeking affirmation interacting with a pattern of accommodation.

¹²⁵ From David Allen's book *Getting Things Done*

Table 14. Developmental outcomes: P9's story

| | Before | After | Comment | * |
|----------------|---|---|---|----|
| Integration | P9 felt that he is lacking in self-confidence. At work he needs to extensively prepare for every interaction and tends to under-communicate and over-prepare. P9's preoccupation with details causes him to easily feel overwhelmed by inflows of information and prevents him from gaining a high level perspective and a more strategic outlook | P9 gained awareness of a pattern of seeking affirmation from external sources. He was also able to identify a root cause for this pattern in his background | P9 became aware of a limiting pattern around seeking affirmation and integrated this new understanding. However, for him, trying to change was extremely challenging: he was iteratively <i>"getting lost and losing perspective"</i> rather than <i>"keeping that positive outlook and not getting buried down in the detail"</i> (P9_R3). As of the end of the research, P9 was still not able to establish a connection with an inner source of authority and validation | SA |
| Sophistication | At work, P9 has been a strong performer individually. However, as a leader of a team he has been facing challenges in bringing others along. | <p>P9 was able to find practical ways to start implementing some change by modifying some of his routines—for example his communication patterns at work and home.</p> <p>P9's attention to external validation is to the detriment of his attention toward the needs of others in his team. He realized that leading a team is not about being prepared beyond criticism, but rather about working together with others towards a shared outcome. He also realized that different people and situations require of him different responses and approaches.</p> | <p>P9 achieved some personality adjustment.</p> <p>His insights on leadership demonstrate a greater of sophistication. However, it is unclear if P9 was able to realize a change in his practice--P9 himself was not satisfied that the way he related with others at work had changed significantly.</p> | PA |

Self-determination

P9 had a sense that, due to his preoccupation with details and workflows, he had not been addressing larger questions—including questions around his overall sense of purpose and direction.

P9's experience at PTFL opened a new window on his interior world. This had raised a question around what would be a truly fulfilling career for him. P9 found thinking about himself and the future extremely challenging. At the end of the research, he seemed to be in an uncomfortable impasse—he could not return to how he was before but seemed to not know yet how to move forward.

P9's awareness of a need to discern for himself a direction for the future greatly improved from the beginning to the end of the research. At the end of the study, P9 seemed overwhelmed by this realization.

SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment ; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

4.2.3 Conclusion

For all nine participants, a process of change was found to occur. In the sample, there were nine (out of nine) cases of expanded self-awareness, five (out of seven) cases of personal development¹²⁶, and two (out of seven) cases of personality adjustment. In all five cases where personal development was found to occur, there was evidence of greater integration, sophistication and self-determination. In the other cases, personality adjustments consisted in a change at the behavioral level but without evidence of systemic change. In all five cases where personal development was found to occur, expansion of leadership capabilities was also found to occur. The table below summarizes developmental outcomes for all nine participants. The following table summarizes evidence around implications for leadership practice and leadership development.

¹²⁶ For the purpose of assessing personality and adjustment and personal development a reduced sample (N=7) was considered, given that two participants dropped out of the research after their second interview.

Table 15. Stories of change through the lens of the personal development framework

| P | Notes on participant | Notes on context | Original issue | Integration | Sophistication | Self-determination | Categorization |
|----|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| P1 | Background as clinical psychologist- | Challenging personal and work context | Void in confidence | Of validation received on PTFL; sense of inner strength and core self | She is as deserving as others; okay for others to take responsibility and for her to get support | Life and career choices attuned with her needs and sense of what is good for her | SA PD |
| P2 | Discontinued research after interview two | Mixed evidence | Self-awareness blind spot | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | SA PA/PD: no data |
| P3 | Conflicted and paradoxical views | Mixed evidence | Self-awareness blind spot | Inconclusive evidence | Inconclusive evidence | Inconclusive evidence | SA (selective) PA (selective: mitigated pattern of interrupting and interjecting) PD: no evidence |
| P4 | Discontinued research after interview two | Supportive personal and work contexts | Self-awareness blind spot | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | Insufficient data | SA PA/PD: no data |

(continued) Summary of the nine stories change through the lens of the personal development framework

| | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|----------|
| P5 | Background as forensic psychiatrist | Challenging personal and work contexts | Self-critical, driven to incessantly do more and better | Of her way of being in the personal and professional domains | View of herself not as at odds with others, but as part of a system--from which she draws support and to which she contributes positively (image of tree) | Values bringing others along; now feels that she can and does do better with other than was done with her | SA PD |
| P6 | - | Supportive personal and work contexts | Personal challenges in leadership situation (e.g. question as to whether he should be a more directive leader) | Of validation received by PTFL group; sense of fuller confidence | More nuanced understanding of leadership (different styles for different situations) | Pursued initiatives to improve personal presence; continued on personal/career directions that are meaningful for him. | SA PD |
| P7 | - | Supportive personal and work contexts | Insomnia Illness is a taboo | Now considers health part of life; and, having to manage illness as part of her psychology; | From considering illness and career as mutually exclusive, to a new understanding which allows her how to preserve her health and pursue her career | Made choices to improve lifestyle to support her health | SA PD |

(continued) Summary of the nine stories change through the lens of the personal development framework

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|--|--|---|--|
| P8 | - Supportive personal and work contexts | Personal challenges in leadership situation (e.g. shifting focus from operational to strategic) Homosexuality is a taboo | Of his way of being in personal and professional life; of his homosexuality in his professional identity; | More nuanced understanding of leadership: realization that there is a multiplicity of views and backgrounds as motivation for more thoughtful interactions; | Discarding elements of the professional persona (lecturing); pursuing, at work, roles that are more meaningful (more mentorship roles and more focus on strategy) | SA PD |
| P9 | - Challenging work context Supportive home context | Lack of self-confidence; tendency to over-prepare and under-communicate | Realization of acceptance of a pattern of seeking affirmation; as of the end of the study, however, there is no evidence of significant integration having taken place | Significant increase in complexity of understanding (incl. awareness of limiting pattern); as of the end of the research, there is a sense of being overwhelmed by this complexity | Realization that his sense of purpose might not resonate with current career set up; as of the end of the study, no evidence of progress in reflecting about this | SA PA communication routines at work and home) PD: no evidence |

SA = expanded self-awareness; PA = personality adjustment ; PD = personal development;

Compiled by the author.

Table 16. Summary of implications for leadership practice and leadership development

| P | Original issue | Implication for leadership practice | PD* | Implication for leadership development | Leadership change |
|----|---|---|---------|--|---------------------------|
| P1 | Void in confidence | Difficulty in holding asserting adequately high expectations of others Disproportionate reliance on self-sufficiency | Yes | More at ease with having expectations of others, able of clearer and more direct communications—there is a time and a place for being assertive Appreciative of inter-independence and facilitating greater collaboration | Expansion of capabilities |
| P2 | Self-awareness blind spot | No mention of personal leadership challenges | No data | No data | No data |
| P3 | Self-awareness blind spot | No mention of personal leadership challenges | No | Mitigation of pattern of interrupting and interjecting on the workplace (only in selected relationships) | Behavioral adjustment |
| P4 | Self-awareness blind spot | Insufficient data | No data | No data | No data |
| P5 | Self-critical, driven to incessantly do more and better | Perceived as exceedingly demanding and “fierce” (P5_R4) Uncertain of her contribution on the board | Yes | Better able to flex her style, put others in her team at ease and supporting them in meeting requirements Better able to assert her contribution on the board | Expansion of capabilities |
| P6 | Personal challenges in leadership situations | Wondering whether he should be more directive (preference for being affiliative) | Yes | Better able to understand the situation and needs of others and to flex his style (affiliative or directive) according to their needs | Expansion of capabilities |

(continued) Summary of implications for leadership practice and leadership development

| | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|----------------------------------|
| P7 | <p>Insomnia</p> <p>Illness is a taboo</p> | <p>Affected by insomnia</p> <p>Would like to be better at helping others</p> <p>No mention of other specific challenges</p> | <p>Yes</p> <p>Feels more rested and relaxed. Less defensive, hence better relationships with superiors. More patience and presence with her team</p> | <p>Expansion of capabilities</p> |
| P8 | <p>Personal challenges in leadership situations</p> <p>Homosexuality is a taboo</p> | <p>Challenging to devote sufficient attention to strategic side of the business</p> | <p>Yes</p> <p>Eliminated lecturing commitments in favor of more focus on strategy and mentoring (more meaningful)</p> <p>Improved relationships with others thanks to greater confidence—e.g., better able to step up to others when needed or to acknowledge and show gratitude for compliments</p> <p>More aware of other perspectives, reflecting more before acting</p> | <p>Expansion of capabilities</p> |
| P9 | <p>Lack of self-confidence; tendency to over-prepare and under-communicate</p> | <p>Tendency to over-prepare and under-communicate</p> | <p>No</p> <p>Personality adjustment: increased frequency of communication routines with bosses and team</p> | <p>Behavioral adjustment</p> |

*PD = personal development

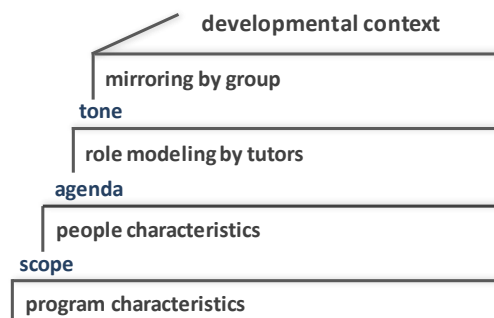
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4.3 Developmental context

4.3.1 Introduction

Findings on developmental context were derived from a phase of cross-sectional analysis¹²⁷. In this section, I gather and consolidate opinions across the sample concerning the distinctive characteristics of PTFL as a developmental context. Based on the evidence in this research, *developmental context* is defined as *a physical and social place which performs holding environment functions and, in virtue of certain distinctive and relatively stable characteristics, is ideally conducive to a specific type of developmental process*. Developmental context is seen as an entity unfolding in four main steps following the interaction of certain key elements that build onto each other: scope, agenda and tone (see a simplified model in the figure below).

Figure 12. Key elements of developmental context



Compiled by the author.

The present section identifies a relationship between these key elements of developmental context and specific aspects of a developmental initiative that seem to most directly affect them: respectively, program characteristics (affecting scope), group characteristics (affecting agenda); role modeling by tutors (affecting tone); and, mirroring by the group of the actions role modeled by the tutors (affecting the overall developmental context).

¹²⁷ By cross-sectional analysis, I mean the study of all the data gathered, across interviews and participants

4.3.2 Scope: program characteristics

4.3.2.1 *The core content of the program*

On PTFL, participants themselves provide most of the content that fill the week in lieu of lectures and theory:

“There was so much material within the group” (P9_R2)

“It’s very much about the people in the room” (P2_R2)

Content provided by participants was in terms of the life stories of individual delegates. Participants were surprised about the great depth in which personal histories were delved in:

“I didn’t quite realize at the start of the course how it would be deep into personal experiences and my history and that sort of thing” (P8_R2)

“It was a really weird experience actually. [...], it started off like any other training session, you meet the other delegates and then I think it was... The second day when we started, somebody sat in a chair and started telling their life story. And by the end of that day [...] two people had done their stories” (P7_R2)

“We tried to be warned about the content involved and the sort of emotional attack that can take place [...] but it still comes as a surprise to see quite how it affects people in different ways” (P9_R2)

In addition to life stories, content was also provided by the live interaction among participants. Live interaction offered a view on some of the typical response patterns of individuals:

“Other courses try to put people into roles and into role-playing, which never

really gets to the bottom of it because people are pretending about the causes for doing things. But this is real life and people are talking from their own experiences and reacting to it which you would never get on your own” (P9_R2)

“You are there, you know, warts and all. And people speak about you and give you feedback.... So I don’t think we get that on a lot of courses we go on.” (P2_R2)

With regard to both life stories and live interaction, the focus was not limited to cognitive explanations by participants; rather, the emphasis was on interpreting emotional responses behind rationalizations presented by participants:

“And I think that’s the big difference with this course: it is about your own personal effectiveness. And much more about... Feelings and emotions, hem, rather than cognitions and skills.” (P1_R2)

All other participants expressed some surprise, following the course, about the little extent to which theory was covered during the week:

“You certainly don’t need a lot of notes [...]I didn’t read anything for the whole week” (P2_R2)

“This wasn’t done the way other leadership courses are done, things about managing conflicts [...], tools for effective leadership, leadership models. A lot of tools, but that one was just on a different level to any of the ones I had done before” (P2_R2)

“There was very little theory in the course, which I was surprised at to start with” (P9_R2)

Of the comparatively little theory that is covered during the course¹²⁸, the piece that seemed to make the most impact on participants is a (high level) review of psychological theories of child development, with a focus on children's needs during the formative years:

"You're looking at that lifecycle between zero and seven years old, which is very important to me, because I have two children under seven, so... That raised very much the importance of what [my children] learn and do over the next year and up to seven years, that is going to be very important" (P4_R2)

This topic seems to make a strong impact on the PTFL audience. This is partly because typically some delegates have children in the 0-7 range of formative years at the time they attend PTFL. The impact of this topic is also due to the connections that, during the week, participants make between the theory that is reviewed and actual childhood memories--whether their own or of fellow delegates. Overall, participants highlighted that PTFL is distinct from other management training previously experienced because its core content is provided in large part by themselves.

4.3.2.2 *The approach underpinning the program*

The approach underlying PTFL seems determined by two aspects: the methodology that is used on the course and the purpose of the program. In terms of methodology, PTFL was presented earlier¹²⁹ as a program informed by no single approach or framework. That is because tutors aim to respond to every individual according to their current outlook and needs. Tutors assess on a case by case basis how likely it is that a participant may benefit from a more consulting versus counseling oriented session. If the counseling route is pursued, then the tutors draw from their broad preparation in psychology. The program's methodology, then, relies on the tutors' preparation and expertise more than it relies on a single framework (whether of the therapeutic or management development type). Participants seemed to be reassured when realizing the role and preparation of tutors. In the words of P4:

"They felt in control, in a good way. Hem... That nothing really bad was going to happen. That they'd know what to do. And, hem... That they would, I think

¹²⁸ A description of the course is included in a dedicated section within the methodology chapter

¹²⁹ See dedicated section in the methodology chapter

as they explained in the beginning, that they would push you past your comfort zone, but that they... That it wouldn't... That they would be able to manage it. Hem... So yeah, and, they are clearly very experienced. Hem... Plus sense of humor. Yeah, they were excellent" (P1_R2)

Given this methodological 'equipment', the course's purpose is to remain as open to the counseling end of the personal development continuum¹³⁰ as needed according to the issues brought forward by the group. Based on a taster session, P5 (whose background is psychology) had assessed PTFL as follows:

"Because there is an element which...I think it is going to be a bit like taking part in group therapy, I think. You know, that's slightly interesting as a position to be in as a [psychologist]" (P5_R1);

Later, participants across the sample confirmed that the course overall features a strong element of counseling:

"We became kind of a counseling group by the end of the week" (P4_R2)

"Therapy... is treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder, treatment or healing of psychological disorders by psychological means. It comes from Latin therapia, or greek, meaning healing, therapia means you start treating medically, there you go. Therapia." (P3_R2)

This, despite the fact that, in the sample of this research, only two individuals (P1 and P5) seem to have had a more therapy-oriented session on the course:

"I've been looking at things like that, similar sorts of issues, with a coach. It's been about four two-hour sessions. And, hem, which have also been very powerful, but nowhere near, hem, I think the depth they got to on the course." (P1_R2)

¹³⁰ The continuum of personal development initiatives (Joo 2005) runs from consulting to counseling, as presented in the literature review chapter.

“You can’t go through an intervention like Module 1 and not have something changed. I don’t think” (P5_R2)

The fact is that it is often difficult to understand where might be the boundary, in a specific case, between consulting and counseling. First, limiting patterns seem to happen to everybody, no matter how psychologically whole they are:

“It is a real eye-opener, you know, these people who on first view you think you can see they are accomplished and have achieved in where they’ve got to. And yet behind the façade they put forward there is all sorts of stories and reasons and causes for them being the way they are, some of which has helped them and some of which has enforced their limiting responses” (P9_R2)

Additionally, the examples of P7, P8 and P9 included a significant issue with confidence (arising from denial of illness, concealment of sexual identity, and from a pattern of seeking positive affirmation respectively). According to all three of these participants, a significant aspect of their session on the program was the psychologically restorative effect from the validation received by the rest of the group. Even though their sessions seemed ‘lighter-weight’, they still included some element of counseling. That some element of counseling, then colored most of the sessions at PTFL seems beyond doubt—but how was the emphasis on counseling received by the group overall?

There was only one case in the research where a participant had a squarely counseling-like session. P6 received mostly pragmatic advice about how to improve his physical presence. P6 noted that he himself probably did not have a need for a counseling-oriented program:

“For me the question is whether it is... purely the PTFL environment that has given me those skills, or whether those skills I could have got from a more general leadership-style course that wasn’t focused on personal issues. Because, as I say, I don’t think I brought any big personal issues or I had any big personal issues to uncover, and I felt very lucky that it was that way” (P6_R2);

However, P6 also noted that he greatly valued the opportunity to witness the counseling approach. Together with virtually all other participants, he found that

witnessing and contributing to the counseling process oriented toward others had enriched him. In the example of P6, following the course he identified a qualitative change in how he was able to empathize with others. There was, however, one exception to this generalized positive response to the counseling element in PTFL. P3 expressed resentment around the fact that the course focused on personal issues (to the extent of bordering with therapy) rather than strictly professional topics:

“[The tutor’s] therapy is for fucked up fuckers.” (P3_R2);

In P3’s story, however, evidence around almost everything is essentially controversial and inconclusive. It is hardly possible to venture interpretations of what P3’s response implies—beyond confirming that the course has an element of counseling—for the present discussion of developmental context. Descriptions by participants overall indicate that PTFL’s methodology is not defined by a specific framework and relies on the psychology expertise of the tutors; also, that the program’s purpose is to be as open to counseling-oriented sessions as needed according to the issues brought forward by individual delegates.

4.3.2.3 *Summary*

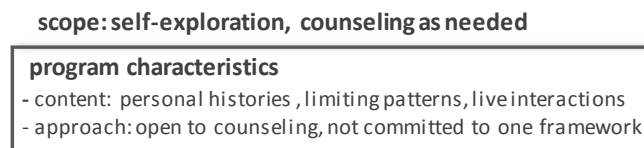
To summarize, the core content of PTFL is provided by its participants and consists of their life stories and their live interaction on the course. The approach underpinning the course is characterized by its openness to the counseling end of the continuum of personal development; also, by the methodological equipment (of the tutors) actually supporting this broad aim.

The core content and approach of PTFL (including the preparation of the tutors) seem to signal to participants what is the breadth and depth of the program: 1) the whole of a person’s history and character is admitted into the boundary of what is examined at the course¹³¹; and 2) there is enough professional expertise on the course (the psychology training and experience of the tutors) to handle the emergence of a range of situations and experiences (including traumatic memories) and to utilize the group as a therapy resource.

¹³¹ It is important to note, however, that the selection criteria for the course exclude admission for individuals with pathological conditions, who would be referred to a more suitable context.

Participants' assessments of what they took away from the program fit these parameters quite closely: participants did not report taking away significant notional content; however, participants on the whole did report taking away a more in-depth knowledge of themselves, an improvement of the issues that were affecting them, and a sense of enhanced understanding of and empathy for others. Hence, certain program characteristics (core content and approach as identified in this research, see figure below) seem able to set the **scope** of a developmental initiative.

Figure 13. The scope of PTFL as a developmental initiative



Compiled by the author.

Scope is thus defined as ***the breadth and depth of what can actually be addressed within a developmental initiative.***

4.3.3 Agenda: people characteristics

Research participants belonged to two different PTFL groups. Nevertheless they consistently identified the same characteristics as key in facilitating the processes on the course. These characteristics are the diversity and peer level within the group and the initial unfamiliarity of delegates with each other.

4.3.3.1 Diversity

A number of participants spontaneously pointed out the diverse composition of the group:

"I guess that the range of people that were there... And were all from very different backgrounds, and that was really one of the benefits of it. Different cultures, different industries.... "(P1_R2)

"One-to-one I would have probably got less out of it. I think the fact that it is ten very different... Culture's different, age's different, background's different, education's different" (P2_R2;

"No, I think it was a very good group of people. Obviously, very mixed backgrounds, and positions, and so on. No, I think it was a great week" (P4_R2)

There was a crucial benefit deriving from such diversity, in that it seemed to corroborate the validity of the feedback received by delegates:

"They all come back with... With the same feedback and they all observe the same thing [...] I had to stand in front of every single one of them and let them have a very, very in depth picture of me and I wasn't allowed to respond" (P2_R2)

"Because I actually got 12 different people telling me different things about me. And that.... And therefore you can actually... There is almost more faith in what.... If just one person said what they think about me, but 12 people said

things and they were very similar things. And therefore they must be. And that's very effective" (P9_R2)

In other words, the diversity of backgrounds and responses within the group reassured individuals that when they did receive uniform feedback from the group, this feedback was not just the product of some shared bias.

An additional benefit of a diverse group included receiving a fresh perspective—compared, for example, to the perspective that would be prevalent back in the workplace:

"That helped, I think, bring different insights than if I had just been talking with colleagues here. Or a mentor here." (P1_R2)

Also, as seen in the case of a number of participants, diversity facilitated the realization of the multiplicity of views and backgrounds that informs responses of different people:

"The way in which different people... Respond in certain situations, and the fact that we were all together in the same situation and we were all asked to respond to the same thing, but we all responded in very different ways."(P6_R3)

4.3.3.2 *Peer level*

While diversity was crucial, there was one aspect of similarity that seemed as crucial for the balance of the group. Delegates are comparable in terms of personal achievements and social standing:

"People who are clearly very successful and present very well. And recognizing what you already know [chuckles] that everyone has got issues. But just... I suppose, feeling it with them--that made a difference.' (P1_R2)

"All of us really are in pretty senior management positions"(P2_R2)

“And then having, you know, for us 13... It was a big group. And having 13... You know, highly achieving people probing into the links that may or may not be there was one thing” (P5_R2)

“Yeah, we were from very different industries, but very similar sort of stage. Quite senior professionals, done very well, and still have further places to go, and were... You know, and everyone was open to share knowledge of what their limiting patterns were and be honest with each other” (P8_R2)

Some of the language in these quotes (“clearly very successful”, “pretty senior”, “highly achieving”, “done very well, and still have further places to go”) indicates the level of achievement of other delegates was inspiring mutual respect. A level of respect likely had a role in how delegates evaluated the trustworthiness of their feedback. However, my opinion is that the key aspect that participants were really referring to is comparability—and not necessarily the high level of achievement. Conceivably, if an individual felt sensibly inferior to other delegates, he or she would be likely to perceive the group as a threatening, rather a holding, environment. On the other hand, if an individual felt superior to the other delegates, then it would be easy for him or her to dismiss feedback. Supporting the notion that comparability matters, two participants pointed out the importance of a peer level within the group:

“The reactions of other people... It was good to get their reactions because you felt that you were getting the reactions of other people who were on the same level as you. And, were not specifically trained necessarily... In that... In psychoanalysis, or anything like that. But that just had, personally, the kind of reactions, I think, that your colleagues could have, or your family could have, or whatever. So I think it was kind of good having those reactions as well, because they were kind of just normal human reactions—that any other group of people could have had. So that is what helped me in thinking ‘Hey, I shouldn’t be hiding what is inside me, because look at how these people have reacted!’” (P7_R2)

“There was somebody else on the course who started from a different place,

because I think she had gone to a taster course already. So I think it wasn't a completely level field on day one because of that. And that was someone who also worked in psychology professionally, so I think that took a bit of adjusting to before we all kind felt leveled, on the first day." (P6_R4)

4.3.3.3 **Unfamiliarity**

Participants identified a last salient characteristic of their groups—that is, delegates were initially unfamiliar with each other:

"It was... You know, mixing with a group of 12 strangers [...] How often in your lifetime you meet 12.... Well, 11 other random people, a psychologist and a psychiatrist [the two tutors], and you tell them the story of your life, you know, naught to all. It just doesn't happen" (P9_R2)

"Yeah. [laughs] yet it's a bunch of strangers!" (P1_R2)

The main reason why unfamiliarity was perceived as salient is that it mitigated the extent to which feedback might be informed by personal agendas:

"There's benefits for having those... Outside of your social group, for many reasons" (P6_R3)

"It's quite intriguing, to get... I would imagine that other people on the course are going to give feedback on how I come across, on how I... On how I deliver myself. That feedback, would be worth taking note of. These are people that you're not working with every day; they don't know the work scenario, they don't know me, I don't know them. Hem, so that's quite an honest assessment of yourself, so I'm quite intrigued to find out." (P4_R1)

Another reason why this characteristic was perceived as salient had something to do with the atmosphere it created. Some felt that unfamiliarity somehow raised stakes—that in sharing with strangers one is able to reenact certain memories more freely and relive emotions quite vividly:

"Some gently probing in an open environment can be very emotional because you are not just like with a counselor one on one, you tell something to 12 strangers." (P9_R2)

“Oh, well, it connects you with the reality... With the real pattern. It connects you to, if you like, to the authenticity that the course is trying to tap into”(P5_R2)

4.3.3.4 *Summary*

Three key characteristics of the groups attending PTFL were their diversity, the peer level and unfamiliarity. The reasons why these characteristics are potentially the following:

- A diverse group is perceived as more capable of offering reliable and unbiased feedback than a uniform group.
- A group of peers is perceived as less threatening than a group whose members are identified as superiors; also, it is perceived as more authoritative than a group whose members are identified as inferiors.
- A group of strangers is perceived as better capable of disinterested feedback than a group of familiar people; also, it is perceived as allowing a freer and more vivid reliving of certain memories than would be possible within a familiar context.

The central issue around which all these themes seem to revolve is the question of what is the actual extent to which freedom of expression and self-exploration are supported by a developmental initiative. Participants reported growing surprisingly comfortable with sharing things they never thought they would share even with close friends, let alone strangers. Also, they reported becoming, in quite a natural way, inclined to externalize to others very honest, self-less and caring feedback. There are indications that participants would not have had similar expectations of an interaction with closer acquaintances (relatives, friends or colleagues) or with individuals less comparable to themselves (for example, a group of students or only the tutors). It seems then that certain key characteristics of the people involved in a development initiative are likely to affect its **agenda** (see figure below).

Figure 14. Agenda of PTFL as a developmental context

agenda: freedom to disclose, disinterested feedback

people characteristics

- diversity - unfamiliarity
- peer level

scope: self-exploration, counseling as needed

program characteristics

- content: personal histories , limiting patterns, live interactions
- approach: open to counseling, not committed to one framework

Compiled by the author.

Agenda is defined as ***the actual latitude that individuals feel that they have to freely explore different directions of inquiry within a developmental initiative.***

4.3.4 Tone: role-modeling by tutors

When asked about the role of tutors, participants highlighted that the tutors' primary function seemed to be that of facilitating the creation of an environment:

"[Their role was] very much to facilitate. To create the environment that is necessary to share these things"(P9_R2)

This function seemed to be carried out through the role-modeling of key behaviors in front of the group. Some of these behaviors seemed aimed at establishing and preserving a holding environment; some others seemed to create an atmosphere that is distinctive of PTFL.

4.3.4.1 Behaviors establishing a holding environment

A holding environment performs three key functions: support, challenge and continuity¹³². Many of the elements highlighted by participants fit into this notion of holding environment. As an element of support, participants perceived that the tutors were making the environment a safe one:

"In terms of the creation of a safe environment, the facilitation, the getting to know each other and the kind of care for individuals' personal and social wellbeing you couldn't improve on that, you know, they are masterly at it" (P6_R4)

"I'd say certainly the first day obviously they were very much leading. And they were guiding... guiding us. [...To] make sure a trust level was established." (P2_R2)

"I thought of it—the way the course is run—and I think, all the credit to [the tutors], who made it feel like a very safe environment for people to go

¹³² According to Kegan (1982), see literature review chapter

through that process of reflection and self-analysis“ (P6_R2)

“They made it very safe” (P1_R2)

As an element of challenge, participants perceived that the tutors would lead the process of inquiry into each person’s story and would drive the inquiry all the way (until the core of the matter would surface):

“It was just fascinating to watch, how they just... Peck and peck away until basically they get at what is the heart of what the problem is. So that was just fascinating to observe, I must admit” (P2_R2)

“You have the whole story, and it would seem reasonably obvious to me, and I guess to [the tutors], where the fundamental and crucial issues to people were” (P5_R5)

“They are incredibly powerful at identifying where there is more to come, and if someone was trying to get away with part of the story and they would pounce on it very quickly and know that there was more to come. Whether through their questioning or their actions or some way... Or an exercise they would suggest to then move on to get to the real heart of the core of the matter. I think, very impressive. I thought they work well off of each other, picking up on different areas. Daniela is incredibly insightful and could judge the character of a person or where the story was going very quickly. Very impressive.” (P9_R2)

As an element of continuity, participants perceived that the tutors were constantly monitoring the environment and would not allow its quality to deteriorate:

“[They] led the insights really. [...] And also [they were] stopping people, you know, when the group members were questioning, stopping people when they were going on the wrong track. That was also quite important. [...] “[The tutors] would kind of pull it back into the direction it needed to go. And I think that was a very important function of theirs” (P5_R5)

“[They] were just... They just controlled the room” (P2_R2)

4.3.4.2 *Distinctive behaviors: vulnerability, processing of emotions, and permission to share*

Other distinctive behaviors that were demonstrated by the tutors, although functionally related to functions of support, challenge or continuity, are not necessarily explained by the traditional construct of holding environment. One of these behaviors is vulnerability:

“Because [lead tutor] did that, and we felt we were getting something of [him]. And the two of them. And that means there is no barrier. [...]. [It's] about... almost involving yourself with your patients, but certainly in that environment, we didn't just want to see a facilitator, we wanted to see the man behind him. And we got some. Not... Not as much as we all gave, but certainly giving... You know, he gives something of himself” (P8_R2)

It seems like the tutors did not, as would be common in many training situations, maintain a distance between themselves and the group. On the contrary, they demonstrated how to let others in who they are as people behind their professional role. The ability to develop closeness is an aspect essential for the running of PTFE: if participants on the course did not develop this ability, the program (as it is currently conceived of) could not possibly take off.

Tutors also demonstrated how they handled themselves when strong emotions surfaced in the room because of other people sharing sensitive parts of their stories:

“They are not just facilitating, but they are involved and mixed up in all of the emotions going on” (P8_R2)

The ability to process emotions is also essential to the functioning of the course, because of the emotional intensity that people are potentially going to witness:

“Actually what you experience is emotion that normally wouldn't have to deal with [...] you turn around and you have nowhere else to go. You can't go and

hide. I think...There are set certain things that you relate to... In other people.”
(P4_R2)

“And by the end of that day when two people had done their stories, I thought I might actually leave the course.” (P7_R2)

Aside from the two research participants with a background in psychology, everyone else in the group would normally not be exposed to the level and range of emotions that they are likely to encounter on the course. In fact, participants found themselves progressing on a learning curve around emotional processing:

“I think throughout the week, it was very emotion-filled as a room. [...] good learning curve about how to deal with that kind of emotion.” (P4_R2)

“As the week went on, I think it became--I'm not sure whether it became easier, but perhaps it was less of a shock and perhaps emotionally I think I began to take control better of my emotions. [...] I think I also became more emotionally attuned to the other people around me in the group” (P7_R2)

“And I felt myself joining in more and more and I believed to be contributing well—I was pleased in my contribution.” (P9_R2)

Lastly, tutors extended to the group permission to share. They did so, it seems, by role-modeling complementary behavior: open sharing on one hand, and listening and acceptance on the other. In terms of exemplifying open sharing, I know from my direct experience of the course that tutors tend to draw from their personal histories, both to demonstrate some of the exercises and to illustrate implications of the more theoretical content that is offered. The group observed that open sharing was being demonstrated with the collaboration of the first participant to tell her life story in front of the group:

“I thought then why had he [the tutor] picked that person he had [to go first]. [...] that just set the tone. Because... The first person up to go up there [...] That, that set the scene for the whole week, for sure. [...] Hem, you can put someone else up there and I think the tone of the week might be different. But hem... they picked this one, they did it wisely, and then it kind of set the

benchmark for openness, honesty... And, trust that you could say anything. That no one was going to judge you.” (P2_R2)

“From day one it was pretty ‘cards on the table’ kind of stuff, and in that set the scene for the rest of the week” (P4_R2)

To really enable open sharing, tutors had to also demonstrate its complementary elements—listening and acceptance:

“Watching the way [the tutors] engaged that [first] person, and dug way deeper in a very compassionate way, letting the class in... That, that set the scene for the whole week, for sure. Because I think it was done very, very well. [...] It kind of set the benchmark for openness, honesty... And, trust that you could say anything. That no one was going to judge you.” (P2_R2)

“[The tutors] obviously set up the stall very well... They set things up, in the first instance--I noticed, that was quite early on in the week” (P4_R2)

By demonstrating both sides of the exchange (openness to share on one side, and listening and acceptance on the other side) tutors effectively extended to the entire group a sort of permission to share:

“And I can think of a number of us on the course... I am just running around the room and what people brought out. There was quite a strong... I guess spiritual element of confession, healing, forgiveness.... That, yeah, that.....Yeah, that was quite significant.” (P1_R3)

“Some of the things that were shared were not that comfortable, were not that great, but nevertheless they were shared. So there was a level of trust there, which I think you have to have for the course to work. And I think the way it is structured, it has definitely supported that.” (P4_R2)

In summary, vulnerability, the processing of emotion and permission to share were the three distinctive behaviors role modeled by tutors which seemed essential to the functioning of PTF as a developmental context.

4.3.4.3 *Summary*

The group seems to have closely observed the tutors' behaviors since the very beginning of the course. Participants seemed also to uniformly interpret the tutors' behaviors as the ground rules for group interactions framing the week:

"Their function as facilitators was in the first place to structure the way the... The course developed" (P7_R2)

"I thought it was nicely structured. It was... [The tutors] created an open and trusting environment"(P8_R2)

"I think the way it is structured, it has definitely supported that." (P4_R2)

"The environment that is created is the key thing. That everyone, if not initially, then certainly by the end of day one or day two are all very open and honest and are opening up in a way that they have possibly never done to anyone before" (P9_R2)

By demonstrating some distinctive behaviors that were essential to the functioning of the group for the purposes of the course, tutors seemed to effectively set the **tone** for the week: that is, they signaled **what general attitude and the behaviors are acceptable and encouraged within the group**.

Figure 15. Tone of PTFI as a development context

tone: closeness, openness, acceptance

role modeling by tutors

- acceptance of vulnerability
- holding environment functions

agenda: freedom to disclose, disinterested feedback

people characteristics

- diversity - unfamiliarity
- peer level

scope: self-exploration, counseling as needed

program characteristics

- content: personal histories, limiting patterns, live interactions
- approach: open to counseling, not committed to one framework

Compiled by the author.

4.3.5 Overall quality: mirroring by the group

The generalized response of the group to the role-modeling by the tutors was to mirror the behaviors that had been demonstrated. The mirroring, it should be noted, happened spontaneously as opposed to in response to explicit instructions (as could have been, for example, an induction about counseling skills). In fact, when asked to describe their role in the group, participants described something similar to what the tutors had been showing. Based on the example of tutors, participants described themselves enacting and preserving the holding environment:

"... We wouldn't have gotten the same feedback from other people in the group if they hadn't facilitated some of the group activities, if they hadn't put in place some of the group activities that we did. You know, for instance, one of the things they asked us to do at the beginning was to go and stand in front of each member of the group and you had to give your reactions as to what you thought of that person based on what you had seen so far. You know, that sort of exercise is really, really interesting. So it doesn't work without them being there and doing that" (P7_R2)

"I hope that [...] when we had to buddy up and talk to someone else, I hope that I was able to help her bring out things that she hadn't thought about before. And I hope within the group, although I was probably relatively quiet, hem... I was able to put in my thoughts, and be constructive and supportive of

the other people within the group.” (P1_R2)

“ I just spent a huge amount of time listening to [my buddy, giving him advice” (P2_R2)

“Yeah, well, I think probably [that the kind of collegial atmosphere] bring[s] good things and bad things. I think it makes you feel threatened in some situations, and obviously that is not good, and it makes you feel supported and that is a great benefit” (P6_R2)

Participants also described group members as mirroring those behaviors that, in the previous section, were identified as distinctive of PTFL and essential to its running:

“And from that experience, the first person who went was very open and that set the trend for everybody else to that obviously follow suit and be equally as open. There's all sorts of things that came out, you know. “(P4_R2)

“It was a surprise how open people were, and very quickly went straight to a great depth and you kind of got to see everything they are made of. There was no... No holding back and we certainly had a group that participated to a great depth and beyond what you could possibly imagine. So that's just... That just blew me away.” (P2_R2)

The group seemed to have accepted vulnerability and the processing of emotions as integral part of the process they had embarked on. Also, they seemed to have internalized the permission to share received by the tutors. That this took place seemed to be a source of surprise for participants and there is little direct evidence explaining how it happened. However it seems clear that, once operational, the group (rather than the tutors) was carrying out most of the courses' processes:

“I was the second of the people going up and giving your life story... What I noticed is that it was actually then more down to the group, how interactive and how much... Because everybody's different, everybody gives their story, everybody has a different story. And people were less... The group became

much more involved, and obviously there was some guidance from [the tutors], but a lot of the feedback and suggestions and support actually started to come from the group, rather than from [the tutors].” (P4_R2)

“[Tutors] were very much observers, who would let the group... I mean, a lot of it was just the group actually discussing [...], and they just validated what was the right way. And if it won't maybe go in the right way maybe just make sure we stuck along the right path, and then... Yeah, and then they kind of left us engage and kind of do everything in the group. Hem... They're very knowledgeable, I mean, they are obviously two very gifted people” (P2_R2)

The significance of the mirroring by the group of behaviors demonstrated by tutors is that the group enacted a new social space which embodied and reinforced the scope, agenda and tone that had been set for the program. I imagine that, for participants, it must have not been too big a leap of faith to trust the tutors and think that they would be accepting, respectful and helpful towards them. Partly, this trust would build on the overall credentials of the tutors—and all participants seemed to have had a good first impression of the tutors. Trusting a group of complete strangers, however, strikes as a completely different matter: a degree of hesitation to share reserved information with strangers would seem just natural. The mirroring by the group helped overcome this hesitation. Single individuals started perceiving that they were surrounded by a system permeated by acceptance, care and constructiveness:

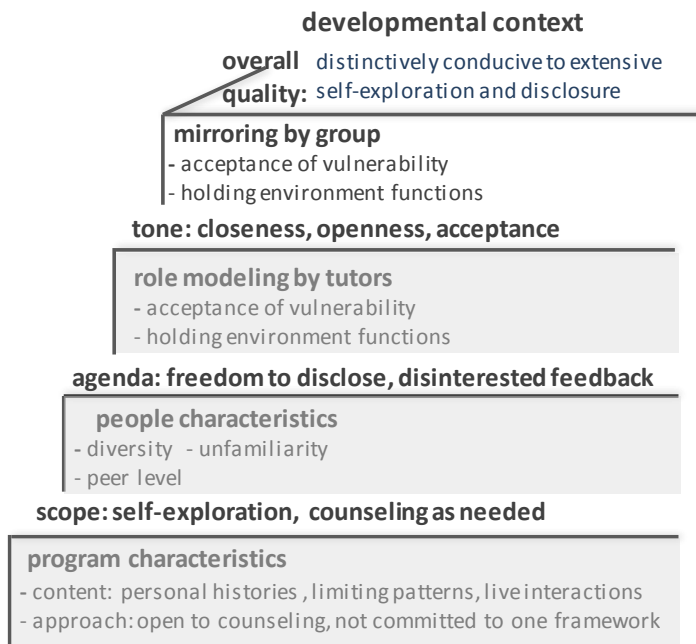
“Everyone, if not initially, then certainly by the end of day one or day two are all very open and honest and are opening up in a way that they have possibly never done to anyone before. The whole... other courses try to put people into roles and into role-playing, which never really gets to the bottom of it because people are pretending about the causes for doing things. But this is real life and people are talking from their own experiences and reacting to it which you would never get on your own.” (P9_R2)

“[People's] honesty, and the fact that you could feed back and they could feed back and there was no inappropriate or 'you can't say that'. No, if they were to say something they said it. [...] as opposed to one-to-one work, people can be very... they can play cool and not say things to your face, and behind back and... None of that, it was a very open and frank conversations. Hem, and a

very supportive group, in the group we were very supportive of each other, so hem... And we became very protective of each other so that was quite funny.”
 (P2_R2)

In other words, mirroring by the group strikes as the earliest point in the process of forming a developmental context where a distinctive and relatively stable environment is observable that, in the case of PFTL, seemed distinctively conducive to high degree of disclosure and self-exploration.

Figure 16. PFTL as a distinctive developmental context



Compiled by the author.

In the following paragraphs I present an operating definition of developmental context.

4.3.6 A definition of developmental context

In developing an operating definition of developmental context from this analysis, five aspects have played a key role. The first aspect is that participants seemed to identify the PTFL context as a physical space. Interviews are interspersed with reference to ‘the room’—the physical lecture room where the group meets for over eight hours daily:

“Looking at the room, I experienced when something kind of clicked: “okay, actually what they are saying is pretty accurate. I can see what I need to do differently”. And you can see that click with other people in the room as well” (P4_R2)

“In the room there was a lot of pathology” (P3_R3)

P6: “to be put in a room for nine hours a day, just listening to people talk [...] I didn't feel like I left the room at the end of the week with questions unanswered” (P6_R2)

The significance of this physical space seems to be that it is a dedicated one, separate from the spaces where regular work and personal activities take place¹³³:

“The whole being away from everything for five days also assists in the learning and gives you time to stop and think” (P9_R2)

“You are away from all other distractions, obviously you’re way from your home life, you’re away from your work life. I switched off from work completely, which was good. I made a conscious decision just to... If they really need me they will contact me on Monday. Which actually, as you look back, didn’t actually make... There is a few things still to tidy up. But. I kind of made a conscious decision, I’m not getting involved with work phone calls or things like that. Or even email, I switched off my blackberry and kept my phone only. This was not how I was going to spend my time. So, I was very

¹³³ The program is residential

much in tune with what was happening, and I was also into with the group. I think you have to do that. I think being away from the work and family environment, that certainly helps” (P4_R2);

“[It was] probably some time out from my situation to think for myself” (P1_R2)

Hence,

- 1) Participants recognized PTFL as a dedicated physical space that was clearly marked and safeguarded by the group.

The second aspect is that participants identified PTFL also as a social space. This was evident in descriptions of how close the group had become on the course:

“Also during the breaks, it was a very sociable group that we had. Everyone seemed to get on well with each other and were happy to talk about their experiences and their learnings” (P9_R2)

“I think the course... It was a great group, because everybody was there for each other and I think as a group we bonded really really well with each other [...] Actually at the end of the week I didn't really want to leave the course, or leave the people I spent the week with, whilst at the beginning I wanted to run away, and then in the end I didn't want to go” (P7_R2)

“And it is good that you spend together as a group—because, you know, you are eating together, you know, beginning in the morning, breakfast, lunch, dinner. You are with each other a lot of the day and a lot of the week . Which brings the group together as well” (P4_R2)

This was also evident in the enthusiasm of participants around meeting again at the follow up module:

“I'm looking forward to being there the night before, so looking forward to seeing all of them and yeah....” (P2_R2)

“It was really good to see people again. And to see what people had done, what they hadn't done. Any changes they had made.” (P1_R3)

"It was great to see the people" (P3_R3)

*"I was quite surprised about how much I enjoyed seeing everybody again. "
(P6_R3)*

Even P3, whose opinion on virtually everything about the course was quite controversial, expressed some (qualified) appreciation for the social element:

"Most of the people that on the course were pretty good... People. Hem... I had a good week. [...] Having good people there and one or two people on the course are really quite exceptional, and very supportive and very very clever and bright people. And that was very encouraging." (P3_R2)

But the implications of a social context were not only in terms of sociability. As mentioned earlier, there is a perception that whatever was accomplished during the course, it was accomplished *through* the group:

"It works mostly as a group there" (P2_R2)

"It was such a... Such a fast... Developmental relationships. Because you knew so much about... Not just people's flaws and worries, and... As well as their strengths" (P1_R2)

"seeing what other people are doing with that time as well and what they are getting from it motivates you to then get on and do it yourself" (P9_R2)

Three participants in particular thought that the group work had been uniquely helpful in their situation:

"Actually I think it's inherent in nature of the work of the group. No, I wouldn't... I have been practicing [as a psychologist] for very long time and haven't [achieved] this before so there is no indication that I would have done so. No, I think, you couldn't have done it on your own. [...]I think an intensity

of interaction and observation of others and reflection on self with feedback from others” (P5_R2)

“P1: [...] I suppose what helped me move on were a couple of things said by [the tutors] and also the background of... The context of doing that work within a group that was accepting.

Linda: Accepting also of negative emotions?

P1: Yeah. And thinking that I am still okay” (P1_R3)

“One to one, all you are doing is understanding yourself. Whereas with this type of course, you understand more about yourself but also how you react on others. And that you won’t get, one on one [...] And what the others, what the rest of the group told me is that I am perfectly fine as I am, I don’t need to put the wall up, and therefore I should be confident” (P8_R2)

Hence:

- 2) The group recognized as a further key and helpful element that PTFL was a social space where issues could be collectively worked on

The remaining three aspects stem from the perception by participants that the context they experience was an emerging and dynamic entity. For example, people felt that degree to which they were able to open up increased as the course evolved:

“The only change I recognize was in... Hem... With openness, I guess, which is what you’d expect, isn’t it. When, you know, I first spoke to my buddy about myself I was fairly... I was a bit hem... Fairly low key, slightly jokey, whilst by the time I told my story it was... It was much more heartfelt.” (P1_R2)

Also, participants observed that the group became more intent on shielding itself from external disruptions:

“It was interesting to see ten people coming together like that [...] And the first day on breaks we all went across the road and were taking phone calls and answering emails, and everybody working on laptops. But then Monday slash say Tuesday I don’t think I’d seen anyone ... By Wednesday, people just said: “I left it in my room”” (P2_R2)

As people began to know each other more, they also started and to care for each other more:

“You do get to know them very well, and what makes them function in the way they do in the world, in quite a short amount of time. And you do generally get to care about them as well.” (P6_R4)

“And [the tutors] got everybody caring about each other. So you got a real team spirit and closeness. So, yes, it was a very unique experience, one you won’t forget.” (P8_R2)

Overall, the way the group interacted matured during the week:

“So that was quite a good thing to see. We became kind of a counseling group by the end of the week” (P4_R2)

Hence, the group was *becoming* the type of group that is able to do the work facilitated on PTFL:

- 3) There is a processual quality to the context that is formed at PTFL;

However there is not the sense that the group was *indeterminately* becoming. As seen earlier, there is a definite switch point when the environment stabilizes (when the group begins mirroring the behaviors role modeled by tutors). Hence:

- 4) Although the PTFL context unfolds dynamically, it reaches a point early on where it becomes relatively stable;

When the environment does stabilize, it becomes one where in-depth personal exploration and disclosure are possible. Hence:

- 5) Once it has stabilized, the PTFL context is such that it is conducive to self-exploration and disclosure within a group;

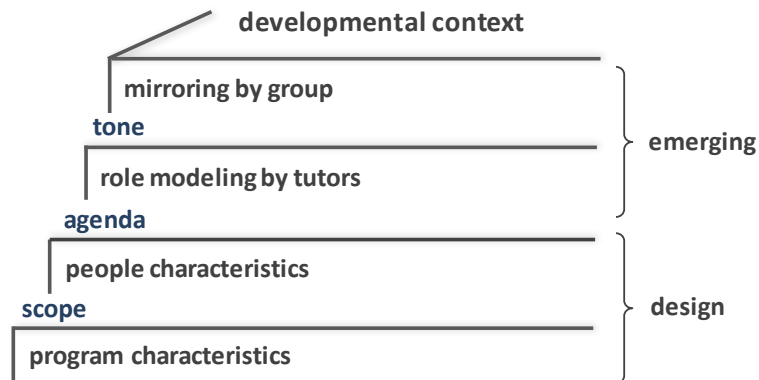
By aggregation of the considerations expressed above, an operating definition of *developmental context* emerge as ***a physical and social place which, in virtue of certain distinctive and relatively stable characteristics, is ideally conducive for a specific type of developmental process.***

4.3.7 Conclusion

Cross-sectional data analysis indicated the presence of four key elements of context:

- **Scope:** defined as the actual breadth and depth of what can be addressed within developmental initiative. In this research, scope seemed to be determined by the core content and the approach of the developmental initiative.
- **Agenda:** defined as the actual latitude that individuals have to freely explore different directions within a given developmental initiative. In this research, agenda seemed determined by some key characteristics of the people attending the program.
- **Tone:** defined as the general attitude and the key behaviors that are acceptable and encouraged within a given developmental initiative. In this research, tone seemed determined by some distinctive behaviors (in addition to behaviors aimed at maintaining a holding environment) role-modeled by the tutors.
- **Developmental context:** defined as a physical and social place which, in virtue of certain distinctive and relatively stable characteristics, is ideally conducive for a specific type of developmental process.

Figure 17. Developmental context: Design and emerging elements



Compiled by the author.

The model above, which summarizes the elements of context presented thus far, also aims to illustrate the dynamic nature of developmental context. Single elements of developmental context (scope, agenda, tone and overall quality) emerge out of specific characteristics of a developmental initiative (respectively, program characteristics, group characteristics, role modeling by tutors and mirroring by group). The interaction of all these elements results in a distinctive developmental context that is ideally conducive to specific developmental processes. An additional consideration around key elements of context is a distinction between ‘inert’ and ‘active’ elements¹³⁴. Common to the elements of scope and agenda described above is that they can be defined ahead of a developmental initiative and that they are true ‘on paper’, irrespectively of when (or whether) a program begins. Scope and agenda seem to be primarily *design* elements of a developmental initiative. In contrast, the two elements of tone and developmental context only develop once the program has begun—in real time and from live actions and interactions. Tone and developmental context seem to be *emerging* elements in a developmental initiative.

¹³⁴ I borrow these terms from the language of pharmacology: where ingredients are distinguished into chemically active substances and excipients, which are chemically inert.

4.4 Developmental processes

4.4.1 Introduction

Like findings on developmental context, also findings on developmental processes were derived from the phase of cross-sectional analysis¹³⁵. In this section, I first draw a distinction between external and internal processes of development. External processes have the function of *facilitating* development and are termed **vector** processes of development. Internal processes *are* development and hence are termed **core** processes of development. In the continuation of this section, I first focus on vector processes: I gather and consolidate opinions of across the sample concerning what activities took place within the developmental context offered by PTFL¹³⁶. Then, I focus on core processes of development: I gather and consolidate descriptions offered by participants around the sensemaking processes, leading to development that took place following to and in conjunction with PTFL.

4.4.2 Vector versus core processes of development

At the beginning of this research, it seemed likely that, if any change was going to be observed, some of that change would take place within the frame of the PTFL program and some other part of that change would have to continue to take place after PTFL and in the context of the lives of individual participants. Interviews confirmed and refined this intuitive understanding--participants highlighted a distinction between what can be accomplished on the course and what is in their own hands to carry forward after the course is over:

“I’m not expecting PTFL to suddenly [snaps] with a light bulb moment, just because it hits me.... I know I need to work around it” (P9_R1)

“I don’t think it’s ‘come back on Monday, walk through the door and everything is going to be different’. It’s... It’s having it in your mind, reconnecting with what you know you need to do, and having the ability to revisit that every so often and make sure that you’re still on the right path, or

¹³⁵ By cross-sectional analysis, I mean the study of all the data gathered, across interviews and participants

¹³⁶ See prior section on developmental context

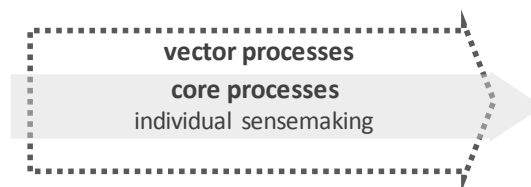
whether you have deviated back into the old person” (P4_R2)

“I could have just gone away from the week saying ‘Oh, that was an interesting week’, but not having changed the way I behaved. You know, that is true only if I make it” (P8_R2)

“I think then it's tying yourself to actually do something about it. Instead of just sit there for a week and say "yes, yes, yes", and listen to everybody else's story, and then go home and not do anything. You know, there's not much point in that. If... [...] These are the things I've gone away with that will be working on. So... I think that is part of the week, yes you're there – but it is more what you do after the week that is the important bit” (P4_R2)

Some expressions and descriptions by participants highlighted external processes of change: for example, shared sensemaking, the practicing of skills and behaviors and partaking in program activities. However, some expressions and descriptions highlighted internal processes of change: for example, from the quotes above, *“It's having it in your mind” (P4_R2): “You know, that is true only if I make it” (P8_R2): and “I think then it's tying yourself to actually do something about it” (P4_R2)*. These data were the basis for a distinction between an external and an internal dimension of personal development and for organizing findings around process into vector and core (see figure below).

Figure 18. Vector versus core processes of development



Compiled by the author.

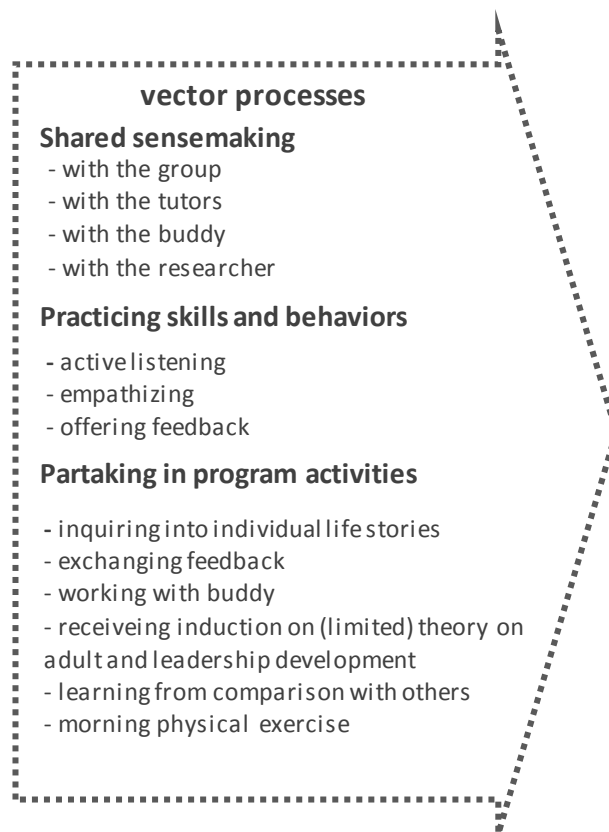
Because of they express a function of holding and directing core processes of change, I have termed these processes **vector¹³⁷ processes: explicit or implicit activities taking place within a developmental context which are aimed at holding core processes of development and directing them toward a main developmental direction.**

4.4.3 Vector processes of development on PTFL

A number of vector processes were identified which took place in conjunction with PTFL and had the function of holding and directing the sensemaking of single individuals (figure below). A detailed presentation and analysis of these processes is available in Appendix 8.12. According to participants, vector processes distinctively facilitated their inquiry into their personal histories and limiting patterns and supported their change by providing challenge and support in adequate measure. Interactions between developmental context and vector processes were addressed which result in the distinctive quality of a developmental initiative. In the case of PTFL, distinctive quality was a heightened emotional charge. Next, findings on core processes of development are presented.

Figure 19. Vector processes on PTFL

¹³⁷ The term vector has emerged before in a study of the long-term adaptive capability of a firm's strategy-making (Burgelman, 2002), to describe the efforts to drive the firm as well as the client organization in a certain strategic direction. Vector is "a quantity having direction and magnitude, denoted by a line drawn from its original to its final position (Oxford English Dictionary)", in Burgelman 2002 (p. 326).



Compiled by the author.

4.4.4 Core processes of development

Core processes were more challenging to identify than vector processes. Core processes took place at the level of individual sensemaking and their identification required tuning in with the discourse of each participant. Analysis required an interpretation of the interpreting frames of single participants and then a comparison of the interpretive frames of different participants. In some cases, identifying a specific pattern of sensemaking has been a matter of noticing its presence in the discourse of some participants but its absence in the discourse of other participants (this was the case, as will be seen later, for expressions of commitment).

4.4.4.1 *Sensemaking as the core process of development*

This analysis proposes that sensemaking of a single individual lies at the core of developmental processes. The centrality of sensemaking to personal development is

hypothesized based on evidence that sensemaking is both a *process* and *outcome* of development. Sensemaking is process in the sense that it is through sensemaking that individuals seem to construct development. Sensemaking is outcome in the sense that when development occurred, it was realized first and foremost in terms of a changed sensemaking--a qualitatively different way of making sense of the self and reality which then also enabled new paths of action. Some reflections on sensemaking being at the same time process and outcome of development are included in Appendix 8.14.

4.4.4.2 *Core processes: self-awareness loop*

Invariably, participants had a gain in self-awareness during the PTFL week. Some participants (P1, P5, P7, P8 and P9) had demonstrated a significant degree of self-awareness prior to the course: for them, the experience on the course shed additional light on the sort of limiting patterns underpinning the issues they had already identified. Other participants (P2, P3, P4) initially manifested a significantly lower level of self-awareness: for them, the experience on the course was mostly about realizing that they had a blind-spot in self-awareness. Relevant evidence is summarized in the table below.

Table 17. Gains in self-awareness as experienced by participants

| P | Self-awareness before PTFL | Self-awareness after PTFL | Gain? |
|----|---|---|-------|
| P1 | Aware of a void in confidence and of not having high enough expectations of others | On the sensemaking underlying the issue: assumptions of not being as deserving as others and having to serve others | Yes |
| P2 | Not manifestly (focus on external challenges) | On his personality, with which he can “smother” (P2_R2) others | Yes |
| P3 | Not manifestly (focus on external challenges) | On his habit of interrupting and interjecting; his “flamboyant dressings” (P3_R2), strong regional accent and use of jargon | Yes |
| P4 | Reduced self-awareness (tendency to focus on external challenges and circumstance). Sense that, as a leader, he might be “too focused on knowing what is right” (P4_R1) | On his coming across as “deadpan” (P4_R2) on the workplace; and, his tendency of being close as a leader (not listening enough and not considering enough the implications for others of his decisions) | Yes |
| P5 | Aware of her difficult background and of a connection between that and the current issue (she comes across as exceedingly demanding and “fierce” (P5_R4) | On her sensemaking: was able to “make the links” (P5_R2) between her story and how she treats herself; and, between how she treats herself and the pressure she puts on others as well. Became aware that the issue extended to her home life (not only to the workplace) | Yes |
| P6 | Aware that he does not come across as “a dynamic, stepping-forward leader” (P6_R2) | On his physical presence which seems to be a bit ‘shy’ (in terms of vocal projection, posture, general presence) | Yes |
| P7 | Manifestly aware of her issue with insomnia. Did not mention (but was aware of) her illness | On her sensemaking: disclosing her illness would hinder her career; hence, the illness as “taboo” and she compensated by being a “workaholic” (P7_R2) and actually endangering her health and career | Yes |
| P8 | Aware that he wanted to work on himself. Did not mention (but was aware of) his homosexuality | On his sensemaking: from teenager years, he carried on a belief that disclosing his homosexuality would be damaging. He had since maintained an outer (successful professional) persona—undermining confidence that he could be valued for who he really is | Yes |
| P9 | Aware an issue with confidence related to perfectionism (would over-prepare and under-communicate, especially at work) | On his sensemaking: he became aware of a tendency to seek positive affirmation from external sources | Yes |

Compiled by the author.

Across the sample, gaining self-awareness was less of an instant event and more of a process. While the moments of epiphany described earlier seemed instant-like, epiphanies did not seem to stand alone. Rather, they seemed to initiate a cycle of reasoning (sensemaking) on the feedback received:

"[I was] open to other people's comments, and I think I have reflected a lot during the groups and afterwards, on what happened and what that meant for me" (P1_R2)

As exemplified by the following comment by P3, this cycle of reasoning could be a struggle:

"And hem, after the week... Hem... Probably I feel, hem... I wouldn't say pissed off is the word, but certainly... a bit more reflective[...] Things are not black and white, certainly there are things I am revisiting, to see where they are" (P7_R2)

Eventually, two outcomes were observed in the sample of this cycle of reasoning: either the new awareness was accepted¹³⁸ or not quite accepted. Conceptually, the alternative opposite to acceptance is denial. However, none of the participants explicitly denied the new self-awareness. Rather, one participant (P3) expressed selective acceptance while others (P2, P4, P9 in addition to P3) expressed some form of discomfort or conflict around the new awareness. The next table summarizes how different participants related to the new self-awareness.

¹³⁸ Knowing of P5's difficult background, I also inquired whether a component of healing might have been relevant in her case. P5 seemed to exclude and rather emphasized acceptance:

"I wouldn't call it healing. I think... Acceptance is probably what I would call that rather than healing. Acknowledgment and acceptance" (P5_R2)

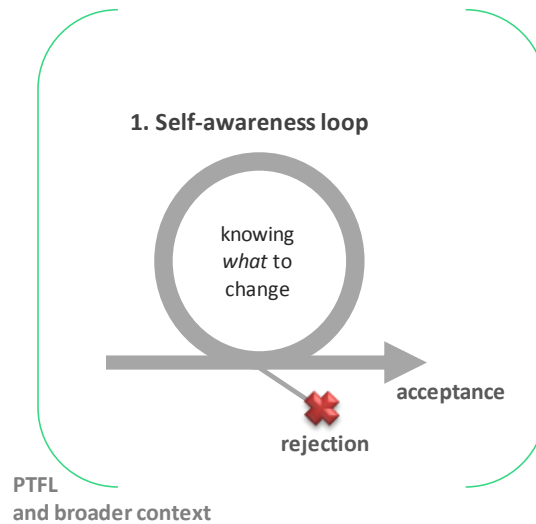
Table 18. Degrees of acceptance of new self-awareness in the sample

| P | Evidence around the acceptance or denial of self-awareness | Acceptance |
|----|---|---------------------------------|
| P1 | <i>"I am just thinking about my self-belief. And my... Not just my expectations, but my... That I deserve to have certain responses from people. That they are not doing me a favor" (P1_R3)</i> | Full |
| P2 | <i>"I came back with that kind of insight, that I have to stand back a little bit, let people space, let them invite me in, as opposed to me just barging in" (P2_R2)</i> <i>"it challenges you to try to change... personally the more exuberant tendencies I have" (P2_R2)</i> <i>"You are there, you know, warts and all" (P2_R2)</i> | Full, elements of conflict |
| P3 | With reference to habit of interrupting: <i>"probably I have been interrupting and interjecting for the last twenty years" (P3_R2)</i> With reference to his style of clothing: <i>"I wouldn't say this is feedback for me. Feedback is not what people think about my dressings, or what I think of their dressings. This is my dressing, a combination of shirts, ties and socks. Try say to them that... Their dressing is non-existent, insomuch... bland colors, bland styles" (P3_R2)</i> With reference to his strong regional accent: <i>"[The tutors] had difficulty understanding what I said. But most of the people, once they tune in, and if I talk slowly... It's not a problem" (P3_R2)</i> With reference to his use of jargon: <i>"There one or two people objected to my... language" "Esoteric', that I was using obscure words"; "If it were to me I could walk around with a dictionary, which is probably about six or seven inches thick, in two volumes. Then, there is no jargon, there is only English language. And to me that appears to be ignorance" (P3_R2)</i> Elements of conflict: <i>"I am sadder. Hem... Sadder because I have a big list of things I didn't do right all these years" (P3_R2)</i> <i>"The head has got... has come along for a good haircut and quite some confidence may have been temporarily reduced" (P3_R2)</i> | Selective, elements of conflict |
| P4 | <i>"So I'll try to be a little bit more warm... Not to change my character completely, but just to be a little bit more subtle, where... Knowing that how I come into the office can affect other people, and as it does with my whole life" (P7_R2)</i> <i>"it's very difficult to come back and roll back into your work and personal life with that personality change" (P7_R2)</i> | Full, elements of conflict |

Compiled by the author.

In the figure below, self-awareness is represented as a sensemaking loop the outcome of which is either acceptance or non-acceptance of the knowledge newly acquired.

Figure 20. Core processes of development: Self-awareness loop



Compiled by the author.

Significance of the awareness loop

The case of P3 highlights an interesting aspect: at the cutoff point of the research, P3 had made changes only in the areas of awareness that he had initially accepted (his habit of interrupting and interjecting, at the behavioral level) and not in the areas that he had rejected (his at times unintelligible language or flamboyant clothing style¹³⁹). Contrasting P3's case with other cases points to what may be the significance of sensemaking around the self-awareness iteration: the change that is eventually attained might be as broad or as narrow as the acceptance of self-awareness at the start of the process.

¹³⁹ "For a while I dressed very demurely, back to grays and blacks all the time. But then I thought 'Hell, I am me—and I am going back to being colorful'. Not outrageously so, just really smart ties and things. [...] probably cost me about 75 pounds at Harvey Nichols. I'll dress with style, rather than being gray and bland" (P3_R4)

4.4.4.3 Core processes: commitment loop

Following an iteration about self-awareness (and more or less acceptance of it), an iteration about commitment was identified. This second iteration stood out from the data all the more because it was clearly present in some cases, but harder to grasp in other cases: while some participants used quite determined language to externalize commitment, other participants¹⁴⁰ tended to use more generic and tentative language. The next table gathers those quotes that exemplify both.

Table 19. Evidence around commitment

| P | Determined language | P | Tentative language |
|----|---|----|---|
| P1 | <i>"definite plans", "do some of the activities I said I would do"</i> | P2 | <i>"I need to", "probably", "try"</i> |
| P3 | <i>"will work on"</i> | P3 | <i>"conscious of"</i> |
| P5 | <i>"high motivation level to do something differently", "commitments made and making sure that I do the work"</i> | P4 | <i>"trying to introduce", "it's difficult", "need to", "I either do...", "should"</i> |
| P6 | <i>"I want to", "I'm pursuing"</i> | P9 | <i>"gains outweigh dis-benefits", "I need to", "not going to... unless I learn"</i> |
| P7 | <i>"So that's what I did"</i> | - | |
| P8 | <i>"I ought to be, and therefore I am going to be"</i> | - | |

Compiled by the author.

It is interesting to contrast the language used by these two subgroups of participants. Participants who used more determined language at times also used more tentative expressions. However, the reverse is not true: the remaining participants only tended to use tentative language.

¹⁴⁰ P3 is included in both subgroups on the basis that he did use determined language to express his commitment to stop interrupting and interjecting; however, this type of language was absent for what concerns other aspects that had been pointed out to him on the course.

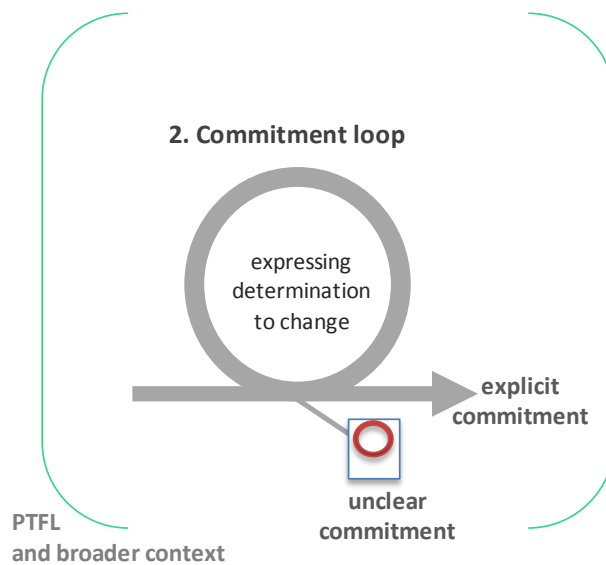
In the figure below, commitment is also represented as a loop because, even participants who expressed their commitment with determination, did not describe their commitment as unwavering. The following quotes highlight an element of discontinuity:

“Gosh I suppose it just sort of drifts in and out” (P1_R3)

“At times I still get, although nobody would notice it externally, but internally I get the old wobble now and again” (P8_R3)

“It’s finding the time to constantly be mindful of it all really, and review and revive and keep it constantly at the fore of my mind and that’s not often been possible at all” (P5_R3)

Figure 21. Core processes of development: Commitment loop



Compiled by the author.

Per se, the distinction between more or less determined externalizations of commitment does not prove the actual intentions of participants around change. Determination of intentions, however, is ultimately believed to be beyond the reach of this or any research. This analysis aims to simply describe that, on the basis of language used, the sensemaking of some of the participants expressed a positive ‘make change happen’ pattern, while the sensemaking of other participants did not.

Whichever the underlying causes or intention, this observation is interesting if juxtaposed with the observation that, out of four participants who expressed less tentative commitment, two did not achieve the same latitude of change as others did and the remaining two dropped from the sample.

4.4.4.4 *The effort loop*

As expressed by P8 (below), participants generally agreed that changing required a conscious effort¹⁴¹ on their part:

“You have to consciously... You have to work on that, it is not something that you suddenly change, you know—for 20 years, that’s the way you’ve been dealing with people. It comes over time. (P8_R2)

Participants¹⁴² seemed to be putting in comparable levels of effort to realize the particular change they were aiming at. A recap of the ways they were actively trying to pursue change is offered in the table below.

Table 20. Evidence around effort

¹⁴¹ The connotation of the word effort, according to several comments by participants, is less that of ‘drudgery’ and more that of applied intentional work

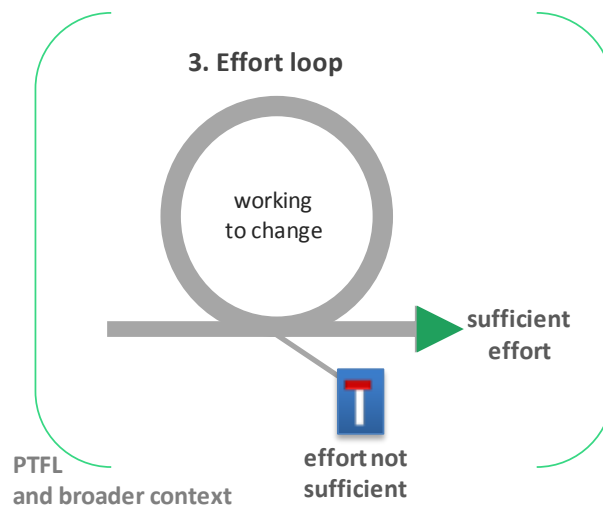
¹⁴² With the exception of P2 and P4. Evidence around efforts in place was taken mostly from later interviews (third and fourth). P2 and P4 (who dropped from the sample after interview two) had certainly described some initial efforts, but there is no data available around how those efforts might have carried forward.

| P | Evidence around effort (note: no data about P2 and P4) | Summary |
|----|---|------------------|
| P1 | <p>Ideated an image that reminds her of her resourcefulness (pyramid with an iron core)</p> <p>Stood up to ex-husband (who had been harassing her) and interrupted communication</p> <p>At work, strived to facilitate others in dealing with their responsibilities (rather than jumping in for them) and to formulate her requests in a concise, clear and direct manner</p> | Yes |
| P3 | <p>Pattern of interrupting: mitigated in personal relationships (his wife and friends) and some of his professional relationships (“my own people”, P6_R4). Other areas of feedback: eventually rejected.</p> <p>P3 was practicing also with me in our second interview “Sorry, I’m still interrupting... See, I’m trying not to interrupt!”(P3_R2)</p> | Yes (in part) |
| P5 | <p>Ideated an image that reminds her of her resourcefulness (tree—interconnected systems)</p> <p>She started watching her own tendency to be very self-critical, making an effort to introduce enjoyable things in her lifestyle (“I am also more challenging myself... In a good way. Because I think I take more time and trouble to enjoy myself”, P8_R2), and finding ways to be with her children more how she would have liked others to have been with her</p> | Yes |
| P6 | <p>He worked on his presence (“I’m learning to talk slowly, I’m learning to sit up in the room not to... In order to use my height, to use my physical presence”, P6_R2), e.g. by taking presentation coaching with his media department</p> | Yes |
| P7 | <p>She started prioritizing health and making her lifestyle less strenuous (note: often, without having to disclose her illness)</p> <p>Reducing workload: e.g., started drawing boundaries around what work she could accomplish in specific time frames</p> <p>Improving quality of life: e.g., doubled Pilates classes, took up sophrology lessons , and built a swimming pool at home</p> | Yes |
| P8 | <p>At work, he started declining lecturing commitments and agreed on a new departmental structure that would allow him to focus increasingly on strategy; also, took up coaching and mentoring roles.</p> <p>He started to reflect more before reacting to communications , confront people when needed, and accept compliments from others; He became more open about his story and identity</p> | Yes |
| P9 | <p>At work, he established a new communication routine with his team and bosses (frequent short meetings) and strived to keep a high level perspective when working on new large deliverables. At home, made time weekly to talk over important things with his wife. Note: efforts seemed to decline in the later part of the research</p> | Yes |

Compiled by the author.

A host of initiatives, then, was set into motion by participants in order to pursue a particular change. Some of these initiatives were more 'internal': for example, P1 and P5 resorted to imagery to remind themselves of their resourcefulness in critical moments. Other initiatives were more 'external'--they looked like practical enactments of a new and qualitatively different (versus the old and limiting) sensemaking.

Figure 22. Core processes of development: Effort loop



Compiled by the author.

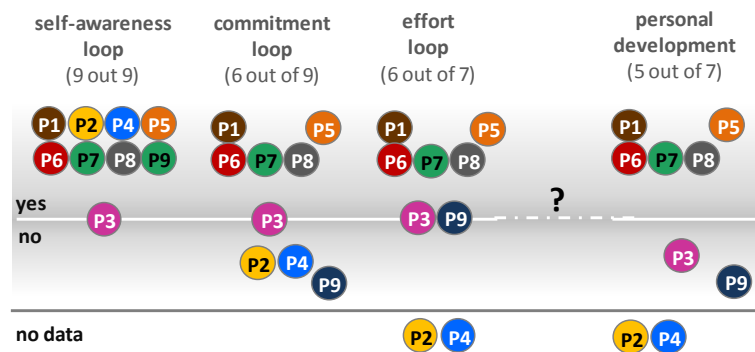
Efforts to change cannot be assumed to always be successful at the first attempt. As seen earlier, this was exemplified by P8, who was learning to 'make it real' and hence also to confront others when necessary¹⁴³. P8 was starting to find ways how to calibrate his new found assertiveness. Efforts then might be adjusted based on feedback received from the environment. Efforts might also start and stop, or stop altogether. The figure above hence pictures effort as a third loop of the core process of change.

¹⁴³ "And the looks I'd get when I first started to do that was 'Bligh me'! And then... But I am softening that up [now]", P8_R3

4.4.4.5 Capability loop

Three sensemaking loops were presented so far: a self-awareness, a commitment, and an effort loop. The following figure displays the distribution of participants around each of these loops. The figure also displays the distribution of participants around whether personal development occurred or not (as assessed in the prior section on developmental outcomes and direction).

Figure 23. Distribution of participants around core processes of development



Compiled by the author.

In five cases (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) there was evidence of personal development. In all five of these cases, participants seemed to accept new awareness *and* express determined commitment *and* input sufficient effort. In contrast, in the remaining¹⁴⁴ two cases (P3 and P9) there was insufficient evidence that personal development had taken place¹⁴⁵ as of the end of the research. Out of these two cases, P3's seems relatively linear: there was initial acceptance of self-awareness, but this was selective (limited to the behavioral pattern of interrupting); commitment and effort ensued and were consistently selective (also limited to this particular habit); finally, the change achieved was in terms of personality adjustment (mitigation of the habit of interrupting). P9's case, however, is less clear: initially, there was full acceptance of awareness; however, commitment was expressed tentatively; initially, effort was

¹⁴⁴ The cases of P2 and P4 are not considered here because these two participants left the research after interview two

¹⁴⁵ In both cases, there was evidence that some change had taken place: however, change was in terms of greater awareness and personality adjustment and not of personal development

invested in realizing the change, but effort diminished by the end of the research¹⁴⁶. Perhaps, P9 did not express determined commitment and sustained his efforts because he did not fully intend to make a change. However, some quotes from P9 seem to indicate that he was experiencing a steep level of challenge:

“Yeah, I am sorry if it is not as positive as I would have liked it to have been” (P9_R4)

“Because one of my limiting patterns is about going to the detail and getting things right and perfect—and PTFL has added in a lot more things that I now need to think about and that has become a bit overwhelming for me. So in some ways that has caused some difficulties. So yes I have grown in that I am more mature because I am more aware of what is going on and it affects... How other people can be affected, so there is certainly some growth in there. But I do have concerns that I have been affected negatively because I am trying to deal with too much” (P9_R4)

“[The second PTFL module was....] for me personally it was about keeping that positive outlook and not getting buried down in the detail—getting lost and losing the perspective. (P9_R3)

“I think, I think it would make more sense [to talk about my change] when I’ve had another couple of months to get through this, this time. And I’ve had a chance to sort of breathe and properly take all this in” (P9_R3)

This sense of struggle suggests that, assuming intention is present¹⁴⁷, there might be an issue of capability to change. The word capability is used because it considers an individual’s ability to do something *in context*¹⁴⁸. P9’s broader context was *relatively* unproblematic: although he referred to issues with his workplace and substantial work pressure, other participants seemed to endure an overall higher level of contextual

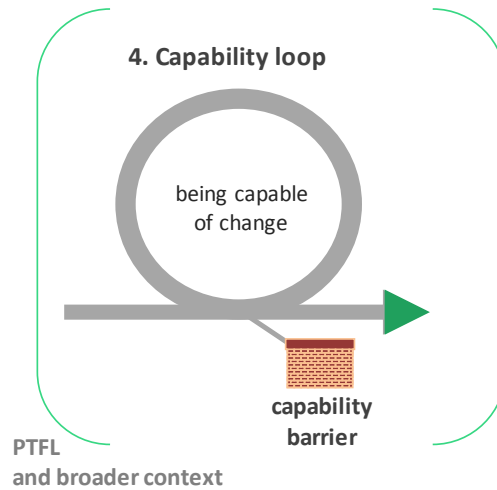
¹⁴⁶ At the end of the study, P9 himself was underwhelmed by the change achieved and expressed that he thought he could have done more on multiple fronts.

¹⁴⁷ Intention did not seem absent, see for example the following passage: *“It would be foolish to throw away those learnings and the time spent in coming to them. So, I mean, that is absolutely vital. And without it, potentially, there is a downwards spiral so this came at a good time for me to try ... Try and reinforce confidence” (P9_R3)*

¹⁴⁸ Capability is the “ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (Jackson et al., 2003 p. 195).

challenge¹⁴⁹. A lack of capability¹⁵⁰ to change is a plausible theoretical possibility. It is captured in the figure below by a further sensemaking loop.

Figure 24. Core processes of development: Capability loop



Compiled by the author.

The capability loop suggests that there might be conditions (situated in the individual and related to the ability to change in context) hindering the extent to which a person can commit to or actually carry out a particular type of change. P9's case is unique in this research sample, but in my practitioner work I have observed examples of participants who seem to accept new self-awareness, commit to change, invest substantial efforts, and eventually stall in their attempts to change.

4.4.4.6 Conclusion

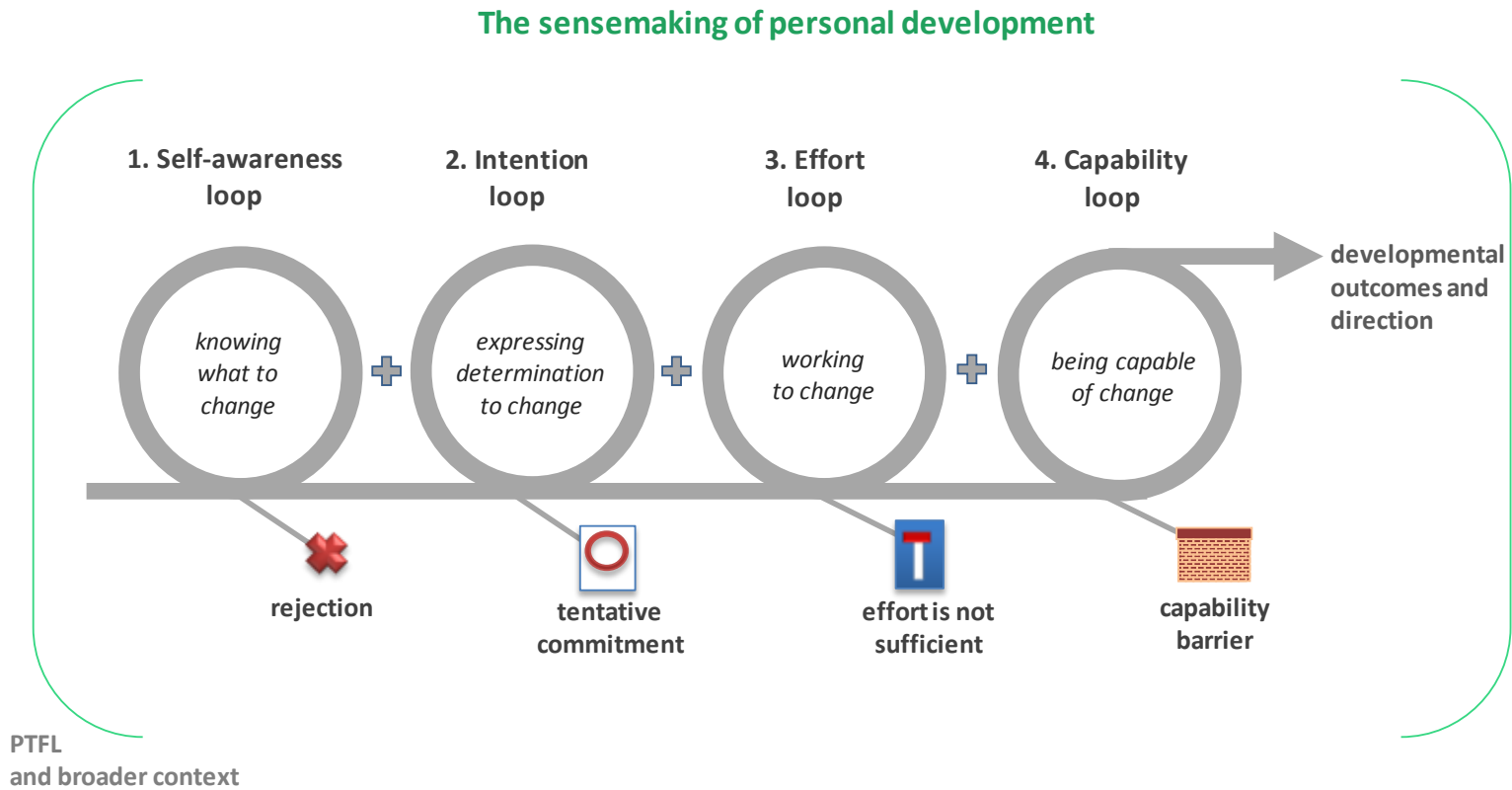
Four iterative patterns of sensemaking were presented as core processes leading to personal development. The model on the following page aims to bring together these four patterns of sensemaking. The significance of having identified these core

¹⁴⁹ Compare, for example, with the situation of P1, who during the research was undergoing a difficult divorce, navigating a reorganization and changing roles

¹⁵⁰ "“Capability” is understood as the ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (Jackson, Farndale and Kakabadse, 2003 p.195)

processes seems to be that, given conducive developmental context and vector processes, for personal development to take place there needs to be the active engagement of an individual's sensemaking on at least four fronts: self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability. A relationship among these patterns was highlighted: the extent to which new self-awareness is accepted might affect the extent to which commitment, effort and, ultimately, change take place.

Figure 25. The sensemaking of personal development



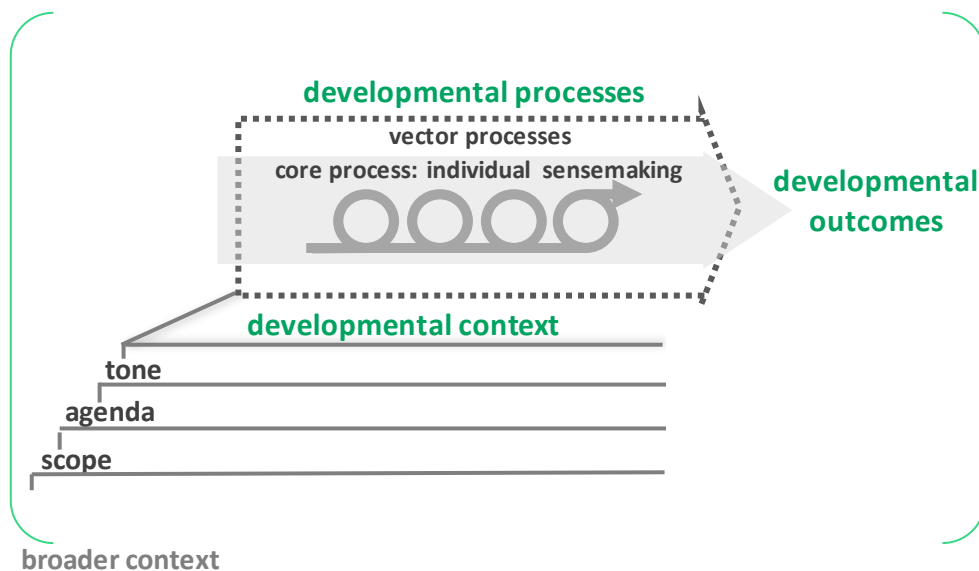
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The model shows sensemaking iterations in the particular they seemed to follow within the experience of the participants in this research. However, the segment of process depicted in the model is really thought of as an iteration—a meta-loop that keeps repeating itself. In a chicken-and-egg fashion, a degree of intent/effort/capability seems to always have to precede a new gain in terms of self-awareness.

4.4.5 Conclusion

In introducing the present chapter I presented a simplified model of personal development to serve as a high level map of findings. In order to summarize the findings on developmental outcomes and direction as well as on developmental context and processes just presented (sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4), I propose the same model with a greater level of detail (see figure below).

Figure 26. An integrative model of personal development



Compiled by the author.

4.5 Findings from comparative analysis

4.5.1 Introduction

In this section, I identify two subgroups of participants that emerged from comparative analysis because they consistently differed on a number of themes salient to this research. Themes considered are: motives, values around personal and leadership development training, patterns of sensemaking and outcomes of the PTFL experience.

4.5.2 Comparing motives: seeking affirmation versus self-concordance

Bass has defined motive as follows: “A motive can energize a variety of behaviors that may differ from each other but all create a similar inner affective state of goal satisfaction if consummated” (Bass, 2008 p. 178). The question was asked of the data of which motives might be energizing the conduct (for example, signing up for the PTFL program) of different participants.. Based on this line of analysis, it was possible to divide the sample in two subgroups: one subgroup seemed oriented to seeking affirmation from external sources; in contrast, a second subgroup seemed oriented to seeking self-concordance.

4.5.2.1 *Seeking affirmation*

In light of self-affirmation theory¹⁵¹, seeking affirmation is here understood as a sensemaking pattern whereby an individual¹⁵² aims at enhancing his or her feelings of self-worth in the face of self-threatening information. Hence, affirmation is understood as a reinforcement of a person’s self-worth and well-being. This research points at external sources of affirmation that individuals might tap into to compound self-affirmative sensemaking: for a subgroup in the sample (P2, P3, P4, P9), there was a disproportionate pattern of gravitation around two main affirming externalities: the approval of other people as well as career and other socially recognized achievements.

¹⁵¹ From the field of psychology, e.g. the work of Sherman and Cohen (2006). Further literature around affirmation will be presented in the discussion chapter.

¹⁵² Mostly unconsciously, according to the literature

4.5.2.1.1 Approval of other people

In one case (P9's) there was explicit acknowledgment of a pattern of seeking affirmation:

"I tend to look for positive affirmation for things that I do" (P9_R2)

On PTFL, P9 identified a root cause of this pattern in the relationship with his father. For as long as he could remember, his father had not been forthcoming in expressing satisfaction with P9's efforts and achievements:

"So I always found myself looking for positive feedback from [my father] on things I had done and he found it very difficult to give that, I believe. I could hear him talking very proudly of me to others, but he would very rarely do that to me." (P9_R2)

In absence of affirmation from his father throughout his formative years, P9 developed a tendency to seek affirmation from others:

"I think that was one of my root causes for needing positive affirmation in whatever I did--whether that was from him or from anyone else." (P9_R2)

At work, this had been translating into a perfectionist drive—a tendency to over-prepare for deliverables so that they looked as good as possible:

"This is part of my 'be perfect' drive, that I've always wanted tried to get that perfect result as I was looking to get that positive feedback and that positive affirmation. And I wanted to make sure that everything worked out perfectly" (P9_R2)

There might be an example within the research of how P9 would seek approval from others. Especially during the first two interviews, his account tended to accommodate the research: nothing that was said which was particularly controversial; he seemed very well prepared; and, the language he used tended to paint the picture of an open predisposition to the program and to change. Here are some examples:

"There's times where I need to make [...] decisions a bit quicker, perhaps with less information. Be able to make the decision with 70-80% of the data rather than... Perhaps I am still looking for the 90-95%. So I need to be able to move things forward quicker." (P9_R1)

“So I think I have got a team who responds to me but are not working... Are not providing their highest efficiency because I think I can... I should be able to bring them on” (P9_R1)

“I got to a zero inbox on Friday night which is great! [...] Which, which no one is going to their obituary ‘Oh yes, he got his inbox to a zero’, but it’s [an] intermediate step, that.... Things have fallen away and I can now focus on what I’m doing” (P9_R1)

“I’m not expecting PTFL to suddenly [snaps] with a light bulb moment, just because it hits me.... I know I need to work around it” (P9_R1)

One characteristic of this language that is absent from the language of others included in this same subgroup is that P9 addresses his limitations, for example by acknowledging a personal share of the challenges he is experiencing. P9 also recognizes that he needs to have an active role to actualize a change. In this, P9 seems more similar to the subgroup that will be presented next rather than to the present one. However, in net contrast with the next subgroup, this language was not followed up on by matching actions. In fact, with a sharp turn in tone, in interviews three and four P9 evaluated negatively his own efforts to change (on virtually all fronts of change that he had identified):

“I don’t think I am fully using that into work yet. Have I built it into my normal working patterns? Has it become a habit? No, probably not enough yet. But I know it is something that I need to work on” (P9_R3)

“I don’t believe I... I’m there yet, because I was so buried in the day to day, trying to deliver on the things that we need to do in the short term” (P9_R3)

“But I haven’t got that working 100% yet, because when the workload builds up I get buried again. So, I’ve still got work to do on that process” (P9_R3)

“I am not using the awareness of others yet as much as I should do. I can see the value of it, and through learning to listen to others on the course I could see how that could help that you relate to them. But I haven’t been able to apply that to my day-to-day work yet” (P9_R3)

“I need to improve on my decision making and my speed of getting to the point. And has it... has it helped? I think it is still work in progress for me.

[...] In practical terms it probably hasn’t yet. In theoretical terms, I think it should do. And I think it is one of those learning points that I am much more

aware of now, but I haven't been able to build it in yet" (P9_R3)

"No. [I did not work on the things I wanted to work on]. Not as much as I should. I have to say it's been... I am still very much working in the present rather than trying to deal with things into the future. Which.... is not a good state to be" (P9_R4)

"[I have not been in contact with my buddy] as much as... Not as much as I should. I do have difficulties in trying to... Trying to start conversations and talking about the bigger picture, and that is disappointing" (P9_R4)

"... I know I shouldn't find excuses for not having the time to do it. Which is a bit of a soft excuse" (P9_R4)

"I'd like to think I've been able to change [as a leader] but I don't think that I've been able to build that into my standard patterns yet" (P9_R4)

As discussed in a previous section (1.4.4, on core processes of development), it actually seemed like P9 was inputting a degree of effort into realizing his change. I speculate that perhaps, for the type of personal change that P9 was aiming at, he was lacking sufficient positive affirmation from external sources to be able to feel good about his efforts. P9 apologized to the research for what he perceived as a lack of progress:

"I am sorry if it is not as positive as I would have liked it to have been..." (P9_R4)

In fact, in response to P9's negative self-assessment, I somehow shifted my balance from the role of interviewer into a pattern of encouragement --either by justifying his difficulty or by de-emphasizing his negative self-evaluation:

"Linda: [Change] takes time. I guess also being on the learning curve for all these things also makes confidence shaky per se. So it is kind of a double challenge... for everybody." (P9_R3)

" Linda: Yeah. And this is possibly one of the busiest times in the year for you. So...

P9: Yeah. Yeah.

Linda: I was also going to ask you if the changes created some additional space and how you find that you are able to use it. But maybe we can talk about it next time, because it really sounds like you've had an exceptionally busy time now" (P9_R3)

“Linda: This is not... This is really not trying to assess whether there has been or not a certain outcome, you know, it’s really, really an exploration... [...]

And we can talk about it again” (P9_R3)

“P9: I probably I haven’t been able to prepare well enough for this [interview], to go over my notes... It was probably a bit of a disjointed response, but I hope there is enough there for you!

Linda: No, no, no—this is great! This is great. And I really want to avoid making people feel unprepared, but sometimes I’m afraid... It happens still, but sometimes it is really a matter of how my questions are, and I realize that. This research is very exploratory, and I tend to like explorations to... So sometimes I sound tentative, and I am sorry if that sometimes impacts people...” (P9_R3)

“Linda: I am sure you will do great. It is just a matter of finding the path and it sounds like you are equipped for finding it” (P9_R4)

“P9: Okay, well you have encouraged me to go out and talk to my network again more and try to explore some of these things” (P9_R4)

I do not think that either of P9 or I intended to enter this dynamic, but within later interviews we effectively instituted an interaction of affirmation seeking/offering.

In the cases remaining for this subgroup (P2, P3, P4), there was no direct acknowledgment of a pattern of seeking affirmation. However, I observed that a lot of energy was invested during interviews by these participants to uphold a positive image of themselves. For example, P2 would not easily pass up on opportunities to emphasize his leadership or personal qualities:

“Honesty. Hem, I think I am quite compassionate with my workforce. I encourage them to think outside the box, and I also encourage them to make decisions, right or wrong. And if they made the wrong one, we’ll laugh about it” (P2_R1)

“I don’t like, I don’t particularly enjoy conflict. I mean, if I’ve got to, I will do it. But if I could avoid conflict, normally I am... I don’t think I am an avoider of it, I am more like... I like to appease people. I like to take the negotiation bit in

the middle” (P2_R1)

“... Most people I employ have been with me for 15 years so I’ve had the same team of people for a long time” (P2_R1)

“[My people] are all coming from different backgrounds, they’ve different upbringings, they’ve worked for other companies, in different industries, so why not let them. Let them contribute, and if it’s a good idea they can go, and if it’s not, work with it, so they still think it’s a good idea. So, a lot of brainstorming and all” (P2_R1)

“I think it’s understanding the people you lead, and it’s not just... yeah, give me... Bob, Bob is a good worker. It’s about what makes Bob tick, and understanding what drives him, what he enjoys doing, and what he’s uncomfortable with... and now and again I give jobs to people because I know they are uncomfortable.” (P2_R1)

“We do annual appraisal for all our staff, so I do all my staff, my direct reports, I do that, continued professional development, there will be opportunities to do external courses. , Mine, mine with my vice president. last about two minutes. So very much down the way, up the way no”

“Yeah, I love living life. I just think it’s sad to see some people are wasting so much... and it’s like, you gotta grab it and go and do it... And people say: ‘Yes, but you can afford to do it’...But you don’t need money to have fun. You just need.. I know people that are 30 years old, that are old, and people who are 60 years old, that are young. And I’ve got some friends in Abu Dhabi who are 60 and have more fun than some 30 year olds I know” (P2_R1)

“If [people] have got issues at home they’ll tend to come and see if I can have a word. And that’s probably because I am very open with people, and you know I kind of have been... In most scenarios as you can imagine, between divorces, and kids and things, so... No, I think I am being seen as a wise person, but a lot came out of that life experience with a huge amount of wisdom. And life wisdom... Like, not necessarily at, at... in [my technical field], or... Just... As a person, “you’ve seen a lot of life and dealt with a lot of scenarios, so I come to you for advice”” (P3_R2)

P3 had a similar tendency to underscore his leadership virtues. When faced with questions around what he would like to improve about himself as a leader, he did not seem at ease and moved the conversation on to emphasizing his strengths:

“I get results. No matter what can of worms I am given. I change it around,

[or] if I'm given a difficult things to do. I have always returned a good result.

[...]I tend to be very touchy-feely. People can wander in to see me. There's coffee-machines, I've got fridges with Coca-Cola in there... And then talk about their problems, and I solve all the problems... I give them a direction to travel. This is how you are going to do this. Also, watch for X, Y, and Z. You're having problems, come back to me" (P5_R1)

In addition, P3 seemed to leverage all opportunities to emphasize his preparation: by referring to prior training, management resources he was aware of or his approach to training:

"Since I have been to Cranfield, [it] has been transformation. I always had a high level of creative intelligence, but it has been harnessed properly and I have noticed significant improvements on the way I lead, the way my team reacts (P3_R1)

"I also remember the first leadership thing we went to, we had to listen to poetry. And, hem... we also had to... do things: massage, yoga, and keep fit... [...]: ... It's also pushing people to the limits. Some people are not comfortable with it. It's pushing them toward areas or zones they are uncomfortable with, to get them to try new things" (P3_R1)

"I did business management [...], had an extension also on communication [later on]" (P3_R1)

"You find out things about yourself you didn't know, probably the Johari window. And suggestions are given to you, and you take them up. And also... the things you're supposed to change, which you take back to the organization. And, it may not be in a practical way. It may be the way you coach, counsel or mentor your staff. Do it differently and, more importantly, have a greater understanding of their needs you haven't perhaps seen before. Certainly, the personality; the Centaur model was an eye-opener for me. In that I saw ways to deal with people" (P3_R1)

"Michael McCoby has a good book out, which deals with narcissistic leaders. And that fits in very snugly with the superhero¹⁵³, and so... There's a list of Dos and Don'ts—basically, you treat them royally" (P3_R1)

"It's going to be... quite a good week. It might be... feel a bit touchy-feely, I'm

¹⁵³ Superhero is the name of a personality type in the Centaur model

*not quite sure how the journey of exploration is going to be [chuckles]
(P3_R1)*

*"I always question myself. I don't really know... Why I handle something one way, why I explode at something. And, hem, there's always more unknowns. It's a quest for knowledge, there's always more questions than answers"
(P3_R1)*

"I have to have an open mind this week. I read all the blurb. What the course is supposed to do, et cetera. And it appeared pretty big. But I have an open mind. And I'll do some try and apply, to not dismiss anything. And sometimes too, the things you learn, you don't see them this week, but maybe in a future week you will. Penny drops on the way to Damascus" (P3_R1)

P4, the remaining participant in this subgroup, seemed relatively less prone to describe his strengths. However, similarly to P2 and P3, he seemed not at ease with discussing potential areas of weakness:

"Linda: anything else [you would like to work on at PTFL]? You said "a few things" earlier... Things that you would like to change.

P4: Well... I mean I think that you can sit here and think about what you want to change every day but, I mean...

Linda: No, no, no – if there's something that is important to you"

"P4: [...]... I am passionate about what I do, and I think that's maybe one of my... You know, we'll work out through the weaknesses I'm sure as we go through the questions, but... Maybe, maybe I find difficulty in finding people that maybe are not as passionate as myself [...]"

Linda: I was not going to ask you about weaknesses. But, since you mentioned it [chuckles], do you have something in mind in particular?"

P4: Weaknesses. I like to call them challenges.

Linda: Okay.

Respondent: Weaknesses, we have all got weaknesses." (P4_R1)

In addition to some defensiveness around discussing personal challenges, P4 stressed at several points during the interview the importance of perception by others:

"I am also, within the team, in a senior position. [...] And, maybe, how I am perceived in that I could develop. I think I am pushed as the bad guy, and maybe [...] the directors feed me what to say and what to do. And to some extent they do, and actually what they're saying is right, but it's how to get that across to other managers without being kind of, for them, the fore guy position, where it's not really me saying that, it's them saying it, it's my boss saying it. "If we have any problems, we'll revert to them instead than to him in any case, so..." (P4_R1)

"Maybe get it a fixture in my head about how I come across, how I am perceived, and from there maybe make more of the picture of who I am in the workplace, and how I come across in the workplace" (P4_R1)

"But I would hope that what does come across is that I am experienced , I have been profitable within the company, and that puts you in a good spot when you are trying to influence others" (P4_R1)

There seems to be a common pattern across participants in subgroup one: an orientation to attempt to appeal (in interviews, to the researcher) in virtue of the positive image they portray of themselves. P9 explicitly attributed this dynamic to himself, while P4 stressed the importance of perceptions by others. The other two participants (P2 and P3) exemplified this orientation in conversation through their unease to discuss personal challenges and emphasis on positive image (leaderships and personal qualities or knowledge and preparation).

4.5.2.1.2 Career and other socially recognized achievements

In this subgroup, especially P2, P3 and P4 attributed a lot of significance to their achievements, both in terms of career progression and status. For example, a lot of the transcript of P2's first interviews revolves around aspects of his role. When I inquired about how P2 might have developed to this stage and over his career, he focused on career progression:

"My title is [...]: I travel the world doing what I do. [...] I now direct people from a distance, so I direct people in [several international locations], so I now direct them and just go help when they need help" (P2_R1)

"But I don't do any [technical] work [anymore]... I basically do business development. I sell my company, I negotiate contracts with companies, [...] I

look at buying companies when I can, so very... from where I started to where I am now very diverse, a very changed, very diverse the role that I have now. I report to the Vice President [...], and he pretty much leaves me alone to do what I want to do" (P2_R1)

"I worked for a large [...] company, [...], so I've sat in a branch for 10 years [...], and then I left and joined this outfit, because I thought that I had probably more opportunities within a smaller company than [in a larger one]. And then I was very fortunate, I had some very good leaders, when I was--both in the clients that I've worked for and my direct management. These people, they have just basically given me the space and guidance to do, and make mistakes, and laugh about the mistakes. Then I was also very forceful and I also was very ambitious, and wanted to do the next job, and so... no one wanted to be my line manager because I always kind of... eventually got their job, maybe nine jobs in the last eighteen years" (P2_R1)

"I got thrust into the senior management role, and then I was basically promoted to as high as I could go to the UK, at a very young age, when I [...], running [a multi-million] dollar of business and that was quite a step to go from what I had been doing to where they put me. I think they showed a lot of faith" (P2_R1)

When asked about what he likes most about his job, P2 talked about winning:

"P2: Winning

Linda: Winning!

P2: [I am] very competitive.

Linda: Winning a contract.... Winning?

P2: Yeah.... Winning contracts, get in a contract, to have to perform well and getting good feedback, that we're performing well. Because we are in very competitive market. So to win a 20 million dollar contract a year is... it's hard to do. It's very hard. So, it's a nice thing to win" (P2_R1)

Turning to P3, he explicitly described himself as very career-oriented¹⁵⁴. In our conversation following PTFL, he defined his self-esteem as consisting of the aggregate of his accomplishments¹⁵⁵:

“Self-esteem, which is what you have done over the years, your qualifications, your experience. A combination of knowledge and experience, all these things” (P3_R2)

During interviews, P3 was often pointing his achievements. Some achievements were on the professional side:

“One, [I work in] the biggest [organization in this area], [...] with a multimillion pound turnover. (P3_R1)

“Five years ago became the Director, and ever since then the job changes continuously. We’re improving on eight pages of strategic objectives to complete per annum, and I came in 100% on target, or completed on budget—0.02% underspent” (P3_R1)

While other achievements were more on the personal side:

“I used to do the Munroes, which are the Scottish hills over 3000 feet. There’s 284 of them. In 1989 I climbed lots of famous things, [...] and 14 alps over 14000 feet. I was in the Ben Nevis mountain rescue team for 21 years, I got a medal from the Queen, for community service. And, in the past I have taken a lot of community service, I’ve been chairman of a roundtable, [...] putting back into the community we live in” (P3_R1)

“And I have got this credit card where if I spend ten grand a year I have a free flight. So I go first class to Sydney, or first class to Sidney and the second flight is free. All you have to do is spend ten grand on this American Express credit

¹⁵⁴ Talking about his relationship with his wife, P3 said: *“We are both very, very busy people, with very, very busy lives. Probably the partner takes second place to me and me to her. [...] Working days and very important jobs. More often job is more important than the partner and certainly it is in my case” (P3_R2)*

¹⁵⁵ And thus ‘safe’ from the ‘attack’ of PTFL

card. And pay the rest with the air miles” (P3_R3)

In any case, status seemed to be important to P3¹⁵⁶:

“You know, in general terms, I’m in the top 1% of income. In terms of professional excellence, [BREAK IN THE RECORDING], I’m the director of one of [the area’s] biggest companies, and yet these guys [at Cranfield] don’t see enough credibility!” (P6_R3)

“To me, the difference between genius and madness is results. You get results, than it’s more being genius than madness. Matter is not whether I am perfect, but my strategic objectives, there’s ten pages of them, and I am the only director who returned all of them completed” (P3_R3)

“And when I do go to work... Today I’m dressed in a black suit and white shirt and a nice geometric patterned tie. It is still multicolor but actually it is subdued. I dress appropriately. I am a chief and they know that I am a chief. When I walk around I am the smartest guy in the building, including the bosses” (P2_R3)

A characteristic of all the achievements mentioned by P3 is that they are positioned as socially recognized (whether by his staff, the Queen, or in terms of a quantification of relative status).

In the case of P4, the first and main reason that was presented in relation to participation in PTFL was that the program was a ‘stepping stone’ to achieve an upcoming promotion:

“I am really at a moment where I am looking to develop within the business. As I explained, I have one person that I report into. The senior team within the company that I work for is made of three directors. The plan moving forward is for me to become a fourth director of the business. And, really this is kind of a stepping stone to achieving that. As with some other objectives and so on, set out within this year.” (P4_R1)

When I asked P4 about his thoughts on what leadership development might be, his answers (similarly to P2’s) tended to focus on career progression:

¹⁵⁶ There is a sense of a recurring narrative around emergence from and excellence within a system. This makes sense in light of P3’s early experience of hardship, including the loss of his father and his family’s economic struggles. P3 described his career path as emerging from a disadvantaged condition: P3’s first job was as a manual worker, from which he went on to university.

"... More recently I've taken a big step, I was managing certain aspects of the business which I knew from my personal career development, [...] and, you know, the work [was] very much front of the house [...]. And that was maybe my comfort zone, and then I was pushed and said: "actually, I want you to go and look after [different sectors]. Which I had no idea. You know, very nervous. And I suppose it wasn't... Now looking back at it, actually, previously I was quite bored, and I was actually sitting, treading water, not really going anywhere, and then it's actually pushing yourself to take that... Quite a big leap. A new market, and take on a new team, grow that team. Really, to kind of take a lead. And now, when I look back, previously I would've said "no, never". No way, never I would a) be able to do it, or b) would want to do it, but now sitting back and looking at it I am thankful that I have. Because now actually within the business, I am pretty much rounded to all the markets, so whenever anybody in the business is talking to me [...], whichever market they are talking about, although I'm not an expert, I still have an understanding, and would be able to give advice, would be able to advise, would be able to kind of have an understanding. So, that I suppose is a point.

Linda: and, as far as you changing, if you think you've changed, what was [the change] about? Do you think you acquired more knowledge, skills, experience, or what else? Do you think it's been more about uncovering who you are, how you do things...?

P4: I do things in the same way, I suppose" (P4_R1)

Perhaps an indirect admission of career drive, P4 discussed how it was often difficult for him to find people as passionate as himself about the business (I suggested the word 'driven'):

"I've grown with the business, you know, from many years ago to where I am now, so I have done quite well in that period than they [other people] have... And I kind of look around, [...] and think... 'Oh, maybe they're not looking for the thing I'm looking for'. It can be frustrating sometimes. And I think also, if you're relying on other people – that's another part of my objectives, is to become a director. I need somebody to come and sit where I sit in your organization now, and that's one of my objectives: to take a couple of people

that I am managing up to where I am, at my level. And that, at the moment, proving quite difficult.” (P4_R1)

Across this subgroup there is a stark theme around the importance of achievements (career and other socially recognizable achievements). It was seen earlier that all of these participants seemed to place significant importance on their positive image: here, it is noted that achievements brought as example are of the type that would augment this positive image.

4.5.2.1.3 Summary

In summary, participants included in subgroup one seemed oriented to disproportionally seeking affirmation from other people based on their outermost image, which they invest in characterizing as positive for example by emphasizing career and other socially recognized achievements.

4.5.2.2 Pursuing self-concordance

In contrast to the subgroup just presented, a second subgroup in the sample seemed to seek self-concordance rather than affirmation from external sources. Sheldon, who, in the field of adult development, has been studying how goal-striving matures during the life-span, has defined self-concordance as “the degree to which one’s self-chosen initiatives match and represent one’s developing interests and core values”¹⁵⁷ (Sheldon, 2009 p.557). These participants exemplified seeking self-concordance in two ways. First, what seemed to energize their choice of attending a course like PTFI was the desire to become themselves more—in the sense of increasing the extent to which they lived life and made choices aligned with their personal values and meaning. Secondly, they seemed motivated by the desire to be a better person for other people—to be better in interactions with others and for the benefit of others rather than their own. Because these two themes emerged as inextricably linked to each other, they are presented together in the following paragraphs.

¹⁵⁷ As opposed to the expression of “social pressures of partially digested introjects” (Sheldon, 2009 p.557)

4.5.2.2.1 Becoming the same person but better

In reflecting over what type of change she was pursuing, P1 talked about remaining herself and at the same time improving:

*“[This is] about being, I’d suppose, about being the same person but better”
(P1_R1)*

The significance of this type of change, according to P1, lied in improving her ability to do what is better for others rather than resort to a default way. P1 gave the example of a round of interviews that she had just conducted together with a colleague, where she noticed that her colleague’s more direct questioning style facilitated a better performance in interviewees:

“A number of them gave much better answers and accounts of themselves once she had done that. So it as really in their favor to have that [...] It just struck me that... it will be good to be able to have that sort of approach in my kit bag as well” (P1_R1)

As of the end of the research, P1 did find that she had become a better communicator (more direct and transparent). Related to self-concordance, she also reported an improved ability to understand herself and pursue what is right for her. For example, through navigating the restructuring in her organization, she eventually secured a different role better fitting her skills and inclination:

“[I] probably have a better... A bit more clarity around what I want and what I am good at. Which I think the course helped with. [...] And [I] have a much better view of what is right for me... And... And I feel less buffeted by what is going on” (P1_R4)

“But I now have a different job with a different title which suits me much better and plays much more to my skills I think” (P1_R4)

P5 shared since the beginning a desire to develop her authenticity. She defined this as reconciling the person that she was at work with the person she was outside work:

“I want to bring together the person that I actually really am with the leader

that I am. So I am seen as being one way at work that actually people who know me outside work know a very different person. So for me is about how to find a way to bring the two people together” (P5_R1)

An implication that seemed to be resonating powerfully for P5 was to be able to be less threatening to other people (less “scary” or “fierce”, P5_R4):

“I am probably not the most tolerant of leaders and I set very high standards and I think at times this is quite challenging for people around me and I need to get better at building relationships with others and bringing them along with me. So I would like to be better at that.” (P5_R1)

“I think that is quite important. I don't regard myself as being particularly great or brilliant. I just believe in striving to be the best you can be and I think perhaps if people can see that the reason I set such high standards is maybe because it sets a goal to aim for, rather than a sense that I'm making people feel like they have failed... That would be a very [BREAK IN THE RECORDING] thing to do” (P5_R1)

In interview two, P5 sounded happy and amused in observing that, after the course, she had been able to conduct a meeting without upsetting people:

“I think people left my office this morning in a good state. So that's always a good sign” (P5_R2)

As of the end of the research, P5 described a greater ability to put others at ease and support them in satisfying her requirements:

“But I am also much better in considering... Perhaps areas that I didn't consider before... You know, making space for the quiet person, or utilizing a whole different range of skills to bring the best out of people, rather than... Kind of having one or two approaches... [chuckles] Now I have about fifteen” (P5_R4)

With regard to self-concordance, the crux of P5's change had been a shift in her underlying operating assumptions around how to treat herself and others: in place of doing with others as it had been done with her¹⁵⁸, she would now pursue what she valued as right—that is, being good to people¹⁵⁹.

Similarly to P1, P6 expressed the wish of gaining perspective over how he could at times handle situations better:

"We all have moments when we come out of a particular situation and we think 'Ah, actually, I could have handled that better', or 'I admire the way in which that colleague of mine dealt with their particular role in that session or discussion' ... And I mean... That's really what I am looking to do, the ability to take a third perspective, almost" (P6_R1)

Having a preference for an affiliative style of leadership, P6 he thought he should learn to be more directive when circumstances require it. In many ways, P6 came across as someone who is really caring and considerate. For example, from a further conversation, it turned out that he had been hesitant to be directive as he had not wanted to be insensitive or unjust with others:

"I suppose I've always made those kinds of relationships in the past, where being directive equals not listening, giving instructions equals not kind of being affiliative" (P6_R2)

Upon realizing that others at times might need and benefit from advice, his hesitation receded:

"It is probably not as clear cut as that. I mean, I think it's actually much more about recognizing what the other person is needing at that time. Sometimes they are needing an unambiguous direction because they actually are in a period of indecision themselves. And they are coming to me to seek some clarity, or to seek some solution that they cannot find by themselves. So, based on the signals that they are giving off, it could be very appropriate for me to say sometimes 'Well, actually this is what you need to do'. [...] It's about active listening and it's about adapting your communication style to the

¹⁵⁸ P5 had an extremely difficult childhood

¹⁵⁹ For example, being nice to her children and more supportive (if still demanding) with her team at work.

individual in responding to the situation” (P6_R2)

P6 thought that following the course he had increased his ability to empathize with other people in professional interactions:

“I think I am becoming better at analyzing my own feelings and the feeling of the third or the second party, when I am in the conversation as well. I think increasingly I am becoming better at taking the second position and being empathic towards that person” (P6_R4)

As to self-concordance, as P6 said himself, he had always been quite clear minded about his values and careful about aligning his life and professional choices to his values. Following PFTL, then, there was no significant change in this respect.

In interview one, P7 expressed a strong interest for helping other people in her team to be successful and develop professionally. Her initial thoughts around change included improving the extent with which she is able to help others:

“I think most challenging is dealing with the... all the different things there are to do, but spending the necessary time with people. You can’t just rush through everything. Even if you have hundreds of things to do, you need to spend the appropriate amount of time with... What is the appropriate amount of time? And how much of your time do you need to spend supporting somebody? And it’s kind of... It’s judging that that is kind of difficult as well. Making people feel valued, spend the right amount of time with the people who are going to feel valued and not abandoned.” (P7_R1)

Following PFTL, the theme of being good to others remained salient for P7, who found that she was better able to be as patient and understanding with:

“I just feel much more at ease with myself and relationships in general, which makes me less worried and more confident about things I suppose” (P7_R4)

“I am better at being tolerant with other people and the course definitely underlined that. Because everybody has their hang-ups. Everybody has a story, to a greater or lesser degree, which takes up a greater or lesser amount

of... Space, in their mind, in the way they are thinking, in the way they are reacting. And so I think I am a lot more tolerant of other people now. So I think... And I know how under stress I feel anxious sometimes and it is not a nice feeling, so I don't want to put that sort of pressure or worry on other people either. So I am more aware of the way I interact with people, because, you know.... People... You know, they give the best of themselves when they feel good about things and about themselves. So I am conscious of trying to help people... make them feel good about themselves and about what they are doing. And not put unnecessary pressure on them. And even if I am under pressure, I try not to do that to other people, to put pressure, because I don't think it is very productive and very positive. It's not going to help them to do as well as they could do" (P7_R3)

The ability to be more patient with others partly stemmed from P7's pursuit of a better lifestyle for herself¹⁶⁰:

"I have been relaxed, yes I have been able to take care of myself. Because I think what has been ongoing with me is the fact that it's okay to... That it is quite okay to take care of yourself and just take a step back" (P7_R4)

As a sign of self-concordance, P7 was feeling more at peace with herself and was fully owning the initiative of taking care of her health.

Finally, P8 asserted since the beginning that he wished the course to help him better himself by working with who he is and his personality:

"As long as the course is focusing on... My personality, rather than give me a 'check'. That's where I think I will benefit. So, working with me rather than saying 'the way you have done things so far in your career, tear that up because this is the way you should do things'. That won't resonate with me. So what I want is to bring this course... this course work with me, to make me—to make the personality I've got even more effective. By helping me work out what is important and what isn't" (P8_R1)

¹⁶⁰ P7 had previously been concealing her health condition and overcompensating with work, to the extent that she was suffering from extreme insomnia and approaching burnout.

The main reason why P8 wanted to become better was to be able to be better with others:

“I think number one is you’ve got to be able to treat people as human beings, and they’ve got to see you as one. And therefore I am not... I know that some people have this view that you should always have a professional front and you never let your guard down, even if you strongly disagree with something that the company is doing, but your management... You basically don’t tell anyone. I don’t agree with that, I think you’ve got to be honest” (P8_R1)

In later interviews, P8 described an improved ability to relate to others—whether to provide more support, to stand up to them when needed or to acknowledge and show gratitude for compliments. As to self-concordance, his outcome from the PTFL experience was very much about him being more and more fully himself: he recognized that he did not have to hide his sexual preferences nor keep up a professional persona¹⁶¹.

4.5.2.2.2 Not seeking affirmation

Not only participants in this sub-group demonstrated an orientation to seeking self-concordance; mostly they did *not* demonstrate an orientation to seeking affirmation. In one case the concept of affirmation was mentioned directly by a participant, who seemed to dismiss it as an optimal motive on the basis that everybody likes to be liked. P6 was exploring reasons why he might generally prefer to be an affiliative (versus a directive) leader:

“Whether I just want to be liked, I don’t think it is. And besides, everybody wants that. And... I’ve always not enjoyed giving people bad news or asking things of people that I know are going to put them under distress or I feel might be unreasonable given... what I know about what it would take them to achieve those things. I found new ways of doing it, I suppose, of doing these things: or the fact that they will pay dividends, or the fact that we can negotiate a position that means that they get some recompense as a person down the line. Maybe... I suspect people management, good people management. I don’t know” (P6_R3)

¹⁶¹ Following PTFL, P8 started to switch his focus at work by eliminating lecturing assignments and concentrating on areas that he was really passionate about (strategy and mentoring).

P6's assumption that people tend to want to be liked seems to be a safe one. What is more interesting about P6 is that he identified for himself a motive (for being affiliative as a leader) that goes deeper than receiving affirmation: P6 seemed able to endorse his preference on the basis that it resonates, at a deeper level, with his values of compassionate people management.

In two cases a pattern of seeking affirmation was present before PTFL, but was recognized on PTFL and seemed to be waning thereafter. Central to the stories of both P7 and P8 was the segregation of a significant part of themselves (respectively, an illness and sexual preference):

"I just kind of thought that in the professional world it was just kind of like... I don't know why I thought that, because the company I work for is a pretty caring company, which... But it was like a taboo, you know, being unwell. It's your problem and work isn't supposed to know these sorts of things, you know, that is just your lot in life and that's it. And I always thought that if I ever acknowledge the fact professionally, I thought that that would stop my career progressing. Which is why I always kept it undercover." (P7_R2)

"The person that I portray in my professional environment, and to a degree in my personal life, is not really the person that is within. And that's basically because since the age of about 14 I got in the habit of burying who I really am and it became a way of life. [...] And that was basically around me keeping my sexuality to myself for many many years" (P8_R2)

Following PTFL, both P7 and P8 integrated the previously segregated part of themselves. This meant living more openly as themselves rather than sustaining an outer image fitting (presumed) expectations of others¹⁶². Indicating a degree of reliance (formerly) on affirmation, both P7 and P8 talked about feeling less defensive in interactions with others:

"Interactions are different in the sense that I don't feel the need now to have an answer in the second that follows a question. I feel quite relaxed about not

¹⁶² Interestingly, in no significant way did this require P7 to disclose her illness or P8 to disclose his sexual preferences. No longer treated as a taboo, these aspects seemed to simply cease to be problematic.

answering straight away. And that therefore means that I am not going to give an aggressive answer, or a defensive answer. Which is probably, I think, what I tended to do when I wasn't really sure of the answer, if I wasn't at ease with the question, or... And I think I I believe that I don't really do that anymore because I feel it is ok to either not have the answer or be able to say I'll get back to you." (P7_R2)

"... There's been a sort of inner calm, in a sense. In the fact that I am not worried about making the wrong decision or about doing the wrong thing. I'm just sort of going with that gut instinct, and knowing that that gut instinct is... right." (P8_R2)

In the cases of P7 and P8 there seemed to be a shift from seeking affirmation to seeking self-concordance within the span of the research. These two participants seemed to no longer prioritize the (presumed) expectations of others, and rather to become more at ease with reflecting (taking time to prepare or listening to intuition) within themselves.

4.5.2.3 *Summary*

Participants in subgroup one tended to seek affirmation from external sources, manifested in a tendency to appeal to others in virtue of their image (which they painted favorably by emphasizing qualities and achievements). In contrast, participants in subgroup two tended to seek self-concordance and be motivated by the prospect of becoming themselves, by better aligning with their personal values and meaning, and becoming better with others.

4.5.3 Comparing values on personal and leadership development training

In Bass (2008), a value is defined as: “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state (Rokeach, 1973; in Bass, 2008 p. 167)”. The question was asked of the data of what the values of participants might be around personal and leadership development training. Based on this line of analysis, the subdivision of the sample that was just presented continues to be supported as subgroup one and subgroup two continue to diverge in their views. Participants in subgroup one seemed to see the personal and professional spheres remain separate and prefer training that focuses on professional development. Also, they seemed to most appreciate the instrumental and formal value of training. In contrast, participant in the second subgroup seemed to see the personal and professional spheres as interconnected and to prefer training that addresses personal development. Also, they seemed to most appreciate the substantive value of training.

4.5.3.1 *Personal and professional spheres are distinct and training should focus on professional development; instrumental and formal value of training;*

Participants in subgroup one (P2, P3, P4, P9) seemed to view personal and leadership development as distinct. These participants explicitly or implicitly identified this distinction. For example, especially during the first round of interviews, it was hardly possible to focus the conversation on participants themselves rather than on their professional circumstances¹⁶³ and external challenges. In addition, participants in this subgroup seemed to prefer training focused on professional development and to appreciate the instrumental or formal value.

4.5.3.1.1 **The personal and professional spheres are distinct**

In common to all participants in subgroup one, when asked about reasons for attending PTFL their answers tended to focus on professional and external challenges and circumstances. Here are examples from P3 and P4:

¹⁶³ Evidence around this point was presented within the individual stories of participants (see section on longitudinal analysis or Appendix 8.7)

“Linda: Why PTFL in particular?”

P3: The financial downturn. It is going to be a lot of change management, a lot of difficulty handling people. [...] already we are doing plans for 5, 10, 15% cutbacks.” (P3_R1)

“[I would like the course] to assist me with the kind of managing up within my organization.” (P4_R1)

“The other three directors are more senior than me, and have been within the business for [a long time], [they] are quite, in some respect, “been there, done that, bought the T-shirt” kind of mentality, and if something gets proposed it’s usually “Oh, we have already tried that, doesn’t work” kind of mentality. So it’s how maybe overcome that kind of...attitude” (P4_R1)

“Maybe I find difficulty in finding people that maybe are not as passionate as myself” (P4_R1)

P2 in particular could not think of anything that he personally could benefit from working on at the course. He also tended to point to professional and external challenges:

“Probably just pressure of work, some days are just so busy, you can’t... you’d love to spend long sometimes doing things, but sometimes you’ve got to react very quickly. And, we’re across many, many different cultures, many different parts of the world... I need to be perhaps a bit more understanding of our American cousins” (P2_R1)

P9’s case was somewhat different. As described earlier (section on seeking affirmation) P9’s language in early interviews did not clearly align with that of other participants included in the same subgroup. While he discussed some professional challenges, he also acknowledged his role in these challenges:

“It comes down to that, how you deal with that day-to-day stuff bombarding you and yet perk yourself up and say ‘Yes, you’ve done for this detail work and the model comes together and this number pops out of the side, but--from here does that really make sense? Yes, you’ve done all this work down here, but when you look at it from up here—that number, does that really

make sense? So being able to see the bigger picture from a number of different ways” (P9_R1)

“I’ve got an issue with dealing with my boss at the moment, [one of the] director[s], and I do need to find ways to manage him better. Part of it is how I set myself up, but also it is how he comes across to me and my peers as well. So I need to find ways of dealing with him better that doesn’t have an impact on me being able to deliver my task” (P9_R1)

However, the elements of professional challenge mentioned by P9 in time became more rather than less relevant¹⁶⁴.

In addition to a focus on professional challenges, there are other ways in which these participants manifested that they maintained a separation between the personal and professional spheres. For example, as acknowledged by P2, he had become aware on PTFL that he tended to behave differently in the professional and personal environments:

“When I am out working, probably, I am very... I very much do tend to sit back, tend to let people volunteer and come up with their ideas... But for some reason I was [made aware] that I don’t necessarily do it in my whole life. [...] I... I’ve got the skills set, I know how to do it” (P5_R2)

Just the same turned out to be true for P4. On PTFL, he learned that he could be a very different person at work than at home:

“What I tend to do is I’ll try with my kids to be kind of stupid and laugh with them and play songs and I drop that man on the corner and walk into the office a completely different person” (P4_R2)

In the case of P3, he explicitly and assertively stated that a proper leadership focus entails splitting the professional from the personal:

¹⁶⁴ As discussed in the section on developmental outcomes and directions, at the end of the research P9 was feeling less in control and more overwhelmed by work pressures and difficulties—which he attributed to his getting carried away by externalities (“*getting lost and losing perspective*”, P9_R2) rather than tuning in into his “*internal viewpoint*” (P9_R4) more.

“If you split the professional and put the professional in front, I [the program] probably would be a bit more leadership oriented. [...] It would be a bit more leadership oriented, if they took the personal problems away from the professional problems. [...] And, and you cannot just be personal leader. Those two things don’t go together” (P3_R2)

This theme was less apparent in P9, who actually noted early on how his challenges with work had been causing issues at home as well and how he wanted to overcome his difficulties to benefit both areas. In later interviews, P9 seemed to realize anew the extent to which his personal standpoint and values mattered to the end of surpassing the challenges he was facing on the workplace—but at that point also seemed unable to bridge the gap

“My life, my career is going through transformation, and there is a lot of things to try and grasp. But the course has given me some sort of framework ideas to try deal with that but I wouldn’t say by any mean that I have fully grasped, made this transformation yet. It is a big change in my career as I move from more of a doer to trying to make things happen through leadership and I am not entirely comfortable that at the moment and I am finding it difficult to keep track of everything. That is causing some internal frustrations for me.” (P9_R4)

4.5.3.1.2 Training should focus on professional development

Consistently with a view of the personal and professional spheres as distinct, participants included in this subgroup seemed to approve of training focused on personal development. A personal development focused was either disapproved of training or not quite acknowledged. P2 and P3 expressed disapproval. Ahead of the course, P2 had made a comment from which transpired an understanding of and a view on personal development training:

“It’s...stand up and sing a jingle, very much tell them about something painful that is going on in your life, bear your soul, and... so one of the guys stands up and says his daughter is on drugs and him and his wife ... are divorcing. And that’s a very American thing. For British people they’d be: ‘Bah...I’m telling them nothing!’ ” (P5_R1)

P3's resentful reaction to PTFL's emphasis on personal development speaks of his disapproval:

"There were one or two people who were... who probably had personal problems" (P3_R2)

"There was one or two basket cases there" (P3_R2)

"Basically people... Whose bottom line is being unloved and abandoned" (P3_R3)

"[The course's] therapy is for fucked up fuckers" (P3_R2)

P4 did not openly criticize personal development training, but seemed to exclude that it might have a role in leadership development. He described leadership as a *"game of chances"* (P4_R1) and did not think that he himself had changed through the years he had been working as a manager:

"I do things in the same way, I suppose." (P4_R1)

In summary, participants in this subgroup more or less explicitly viewed the personal and professional spheres as distinct; consistently, they seemed to expect of professional training that it would not focus on personal issues.

4.5.3.1.3 Instrumental and formal value of training

Another commonality within subgroup one is the appreciation mainly for the instrumental and formal value of training. P2 and P4 expressed that they were attending the course because of an upcoming or potential promotion:

"I think we are just trying to put a bit of formality into... Of course I have been in the company a long time, and the next step is senior but even more senior than I am right now." (P2_R1)

“I am really at a moment where I am looking to develop within the business. As I explained, I have one person that I report into. [...] The plan moving forward is for me to become a [...] director of the business” (P4_R1)

In their eyes, the value of PTFL seemed to lie in the formalization of experience which was going to open doors to the prospective promotion¹⁶⁵:

“And, really this is kind of a stepping stone to achieving that” (P4_R1)

“I’ve done quite a piece in our company, and they just felt it was time to formalize some of my training. So I am never going to do an MBA, am never going to go to the university, too busy...” (P2_R1)

Promotion was not a factor at play for P3 and P9. P3 talked about several training initiatives he had taken part in (see earlier section on seeking affirmation). About training, he emphasized most the aspect of acquiring tools and frameworks. For example, from a Cranfield Praxis course he had previously attended, he had adopted a particular framework of personalities:

“Basically, [on that course] they gave you a way to assess what sort of person you are dealing with. Five... The Centaur model, five different types [of people] and how to deal with them. [...]” (P3_R1)

P3 emphasized a number of times throughout the research that he preferred the approach of this prior course over the approach of PTFL. The key reason for his preference was the focus of this prior course on the framework of personalities which he had become his “Bible” (P3_R4):

“The Centaur model was an eye-opener for me. In that I saw ways to deal with people. The Sprite¹⁶⁶ you never close a deal with, they’ll close it by

¹⁶⁵ In both the cases of P2 and P4, a boss’ recommendation was part of the reason they were going to attend PTFL. They both mentioned that their respective bosses had suggested that going on the course might help raise their self-awareness.

¹⁶⁶ Here P3 is referring to different personality types by the names given to them in the framework.

themselves and will come back to you. My colleagues who are classical warriors, instead of saying: “Nice day, let’s have a coffee”—straight down to business with them. And the ones who are guardians, come-by-come-from, you know, have us coffee before we carry on with stuff... have a glass of wine. Get the social going” (P3_R1)

“Which [the material from the prior course] I use as my Bible, for my decision making, assessing situations, dealing with people, being with integrity, and knowing yourself” (P3_R4)

Similarly, P2 and P9 seemed to appreciate the aspect of ‘re-tooling’:

“I think we are just trying to get me some tools” (P2_R1)

“The course has given me some sort of framework ideas to try deal with [things] (P9_R4)

“I have started learning a methodology to enable me to process day to day items much better” (P9_R1)

In sum, there is a theme across this subgroup around appreciation of the instrumental (tools and frameworks) and formal (credentials for promotion) value of training.

4.5.3.1.4 Summary

Participants in subgroup one tended to see personal and professional spheres as distinct, prefer that training initiatives focus on professional development and appreciate the instrumental and formal value of training.

4.5.3.2 *Personal and professional spheres are interconnected and training should address personal development; substantive value of training;*

Participants in subgroup two (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) tended to express a view that the personal and professional development are interconnected. Also, they tended to emphasize the substantive value of training: by substantive, I mean training that addresses the substance of who they are (their developing sense of personal values and meaning) versus training that augments credentials or probability of promotion.

4.5.3.2.1 The personal and professional spheres are interconnected

Participants in subgroup two were often spontaneously forthcoming about a view of themselves as one and the same person across these personal and professional contexts. This was expressed in different ways by different participants. For example, P1 emphasized toward the beginning of the first interview that she felt that her (self-confidence) issue was affecting her at work as well as at home:

“Because, you are the same person at work and after work” (P1_R1)

P5 initially felt that there was a perception gap around her personal versus professional characters. She expressed early on her aspiration to bring these two sides of her together:

“I think I am quite misunderstood [...] I think it's about feeling... Getting to a point where I feel more confident in my role as a leader. Almost that I accept that that's what I am, so that I don't have to keep proving myself over time.” (P5_R1)

In the case of P6, he specified from the first interview that the challenges he was experiencing in leadership situations were essentially personal challenges—they had to do, he believed, with his own default responses to external situation:

“[I want to be] developing awareness of some of the challenges that I personally have been facing in this role. The role is very much about... getting our organization to work in a new way and that can be sometimes personally challenging.” (P6_R1)

“Essentially it's all about organizational change, as much as it is about delivering a service. And that can be... It can be, personally, quite a difficult

process sometimes” (P6_R1)

P7’s issue was a taboo around her illness. The core of her message, starting in interview two, became to integrate (rather than segregate) the reality of her illness in her life. She shared a conversation she had with her chairman immediately after the course around effects of illness on risk-taking and the importance of dealing with the illness (rather than denying it):

“He said to me, quite interestingly, that quite often people that are ill or do have illnesses are sometimes... Do have a bit of a fear factor which holds them back sometimes from taking risks. And so perhaps that's part of my psychology at the moment, so that is something that I need to try learn to live with or deal with” (P7_R2)

Lastly, P8 highlighted early in the first interview that he saw himself as the primary instrument through which, at work, he was managing other people:

“It is about people. If you are managing people, they are people. And equally, they have to deal with me” (P8_R1)

“You are understanding others more, which then by understanding others better has helped you to drive them as well as driving yourself” (P8_R1)

These five participants expressed a sense of personal unity across contexts. In addition, in contrast with the participants in the other subgroup, they seemed relatively comfortable when the conversation focused on themselves¹⁶⁷ (rather than external circumstances and professional challenges).

4.5.3.2.2 Training should address personal development--substantive value of training

These same participants who viewed the personal and professional spheres as interconnected seemed to prefer training focused on personal development. As

¹⁶⁷ Evidence around this point was presented within the individual stories of participants (see section on longitudinal analysis or Appendix 8.7)

expressed especially by P1 and P8, these participants were intentionally seeking this type of training and were less interested in acquiring new management models or techniques:

“And I was quite intrigued by this particular course... Because it seemed very different to usual management courses that... about knowledge and information and that’s a different source of planning and hem....and this seemed very much about you as a person” (P1_R1)

“You can go on lots of management courses and learn information on the strategies and tactics. But if there are reasons within yourself why you are not able to use that or implement some of that to its full extent... Then you can learn all you like but it’s not... You are not going to reach your full potential. So for me it was more about understanding what it is that held me back in some situations, and therefore find ways where I could be more effective in the future” (P1_R2)

“I didn’t want just a standard... You know, ‘This is what you do’. It seemed to me that the course was working with me, and my personality, and my role, rather than saying ‘This is what management....’...I am not into that. And because I think management is about your personality, I thought this was working with you rather than just giving you a check list” (P8_R1)

“Actually, management training is in a bubble... You know, you do management training and it is all about techniques about management yet it is not addressing the person, it is not going to develop people” (P8_R2)

These participants also seemed to seek training that would help them understand and improve themselves. This was expressed in various ways. P5 described her expectations as follows:

“I expect that the program will provide an in-depth understanding of how my background impacts on my role as a leader [and] enable an understanding of my limiting patterns” (P5)¹⁶⁸

P6 had researched training options and selected PTFL. As mentioned earlier, he was looking for training that focused on *“soft skills”* (P6_R2) because he wanted to take perspective over his own *“gut reactions or my natural tendencies to do things”* (P6_R2) and understand what he could be doing better as a leader of his team. While P7 was invited to attend PTFL by her Chairman, she had reacted enthusiastically to the invite even though at the time she had quite a full plate¹⁶⁹:

“I kind of thought... Hmm, I wonder why. And then I thought, well, ‘Why not?! You know, he’s offering me the opportunity—such a fabulous opportunity to do something like this, so... You know, you don’t get offers like that every day!’” (P7_R1)

Given the interest of these participants in further understanding and improving themselves, I define their interest in PTFL as an appreciation of the substantive value of training.

4.5.3.2.3 Summary

Participants included in subgroup two tended to see the personal and professional spheres as interconnected and favor training that addresses personal development. Also, they seemed to appreciate the substantive value of training.

4.5.3.3 Conclusion

The following table aims to capture the comparison between subgroups one and two around values (along with the themes just explored: relationship between personal

¹⁶⁸ Extract from P5’s summary of pre-program expectations, which she filled out on the Praxis’ application form and forwarded to me in response to my interview question around expectations

¹⁶⁹ With work but also with training: at the time of the research, P7 was completing a graduate business degree and attending a course on online marketing. Not to mention the impact of her illness.

and professional spheres, preferences around training and perceived value of training) and summarize supporting evidence.

Table 21. Comparing subgroups on values around personal and leadership development training

| Theme | Subgroup one (P2, P3, P4, P9) | Subgroup two (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Personal and professional spheres | Are distinct: Difficult to focus conversation on participants rather than external circumstances | Are interconnected: Not difficult to focus conversation on participants |
| Training | Personal and leadership domains are (and are best kept) separate Should focus on professional development And provide framework/tools | Personal and leadership domains are interconnected: a person is the same across contexts Should address personal development And work on the person and how the person deals with external challenges |
| Value of training | Instrumental/formal To help re-tool, to formalize work experience, to facilitate promotion | Substantive To help individuals understand themselves, find alignment with their personal values and meaning and become better with others |

Compiled by the author.

4.5.4 Comparing patterns of sensemaking

In section 1.4.3 four key iterative patterns (a self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability loop) of sensemaking were presented as the core processes leading to personal development. Findings were presented around the way in which different participants engaged with each of these. Here, the same findings are presented but organized in a new way: they are summarized at the level of the two subgroups identified through comparative analysis. The two subgroups, which emerged based on their differing on motives and values, also differed in terms of how they engaged with the four sensemaking loops (see table below).

Table 22. Comparison of participants based on sensemaking patterns around the key core processes of personal development

| Subgroups | Self- awareness Loop | Commitment Loop | Effort Loop | Capability Loop |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Subgroup one (P2, P3, P4, P9) | Increased; Selective (P3) or conflicted (P2, P4, P9) acceptance; | Tentative language | Selective (P3), not sufficient (P9), no data ¹ (P2, P4) | Capability unknown |
| Subgroup two (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) | Increased; Full acceptance; | Explicit and determined language | Sufficient to attain change pursued | Capability assumed |

Compiled by the author.

On one hand, participants in subgroup one seemed to exemplify one (or more) of the following situations:

- Self-awareness loop. Without exception, self-awareness was increased following participation in PTFL. However, acceptance of the new self-awareness was either limited (P3 selectively accepted one out of a number of elements of feedback) or somewhat conflicted (P2, P3, P4 and P9 seemed to be in a slight state of shock as of interview two. In addition, P2 felt humbled, P3 felt sad and resentful; P4 and P9 were harder to read but expressed a sense of difficulty).
- Commitment loop. These participants never quite expressed in explicit terms a determination to make a specific change. Rather, their language around commitment remained generic and tentative (for example, *“I was told that if I did more of this, I could see more of that”*, P2_R2; *“Things are not black and white, certainly there are things I am revisiting, to see where they are”*, P3_R2; *“I am still in a transition period of adjusting back, and it's very difficult to come back and roll back into your work and personal life with that personality change”*, P4_R2; *“I think the gains from doing it that way far outweigh the dis-benefits”*, P9_R2).
- Effort loop¹⁷⁰. P3's effort, which was limited to the one area of feedback that he had accepted, was sufficient to the end of achieving personality adjustment. P9, by his own assessment, he had not been able by the end of the research to input sufficient effort in order to achieve the change that he had targeted following PTFL.

¹⁷⁰ Data are not available for P2 and P4, who dropped out of the research after interview two

- Capability loop. It is not possible to draw conclusions on the capability to change of participants based on the data gathered. The theoretical possibility is considered that, at the time of the research, in the cases of P3 and P9 there was an internal barrier to achieving the type of change encouraged at PTFL.

On the other hand, the following was observed about participants in subgroup two:

- Self-awareness loop. These participants discussed a novel, self-relevant, specifically defined and relatively profound insight about themselves. They considered this insight carefully and eventually accepted the new self-awareness.
- Commitment loop. These participants expressed in explicit terms (often spontaneously) a firm intention to make a change.
- Effort loop. These participants undertook a number of initiatives to realize the change (including remaining mindful of their aim). Their efforts were sufficient to attain the change that they were pursuing.
- Capability loop. Because these participants attained the change that they are pursuing, it can be assumed that at the time of the research they were capable of attaining it.

4.5.4.1.1 Summary

Participants included in subgroup one engaged somewhat with each of the four loops of sensemaking identified as leading to personal development (P3: selective engagement; P2, P4, P9: tentative commitment; P3, P9: unknown capability). In contrast, participants included in subgroup two engaged fully with and eventually surpassed all four loops.

4.5.5 Comparing outcomes

Outcomes were considered earlier in this chapter on findings (section 1.2) in terms of type of change achieved by individual participants. Two more outcomes are considered here: the affective state of participants and any variation in their sense of self-worth in conjunction with their participation in PTFL.

4.5.5.1 *Affective state*

The data shows that participants across the sample felt some degree of surprise (or even shock) from the self-awareness acquired on PTFL. In addition to surprise, participants in subgroup one reported mostly negative emotions while participants in subgroup two reported positive emotions in conjunction with their experience of PTFL. In subgroup one, the stronger expressions of negative emotions came from P3 (*"sadder", "pissed off"*) and P9 (*"taken aback", "affected negatively", "overwhelming"*). P2 and P4 expressed non-positive, rather than outright negative, reactions (*"humble", "not easy"; "demanding", "difficult"*). In subgroup two, the stronger expression of positive emotions came from P7 (*"a lot more calm, peaceful and relaxed"*) and P8 (*"really enjoyed", "inner calm"*). Other participants (P1, P5, P6) mentioned that they had been feeling stronger or more confident after the course, and that they enjoyed the experience. Full quotes for all the examples just cited are provided in the table on the following page.

Table 23. Evidence on effects of the PTFL experience on affective state

| Subgroup | Quotes |
|---|--|
| Subgroup one (P2, P3, P4, P9) | <p>P2: “[I have been] A little more humble”, “It really made me go away and think about how I am with people I work with, people in my own life. And... That’s not easy, I mean, it’s very hard to change and stuff like that. But certainly, it challenges you to try to change...” (P2_R2)</p> <p>P3: “Probably I feel, hem... I wouldn’t say pissed off is the word, but certainly... a bit more reflective [...] I am sadder. Hem... Sadder because I have a big list of things I didn’t do right all these years” (P3_R2)</p> <p>P4: “it was a very good course. Certainly very demanding. A bit tiring, but certainly interesting”; “Maybe I wasn’t aware of what I was doing”; “Maybe [I] wisened a little”; “[It was the] realization of how I am perceived or how I come across that was highlighted to me the course, and certainly some of that I can relate my work life. And I would say I am still in a transition period of adjusting back and it’s very difficult to come back and roll back into your work and personal life with that personality change” (P4_R2)</p> <p>P9: “We tried to be warned about the content involved and the sort of emotional attack that can take place” (P9_R2); “It was quite something to take... To get quite taken aback by at the start, but then they are right and I need to find ways to work around that” (P9_R2); “PTFL has added in a lot more things that I now need to think about and that has become a bit overwhelming for me. So in some ways that has caused some difficulties. So yes I have grown in that I am more mature because I am more aware of what is going on and it affects... How other people can be affected, so there is certainly some growth in there. But I do have concerns that I have been affected negatively because I am trying to deal with too much” (P9_R4)</p> |
| Subgroup two (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) | <p>P1: “I felt quite strong actually, and that was... One of my issues was about feeling stronger. Hem, and, hem... Showing my strength, and I certainly have felt that since I came back” (P1_R2)</p> <p>P5: “It was intense, tiring but it was good. I enjoyed it. Good, I enjoyed it”, “I have a different... Kind of attitude probably toward myself, and also hopefully also toward other people [...] I probably need to be an awful lot kinder and less tough on myself” (P5_R2)</p> <p>P6: “Recognizing that every individual has a story to tell and, in some ways, some of the kind of things... The insecurities that I had, you know, other people had too. And I think everybody had that as well. I’m not sure I can speak on their behalf, but a lot of people said to me “you know, I thought that I was the only person who ever thought about that”. So from that point of view, I thought it is very useful”</p> <p>P7: “I’m just a lot more calm, peaceful and relaxed. And I thought that had a lot to do with the course, because having an experience [like the one] we lived on the course [...]... and the course helped me find a better perspective on life and work” (P7_R3)</p> <p>P8: “I really enjoyed the course. Not what I was expecting, but it was a very good experience”, “it’s been... There’s been a sort of inner calm, in a sense. In the fact that I am not worried about making the wrong decision or about doing the wrong thing” (P8_R2)</p> |

Compiled by the author.

4.5.5.2 *Effects on sense of self and self-worth*

A second noticeable pattern is that, after PTFL, participants in subgroup one referred (or continued to refer) to a split self-concept. Some seemed to also refer to a weakened sense of self-worth. In contrast, participants in subgroup two referred to greater integration and to a strengthened sense of self-worth. In subgroup one, the persisting sense of a split self-concept was evident in P2 (*“internal”* person, housing *“insecurities”*, versus *“external”* person seen by others) and P4 (who articulated a not too clear notion of an inner person, where insecurities and issues reside, and an outer personality). The pattern of weakened sense of self-worth was most evident in P3 (*“confidence dented”*; *“The head [...] has come along for a good haircut”*; *“in retro”*) and P9 (*“more difficult for me”*, *“overwhelming”*). In subgroup two, the pattern of strengthened sense of self was most evident in P1 (*“iron core”*, *“head above the water”*) and P8 (*“being myself is very acceptable”*). P5, P6 and P7 also discussed feeling stronger and more at ease with themselves. Full quotes for all the examples just cited are provided in the table on the following page.

Table 24. Evidence on effects of the PTFL experience on sense of self and self-worth

| Subgroup | Quotes |
|---|---|
| Subgroup one (P2, P3, P4, P9) | <p>P3: <i>“probably I left with hem... confidence dented rather than... I’m probably more aware to other people, but as a leader... I think I’ve gone... probably in retro”</i>; <i>“Then there’s self-confidence, which is the top part of the tree. Hem ... The head has got... has come along for a good haircut and quite some confidence may have been temporarily reduced”</i> (P3_R2)</p> <p>P2: <i>“the person who is inside... I think that is very much how you are raised and nurtured, and you know what you are confident in and what your insecurities are, because everyone has got their insecurities. And that’s the internal person. And then you have the external person that everyone gets to see. And, very few people get to see the real inside person. Because... I was trying to think, you can keep that away from people and not allow other people to see you”</i> (P5_R2)</p> <p>P4: <i>“Personality can be read by others. If you're talking about a kind of an inner core, where you're dealing with issues, where you're dealing with things internally, then definitely yes. Because what happens with people is that people try to internalize things. [...] So it's through personality which other people would pick up on: "Why is she upset?", you know, you can't tell automatically, through someone's personality, that something has changed in their feelings. But some people take things into their core self and try to deal with them, and rationalize, and I think what happened on the course, maybe that's where your question is coming from, is that people core feelings came out rather than their personality. [...] There were some real things which were...In some instances they were internalized, you know... And that was really the problem there”</i> (P4_R2)</p> <p>P9: <i>“I am finding it difficult to keep track of everything. That is causing some internal frustrations for me”</i>; <i>“in some ways that has made things more difficult for me. Because one of my limiting patterns is about going to the detail and getting things right and perfect—and PTFL has added in a lot more things that I now need to think about and that has become a bit overwhelming for me”</i> (P9_R4)</p> |

(continued) Evidence on effects of the PTFL experience on sense of self and self-worth

| Subgroup | Quotes |
|---|--|
| Subgroup two (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) | <p>P1: <i>“inside there’s a sort of an iron core which means I can’t be knocked over as much”</i> (P1_R2); <i>“Prior to going on the course, I was quite overwhelmed with a lot of the things that were around both in my personal and my professional life. And, hem... And it was quite difficult to see where I was going. I think I described it to someone once as if I was swimming along in a river and there are lots of floats and jetsam, lots of debris and I couldn’t get my head above the water enough to be able to breathe. And I think that, over the last year, I have managed to get out of the water and have a much better view of what is right for me”</i> (P1_R4)</p> <p>P5: <i>“In fact [I feel] possibly a lot stronger. A lot stronger. Much more confident in terms of what I bring to the table, I don’t feel like I have to constantly justify that.”</i> (P5_R4)</p> <p>P6: <i>“There are circumstances where I certainly felt I handled myself better or I felt more confident and not felt as self-conscious or threatened as I might have done in similar circumstances previously. Yeah, absolutely”</i> (P6_R3); <i>“I think I have [always had] a very strong sense of what my internal reference point and values are, and... I think they... They do mean that I am quite principled in what I do [...] ... [In terms of] making decision about my own work and the directions I think things should go in... I don’t really think [PTFL] has been something important for me. I think it is more about the communication of decision making and getting buy-in to it. But yeah... I am fairly decisive about things, I know what I think”</i> (P6_R4)</p> <p>P7: <i>“I just feel much more at ease with myself and relationships in general, which makes me less worried and more confident about things I suppose”</i> (P7_R4)</p> <p>P8: <i>“That sort of lecturing persona, which has always been the person, you know, very much out there, very confident... that’s the person that a lot of the professionals see. [...] And I’ve always said, you know, if... I think I am always going to keep lecturing, because if I keep that person out there then if my company gets fed up with me and wants me to leave, then I always have that to fall back on. But more recently, and in fact at 3.30 this afternoon I am talking to my managing director about actually reducing my lecturing almost to zero so that I can concentrate on doing what I really enjoy and that is building businesses within the company. [...] So I am doing what I’ve always said I wouldn’t do. You know, I am getting rid of the old P8, and saying ‘That’s the lecturing P8, that is finished now’ and keep that out there because it’s useful from a business perspective, but I want to do is not lecturing anymore”</i> (P8_R2) <i>“I was told is to make it real and show a bit of the true me rather than always give what I think people want to see. So always to remember to be myself, and being myself is very acceptable [...] [I’ve got to] just be me and just be happy, and content. You know, keeping it real, keeping it about me”</i> (P8_R3)</p> |

Compiled by the author.

4.5.6 Conclusion

Two subgroups of participants were identified which consistently differed on a number of themes, including motives, values around personal and leadership development training, sensemaking patterns and outcomes of the PTFL experience. In terms of motives, subgroup one seemed oriented to disproportionately seeking affirmation from external sources; in contrast, subgroup two seemed oriented to seeking self-concordance. In terms of values, subgroup one maintained a distinction between personal and professional spheres, favored training that focuses on professional aspects and appreciated the instrumental and formal value of training; in contrast, subgroup two saw the personal and professional spheres as interconnected, favored training that addresses personal development and appreciated the substantive value of training. In terms of sensemaking patterns, subgroup one engaged only to some extent with each of the four loops of sensemaking identified as leading to personal development; in contrast, subgroup two engaged fully with and eventually surpassed all four loops. Finally, in terms of outcomes, subgroup one was affected negatively by the PTFL experience (negative affective state and weakened sense of self-worth); in contrast, subgroup two was affected positively by the PTFL experience (positive affective state and strengthened sense of self and self-worth) .

4.6 Findings from integrative analysis

4.6.1 Introduction

In this section, findings from comparative analysis (see prior section) are summarized and integrated with earlier findings around developmental outcomes (section 4.2) and core developmental processes (section 4.4.4) in highlighting a pattern of internal consistency within each of the two subgroups just identified through comparative analysis. The aim of integrative analysis¹⁷¹ is to bring together key elements of findings and begin to highlight relationships among them.

4.6.2 Integrating findings

The table below summarizes motives, values, sensemaking patterns as well as outcomes for each of the two subgroups identified through comparative analysis.

Table 25. Summary of motives, core developmental processes and outcomes per subgroup

¹⁷¹ By integrative analysis, I mean analysis that proceeds to a higher level of abstraction compared to previous stages of analysis. Previous stages of analysis proceeded directly from data; in contrast, integrative analysis builds on categorizations derived from data at those previous stages of analysis. Moving from a high level picture of the data, integrative analysis brings together key elements of findings by highlighting the relationship among them. This is the part of analysis that is farther away from the data and closer to theorization. Often in doctoral theses this type of analysis is presented at the beginning in the discussion section; however, I present it in the context of findings in order to preserve continuity of the presentation.

| Subgroups | Subgroup one (P2, P3, P4, P9) | Subgroup two (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) |
|---|--|---|
| Motives | Seeking affirmation | Seeking self-concordance |
| Values around personal and leadership development training | Personal and professional spheres are distinct Training should focus on professional development Instrumental/formal value of training | Personal and professional spheres are interconnected Training should address personal development Substantive value of training |
| Core processes: four loops of sensemaking | | |
| Self-awareness | Increased | Increased |
| Commitment | Selective/conflicted acceptance | Full acceptance |
| Effort | Tentative | Determined |
| Capability | Selective (P3), not sufficient (P9, no data (P2, P4) | Sufficient |
| Outcomes | | |
| Affective state | Negative | Positive |
| Self | Split | Integrated |
| Self-worth | Threatened | Strengthened |
| Personal development | No (P3, P9) No data (P2, P4) | Yes |
| Other change | Expanded self-awareness Personality adjustment (P3, P9)/ No data (P2, P4) | Expanded self-awareness Personality adjustment |

Compiled by the author.

From this integration of evidence, a pattern of internal consistency emerges for each of the two subgroups.

Participants in subgroup one:

- Seemed motivated by seeking affirmation from external sources
- Saw the personal and professional spheres as distinct and favored strictly professional training, which they appreciated for its instrumental and formal value
- Reacted to new self-awareness with selective or somewhat conflicted acceptance; their language around commitment was tentative and the effort invested in the change was partial (P3) or insufficient (P9);
- Outcomes of their experience of PFTL included negative affect and a threat to their sense of self-worth (or a persisting sense of a self-concept split between internal and external);

- From the point of view of developmental outcomes, these participants (P3 and P9) achieved some form of personality adjustment but to not achieve personal development

The internal consistency proposed as characteristic of subgroup one revolves around the motive of seeking affirmation and the reliance on external image as a source of security and confidence. PTFL typically encourages participants to rely less on external image and turn the gaze inward; in addition, the program tends to highlight shortcomings (limiting patterns) through direct feedback. In the eyes of these participants, the personal feedback received on PTFL must have been the opposite of affirming, undermining their very sense of self-worth in as much as it relied on external image. In the face of a threat to self-worth, it would be natural that defensive sensemaking mechanisms¹⁷² would be triggered—for example the screening out of new awareness.

In contrast, participants in subgroup two:

- Seemed motivated by seeking self-concordance
- Saw the personal and professional spheres as interconnected and favored training with a focus on personal development, which they appreciated for their substantive value;
- Reacted to new self-awareness with full acceptance; their language around commitment was determined and the effort they invested was sufficient to achieve the change they were pursuing;
- Outcomes of their experience on PTFL included positive affect and a strengthened and further integrated self-concept
- From the point of view of developmental outcomes, these participants achieved personal development (forms of personality adjustment that can be subsumed in their personal development occurred as a consequence).

The internal consistency proposed as characteristic of subgroup two revolves around the motive of seeking self-concordance and the reliance on internal sources of wisdom (personal values and meaning) as a primary source of security and confidence. PTFL's method, which tends to intensify quality and extent of self-inquiry and to encourage the exploration of personal values and meaning, seemed to be perceived by these participants as valid (to the end of achieving greater self-understanding and self-concordance) but also as non-threatening. These participants seemed to subject feedback to careful consideration and eventually accept in full the self-awareness

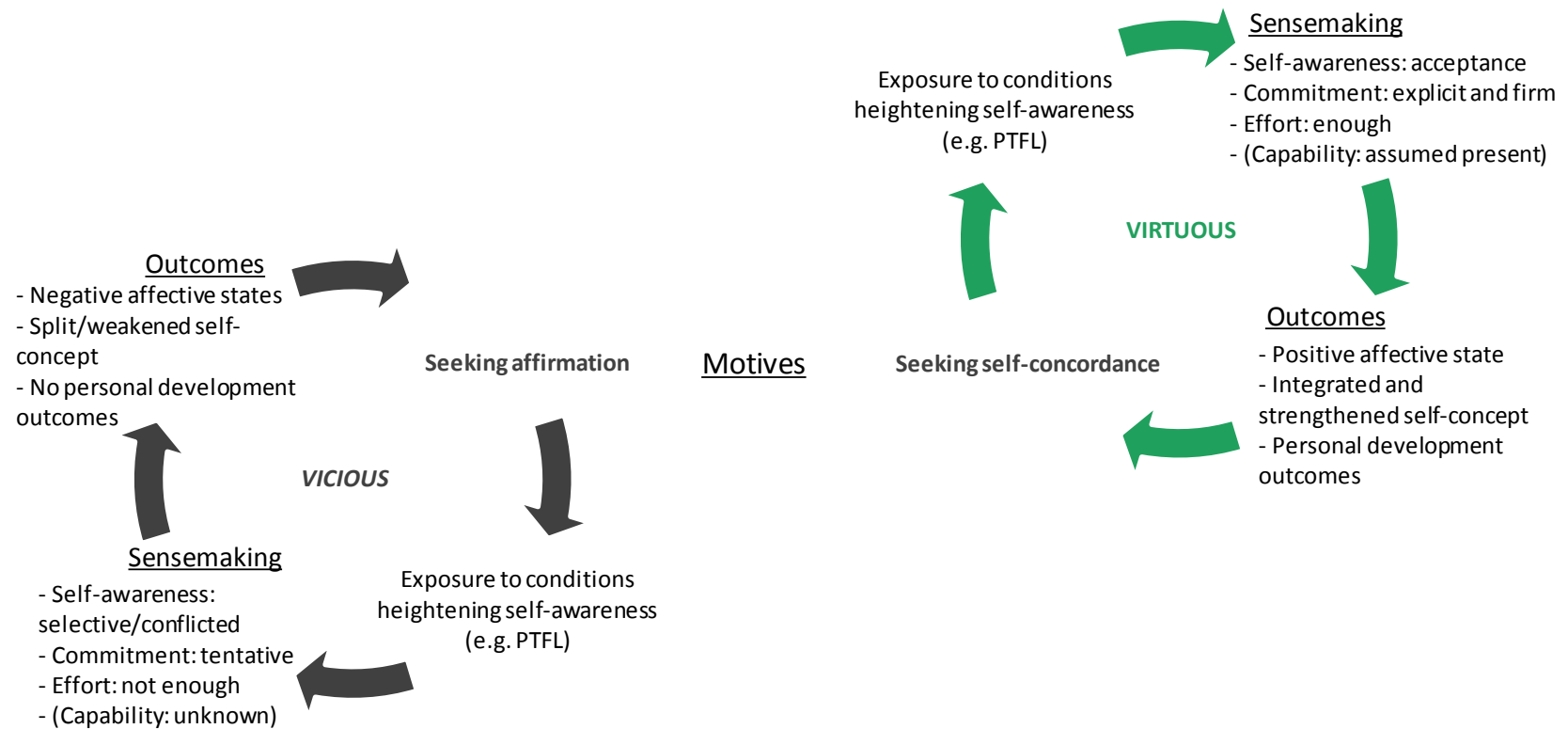
¹⁷² I believe it is possible that these mechanisms would be partly or entirely unconscious

newly acquired. Determined commitment and sufficient effort simply seemed to ensue.

4.6.3 Hypothesizing virtuous and vicious circles of development

The above analysis is an interpretive description of the data gathered around the subjective experience of participants. As such, it does not aim to reveal and explain causal links among the phenomena observed. However, based on the internal consistencies just observed, a speculation is ventured around the effects of motive on personal development. The aim is to highlight an opportunity, relevant to both the fields of adult and leadership, for further research around the potential of motive to explain dynamism and inactivity in development. This speculation is based on a re-organization of information from the descriptive form (e.g. the table above) according to a criterion of logical consequence: with motive followed by, sensemaking patterns and outcomes.

Figure 27. Hypothesizing vicious and virtuous circles of personal development



Compiled by the author.

As represented in the figure above, if motive revolves around seeking affirmation and given an emphasis on positive outer image, a situation (like PTFL) where the accent is on addressing limiting patterns and encouraging exploration of inner values and meanings would likely be perceived as threatening. Consequently, new awareness would be a questionable benefit, as well as a questionable basis for commitment and effort. The overall experience would be perceived as threatening and work on self-inquiry would seem undesirable. Personality adjustments (which occur closer to the surface, at the behavioral level) could be achieved, but personal development would be hindered. Potentially, a vicious circle of personal development is generated as a negative experience would likely be basis for rejection of further iterations of expansion of self-awareness.

In contrast, if underlying motive revolves around seeking self-concordance and given an emphasis on personal values and meaning, the focus and intensity of the PTFL program would be overall perceived as helpful¹⁷³. Acceptance of new self-awareness would provide a basis for deliberate commitment and full effort to change. In as much as the experience granted an increase in self-concordance (the feeling that the change is meaningful and 'right' for the person), the overall experience would be perceived as positive. Personal development, which relies on the revision of deeply seated assumptions, would be available. Potentially, a virtuous circle of personal development is generated as the experience would establish a positive precedent for further iterations.

4.6.4 Implications

The analysis presented in sections 1.5 and 1.6 relies on a division of the sample in two subgroups, where participants included in one subgroup eventually achieved personal development while participants included in the other subgroup eventually did not. While this division is justified by the evidence presented (across the themes of motives, values, sensemaking patterns and outcomes), it might be misleading in terms of pointing at an assumption that people can be divided in 'changers' and 'non-changers'. If anything like the virtuous and vicious circles of personal development exists, it is unlikely that there is a type of individual who would incessantly develop and a type of individual for whom development would be increasingly inhibited. Rather, it seems likely that different iterations of personal development would continue to occur

¹⁷³ Perhaps, participants would draw on the affirmation offered by peers on the course in order to buffer the challenge of expanding self-awareness

and overlap in time; and, that an iteration of personal development which, for whatever reason, has stalled could be resumed and 'completed' at a later stage. It is also conceivable that (temporary or permanent) regression could be experienced given stressful enough conditions. Although I believe that some extreme cases (of 'chronic' changers or non-changers) might exist in reality, a norm is more likely to consist of individuals who iteratively experience both circles. The sensemaking of personal development is an intellectually and emotionally demanding process and attaining a certain developmental gain is always a stretch in itself. If, at a given time, personal development cannot be attained, that might be because of adverse contextual circumstances; or, as will be discussed next, it might be because of a capability barrier.

4.6.5 Conclusion

One issue potentially at the heart of the distinction between the two subgroups revolves around capability to change. It is not in the faculty of this research to assess whether participants had the capability to carry out personal development. However, it seems safe to assume that those who did make a change in personal development also had the capability to do so. In the remaining cases¹⁷⁴, a capability barrier might have been present. This idea was suggested by P3's case: P3 described his PTFL experience as a bad intervention ("*bad surgery takes three weeks longer to heal*", P3_R2) while repeating that the time spent on personal issues was redundant. There was something conflicted about how P3 related to his own personal issues ("*most of the things that I have in my life which were goners [...] have been chased away*", P3_R2; "*there's a few ghosts I've put to rest*", P3_R1). P3's described his approach to dealing with issues, such as the loss of his arm as: "*The normal process would be to have denial, to have anger, to have depression, and then acceptance. But when it happened, I was just 'Okay, it happened'. How am I going to look at it? Cut the four stages and come to the same end point*" (P3_R3). P3 made harsh remarks on the people on the course who did have issues and referred to an interesting model of change: "*Almost like terminator, [...] perhaps by magic effect, terminator puts all the pieces together and he comes back better and stronger than he was before*" (P3_R3). P3's and PTFL's approach to dealing with issues seem drastically incompatible but, in addition, there is something conflicted and painful about P3's grappling with his experience on the program. There is a theoretical possibility that a person might have

¹⁷⁴ Assuming intention to change

had a negative experience with self-awareness¹⁷⁵ and developed a strong defensive mechanism against 'intrusions' into self-awareness. If this mechanism were present, it could create a bias in motive, away from self-concordance (which requires extensive self-awareness work and going inward) and towards seeking affirmation (which relies on external confirmations). As seen earlier, a seeking affirmation motivation might be able to give a negative spin to the wheel of development. The PTFL context, which seemed ideally conducive for some, would be most counterproductive for people who do have this type of internal barrier. In its conclusion, this thesis wants to highlight the criticality of better understanding inner dynamics of capability and motive because of their potential to explain some of the dynamism and inactivity in personal development.

¹⁷⁵ Perhaps because of the intensity of a prior experience of aggressions to their sense personal sense of self-worth (and perhaps, at a crucial juncture of development)

4.7 Summary of findings

Developmental outcomes

This research originally set out to observe whether, in conjunction with participation in PTFL, a process of change was observable in the sensemaking of participants which had implications for both personal and leadership development. For all nine participants, a process of change was found to occur. In five (out of seven) cases, personal development as well as expansion of leadership capabilities were found to occur.

Developmental context

This research also set out to identify which may be the main elements of a developmental context and what qualities of context may make it conducive to the specific type of change that it intends to facilitate. Four distinct elements of context were identified: scope, agenda, tone¹⁷⁶ and actual developmental context. The quality of these four elements is affected by specific characteristics of a developmental initiative: program characteristics, people, characteristics, role modeling by tutors and mirroring by group (respectively). Context is presented as a processual entity that develops from the interaction of its key elements (of design or emergent). As a developmental context, PTFL is ideally conducive to extensive self-examination and the inquiry into personal histories and limiting patterns and seems to facilitate personal development. Developmental context emerged as a necessary (but not sufficient) for development to occur: according to participants, the PTFL context distinctively facilitated, accelerated and deepened their experience of change.

Developmental processes

An additional aim of this research was to discern processes taking place in the experience of change as relayed by participants. Participants indicated a distinction between processes of change mainly situated in a domain external to them (vector processes which facilitate development) and processes of change mainly situated in a domain internal to themselves (core processes which are change). Three groups of vector processes were identified that took place in conjunction with PTFL: shared

¹⁷⁶ The scope of PTFL is personal consulting and counselling (as needed); its agenda is one of freedom to disclose and disinterested feedback; and, its tone is one of closeness, openness and acceptance.

sensemaking, practicing of skills and behaviors and partaking in program activities. The interaction of vector processes within the developmental context resulted in PTFL's distinctive quality: a heightened emotional charge that, according to participants, distinctively facilitated their self-inquiry and experience of change. Four core processes were identified which seem to lead to personal development. These consist of four iterative patterns of sensemaking: around self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability. It was highlighted how the extent to which new self-awareness is accepted might affect the extent to which commitment, effort (and, ultimately, change) can occur.

Findings from comparative analysis

Like developmental context, vector and core processes of development also emerged as necessary but not sufficient for development to occur. Having identified these elements, it still remained unclear why some participants attained personal development while others did not. A further iteration of analysis resulted in dividing the sample in two subgroups which consistently differed on four themes salient to this research: motives, values, patterns of sensemaking and outcomes. As to motives, subgroup one participants tended to disproportionately seek affirmation from external sources, while subgroup two participants tended to seek self-concordance. In terms of values, subgroup one participants seemed to prefer training that addresses professional rather than personal topics; also, these participants emphasized the instrumental and formal value of training. In contrast, subgroup two participants seemed to prefer training that addresses personal and professional issues jointly; these participants emphasized the substantive value of training (work on the self rather than management frameworks or tools). In terms of sensemaking patterns¹⁷⁷, subgroup one tended to have a conflicted relationship with self-awareness, express commitment only tentatively and exert efforts selectively or to an insufficient extent. In contrast, subgroup two tended to accept new self-awareness, express commitment in a determined way and exert efforts sufficient to achieve the desired change. Finally, in terms of outcomes, participants included in subgroup one seemed to be affected negatively by participation in PTFL: they reported negative emotions, a split sense of self and a weakened sense of self-worth following the program. In contrast, participants included in subgroup two seemed to be affected positively by participation in PTFL: they reported positive emotions, integration and a strengthened sense of self-worth following the program.

¹⁷⁷ Specifically, the four iterative sensemaking patterns (loops) highlighted in the prior section as core processes of personal development

Findings from integrative analysis

The aim of integrative analysis was to highlight a pattern of internal consistency within two subgroups in the sample. Characterizing subgroup one is reliance on external sources for affirmation and on external image as a source of security and confidence. The PTFL program is likely to have been perceived like threatening more than affirming because of its focus on limiting patterns and self-inquiry. In this case, defensive sensemaking mechanisms (probably unconscious) would be have been triggered (starting with a reduced acceptance of the new awareness). Personal development did not occur for participants included in subgroup one. On the other hand, characterizing subgroup two is the motivation to pursue self-concordance and the capability to rely primarily on internal sources of wisdom (personal values and meaning) as a source of security and confidence. The personal feedback received on PTFL is likely to have been received as non-threatening, potentially useful information. Personal development did occur for participants included in subgroup two.

Conclusions

Other things being equal¹⁷⁸, personal development and motive orientation might be a matter of capability. An opportunity for further research¹⁷⁹ is highlighted: around the effects of seeking affirmation on personal development and around the appropriate developmental initiatives in cases where seeking affirmation is underpinned by a capability barrier.

¹⁷⁸ Assuming intention to change and given conducive developmental context and vector processes

¹⁷⁹ Relevant to both the fields of adult and leadership development

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Overview of discussion

Findings in relation to the research problem

Using an exploratory approach, this research was able to address a range of methodological and substantive issues involved in the study of highly interconnected elements of individual change: context, process and outcomes. Context emerged from this research as a processual entity. Developmental context includes, but is not limited to, functions of a holding environment. As to process, a distinction emerged from this research between vector and core processes of development. The vector processes of PTFL are equated to those of group counseling. Theories are reviewed from different fields that support the finding that sensemaking lies at the core of the processes of development. Personal development is compared to the notion of systemic psychological change in developmental psychology. Finally, personal development is presented as necessary but not sufficient for the development of leadership capabilities.

Findings in relation to the literature

This research addressed the black box of leadership development by empirically observing some processes (change in individual sensemaking, personal development) that are thought to take place within its confines. As a result, this research supports the clarification of research focus within the field of leadership development, for instance through the distinction between research focusing on vector and core processes of development. In the continuation of the discussion, the affinity between personal development and authentic leadership development is considered. Finally a debate around the development of the moral component of authentic leadership is highlighted as unresolved (see also Appendix 8.18).

5.2 Findings in relation to the research problem

This section discusses how, using an exploratory approach, this research was able to address a range of methodological and substantive issues involved in the study of highly interconnected elements of individual change: context, process and outcomes.

5.2.1 The nature of the research problem

At the intersection of the literatures of interest, there lie several unanswered questions. This research aimed to explore interrelated processes of change in individual sensemaking, personal development, and leadership development (see section 1.1.1 on research motivation, aim and objectives). The complex and adaptive nature of these processes (discussed in sections 2.4 and 3.4.1) entails that their meaningful study is likely to have to keep in scope issues of context, process and outcomes. During the inquiry, the researcher has pondered on questions such as the following: How can instances of developmental context be recognized and studied? On what basis can different instances of contexts be distinguished? How can outcomes of development be identified? Is there a range of outcomes and, if so, how can they be systematized? What does the process of development look like? Where is it situated? What informs, hinders or facilitates development? Are personal and leadership development implicated with each other and, if so, in what ways? With the aim of not excluding any of these interrogatives from the scope of this research, the research question was formulated in terms as open as possible:

Research Question: In the context of a leadership development program with an emphasis on personal growth:

- a. How do participants construct change for themselves?
- b. How do participants construct any implications of change for their own leadership practice?

This research tackled an intricate bundle of issues by adopting a radical exploratory approach. This approach facilitated a connection to a literature (psychology) that is different from the literatures informing the research. Far from being able to address all issues lying at this particular multi-disciplinary intersection, the research was able to identify empirically grounded criteria that can be employed to organize the understanding of complex and interconnected realities.

5.2.2 Addressing context

This section first discusses methodological implications of a processual view of context. Then, it highlights the finding that the function of developmental context amounts to more than the functions of holding environment that are known in extant literature.

5.2.2.1 Methodological issues

A key methodological issue around context was to recruit a setting where the process of interest would take place¹⁸⁰. This issue was complicated by the fact that, at the beginning of the research, it was unclear what the process of interest looked like. It turned out that the characteristics of the chosen context (PTFL) were instrumental in allowing a range of change (including personal development) to occur. Also, it turned out that context was inextricably interrelated with vector and core processes of development. This emerging explanation resonates with a multi-level and processual view of context (Pettigrew 2001):

“The intellectual task is to examine how and why constellations of forces shape the character of change processes. [...] Crucially, context is used analytically not just as a stimulus environment, but also as a nested arrangement of structures and processes in which the subjective interpretations of actors' perceiving, learning, and remembering help shape process” (Pettigrew 2001, p. 699)

The complexity of the view expressed by Pettigrew became easier to metabolize after exploring its implicit ontological assumptions. To this end, the philosophical contribution of Whitehead (1929; in Pavlov, 2010)¹⁸¹ was found to be most useful. Whitehead believed in the inherently unfolding nature of reality; hence, he thought

¹⁸⁰ Purposive sampling, as discussed in section 3.4.3 of the methodology chapter

¹⁸¹ As helpfully reviewed by Pavlov (2010) in his doctoral thesis: *'Reviewing Performance or Changing Routines? An Analysis of the Experience of Participants in Performance Management Review Meetings'*

that focusing on reality as process¹⁸² would enhance the ability to understand it. Crucially, in Whitehead, process is defined as the becoming of subjective experience¹⁸³. Subjective experience is the experience of any and every entity; all entities (all subjective experiences) keep unfolding; and, they unfold by drawing from and contributing to other entities (other subjective experiences). With such frame of reference, a blurring of the line between context and process is to be expected: context itself is really a process which interacts with other processes. Then, a developmental initiative like PTFL could be understood as a bundle of processes. The bundle of processes is constituted by contextual (developmental context) and interactive processual (vector processes) elements. This bundle of processes is informed by other processes: for instance, the program carries an imprint of its founders, directors and tutors. Finally, the bundle of processes informs other processes—importantly the sensemaking of individuals, along with their personal and leadership development. Once context is understood as a form of process, it is easier to grasp its interactions with other processes. This research exemplifies a type of inquiry that, by jointly considering context as process, is able to identify some key junctures where osmosis takes place—junctures at which context informs the individual and group processes that it hosts¹⁸⁴.

5.2.2.2 *Substantive issues*

Context¹⁸⁵ has already been recognized a critical role in development as holding environment (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Kets De Vries and Korotov, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2005; Kegan, 1982). Two conceptualizations of holding environment are examined: the

¹⁸² Whitehead mirrored, in philosophy, the advance of understanding that, in physics, was allowing a leap from traditional to quantum theories

¹⁸³ Rather than the becoming of objective reality. I argue that, because of this consideration, Whitehead's ontology and epistemology collapse together: the fundamental unit of reality (process) coincides with the fundamental unit of knowing about reality (experience). Whitehead's ontological assumptions, then, might be realist ('provisional realism', Whitehead 1925, in Pavlov 2010) in the sense that he believes that there is a reality; however, they are not realist in the sense that there is an objective reality.

¹⁸⁴ In the example of this research, emerging aspects of context (tutor role modelling resulting in the tone of the initiative and group mirroring resulting in a stable developmental platform) were found to be two such junctures.

¹⁸⁵ Context is intended, in a narrower sense, as the context of an initiative with educational or developmental intent. As was noted earlier, contrasting evidence emerges from this study around the role that broader context (the background and personal and professional environments of an individual) plays in the process of individual change.

one underpinning CD theory and one underlying emerging literature on individual development in leadership.

In laying the bases of CD theory, Kegan (1982) defined holding environment based on three key functions that it serves: confirmation, contradiction and continuity. Context gives confirmation when it has empathy with the emotions of a person undergoing change; also, when it shows genuine trust that the person has the ability to move forward¹⁸⁶. Context offers contradiction when it helps ‘letting go’ of old ways: for example, by encouraging open dialogue, the challenging of assumptions and the acquisition of greater independence. Finally, context offers continuity by remaining in place: that is, by staying true to itself well beyond the time when a person ceases to identify with it.

Without contradicting Kegan’s detailed definition, Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) utilize a synthetic definition of holding environment:

“a social context that reduces disturbing affect and facilitates sense making” (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2010)

The definition above highlights the relationship between context and sensemaking processes, an aspect confirmed by the findings of this research.

However, this research finds that the function of context goes beyond holding environment. This research finds that context is characterized by a distinctive emerging quality which makes it ideally conducive for a specific type of change (conceivably, it also makes it also less than optimally conducive for other types of change). In order to explore this further, a cursory comparative analysis of PTFL and two different contexts (featured in two different studies) was carried out. The comparison¹⁸⁷ (see next table) was carried out through the model of developmental context which emerged from this research. As seen earlier (Section 4.3 of findings), PTFL was found to be conducive to extensive self-exploration and disclosure, and to personal development. Here, PTFL is compared with a group coaching initiative within an executive team (in Kets de Vries, 2007): as a tentative interpretation, the group coaching initiative prioritized the critical review and modification of workplace

¹⁸⁶ As opposed to attempting to minimize or relieve discomfort

¹⁸⁷ The comparison is only demonstrative, as the information available in the original sources is not sufficient to draw definite conclusions around scope, agenda, tone, overall quality and distinctive characteristics of each context

behaviors¹⁸⁸. PTFL is also compared with a “tutorial in self-awareness” (in Petriglieri et al., 2011 p.433): this initiative addressed, precisely, expansion of self-awareness¹⁸⁹. It is questioned whether, in the absence of live interactive feedback, this type of initiative would be able to catalyze further phases of the deep psychological change¹⁹⁰ involved in personal development.

Table 26. A cursory comparative analysis of three different developmental contexts

¹⁸⁸ The initiative followed a request by the CEO of the organization that the executive team increase its effectiveness

¹⁸⁹ Through guided introspection

¹⁹⁰ According to the present study, three further phases follow the expansion of self-awareness: these phases consist of sensemaking around commitment, effort and capability to change.

| Elements of developmental context | PTFL (Section 4.3 of findings) | A group coaching initiative (Kets de Vries, 2007) | A tutorial in self-awareness (Petriglieri et al., 2011) |
|---|--|--|---|
| Scope (program characteristics) | Self-exploration; counseling as needed; | Primary: assessing personalities and workplace dynamics (centrality of a 360 rating as well as a multiple-responder Personality Audit) | Framed by surrounding “regressive environment” (an MBA program): participants developed awareness mainly around how they “made sense of, dealt with, and learned from the stressful and puzzling experiences ignited by the regressive domain” (p. 436) |
| Agenda (people characteristics) | Freedom to disclose; disinterested feedback (unfamiliarity of participants) | Improving individual effectiveness in the executive team; informed feedback (participants are from the same team) | One-to-one sessions with a psychotherapist: the counselor-client relationship is usually uneven (contrast with a level social ground) |
| Tone (tutor role-modeling) | Closeness, openness, acceptance | Critical review? (tutors role modeled holding environment but also ‘quipping’ and reviewing; team displayed defensiveness) | One-to-one sessions with a psychotherapist: the counselor-client relationship is usually defined by clear boundaries (contrast with atmosphere of closeness and vulnerability) |
| Overall quality | Conducive to extensive self-exploration and disclosure and to personal development | Conducive to critical review and modification of workplace behaviors | Conducive to introspection and expansion of self-awareness |

Compiled by the author.

It seems that context is not limited to the functions of holding environment: whether explicitly or implicitly and whether intentionally or not, the distinctive overall quality of context is able to frame what change can occur within its boundaries.

5.2.3 Addressing process

The methodological challenge of studying sensemaking as the core process of change is first discussed in this section. Then, the person-centered approach to studying sensemaking is presented: original of the field of developmental psychology, this approach is emerging as a novel application in the management area. The differentiation between vector and core processes of development is here reintroduced: it is proposed that the PTFL vector is a form of group counseling; and, evidence from this research is reconciled with evidence from extant literature in proposing sensemaking as the core processes of personal development.

5.2.3.1 Methodological issues

At the beginning of this research, it was unclear what the processes of interest looked like. Compatibly with an exploratory approach, in the research question process was defined as broadly as possible--as "how participants construct change for themselves". Based on the data gathered from participants, 'construction of change' (sensemaking) is the very process and outcome of change. Despite a relative wealth of conceptualizations affirming the importance of sensemaking at individual and collective levels, empirical research directly aimed at understanding sensemaking is lagging (Weinberg, 2008). For example, while leadership has been examined extensively and in great detail in over a century of academic research, its study has not ventured much into the depths of sensemaking. Research around sensemaking has been carried out in the skeptics and information-processing schools of leadership; however, these approaches have mostly focused on cognition (Antonakis et al., 2004b). The hesitation to study sensemaking has persisted also outside of the management area. In adult learning, the very subject of inquiry is how people absorb, integrate and apply new information (Hoare, 2006). Admittedly, however, one of the most slippery and debated issues in learning is what changes in the mind when learning takes place (Scott et al., 2007). In psychology, the study of sensemaking has often been reduced to the study of cognition. Some psychology scholars regret that research on cognition, "swiftly moved from a central concern with meaning and

meaning making into the science of information processing" (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p. 54). Research in adult development has in the past prioritized the study on objectively observable patterns of change throughout the life-span. Recently, with a warming up to qualitative methods (Smith and Osborn, 2008; Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008) and ipsative approaches (Gardner et al., 2005), adult development is increasingly devoting attention to subjective and intra-individual aspects of change (Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009). Across fields, sensemaking has been a less than ideal topic of study¹⁹¹ because of its multidimensionality and subjectivity. However, dealing with sensemaking in social research is hardly an option: every time a researcher examines data gathered from another individual they are, after all, making sense of somebody else's sensemaking.

A person-centered approach¹⁹²

An analysis method used in this research consisted in developing interpretive frameworks for each participant. Interpretive frameworks were based on the overall grasp¹⁹³ by the researcher of the recurring sensemaking patterns of individual. Interpretive frameworks were then applied and refined during cross-sectional thematic analysis. This is an example of how a person-centered approach (Magnusson, 2001) was realized in this research. While emergent in the leadership development area, this approach is less of a novelty in the field of developmental psychology. The person-centered approach relies on:

“the discovery of patterns or typologies of psychological systems within the person” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010 p. 492)

In other words, this methodology aims at grasping how particular systems (of sensemaking around a specific topic, for example) are organized within an individual. Organization patterns are captured at a specific point in time. By comparison, it is then possible to observe changes in such organization patterns at a later time (ipsative assessment, Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas, 2009; defined earlier in sections 1.2.5 and 3.5.1) This approach is deemed to be holistic because it aims at grasping the overall organization of individual sensemaking, a system encompassing cognitive as well as emotive, purposive and conative dimensions:

¹⁹¹ Especially for objectivist approaches predominant until recently in mainstream social research

¹⁹² The section on the person-centered approach is based on a discussion of methodologies for research in developmental psychology in the Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010.

¹⁹³ Frameworks emerged repeated observation not just of the cognitive patterns, but also of the explanations, areas of emphasis and distribution of emotional valence in the narrative of that individual.

“this approach is holistic in its assertion that psychological systems and subsystems are best studied not in isolation, but in terms of patterns of interactive functioning (Magnusson, 1998).”

Because of its focus on intra-individual and holistic change, this methodology is particularly apt at studying development (which is systemic and qualitative in nature) at the individual level¹⁹⁴. This research confirms the usefulness of a person-centered approach and ipsative assessments in the study of personal and leadership development.

5.2.3.2 *Substantive issues*

Vector versus core processes

Early during data collection and analysis, evidence began to accumulate which pointed to sensemaking as a fundamental process of change. The analytic strategy adopted for the remainder of the research was to divide processes between those occurring mainly externally or internally to the individual. This line of analysis allowed the exploration of a distinction between vector processes (those *facilitating* change) and core processes (those that *are* change). Appendix 8.13 reviews in detail how the PTFL vector processes were found to be similar to processes of group counseling (as contrasted with group consulting or therapy).

¹⁹⁴ In contrast, research focusing on *inter*-individual change tends to be variable-centered and employ longitudinal (study of the same individuals at different points in time), cross-sectional (study of individuals from different age groups at the same point in time,) or cross-sequential (a hybrid of longitudinal and cross-sectional) designs.

5.2.4 Addressing outcomes

In this section, two tools used in the research (a framework of personal development and a continuum of personal change) are revisited in light of their performance as analytic aids. Then, the personal development outcomes observed in the research are read through the lens of developmental psychology: as a result, it is proposed that personal development amounts to systematic psychological change (insofar referred to as a systematic change in sensemaking). Finally, personal development is proposed as necessary but not sufficient for the development of leadership capabilities.

5.2.4.1 Methodological issues

This research mostly drew from, rather than contributing to, the field of adult development. In particular, it relied on adult development theories in order to develop the tools that supported the research: in particular, the personal continuum of personal change and the personal development framework¹⁹⁵. Post hoc reflections around the performance of these tools in the research are as follows:

- The framework of personal development introduced a literature-based criteria for assessing development: this anchored the research in the literature with the aim of mitigating researcher bias (see section 3.4.8 on researcher bias)
- Based on the framework of personal development, it was possible to make consistent assessments within cases. For example, when a qualitative change occurred in one dimension of development (sophistication, integration, self-determination), a qualitative change usually occurred also in the other two dimensions..
- Differentiations based on the framework (participants for whom personal development was found to occur versus not) seemed to be meaningful in light of other patterns of differentiations across the sample (participants who seemed to be seeking self-concordance versus disproportionate affirmation)¹⁹⁶
- The differentiation, along a continuum, among expanded self-awareness, personality adjustment and personal development supported a meaningful

¹⁹⁵ These were presented earlier in this thesis (Section 3.5)

¹⁹⁶ With the limitation, however, that data thinned out after interview two, due to the drop out of two participants.

comparison¹⁹⁷ of these three types of change which were all found to occur in the sample

Overall, these tools are found to have satisfactorily served their purpose within this research. However, they are far from being fully fledged or validated research methods. This research has simply shown the potential of applying one qualitative framework in empirical research on personal and leadership development, pointing to a research opportunity around further defining and validating this type of method. .

5.2.4.2 Substantive issues: personal development as psychological change

Participants in this research for whom personal development did occur talked about a holistic change that encompassed their understandings, emotions and behaviors. As discussed earlier, the literature on sensemaking in the management field does not provide an adequate explanation of this finding. However, the psychology literature offers a possible explanation. Carey et al. (2007; in Higginson and Mansell, 2008) set out to study what psychological change is and how it takes place (during the psychotherapy process):

“For participants in the study, change seemed to be defined by a change in feelings, thoughts, and actions, with both internal factors such as motivation and readiness, and external factors such as the relief of talking emphasized in accounts of what helped change occur. Participants in the study were unable to give an account of exactly how this change had happened, yet interestingly they provided descriptions of change as involving both sudden and gradual components. The sudden component was likened to the experience of insight that is the ‘aha!’ experience of suddenly understanding how to solve a problem” (Higginson and Mansell, 2008, p. 311)

The findings of the present research are more than just reminiscent of the findings by Carey et al.: the two studies might have been looking essentially at the same phenomenon. If that is true, then sensemaking is just a different (non-specialized,

¹⁹⁷ However, this rough typology lacks granularity: subtle differences between types of change might have gone lost; some other types of changes might have gone undetected.

perhaps) label for psychological change. Following a high level search of the psychology literature in search for corroborating evidence, the idea that has formed is that psychological change is a pervasive but also an evasive concept. In the words of Higginson and Mansell:

“There is a continuing mystery surrounding the nature of psychological change” (Higginson and Mansell, 2008, p. 309)

A clue around what psychological change might be is offered by the language of developmental psychology. The following is a definition of developmental psychology:

“Developmental psychology may be broadly defined as the scientific study of systematic changes of an organism’s behavior and the psychological processes that behavior reflects” (The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010, p. 489)

From this definition, it appears that development¹⁹⁸ is systematic psychological change. In all cases of participants in this research where personal development was found to occur, signs of systematic psychological change also were found to occur. Hence, it is proposed that personal development occurs through systematic psychological change or-as it was termed thus far in this thesis, through systematic changes in sensemaking.

Personal development as necessary for the development of leadership capabilities

Throughout the sample, the extent of change in terms of personal development was found to be proportionate to the extent of change in terms of leadership development. In all of the cases where personal development was found to occur,

- Participants also indicated that they were mindfully applying their personal change to actual and specific leadership interactions;
- They described new leadership capabilities¹⁹⁹: they referred to a greater ability to apply different styles or responses based on their assessment of what would create greater value in different contexts

¹⁹⁸ The key word seems to be ‘systematic’: according to Hoare (2006) development occurs when change is systematic and qualitative (2006). In addition, generically defined psychological change does not necessarily denote development. For example, the following broad definition of psychological change was found in the area of group dynamics: “any alteration of the state of some system over time” including “changes in behavior, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values, and all other aspects of the person’s psychological field” (1968, p. 260).

¹⁹⁹ ““Capability” is understood as the ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (Jackson, Farndale and Kakabadse, 2003 p.195)

- Based on their experimentation with new capability, these participants were revising and advancing their understanding around their personal leadership.

Table 27. Participants for whom personal development was found to occur: Evidence around greater leadership capabilities and the revisiting of personal leadership theories

| P Leadership capabilities | Revisiting theories of personal leadership |
|--|---|
| <p>P1 <i>“Less sort of messing around as to how I am going to respond to people. [...] I can’t remember if I mentioned to you this example before, about just getting people to sort out their own problems with one another. And not saying ‘Well, leave it with me and I will speak to them’, so that everything then gets, all the emotions and actions then get dumped on me. So it is saying ‘What you can do is talk to that person about that’, or ‘Why don’t you just ring them?’. So I am taking less responsibility for other people’s happiness.”</i> (P1_R3)</p> | <p><i>“You know, this is the one minute manager:, ‘Yeah, this is really good’, or ‘No, that bit isn’t. I need you to change that, by...whenever’. And so it is more direct and I suppose”</i> (P1_R3)</p> |
| <p>P5 <i>“I am also much better in considering.... Perhaps areas that I didn’t consider before... You know, making space for the quiet person, or utilizing a whole different range of skills to bring the best out of people, rather than... Kind of having one or two approaches... [chuckles] Now I have about fifteen”</i> (P5_R4)</p> | <p><i>“I am far more open in terms of letting people know where I am coming from. And, supporting them in terms of meeting expectations. Whereas perhaps I wasn’t so good at that. So I think that people have warmed to me a lot more and understand me a lot better”</i> (P5_R4)</p> |
| <p>P6 <i>“Sometimes [people] are needing an unambiguous direction because they actually are in a period of indecision themselves. And they are coming to me to seek some clarity, or to seek some solution that they cannot find by themselves. So, based on the signals that they are giving off, it could be very appropriate for me to say sometimes ‘Well, actually this is what you need to do”</i> (P6_R2)</p> | <p><i>“I suppose I’ve always made those kinds of relationships in the past, where being directive equals not listening, giving instructions equals not kind of being affiliative. It is probably not as clear cut as that. I mean, I think it’s actually much more about recognizing what the other person is needing at that time”</i> (P6_R2)</p> |
| <p>P7 <i>“It is ok to not have the answer to everything but go and find somebody else who does, and seek help from the different sources and contacts that one has. But... And I definitely have, because I have been around for a while [laughs]! But I am quite at ease with the fact that if I don’t know something, it doesn’t matter because, you know, I will find somebody that can help me”</i> (P7_R4)</p> | <p><i>“I find that they respond really well to that. Because, in general people like you asking for help and getting them involved. It makes them feel... I find it makes them feel quite....more....it makes them feel important, and that they feel that they are contributing something as well”</i> (P7_R4)</p> |

(continued) Participants for whom personal development was found to occur—Evidence around greater leadership capabilities and the revisiting of personal leadership theories

| P | Leadership capabilities | Revisiting theories of personal leadership |
|----|---|---|
| P8 | <p><i>"I can make my point but I can make it in a very different way, without absorbing a load of energy and being overbearing on others. So it's mainly sort of step back a bit. You know, there are situations where you think to yourself 'That situation has annoyed me a bit'. Rather than react, I stop to think 'Why did that person do that?', 'Oh, that's because they misunderstood what was going on there, I need to correct them'. Rather than just reacting." (P8_R2)</i></p> | <p><i>"I see other people around the business and I am thinking... So, there are certain people who are very protectionist about their area and they run a very tight ship, and nobody dares to question them, and nobody dares to infringe on their territory. You've got other people who are much more, you know...[...] land grab and taking parts of the business away from other people and all the way sort of confrontational" (P8_R3)</i></p> <p><i>"the conclusion I really got to was... If we've got to live as better people, across everything we do, we've got to stop thinking about them and us and start thinking about us and us. 'Them and us' puts up barriers, and creates prejudice, discrimination, and all very negative things. While if you think in terms of us and us, and I have been drilling this into my teams as well, then everyone works much more collaboratively, and cooperatively. Then you gather the strength in the group rather than everyone infighting. Because infighting is very negative." (P8_R3)</i></p> |

Compiled by the author.

In contrast, in the two cases where personal development was *not* found to occur:

- Participants also indicated that they were applying their personal change to actual and specific leadership interactions;
- However, their change in terms of leadership development was more akin to behavioral adjustment (non-systematic application of new knowledge or of a new skill or competency) than to the development of greater leadership capability
- Their change was not associated with a revision of their understandings around their personal leadership. On the contrary, these participants at times explicitly affirmed their theory of leadership over the suggestions received at the course (P3) or that there was not yet a systematic change supporting adjustments (P9).

Table 28. Participants for whom personal development was *not* found to occur: Evidence around behavioral adjustments and maintaining prior understandings around personal leadership

P Behavioral adjustments on the workplace

Maintaining prior understandings around personal leadership

P3 *"I've always seen myself as an enthusiastic person and I do tend to interrupt. At least I worked on that and I don't interrupt as much" (P3_R3)*

"Professionally, with your own people, that's very applicable. But when you are head to head [...] when I am in certain meetings, I probably actually need to be more aggressive and more cut and thrust, to get what I want, rather than the softer option. So the course worked quite well for personal relationships and relationships with the team, but not for corporate" (P3_R3)

P9 *"I may not wait to be as fully prepared as I would have been in the past, particularly for small one-to-one sessions, which now I'm making sure happen on a regular basis--at least biweekly with all my direct reports--whereas perhaps in the past I would put them off to a time when it was too late for some things. So, I raised the priority of my communication sessions" (P9_R2)*

"To me, the difference between genius and madness is results. You get results, than it's more being genius than madness. Matter is not whether I am perfect, but my strategic objectives, there's ten pages of them, and I am the only director who returned all of them completed. [...]. I get things... I get things done. Whether or not I am corky, and whether or not people don't believe me. I know what things to do to get results" (P3_R3)

"I think at times it [the change] has drowned out in the day to day and the impact from stress that I have got going on through work—for which it hasn't had the impact that it might have had" (P9_R4)

"It is a big change in my career as I move from more of a doer to trying to make things happen through leadership and I am not entirely comfortable that at the moment and I am finding it difficult to keep track of everything. That is causing some internal frustrations for me" (P9_R4)

Compiled by the author.

Personal development as not sufficient for the development of leadership capabilities

This discussion identifies two reasons why personal development is necessary but insufficient for the development of leadership capabilities. The first reason is rooted in a characteristic of this sample: all participants had leadership roles in organizations at the time of the research. If research participants had been a substantially different role (for example counselors or, like the author, independent researchers), a more immediate application of personal development for them would have been the development of capabilities relevant to their specific occupation (i.e., counseling capabilities or, in case of the author, research-related capabilities). It is believed that, for personal development to have an effect on leadership development, the practice of leadership must be relevant²⁰⁰ to the experience of an individual. Secondly, all participants indicated that they were (or should be) actively involved in translating their personal change across to the leadership context. Conceivably, if individuals did not seek out ways to apply and implement their change in actual leadership situations, the development of leadership capabilities would not occur.

²⁰⁰ Or become relevant at a later stage

5.2.5 Conclusion

In this section, some merits of the exploratory method were underscored. Due to the width of scope granted by an exploratory approach, this research was able to simultaneously address three highly interconnected elements of individual change: context, process and outcomes. To the inherent challenges of the task of studying individual change in context, this research responded with a adopting a person-centered approach, a methodology emergent in the leadership development area but often used in developmental psychology for the study of intra-individual change. To the challenge of discerning developmental outcome, this research responded by assembling a framework based on theories of adult development. While limited, the framework proved adequate for a meaningful analysis of research findings.

Substantive findings in the areas of context, process and outcomes were discussed in relation to extant literature. Context emerged as a processual entity and some junctures²⁰¹ were identified at which it interacts with processes of development. In accord with extant literature, context was found to perform functions of a holding environment. However, because of its interaction with developmental processes, context was also found to express a distinctive quality which determines what type of change it is ideally conducive to. As to process, it was proposed that PTFL is a form of group counseling: a mid-range form of group work in between group facilitation and group therapy. Evidence from this research was reconciled with evidence from extant literature around sensemaking being the core processes of personal development. Furthermore, evidence was traced in the field of developmental psychology indicating that the sensemaking of personal development amounts to systematic psychological change. Finally, it was argued that personal development is sufficient but not necessary for the development of leadership capabilities.

²⁰¹ Its emerging elements: tone (set by the role modelling by tutors) and overall quality (set by the mirroring of tone by the group)

5.3 Findings in relation to the literature

5.3.1 Leadership development

The research problem of leadership development at the individual level was framed in terms expanding the capabilities of an individual to engage with leadership processes; also, in terms of a black box defined by the literature around the core processes of leadership development. It is believed that this research enabled to observe processes that take place within such black box, indicating that personal development lies at the core of leadership development. This discussion distinguishes between research on vector processes (facilitation) and core processes of development. This thesis also identified a parallel between findings from this research and the current understanding of authentic leadership development (discussed in Appendix 8.17. together with a question around the moral component of authentic personal and leadership development).

5.3.1.1 *Addressing the black box of leadership development*

Personal development at the core of leader development

A review of the literature (Chapter 2) emphasized the confines of a black box around the core processes of leadership development. This research finds that sensemaking and personal development are intimately related to leadership development. The following is a recapitulation of findings that are relevant to this point:

- In five cases personal development was found to occur; in these cases, sensemaking was found to result in systemic qualitative changes²⁰²
- In the five cases of personal development, there was evidence that participants developed greater leadership capabilities and revisited and advanced theories around their personal leadership
- In two cases personal development was *not* found to occur; in these cases, sensemaking was found to result in personality adjustments attained from within the existing frame of reference

²⁰² Comparable, as discussed earlier, to the systemic psychological change described by the language of developmental psychology

- In the two cases of personal adjustment there was no evidence that participants developed new or greater leadership capabilities. Participants were found to make some surface behavioral adjustment in the workplace (such as scheduling more team meetings or mitigating the habit of interruption). However, these changes seemed to not be part of a systemic qualitative change by which participants would revisit and advance theories around their personal leadership

In other words, the extent to which participants changed in terms of personal development was found to be proportional to the extent to which participants changed in terms of leadership development. In this sense, it is believed that this research was able to empirically observe processes that are inside the confines of the 'black box' defined by the literature.

5.3.1.2 Literature focusing on vectors of development

As argued in the literature review, leadership development research does not focus development itself as often as it may seem. This discussion presents two examples from authentic leadership literature of studies that focus on vector processes (facilitation). Drawing from the findings of the present research as well as from extant psychology literature, it is advocated that a clearer distinction is made between the study of vector and core processes within the leadership development field.

Facilitation versus development—an example

In May et al. (2003) a sophisticated model is proposed that addresses the development of the moral component of authentic leadership. This processual model portrays the interaction of three main areas (authentic decision-making, authentic behavior and authentic leadership development) and eleven sub-constructs distributed across these main areas. The area of authentic leadership development is here considered more closely. Three sub-constructs included in authentic leadership development are: moral capacity, moral courage, and moral resiliency. Very broadly, moral capacity has to do with the capability of a leader to recognize a moral issue as such. Moral courage has to do with self-efficacy, specifically the confidence in the ability to “translate moral intentions into actions” (p. 257). Finally, moral resiliency has to do with persistence and effectiveness in the face of difficulty. Generally, according to the authors,

organizations can facilitate the development of the moral element of leadership by truly supporting ethical decision making:

“In order to develop authentic leadership, organizational leaders must consistently support the ethical decisions they make” (May et al., 2003 p. 250)

In addition, the development of authentic moral leadership can be facilitated through the following methods: moral capacity can be developed by exposing leaders to “discussion and self-reflection”, “discussions of moral dilemmas with role models they respect”, “Training in different models of moral reasoning”, and “typical moral dilemmas that leaders face in their positions” (p. 257); moral courage can be developed through training and developmental activities (“such as role plays with moral dilemmas”, “models of performance”, “coaching and encouragement”, p. 257); and moral resiliency can be developed through “a number of different process-oriented methods”, such as “graduated mastery experiences”, “healthy coping techniques”, “mentoring relations”, and “participation in leadership development programs” (p. 258). In light of findings in this research, all of the methods identified in the article are fundamentally vector processes facilitating development. Then, the focus of the article is on facilitating development, rather than on development itself.

A somewhat circular definition of development

A second contribution (Avolio and Hanna, 2008) focuses on leadership development in general terms. In this article, the authors propose that leader development can be accelerated by boosting developmental readiness:

“We propose that leaders with higher levels of developmental readiness in the right context will be better able to reflect upon and make meaning out of events, challenges, and/or opportunities that can stimulate and accelerate positive leader development” (Avolio and Hanna, 2008 p. 332)

A framework is provided which considers five elements of developmental readiness: self-awareness, developmental efficacy, leader complexity, meta-cognitive ability²⁰³, and learning goal orientation (see definitions in the table below). In the article, a range of methods through which developmental readiness can be enhanced are discussed: for instance, facilitating the work of leaders on their life story, exposing them to “mastery experiences”, “role modeling or vicarious learning”, “social persuasion and feedback”, “psychological arousal” (pp. 337-338) and “various trigger events” (p. 340). Once again, in light of the present research these methods are more appropriately categorized as vectors of development.

²⁰³ The framework also consider salient external elements such as organizational climate and the presence of events capable of triggering development

Table 29. Definitions of the key constructs included in developmental readiness

| Construct | Definition (based on Avolio and Hanna, 2008) |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| self-awareness and clarity | “a heightened sense of self-concept clarity, defined as “the extent to which self-beliefs (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable” (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 141), will promote greater developmental readiness and leader development. Higher levels of self-awareness can enhance the leader’s ability to make meaning of relevant trigger events and how they contribute to the individual becoming a more effective leader” (p. 338) |
| learning goal orientation | “represents whether individuals engage in tasks with a focus on achieving a certain performance standard or, conversely, to learn and develop (Button, Matieu, & Zajac, 1996)”; “Learning goal-oriented leaders tend to view themselves as incremental learners and interpret performance feedback as being developmental and useful for enhancing one’s potential. Conversely, performance goal-oriented leaders are prone to look at themselves as more of a fixed entity” (p.336) |
| developmental efficacy | “Leaders’ developmental efficacy represents their level of confidence that they can develop a specific ability or skill for employment in a specific context or leader role. Such confidence would then result in greater effort on the individual’s part in pursuing experiences to develop those skills as well as enhancing the level of effort applied to those experiences (Lord & Hall, 2005)” (p. 337) |
| leader complexity | “Cognitively complex leaders process information more thoroughly and expertly and perform tasks better because they use more dimensions to discriminate among stimuli and yet see more commonalities among these dimensions (Hannah, Eggers, & Jennings, 2008). Applying our discussion of leader self-complexity to accelerating positive development, we suggest that more complex leaders are better able to perceive and attend to a greater range of factors that are represented in a developmental trigger experience” (p. 339) |
| meta-cognitive ability | “Metacognitive ability is how one is thinking about their thinking (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994). This form of “second order” thinking entails awareness of one’s cognitive processes, cognitive strengths and weaknesses, and cognitive self-regulation. Also, in the context of this article, such meta-abilities relate to the individual’s capacity for examining his or her own self-construct” (p. 340) |

Compiled by the author. Based on Avolio and Hanna, 2008

This thesis agrees that all elements included by this article in developmental readiness are crucially connected to development. Developmental readiness informs further development: at any point in time, sensemaking naturally frames further development efforts²⁰⁴. However, this research challenges the idea that developmental readiness is something distinct from and merely a booster of development:

“Organizations will increase both the efficiency and effectiveness of their leader development resource allocations by first ensuring that the organization and its leaders to be developed are developmentally ready” (Avolio and Hanna, 2008 p. 342)

In light of findings from this research, developmental readiness, together with its components, is in itself a developmental outcome²⁰⁵. But then, saying that in order to accelerate development we must increase developmental readiness is like saying that in order to accelerate development we must increase development. The point is that whenever leaders are achieving self-awareness, learning goal orientation, developmental efficacy, leader complexity, and meta-cognitive ability, they *are developing*. It would seem that a priority is to understand and support this process as such rather than thinking of it as a precursor and focusing on assessing developmental readiness for resource allocation purposes.

Development according to the field of psychology

Perhaps, in comparison with the two examples above, the understanding of the word ‘development’ which emerges from this research refers to a deeper level of experience. Some support for this view is derived from the field of psychology. The following is a definition of purpose of research in developmental psychology:

“For empirical research on individual development, the purpose of any study on a specific problem is to contribute to the synthesis and integration of knowledge about how and why individuals function and develop as integrated organisms in real life” (Magnusson, 2001 p. 153)

²⁰⁴ The model of core processes of development was presented as being itself an iteration. This choice is supported by the whole of the development literature reviewed in this thesis.

²⁰⁵ It is conceivable that development somehow ‘compounds’ its effects: that is, individuals who are more mature are more ‘efficient’ in further development

For example²⁰⁶, in the field of leadership development ‘taking a developmental approach’ has been described in terms of standing by a belief development can occur:

“We take a positive approach to developing such leaders and believe that most people have the innate potential to become an authentic moral leader” (May et al., 2003 p. 250)

What if, in leadership development there was a conversation whose purpose was to “contribute to the synthesis and integration of knowledge about how and why individuals function and develop as integrated organisms in real leadership situations”. The language from the field of psychology reflects a sophistication of understanding that is absent from a lot of the leadership development discourse: for this reason, it is argued that a tighter collaboration with the field of psychology will be crucial to the end of making a systemic change to the current understanding of leadership development.

5.3.1.3 Literature focusing on the core of leadership development

There is a strand of literature which has been working directly with the core of leadership development: such strand of literature includes CD theory (see Section 2.4.4 of the literature review), life-story approaches (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Bennis, 2004), and on identity development (Lord and Hall, 2005; Ibarra, 2003). Reviewed in Petriglieri, Wood and Petriglieri (2011), this literature has been an advocate for the role of personal development in leader development:

“developing leaders entails deeper personal work alongside the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities (p. 445)

A most recent contribution to this literature is the qualitative study by Petriglieri et al. (2011) of a personal development elective within an MBA program. The study found that the transformational learning of students was fostered:

²⁰⁶ in recent work on authentic leadership development focusing on its moral component

“through a process of personalization, by which students examine their experience and revisit their life stories as part and parcel of management learning (p. 431)

Such process was found to occur through reflective engagement, which the authors defined as:

“the discipline to examine one’s experiences, acknowledge and manage one’s emotions, and attempt behavioral experiments in conditions of uncertainty and pressure (p. 431)

In agreement with what found in this research, a sensemaking process encompassing the cognitive, emotive, purposive and conative dimensions, is found to take place and to contribute to development. The authors identify two ways in which the process of personalization contributes to leader development. In general, the process of personalization,

“complements the acquisition of conceptual knowledge and analytic skills from traditional coursework (p. 431)”

The research also identified specific developmental outcomes: self-awareness, self-management and the revisiting of life narratives. The research, then added weight to prior literature in favor of self-awareness:

“A major aspect of personal development is the process of becoming more aware of one’s self (Hall, 2004: 154)” (p. 430)

By identifying self-management²⁰⁷ as an outcome of the personal development elective, the research also corroborated literature emphasizing the importance, for leader development, of developing intra-personal abilities. Lastly, the research confirmed the importance of finding some dedicated time to make meaning of life

²⁰⁷ Self-management “involved the perception of being more equipped to manage one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors” (Petriglieri et al. 2011 pp.444-445)

experience (as advocated by life-story approaches). The main contribution of the research is that of having explored the process,

“through which these courses enrich their institutional context and enhance students’ ongoing development and practice of leadership (p. 430)

The present research extends the main findings of the study by Petriglieri et al., which specifies the significance of personalization or reflective engagement taking place as “part and parcel of management learning”: personal development is at the core of leader development, as long as an individual is active in a leadership role and actively translating their learnings into actual leadership interactions. The present thesis argues that sensemaking is both process and outcome of development; in this sense, this thesis concurs with the finding by Petriglieri et al. that greater self-awareness, self-management and ownership of life narrative are types of developmental outcomes. However, this thesis proposes that research will get closer to grasping the significance of ubiquitous constructs such as self-awareness by separately examining their aspects as process and outcome of development. In considering self-awareness as *process* of personal development, this research finds that it is just a first of four iterations of sensemaking needed to attain personal development. In considering self-awareness as *outcome* of personal development, this research finds that self-awareness per se is *not* development. By linking to the developmental psychology literature, this thesis makes the case for assessing development through the relatively mature lens of developmental psychology: development occurs when systemic qualitative changes of sensemaking take place. An individual could achieve great self-awareness accompanied by greater confidence in self-management but not have developed. This research assessed development through the help of the person-centered approach (which considers the sensemaking of individuals holistically) and of a personal development framework (and its criteria of integration, sophistication and self-determination), both derived from the field of developmental psychology.

5.3.1.4 Conclusion

By finding that personal development lies at the core of leadership development, this research contributes to demystifying the black box of leadership development and joins conversations deliberately focusing on core processes of development. To these conversations, this research contributes an expanded understanding of both process and outcomes of personal development. In terms of process, this research proposes a model of sensemaking which includes self-awareness (ubiquitous in the literature) but

goes on to identify three ensuing iterations of sensemaking²⁰⁸ that are found to be necessary for personal development. In terms of developmental outcomes, this thesis affirms that they should be assessed by the narrower and better graduated definitions available in the field developmental psychology, rather than by the broad understandings that can be recruited in the management area. Because development only occurs if systemic qualitative changes take place, progress in single areas (e.g., self-awareness) cannot be taken as a mark of development. In order to assess developmental outcomes, this research utilized a person-centered approach (sensemaking of individuals holistically) and a personal development framework (including criteria of integration, sophistication and self-determination). The connection between personal and leadership development was established earlier through the findings that, for participants in this research, change in terms of personal development was proportional to change in terms of leadership development. In Appendix 8.17, a close parallel is highlighted between findings around personal and leadership development in this research and conceptualizations of authentic leadership development. Finally, a debate was highlighted as unresolved in the field around whether authenticity is necessarily characterized by a positive moral valence.

²⁰⁸ These are the commitment, effort and capability loops

5.3.2 Seeking affirmation

Perhaps a novelty in the leadership development area, this research exposes and explores the effects of seeking affirmation on personal and leadership development. In this section, I elaborate on the idea that disproportionate seeking affirmation might be a pattern of sensemaking capable of limiting development by triggering maladaptive self-reflection. I review self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), a psychology theory which helped make sense of in the findings from this research, confirming the potential of affirmation dynamics to contribute to explaining a type of capability barrier to personal and leadership development.

5.3.2.1 *Elaborating on findings around affirmation*

A subgroup in the research sample was found to be characterized by a motive of seeking affirmation. The same subgroup seemed to rely on external image as a primary source of security and confidence. In contrast, a second subgroup was found to be characterized by a motive of seeking self-concordance. This second subgroup seemed to rely on internal sources of wisdom (personal values and meaning) as a primary source of security and confidence (Section 4.6 of findings). A paradox is observed in the data: participants who were *not* seeking affirmation *found it*, while participants who *were* seeking affirmation *did not find it*. Not only did they not find affirmation, they also felt somewhat dis-affirmed in the process²⁰⁹. Yet, among the processes hosted by PTFL, the offering of affirmation to delegates is a prominent one: as supported by the literature and this research, affirmation has the power to ‘sweeten the pill’ of development--where the pill is the novel realization of a limiting pattern. In addition, as developmental contexts go²¹⁰, PTFL seems to be relatively non-threatening.

²⁰⁹ As seen earlier (Section 4.6), these participants reported negative affect and a weakened sense of self-worth.

²¹⁰ As seen earlier in this discussion, in a cursory comparative analysis of PTFL and two other contexts: a group coaching initiative and a tutorial in self-awareness

Table 30. Examples of affirmation received by delegates on PTFL

| P | Example of affirmation received by delegates on PTFL |
|----|---|
| P1 | <i>"I think the gaining [this place of strength] is... Probably confidence that I have received from the group and validation from the group that I was with" (P1_R2)</i> |
| P5 | <i>"People perceive me as being very, very capable and strong" (P5_R2); "But that's very different from how I perceived myself" (P5_R3); "In fact possibly a lot stronger. A lot stronger. Much more confident in terms of what I bring to the table, I don't feel like I have to constantly justify that" (P5_R4)</i> |
| P6 | <i>"Generally everybody said 'You come across as somebody who is open and friendly, and somebody we would trust" (P6_R2); "I realized that it's things that individuals are bringing with them or things outside of the immediate circumstances [...] that affect how they respond—[...] And, sometimes... in work situations, those insecurities that I may have of how I am perceived, are really because of other people's reactions" (P6_R3)</i> |
| P7 | <i>"[I am] managing to take a step back from things and taking my time to do things and think about things rather than being in a mad, hectic rush about everything all the time. I'm just a lot more calm, peaceful and relaxed. And I thought that had a lot to do with the course [...] I felt that I was putting that into practice because I had kind of had the okay, or the approval--if you like--from the group that the way I was acting was really not appropriate, and that was a better or a different way of acting or seeing things" (P7_R3)</i> |
| P8 | <i>"what I was told is to make it real and show a bit of the true me rather than always give what I think people want to see. So always to remember to be myself, and being myself is very acceptable, that was really okay" (P8_R3)</i> |

Compiled by the author.

The table above shows how certain participants seemed to receive the affirmation and be able to draw from it. These are also the participants for whom personal development was found to occur. In contrast, the two participants for whom personal development was not found to occur (P3 and P9)²¹¹ seemed to feel somewhat dis-affirmed. P3 was in disbelief regarding how little affirmation he received given his credentials:

²¹¹ The two remaining participants (P2 and P4) were similar to P3 and P9 in this respect. However, there is insufficient data in the research to extend this discussion to these two participants, who dropped from the sample after interview two

"I think between [module] number one and two I was pretty pissed off, and almost considering not going back" (P6_R4)

"I'm the director of one of [the area's] biggest companies, and yet these guys don't see enough credibility!" (P6_R3)

In contrast, P9 seemed to have drawn some affirmation from the first module of PTFL:

"I am pleased with that [the feedback received on the course]: they found me friendly and approachable and not standoffish" (P9_R2)

But, not to a sustainable extent: a low in morale was to follow, together with a sense of being overwhelmed:

"For me personally [Module 2] was about keeping that positive outlook and not getting buried down in the detail—getting lost and losing the perspective [...] I had had some confidence issues around trying to deliver on the work that I need to do and PTFL has assisted me in trying to deal with that" (P9_R3)

"PTFL has added in a lot more things that I now need to think about and that has become a bit overwhelming for me" (P9_R4)

"Those levels of details were there with or without it, but perhaps it has opened my eyes and tuned them in a bit more and now I have got to find a way of shutting that back down or keeping the important...Identifying which are the important pieces" (P9_R4)

The last comment above (*"it has opened my eyes and tuned them in a bit more and now I have got to find a way of shutting that back down"*, P9_R4) gives away a sense of discomfort with 'tuning in'. This discussion hypothesizes that such discomfort had a role in some sort of maladaptive affirmation pattern. As discussed next, such hypothesis is derived from an exploration of the paradox just identified through the lens of self-affirmation theory.

5.3.2.2 *Self-affirmation theory*

Self-affirmation theory, from the field of psychology, provides a useful lens for explaining some of the findings of this research. Developed by Steele (1988)²¹², the theory aims to explain how and why individuals tend to preserve their sense of themselves. According to Steele, the self is a flexible system that monitors and preserves self-integrity. Self-integrity is a sense of being an appropriate person by known social and cultural standards. Self-integrity is believed to have an important role in modulating the 'social fitness' of individuals, enabling adaptive and evolutionary change, and also in keeping at bay the fear of mortality. The social and adaptive significance of self-integrity is supported by research finding that a threat to self-integrity:

"will always involve real and perceived failures to meet culturally or socially significant standards (Leary and Baumeister, 2000; in Sherman & Cohen, 2006 p.7)

A threat to self-integrity is well exemplified, I believe, by feedback that the research participants received on PTFL: in that situation, a group of peers pointed out to each of them their particular limiting patterns²¹³. Research has shown that when a threat to self-integrity is perceived, individuals react in one of three ways:

- Acceptance: the individual acknowledges the new information and uses it as a basis for adaptive change. This is the least likely outcome: the self tends to protect self-integrity and individuals will struggle to integrate information about their limitations.
- Self-defense: through defensive mechanisms, such as non-acknowledgment or various rationalizations²¹⁴, the individual rejects the new information. Self-defense is understood within this theory as a negative force because, although

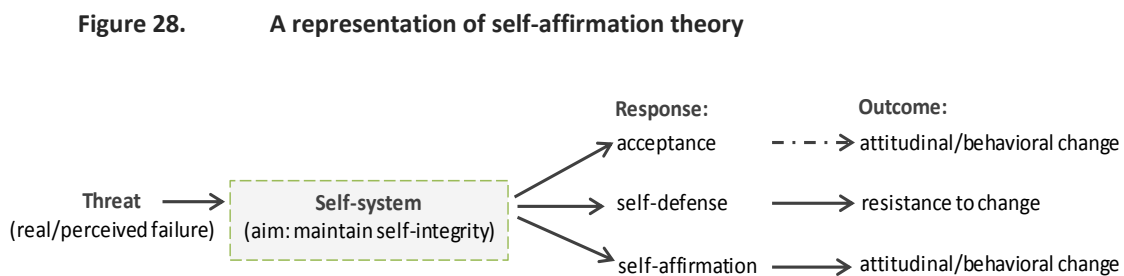
²¹² This discussion of self-affirmation theory relies on a comprehensive review by Sherman and Cohen (2006)

²¹³ Examples from this sample are: discrediting the self and excessively accommodating others (P1); taking over conversations and invading other people's space (P2); taking over conversations, acting as a 'court jester', interrupting and interjecting (P3); focusing excessively on task completion versus listening and including others (P4); putting excessive pressure on others through exceeding demands and insufficient support (P5); self-doubting personal in demanding leadership situation, under-energized physical presence (P6); denial of health conditions and unhealthy self-destructive behavior (P7), partial denial of identity and maintaining a professional persona (P8); seeking positive affirmations from others (P9);

²¹⁴ For example, arguments constructed to reduce the limitation to a non-limitation or to discredit the source of the information

- self-integrity is preserved, an opportunity is lost for learning and adaptive change
- Self-affirmation: faced by threatening information about one particular domain of the self, the individual draws on the sense of being overall a good person or on the sense of being good in a different domain of the self than the one that has just come under threat. This affirmation loop helps summon some strength: once the limiting pattern is framed as no longer defining of the self, the new information becomes less threatening and can be acted upon in terms of adaptive change.

Research conducted in the couple of decades since the theory was formulated seems to have confirmed its predictions. The figure below aims to capture the main constructs and relationships included in the original conceptualization of self-affirmation theory.



Compiled by the author. Source: Steele, 1998.

Research was conducted to explore outcomes and moderators of self-affirmation. In the great majority of studies, self-affirmation is found to be associated with positive outcomes, including: open-mindedness, de-biasing, reduction of stress, and reduction of cognitive dissonance. For example, studies of situation where values or beliefs are threatened (such as orientation around abortion or capital punishment) found that self-affirmed²¹⁵ participants became more open-minded: they were more likely to entertain differing arguments and even to change their original position. Studies around the effect of threatening health information (for example, both low and high caffeine consumers being exposed to information on the effects of heavy caffeine consumption) found that self-affirmed participants were de-biasing—that is, they were

²¹⁵ In research designs, individuals are ‘self-affirmed’ for example by being exposed and asked to write about a value that is very important to them

becoming more prone to consider the information around the health risks that they incurred and change their unhealthy behavior. Studies on stress showed that the stressor becomes less relevant for self-affirmed individuals; even, that cortisol²¹⁶ levels decrease and physiological and health outcomes improve. A final example is that of studies on cognitive dissonance: self-affirmation is found to reduce discomfort as well as the need to rationalize and react defensively. As just exemplified, self-affirmation emerges from research conducted so far mainly as a positive force allowing individuals to become better by reducing the extent to which they are threatened by new information about themselves.

More research was conducted to understand other variables that might interplay with self-affirmation. First, self-affirmation is involved in self-defensive functions: it tends to increase positive affect and decrease negative affect. Findings from this research, however, indicate that self-affirmation might not always occur or result in positive affect: participants who were disproportionately seeking (affirmation from external sources seemed to experience negative affect in conjunction with the program. This invites to consider that perhaps their own self-affirmation function was less than optimally operative. Secondly, self-affirmation is found to be closely implicated with self-esteem. In psychology, two levels of self-esteem are distinguished: explicit and implicit self-esteem. Explicit self-esteem is that which is manifested outwardly, while implicit self-esteem is that which is housed deeper in the self. Research found that individuals with high explicit and implicit self-esteem seem to have greater psychological resources and are more capable of self-affirmation. In contrast, individuals with high explicit but low implicit self-esteem seem to be less capable of self-affirmation. It is interesting to observe that in the case of the two participants that were found to seek affirmation, a divide was observed between the professional outer image and the personal inner world—self-esteem around the former was more secure than implicit self-esteem. In contrast, for participants who were not found to seek affirmation such divide was not evident—and self-esteem seemed to rely on inner sources of strength and wisdom. In light of self-affirmation research this could be explained as insufficient psychological resources to engage in self-affirmation effectively. Finally, a relationship has been found between self-affirmation and identity centrality: if the domain of the self which is threatened by new information is very central (salient) to identity, greater affirmation is needed in order to overcome defensive reactions and the loss of opportunity for adaptive change²¹⁷. However, if the

²¹⁶ Cortisol is the hormone associated with stress

²¹⁷ For example, heavy caffeine drinkers are more susceptible to feeling threatened than light caffeine drinkers by information on the health risks related to caffeine. Hence, heavy caffeine drinkers tend to react more defensively and to need greater self-affirmation to cope with information on the health risks of their conduct.

domain of the self which is threatened by new information is not very central (salient) to identity, then less affirmation is needed in order to overcome defensive reactions. This last consideration is intriguing in light of the findings of this research: perhaps a more salient aspect of identity was threatened for participants who were found to seek affirmation than for participants who were found to not seek affirmation.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of research on self-affirmation supports the view that it is a 'positive' process which enables individuals to be more open-minded, accept their limitations more easily and hence, conceivably, be more open to personal development. However, a 'dark side' of self-affirmation is starting to emerge from research (including from the present research). First, in some cases self-affirmation is derived to the detriment of others: studies on distortions of social perspectives have uncovered how self-affirmation can be derived from comparison to someone who is socially inferior or is perceived to be faring worse, from gossiping negatively about others, from putting (marginalized) others down. When used in this way, self-affirmation is found to exacerbate stereotypes and outgroup denigration. In addition, and of greater relevance to this research, self-affirmation is found at times to backfire. Self-affirmation only works as postulated by the theory when it is carried out within a domain of the self which is *different* from the domain that is being threatened. When this is the case, self-affirmation *reduces* resistance to change. However, if self-affirmation is carried out in the *same* domain that is being threatened, then it actually *increases* resistance to change. It is also believed that self-affirmation processes take place unconsciously. In fact, research has found that making some study participants aware of the self-affirmation manipulation negates the beneficial effects that are found in other study participants. In other words, bringing the self-affirmation process to awareness seems to defeat its purpose. This is a recent discovery in the field:

"affirmation appears to operate not in a self-conscious, deliberate manner, but rather in a subtle, unconscious manner. Future research could address this issue more directly by experimentally manipulating whether participants are informed of the psychological benefits of self-affirmation, and assessing whether such affirmations are less effective when people are unaware, rather than aware, of their beneficial effects" (Sherman and Cohen, 2006 p.65)

In concluding this focused review of self-affirmation theory, the aspect is underscored of the inherent difficulty involved with the study of affirmation-related mechanisms:

"Indeed, defensive adaptations are so stubborn and pervasive that Greenwald (1980) described the ego as "totalitarian" in its ambition to interpret the past and present in a way congenial to its desires and needs" (Sherman and Cohen, 2006 p. 4)

5.3.2.3 *Seeking affirmation: a sensemaking pattern limiting personal development?*

Conceptions of adult learning and development at times stress the role of individuals in framing (and sometimes limiting) further learning and development. In the words of Boyatzis (from the field of intentional change):

"adults learn what they want to learn" (Boyatzis, 2006 p. 609)

Are processes of adult learning and development²¹⁸, in this sense, the epitome of a self-fulfilling prophecy? In many ways, the findings of this research do support this view: the extent to which participants accepted their new self-awareness seemed proportional to the extent to which they expressed commitment, exerted effort and eventually changed. Self-affirmation theory adds weight to this understanding: perhaps, *adults only learn what they can cope with realizing*. Possibly, some of the participants in this research *could not cope well* with the very act of accepting the knowledge of a limitation of theirs. Not only, perhaps they could not cope well with introspection—an act likely to bring limitations to awareness. Findings indicated that, for whichever reason, relying on external image was preferred by these participants over looking at inner sources of strength in constructing their change. If a limiting pattern exists that creates a barrier from turning inwards, it is important to gain an understanding of how such pattern can be addressed. As mentioned earlier, a context like PTFL (which presses the accelerator of introspection, magnifies opportunities for feedback and tackles limiting patterns with a 'head on' approach) might just not be helpful in surpassing the hypothesized limiting pattern. In light of self-affirmation theory, an alternative explanation is proposed. The following is a recapitulation of the implications of the findings of this research in light of self-affirmation theory:

- A substantial part of PTFL revolves around offering affirmation to delegates

²¹⁸ Adult learning and development are two intertwined processes: development can't occur without learning, even though not all learning is developmental. Hoare (2006) describes it as a scaffolding effect: "learning and development will each lead to enhancements in its essential counterplayer; both are transformed in the process" (p. 7)

- A paradox was observed: participants who were disproportionately seeking affirmation felt dis-affirmed, while participants who were not disproportionately seeking affirmation (but achieved a balance between that and seeking self-concordance) felt affirmed
- This observation could be explained by a capability barrier: participants who were disproportionately seeking affirmation might also have had insufficient psychological resources to beneficially leverage their own self-affirmation function
- Participants who were seeking affirmation seemed to have high explicit self-esteem but low implicit self-esteem: that is, outwardly they were more confident than they seemed to feel inside. External image and exterior manifestations of strength were comparatively salient for these participants (in contrast, the other participants emphasized the salience of an internal source of strength)
- The more salient is the domain of the self that is being threatened, the greater the self-affirmation needed to mitigate the threat

This discussion returns to the image of virtuous and vicious circles of development:

- There could be a virtuous circle of self-affirmationsupporting development. This form of 'adaptive' affirmation would be more likely to be in place when individuals are *not* disproportionately threatened by introspection and the eventuality of recognizing in themselves somelimiting patterns . These types of individuals would be able to incrementally leverage inner resources and, given supportive circumstance, would more likely stay on an optimal trajectory of development (integration, sophistication and self-determination). In this hypothetical scenario, individuals are more capable of self-affirming, hence need less affirmation from external sources.
- There could also be a vicious circle of self-affirmation hindering development. This form of 'maladaptive' affirmation would be more likely to be in place when individuals *are* disproportionately threatened by the prospect of being found wanting and, hence, by the prospect of introspection. These types of individuals would not be able to rely on inner resources as much and might then rely disproportionately on external image and affirmation from external sources. Change would not be entirely unavailable to these individuals: self-awareness could still expand to some extent, and a range of personality adjustments could take place. Conceivably, however, due to disproportionate attention to external circumstances, they would struggle to harmonize their change with a self-concordant (hence optimal, according to adult development literature) trajectory of development. In this scenario, individuals are less

capable of self-affirming hence might need more affirmation from external sources.

Across the sample, PTFL is likely to have threatened some areas of the self but to have offered affirmation to other areas. Still, in some cases something did not work out. Research evidence suggests that effective self-affirmation is largely unconscious (Sherman and Cohen, 2006): if a vicious circle of self-affirmation is at play, might it be more beneficial to bring it to full awareness to the end of diffusing it? A hunch suggests that such an approach would have a high risk of being too distressing, and especially so for someone wary of introspection. Perhaps, it is currently underestimated how much external affirmation is needed to truly support an individual when case a vicious circle of self-affirmation is in place. Or, inadvertently affirmation could be given to the same domain of the self that was under threat: an example of that would be affirming the credentials of a participant and at the same time asking that participant to take their exterior accomplishments less seriously (this might well have occurred in the case of P3). Or, affirmation was offered about perceived inner qualities of a participant; but this affirmation was not believable in the eyes of the participant because of low implicit self-esteem (this might have occurred in the case of P9).

In the conclusion of the chapter on findings, it was suggested that a developmental initiative like PTFL, as it currently is, is perhaps not the most appropriate when patterns of disproportionate affirmation seeking are at play. In light of the discussion above, it is suggested that PTFL as developmental context might still be appropriate; but, that among its vector processes (intervention strategies) there is not yet one that is well suited to dealing with patterns of affirmation.. Further research focused on seeking affirmation would potentially make a contribution to self-affirmation theory, illuminate dynamics underlying maladaptive reflection within leadership development, and enrich and the repertoire of effective personal and leadership development practice.

5.3.2.4 Other barriers to development

This research has identified a pattern of disproportionate affirmation seeking as a limiting pattern capable of hindering development. However, this discussion does not intend to exclude that there are other patterns potentially limiting development. For example, I believe that the disconnection pattern that I discuss with reference to my own story (bracketing essay, Appendix 8.2) has also the ability to hinder development.

5.3.2.5 Conclusion

Self-affirmation theory, from the field of psychology, offers a lens for further interpreting findings from this research around a pattern of disproportionate affirmation seeking. Self-affirmation theory indicates that affirming one domain of the self helps integrate threatening information about a different domain of self and engage in adaptive change. Offering affirmation to participants is a primary process of PTFL as a holding environment. However, a paradox was observed in the sample: participants for whom personal development *was* found to occur were *not* seeking affirmation but *did* find it; in contrast, participants for whom personal development was *not* found to occur, *were* seeking affirmation but *did not* find it. In the sample, disproportionate affirmation seeking was associated with a pattern of excessive reliance on exterior image and accomplishments. The more external image is salient to identity, the greater is the perceived threat in a situation that compels introspection (conceivably because of the threatening prospect of being found wanting) and the greater the change of self-defensive reactions. Based on evidence from self-affirmation theory, three ways in which practice could better support individuals with disproportionate affirmation patterns were hypothesized: increasing the level of externally provided affirmation; ensuring that affirmed qualities are in domains other than the domain under threat (external image); and prioritizing the facilitation of greater implicit self-esteem when its levels are not sufficient to support effective self-affirmation and, hence, the pursuit of further personal development objectives. Research is needed to further the understanding of disproportionate affirmation seeking and of developmental strategies that might be most helpful in addressing this type of capability barrier.

5.4 Summary of discussion

Findings in relation to the research problem

Thanks to the width of scope granted by an exploratory approach, this research was able to simultaneously address three highly interconnected elements of development: context, process and outcomes. Context was examined as a processual entity and key junctures were highlighted at which osmosis between developmental context and processes occurs. In accord with extant literature, developmental context was found to perform functions of a holding environment. However, developmental context was also found to express a distinctive quality determining what type of change it is ideally conducive to. Following the emerging distinction between vector and core processes of development, this discussion highlighted a parallel between the vector processes of PTFL and those of group counseling—placing a PTFL-like initiative mid-range between group coaching and group therapy. Evidence from this research was reconciled with evidence in the literature (in the fields of CD theory, management and adult learning, organization theory and individual change) around sensemaking being the core process of development. This research applied a person-centered approach, including qualitative ipsative assessments, to the study of intra-individual change. Developmental outcomes were assessed through a literature-based framework derived from theories of adult development. While limited and in need of further definition, the framework proved adequate for a meaningful analysis within this research. Personal development was identified as systemic qualitative change in individual sensemaking in the direction of greater integration, sophistication, and self-determination compared to the notion of systemic psychological change in developmental psychology. Finally, highlighting the nature of the link between personal and leadership development, congruence was observed between the extent to which research participants changed in terms of personal development and the extent to which they changed in terms of leadership development. Because all research participants had active leadership roles at the time of the research, personal development was presented as necessary but not sufficient for the development of leadership capabilities.

Findings in relation to the literature

By finding that personal development lies at the core of leadership development, this research helps demystifying the black box of leadership development. This research has strived to pursue and is a proponent of greater clarity of research focus in the

leadership development field. For instance, this thesis offers a differentiation between research on vector versus core processes of development; also, between research on process versus outcomes of development. Based on research findings, it was argued that the process of development begins with self-awareness but has to go through further iterations of sensemaking before development can occur. Hence, this research problematizes the notion that expansion of self-awareness might per se constitute development. It was argued that developmental outcomes should be assessed with a stricter measure derived from developmental psychology rather than with relatively broad understandings currently available in the management area. Development was identified to occur when systemic qualitative change in individual sensemaking takes place in the direction of greater integration, sophistication, and self-determination. . In an additional discussion included in Appendix 8.81, findings from this research are related to current conceptualizations of authentic leadership, suggesting that this research might have stumbled in a context where authentic leadership²¹⁹ is developed. In the same appendix, drawing from an unresolved debate around morality and leadership, the interrogative is raised of whether authenticity is necessarily characterized by a positive moral valence as implied by much recent literature on authentic leadership development.

Self-affirmation theory was reviewed and utilized as a lens for further interpreting findings from this research around patterns of disproportionate affirmation seeking. Self-affirmation emerges from extant literature mostly as a positive psychological force, enabling individuals to be more open-minded, accept their limitations and engage with adaptive change. This research seconds emerging psychology research finding that self-affirmation at times ‘backfires’: In the case of some of the participants in this research, self-affirmation did not seem to operate functionally: external affirmation received on PFTL was not perceived as either sufficient or believable, resulting in negative rather than positive affect. In light of self-affirmation theory, it is suggested the more external image is salient to identity, the greater is the perceived threat in a situation that compels introspection (conceivably because of the prospect of being found wanting); hence, the greater the chance of self-defensive reactions. It is speculated that a capability barrier revolving around the pattern of disproportionately seeking affirmation may be contribute to reducing access to virtuous circles of development and rather reinforce vicious circles of development. Based on evidence from self-affirmation theory, three ways were hypothesized in which practice could better support individuals when a pattern of disproportionate affirmation seeking are at play: increasing the level of affirmation; ensuring that affirmed qualities are in domains other than the domain under threat;and, prioritizing work aimed at

²¹⁹ As defined by Avolio and colleagues

strengthening low implicit self-esteem when this is insufficient to support self-affirmation functions in the individual. Further research is needed to understand the pattern of disproportionately seeking affirmation and the developmental strategies that might be most helpful in addressing them.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Overview

In this chapter, theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions are presented. In the conclusion of this chapter, validity is discussed (with reference to the framework by Lincoln and Guba, 1985), limitations of the research are addressed and pathways for future inquiry are highlighted.

6.2 Contributions

Next, theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to the leadership development field are summarized.

6.2.1 Theoretical contributions

In the leadership development literature, the language of the context, process, and outcomes of development frequently blurs, indicating that a clear conceptual differentiation of these interrelated but distinct elements is missing. A primary contribution of this research is to offer a conceptualization that, while acknowledging interrelationships, clearly differentiates context, process and outcomes of development. This thesis looks at *developmental context* as the platform²²¹ hosting developmental processes²²². In contrast, extant literature often equates context to methods facilitating the development of leadership (e.g., Bass, 2009; Avolio and Hanna, 2008; Day, 2001). This thesis divides the process of development in vector and core processes. *Vector processes*²²³ are the activities (as in methods, e.g. Avolio and Hanna, 2008; Gray, 2007; Day, 2001; or, as in elements of program design, e.g. Petriglieri et al. 2011 or Kets de Vries, 2007) hosted on particular platform (context) and aiming to facilitate development. *Core processes* take place within the individual and correspond with iterations of sensemaking²²⁴ leading to development. This research proposes an inductively derived model of core processes—the sensemaking of personal development. For the definition and assessment of developmental outcomes, this research drew from the field of developmental psychology: for development to occur, systemic qualitative changes in individual sensemaking must have also occurred, in the direction of greater integration, sophistication and self-

²²¹ An operational definition of context was proposed: developmental context as a physical and social place which performs holding environment functions and, in virtue of certain distinctive and relatively stable characteristics, is ideally conducive to a specific type of developmental process

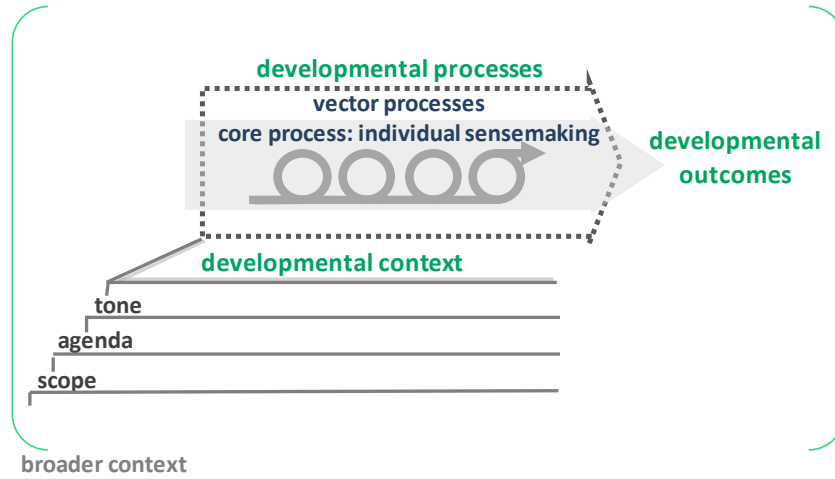
²²² Context emerges seen as a processual entity, and the junctures at which osmosis with other processes of development were highlighted

²²³ An operational definition of vector processes was proposed: vectors are explicit or implicit activities taking place within a developmental context which are aimed at holding core processes of development and directing them toward a main developmental direction.

²²⁴ These include a self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability loop

determination²²⁵. The relationships between context, processes and outcomes of development are visually recapitulated in an integrative model (see figure below).

Figure 29. Context, process and outcomes of development



Compiled by the author.

This research links personal development to leadership development through finding congruence, in the sample, between the extent of change in terms of personal development and extent of change in terms of leadership development. Personal development was found to be associated with the development of leadership capabilities; in contrast, personality adjustment was only found to be associated with isolated behavioral adjustments in the workplace.

Table 31. General contribution to the field of leadership development

²²⁵ In order to assess development, this study used a personal development framework derived from the adult development literature in developmental psychology

| Area | This study confirms | extends | challenges | Areas for further exploration |
|-------------------------------|---|---|------------|---|
| Leadership development | Context, process and outcomes of development are interrelated Personal development is central to leader development (Petriglieri et al., 2011) | A conceptualization differentiating interrelated but distinct context, process and outcomes of development Personal development as the core process of leadership development (proportionality between extent of personal change and extent of leadership-relevant change) | - - | Working definitions and models of: developmental context, vector and core processes, developmental outcomes Relationship between a range of changes at the personal level and a range of leadership-relevant changes |

Compiled by the author.

Generally, this thesis advocates a tighter collaboration with the field of psychology to foster conceptual and linguistic clarity as well as generate more research opportunities in the area of personal development.

6.2.1.1 Contributions around context

In the leadership development literature, the criticality of context was never in doubt. Context²²⁶ is presented as fostering leadership development in a review of research by Bass (2009). Day (2001) reviewed prominent types of executive development interventions²²⁷ and, while recognizing the paucity of evaluative evidence, affirmed their importance in stimulating leadership development. McCauley highlights the role of organizational settings as “support for development, which includes a variety of contextual factors, such as coaching, feedback and rewards for development” (in London and Maurer, 2004 p. 223). While the criticality of context is widely

²²⁶ Context can be provided by life experience as well as by on-the-job and off-the-job opportunities for development (Bass, 2009)

²²⁷ Such as executive coaching or 360 assessments

acknowledged, there is less clarity around which contexts facilitate which outcomes and how do they do so. This gap is often exposed in the literature on evaluation²²⁸:

“We need to know why and in what circumstances, programmes affect potential subjects before we can begin to say if they work (1994, p.292)” (in Denyer and Collins, 2008 p.170)

The challenge of grasping the role of context is not unique to the field of leadership development. It is also present in the psychology literature on of group counseling:

“Efforts to increase the empirical evidence for group counseling in specific group settings with specific populations and members should be undertaken and supported. Although the complexity of finding meaningful and reliable results in the extremely complex arena of human experience and group interaction remains challenging, acquiring evidence from research that may be integrated with clinical wisdom about best practices in group counseling should become a priority” (Ward 2011, p. 48)

The present research contributes to literature around context of leadership development with an in-depth analysis how a specific context (PTFL) was perceived by its participants to contribute to their development. By doing so, this research joins a space in the literature where context is studied in terms of design and of the key functions that it serves (e.g., Petriglieri et al., 2011; Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2005). This area of investigation has an inherent weakness: because findings of different studies are not comparable, the field struggles to form a typology of contexts. A model of developmental context emerges from this research which, if validated, could support the comparative study of developmental contexts. The model identifies four key elements of contexts (scope, agenda, tone and overall quality) together with four characteristics of a developmental initiative (program characteristics, group characteristics, role modeling by tutors, mirroring by group) that seemed to determine the quality of each of these key elements. The model, presented earlier in the findings chapter, is repeated in the figure below.

²²⁸ In fact, in the field of evaluation, there has been a multiplication of research-based and practitioner frameworks which aim at capturing the role of context: for example, the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product; Stufflebeam, 1989), CIRO (Context, Input, Reaction, Outcome; Warr et al., 1970), and CIMO (Context, Intervention, Mechanisms, Outcomes) models; in Denyer and Collins, 2008

Figure 30. A model of developmental context



Compiled by the author.

Moreover, the literature of reference has been discussing the significance of context primarily as holding environment (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Kets De Vries and Korotov, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2005; Kegan, 1982). This research extends this understanding by establishing that the function of a developmental context includes but goes beyond holding environment: the interplay of key elements of context results in the expression of a distinctive quality which makes the context ideally conducive to a certain type of change. Contributions around context are summarized in the table below.

Table 32. Contributions around context

| Area | This study confirms | extends | challenges | Areas for further exploration |
|------------------------------------|--|--|------------|---|
| Leadership development— Context | Context as necessary (if not sufficient) for development | Inductive model of context Role of context beyond holding environment: the distinctive quality of context makes it ideally conducive to a certain type of change An in-depth analysis of a specific context (PTFL) was perceived by its participants to contribute to their experience of change | - | Further define and validate the inductive model of context Comparative analysis of different developmental contexts (aided by a validated model) |

Compiled by the author.

6.2.1.2 Contributions around process

Vector versus core processes of development

Participants in this research indicated a distinction between processes of change mainly situated in a domain external to them (vector processes which *facilitate* development) and processes of change mainly situated in a domain internal to themselves (core processes which *are* change). To the literature, this research proposes the language of vector and core processes to differentiate research focusing on the facilitation of development from research focusing on development.

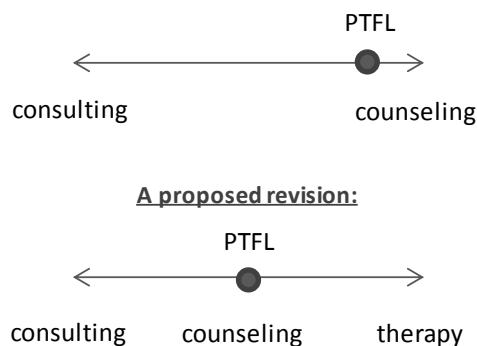
Vector processes

This research joins literature aiming to describe vectors of development: for example, literature on the functioning of a specific developmental initiative (e.g., Petriglieri et al., 2011; Gray, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2005) or on methods thought to develop a specific type of leadership capability (e.g., Avolio and Hannah, 2008; May et al. 2003). The findings around PTFL are that it hosts three main categories of vector processes:

shared sensemaking, the practicing of skills and behaviors, and the partaking in program activities.

This research built on a tenuous link between the literatures of leadership development and counseling, and leveraged a continuum (consulting to counseling) of executive coaching initiatives by Joo (2005). In Joo, counseling refers to a range of developmental interventions that might also include aspects of remediation and hence is not distinct from therapy. Findings confirm the usefulness of Joo’s continuum and also that PTFL is an instance of group counseling. Based on a distinction in the literature on group work²²⁹, and solely for the purposes of locating the findings from this research, it is proposed that counseling (focusing on development and prevention) and therapy (focusing also on remediation) are decoupled and that the continuum is expanded to include therapy (see figure below).

Figure 31. A continuum of executive coaching initiatives: locating PTFL



Compiled by the author. Source: Joo, 2005.

While a counseling-like initiative like PTFL lies on an extreme end of the original continuum by Joo (2005), it lies on a mid-range point of a consulting to therapy continuum.

Personal development as the core process of leadership development

The leadership development literature has defined the boundaries of a black box around core processes of development (Avolio, 2008; Allen, 2008; Lord and Hall, 2005).

²²⁹ A review of the ASGW 2000 standards, see section 5.2.3

This research joins existing literature advocating that personal development is a crucial part of the development of leaders (reviewed in Petriglieri et al., 2011) and extends this notion by proposing that personal development is the core process by which individuals become able to express greater leadership capabilities. As mentioned earlier, congruence was observed in the sample between the extent of change in terms of personal development and the extent of change in terms of leadership development.

Sensemaking as the core process of personal development

If personal development was found to lie at the core of leadership development, sensemaking was found to lie at the core of personal development. In accord with adult development literature, this research finds that sensemaking is the very fabric of change within the individual: while not all sensemaking is developmental, there cannot be development without sensemaking. Extant research that is based on constructivist assumptions often assumes that sensemaking underpins change; however, studies whose focus is explicitly dedicated to the study of sensemaking of change are more rare (Weinberg, 2008; Schwandt, 2003). Literature addressing sensemaking directly (if not always explicitly), includes: the whole of CD theories (reviewed in McCauley et al., 2006)²³⁰; work on sensemaking by Weick (1995) in organization theory; some of the management learning literature (e.g., Argyris, 1978, 2001; Schwandt, 2005); some of the adult learning literature (e.g. Mezirow's transformational learning, 1991; and, Marsick and Watson's informal and incidental learning, 1990); work on individual change (in the field of psychology, including: Bandura's notion of self-efficacy, 1986; Kolb's model of experiential change, 1984; Boyatzis' intentional change theory, 2006; Prochaska et al.'s model of recovery from addictive behaviors, 1992; and, Kübler-Ross' transition curve, 1969 in Slocum et al., 2002). In accord with some of this literature, this research endorses the view that sensemaking is a holistic phenomenon including cognitive but also emotive, purposive and conative²³¹ dimensions (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Weick, 2010; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Sheldon, 2009; Marsick et al., 2009; Weinberg, 2008; Basu and Palazzo, 2008; Boyatzis, 2006; Proshaksa et al, 1992; Kübler-Ross, 1969 in Slocum et al., 2002). All of the examples just cited have the following in common:

- They have sensemaking as their primary focus

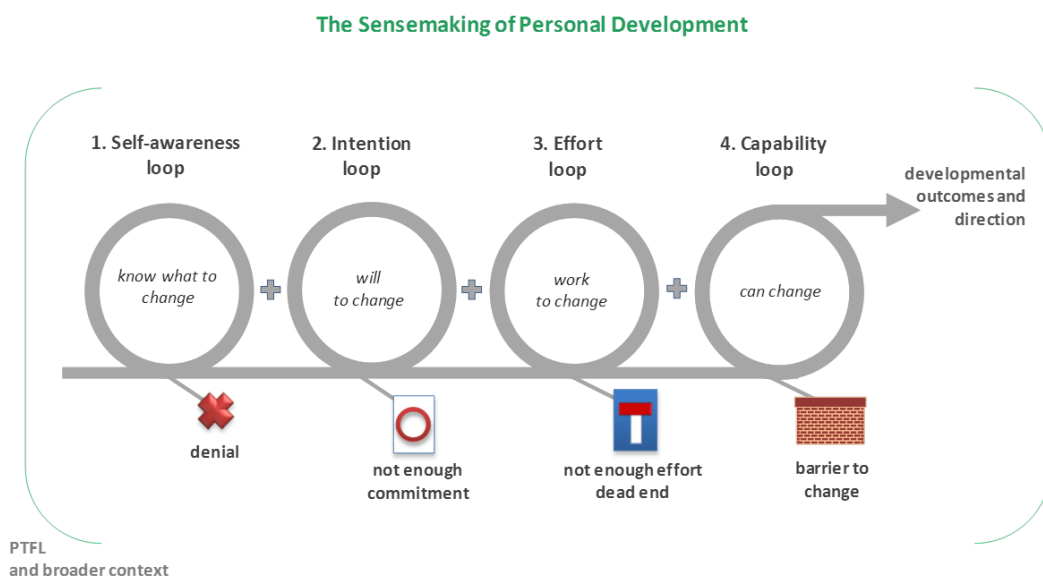
²³⁰ For example, Kegan's theorization of constructive development (1982), Torbert's action logics (1994), and Kuhnert and Lewis' developmental framing of transactional and transformational styles of leadership (1987).

²³¹ The term conative refers to behavioral disposition (Basu and Palazzo, 2008)

- They study some form of change (change, learning, development)
- They describe sensemaking as iterative and non-linear
- They identify iterative stages of sensemaking

The aggregate of this literature lends strength to the conclusion that sensemaking is at the core of personal development. This research furthers this understanding through an inductively derived model of the sensemaking of personal development. The model identifies four iterative patterns of sensemaking leading to personal development: self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability loops. The model, presented earlier in Section 4.4.4 of the findings, is repeated below.

Figure 32. Core process: A model of the sensemaking of personal development



Compiled by the author.

In this research, the model supported the observation of relationships between patterns of sensemaking and patterns of change (both in terms of personal and leadership development). It is proposed that, if validated, this model could aid in further research aimed at differentiating types of changes occurring at the individual level—such as instances of personality adjustment versus personal development.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the understanding of the processes of leadership development by distinguishing between vector processes of development; by identifying personal development as the core process by which individuals develop leadership capabilities; and, by identifying individual sensemaking as the core process of personal development. Contributions around process are summarized in the table below.

Table 33. Contributions around process

| Area | This study confirms | extends | challenges | Areas for further exploration |
|---|---|---|------------|--|
| Leadership Development-- Process | Process as necessary (if not sufficient) for development | Distinction between vector and core processes of development | - | |
| Vector processes | An in-depth analysis how the vectors processes of PTFL (the PTFL platform) were perceived by its participants to contribute to their development; Vector processes of PTFL; | PTFL as group counseling Continuum (consulting to counseling) of executive coaching initiatives (Joo, 2005): differentiation of counseling and therapy; extension of continuum to include therapy) | - | Comparative study of different vector processes and their effect on development |
| Core processes | Personal development as critical to leader development (as reviewed in Petriglieri et al., 2011) Sensemaking lies at the core of processes of individual change (Weinberg, 2008; McCauley et al., 2006; Boyatzis, 2006; Schwandt, 2005 and 2003; Argyris, 2001 and 1978; Weick, 1995; Proshaksa et al.'s, 1992; Mezirow, 1991; Marsick and Watson, 1990; Bandura, ref; Kolb, ref; Kübler-Ross, 1969 in Slocum et al., 2002) and includes cognitive as well as emotive, purposive and conative dimensions (Weick, 2010; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Sheldon, 2009; Weinberg, 2008; Basu and Palazzo, 2008) | Personal development as the core process by which individuals develop greater leadership capabilities. An inductively derived model of the sensemaking of personal development, including four iterative patterns of sensemaking leading to personal development (self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability loops) | - | Validation of the model of personal development Study of range of changes at the individual level |

Compiled by the author.

6.2.1.3 Contributions around outcomes

Developmental versus non-developmental outcomes

Research on personal development in the management area is scant (Petriglieri et al., 2011) and often lacks clarity around what personal development is. For example, in Petriglieri et al. (2011), developmental outcomes are equated to greater self-awareness, self-management, and the revisiting of life narratives. This thesis argues that, in absence of an appropriately sophisticated framework for assessing development, it cannot be concluded that change in each or all of these three areas constitutes development. Following a comparison of the findings of this research and notions of development in the field of developmental psychology, it was proposed that personal development coincides with systemic qualitative change in individual sensemaking, in the direction of greater integration, sophistication and self-determination. This thesis advocates that a more stringent measure²³², based on the wealth of knowledge available in the developmental psychology, is developed and applied to the assessment of what constitutes or does not constitute a developmental outcome.

Authentic leadership development

The literature highlights the priority of studying how the development of authentic leadership takes place (Gardner et al., 2011; Avolio, 2010). This research might have stumbled in a type of context where the development of authentic leadership²³³ can take place: in Appendix 8.18, a close parallel was highlighted between findings of this research around personal and leadership development and the conceptualization of sub-constructs of authentic leadership. This research also contributes to problematizing the positive moral valance commonly attributed by scholars to authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2011). Scholars as well as practitioners increasingly encourage managers to become more authentic by tuning into their “true self” (Harter, 2002; in Gardner et al., 2011) or core values (e.g., in Avolio and Hannah, 2008) and acting in concordance with them. This research does find that genuine personal development, associated with introspection and self-concordance, is also

²³² In this study, personal development outcomes were assessed through a framework derived from the adult development literature and according to criteria of greater integration, sophistication and self-determination

²³³ As defined by Avolio et al., e.g. in Walumbwa et al., 2008

associated to greater sensitivity around being ‘better with others’ (self-transcendence, in Staundinger and Kessler, 2009). These findings seem to support much of the authentic leadership literature in attributing a positive moral valence to authenticity. However tempting this conclusion might be, there are unresolved concerns that suggest it is premature: there is only exiguous empirical research that has examined the relationship between morality and authenticity; and, self-selection of participants in a research context (such as PTFL) or research sample (as in the present research) is likely to limit the generalizability to a population that is attentive to issues of morality. Overall, it is argued, the field is still far from having resolved the key issue of how morality relates to authenticity²³⁴ and thus has not yet warranted the claim that authenticity is morally positive.

Table 34. Contributions around outcomes

²³⁴ For example, was Hitler an authentic leader? (see discussion on the moral component of authentic leadership development)

| Area | Confirms | Extends | Challenges | Areas for further exploration |
|--|----------|---|---|---|
| Personal and leadership development--developmental outcomes | - | For development to have occurred, a systemic qualitative psychological change must also have taken place Integration, sophistication and self-determination as proposed criteria to assess development | Development cannot be assessed without an appropriately sophisticated and validated framework Increases in self-awareness or other isolated area per se do not necessarily constitute development (Petriglieri et al., 2011) | Develop and validate a framework for the assessment of developmental outcomes Study of the range of change at the individual level and their relationship with developmental outcomes |
| Authentic leadership development | - | PTFL as a context where authentic leadership development (as defined by Avolio and colleagues) can take place Authentic development is likely to have a positive moral valence (as reviewed in Gardner et al., 2011) | - There is insufficient empirical evidence that authentic personal and leadership development necessarily have a positive moral valence | Further research on the relationship between PTFL and authentic leadership development Further research and philosophical work aimed at exploring the relationship between authenticity and morality |

Compiled by the author.

6.2.1.4 Contributions around affirmation

Day (2001) pointed out that feedback (such as the feedback received on PTFL by research participants) is crucial to development; also, that what individuals do with the feedback may make a difference. This is a view that shared with approaches that focus on the importance of reflection (e.g., Petriglieri et al. 2011; Gray, 2007; Avolio and Hanna, 2008):

“we next need to ask whether leaders are adaptive or more maladaptive in how they reflect on what they have learned about

themselves” (Avolio and Hannah, 2008 p. 338)

Avolio and Hannah have operated a distinction between two forms of self-reflection—*adaptive* and *maladaptive*:

“Adaptive self-reflection represents a constructive process of reflection associated with patterns of thinking and emotions characterized by openness, positivity, and a learning goal-oriented perspective (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). Such openness to aspects of the self can result in greater self-awareness and self-knowledge that then contributes to more effective choices in terms of actions, behaviors, and emotional self-regulation over time (Carver & Scheier, 1982)” (Avolio and Hannah, 2008 p. 338)

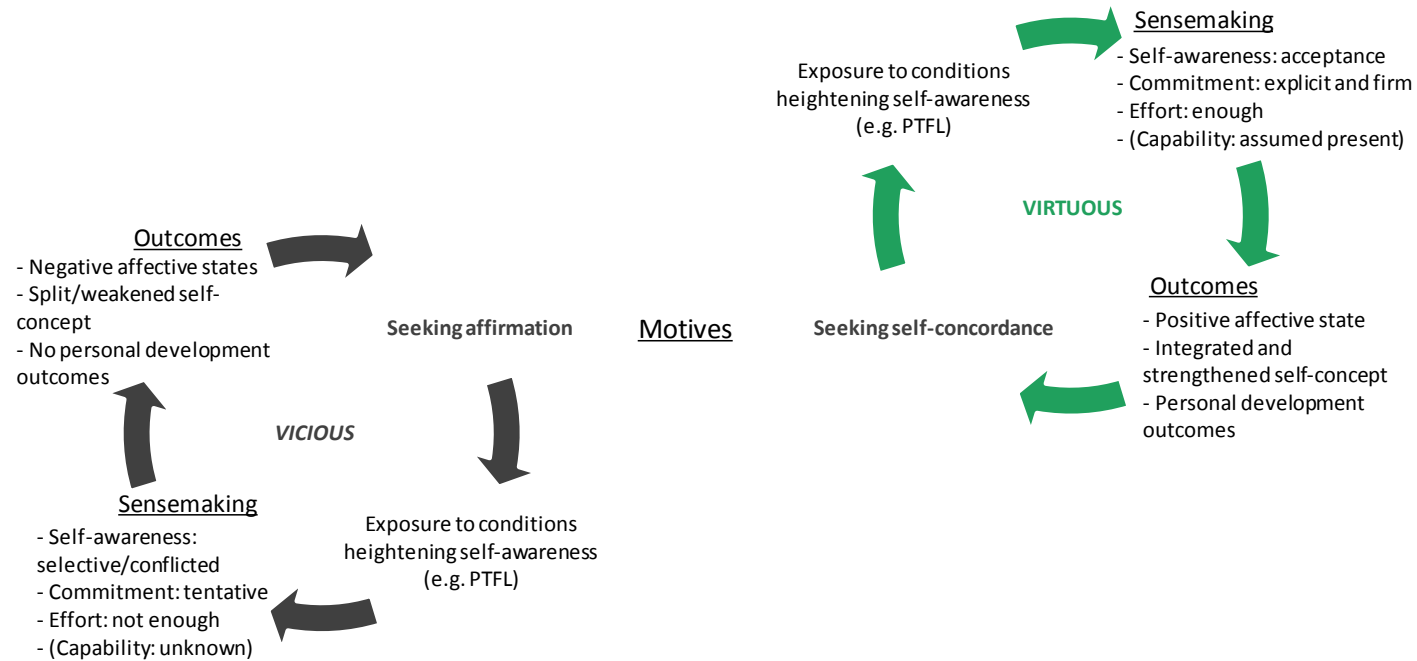
Managers engaging in maladaptive self-reflection, the authors propose above, develop negative emotions upon receiving feedback and tend to engage in negative “rumination” (p. 338) rather than with the opportunity to learn and change²³⁵. This research confirms the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive self-reflection. It also gets underneath this distinction: it points at a pattern of disproportionate affirmation seeking which might generate maladaptive and self-defensive reflection. Self-affirmation (Steele, 1988), mostly an unconscious sensemaking mechanism believed to generate positive affect, is a psychological function whose purpose seems to be to prevent self-defensive reactions and open individuals to change. When the self is faced with threatening information (e.g. feedback) around a specific domain, it tends to play up the overall ‘goodness’ of the person or the positive character of a different domain of the self. As a result, feedback is perceived as less threatening and can be integrated for the purposes of adaptive change. This research adds to other research in identifying that self-affirmation can ‘backfire’ (as reviewed in Sherman & Cohen, 2006): even though the PTFL context provided an external source of affirmation (a key function of a holding environment), two participants seemed to feel on the whole dis-affirmed. In these two cases, negative affect, self-defensive sensemaking and closure to change were observed.

It is suggested that the pattern of disproportionate affirmation seeking might have a role in reducing access to virtuous circles of development and in reinforcing vicious

²³⁵ This conceptualization is supported by the findings of this research

circles of development. Virtuous and vicious circles of development were hypothesized earlier (Section 4.6.3); the model is repeated on the next page.

Figure 33. Hypothesizing vicious and virtuous circles of personal development



Compiled by the author.

The concept of disproportionate affirmation seeking, the possible role of this pattern in hindering development, and the connection with self-affirmation theory are novel contributions to the leadership development field. Contributions around seeking affirmation are summarized in the table below.

Table 35. Contributions around affirmation

| Area | Confirms | Extends | Challenges | Areas for further exploration |
|---|--|---|------------|--|
| Leadership and personal development-Affirmation dynamics | There are adaptive and maladaptive forms of self-reflection (Avolio and Hannah, 2008) | A maladaptive affirmation patters might underpin maladaptive self-reflection and hinder development Connection with self-affirmation theory in the field of psychology | - | Study of affirmation dynamics and their effects on development |
| Self-affirmation theory | Self-affirmation can backfire (reviewed in Sherman & Cohen, 2006) | The more external image is salient to identity, the greater is the perceived threat in a situation that compels introspection (conceivably because of the prospect of being found wanting); also, the greater the chance of self-defensive reactions, and the difficulty of self-affirming in beneficial ways | - | Research on identity salience of external image and exterior accomplishments and effects on self-affirmation |

Compiled by the author.

6.2.2 Methodological contributions

This research aimed at developing theory around the processes at the core of leadership development through an exploratory approach and a longitudinal qualitative study. The commitment to an exploratory approach meant gradually discovering challenges unique to this research and developing strategies to overcome those challenges. One key challenge was to find a way to examine sensemaking that would not reduce sensemaking to cognition. There were clues in the literature that research on individual change focusing on cognitive sensemaking was offering decreasing marginal returns: the process of individual change seemed to transcend cognition (e.g. in Weick, 2010; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Moreover, the data gathered in this research demonstrated a richness that surpassed cognition: in describing their experience of change, participants raised topics of emotional processing, of deep intuition, of learning through empathy. These topics simply did not fit a cognitive frame of reference. An added challenge was imposed on the research by the aim of assessing development. Several iterations of analysis were attempted with tentative approaches. Eventually, Magnusson's paper (2001) on a person-centered approach to the study of development provided inspiration. The main points that were taken from that article were the following:

- The sensemaking of change spans different dimensions—the cognitive dimension as well as emotive, purposive²³⁶ and conative dimensions
- The sensemaking of change is systemic: it manifests through changes in the cognitive *and* emotive *and* purposive *and* conative dimensions
- Because the sensemaking of change is systemic, it is easier to understand it holistically rather than by attempting to trace its single components

Attempts were abandoned to track, during analysis, the thoughts of participants as separate from their emotions, intuitions and behavioral changes. Rather, the focus shifted on asking of the data the broader question of 'What does this passage mean?' (along the lines of what is encouraged in Charmaz, 2008). Attempts to answer this question inevitably exposed another difficulty: for every passage, a number of different interpretations were possible. The question was really 'What does this passage mean *for the participant?*'—a second point of inspiration was a conversation with my supervisor, who suggested that I begin analysis with the longitudinal study of

²³⁶ The inclusion of a purposive dimension as well was based on other adult development literature (Sheldon, 2009)

the case of each participant. I took this advice on board, although at first I could not grasp its significance. When I eventually completed the full sets of interviews (four per participant), I realized that each set as a whole provided a number of reference points for the interpretation of what a participant said in a single passage. When in doubt about a passage, I began referring to other passages which were relevant because of the topic or the language used. Later, I created an analysis template that compared the sensemaking of each participant at each of the four encounters. By doing this, I formed interpretive frameworks which guided me in making sense of the participants' sensemaking (Smith and Osborn, 2003). In developing interpretive frameworks²³⁷, I looked for mainly two things: an overall sense of what the participant was experiencing and an idea of whether something had changed compared to earlier encounters. This interpretive framework method emerged from this research as the nature of the data moved the analysis progressively closer to the field of psychology. Only later, in reviewing methodologies of research in developmental psychology, I came across a formalized description of the person-centered approach (based on the work of Magnusson)²³⁸ and realized that the interpretive framework method is an expression of that approach. Possibly a testament to the fit between the person-centered approach and the study of systemic intra-individual change, this research was well-supported by this approach. However, interpretive framework is an inductively derived and still incomplete method needing further definition and validation (to begin with, through a review of methods used in developmental psychology within the person-centered approach).

Another key challenge faced by this research was to find a way to discern and assess development. Consistently with the exploratory approach of the research, care was exercised so as to include as little a priori constructs as possible. In responding to the challenge of assessing development, however, this research resorted to deriving a framework from the literature of adult development. The aim was to identify developmental patterns on whose existence there is wide consensus in the literature and thus enjoy some meta-theoretical support. . Criteria had to respect the principle of ontogeny—that is, they had to incorporate an element of universal (transformational) change and an element of idiosyncratic (variational) change (see Section 2.4.3). The framework eventually included three criteria: integration, sophistication and self-determination (see Section 3.5). The framework was found to perform satisfactorily within this research (see Section 6.2.2). Its main contribution is to show that, with the help of a tool calibrated on the relatively mature understanding

²³⁷ In this thesis, interpretive frameworks are included in Appendix 8.6 but are also visible in the narration of individual stories of change (integral versions in Appendix 8.2)

²³⁸ In The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, Weiner and Craighead, 2010

of development present in the field of psychology, it is possible to add sophistication to the understanding of development in the area of management. As discussed in the section on limitations, the use of this framework had also the purpose of limiting researcher bias. Also this framework, however, is far from being a fully-fledged method and requires further definition work and validation.

Table 36. Contributions to methodology

| Area | Confirms | Extends | Challenges | Areas for further exploration |
|------------------------------------|----------|--|------------|---|
| Studying the sensemaking of change | - | Use of the person-centered approach is novel in the field of leadership development | - | Review of methods used in developmental psychology within the person-centered approach Potentially, formalization of the interpretive framework method |
| Assessing development | - | Use of a framework derived from the adult development literature is novel in the field of leadership development | - | Definition and validation of a framework for the assessment of development |

Compiled by the author.

Finally, throughout the thesis a case was made for the value of exploratory and longitudinal qualitative research. This research reinforces notions that exploratory research is an appropriate fit for research problems located in nascent areas of the literature (Edmondson and MacManus, 2007). Hopefully, the research also supports that longitudinal qualitative can be valuable in distilling “parsimonious” (if somewhat “rudimentary”) conceptualizations starting from “complex and little understood phenomenon” (Burgelman 2011, p. 20).

6.2.3 Practical contributions

As a practitioner, I feel that a personal priority is to further the understanding of the space within which I operate. This sense of priority is heightened by the consideration that the practice I engage in interplays with deep dynamics of sensemaking in myself as well as in other people. The reflections that are shared next are first of all items of reflection for my own development and practice.

Developmental context and vector processes

This research identified specific relationships between elements and characteristics of context, including its overall quality and fitness for a specific educational or developmental aim. Careful consideration and calibration of micro-decisions of design (of context and vector processes) of a developmental initiative is likely to support the expression of the distinctive quality that is truly supportive of its aims. In accord with a wealth of practitioner and scholarly knowledge, this research confirms that executive education is crucially about designing appropriate developmental initiatives.

Program and personal accountability

The process of personal development is still little understood and is often surrounded, in practice, by an aura of mysticism. Perhaps, the mist contributes at times to blurring boundaries between what a program can deliver and what individuals need to attain themselves through active engagement. The model of personal development proposed in this thesis (see Section 4.4.4) suggests a scope for the engagement of individuals: by identifying four necessary iterations of sensemaking leading to personal development (the self-awareness, commitment, effort and capability loops). This research indicates that developmental initiatives can have an effect on two of these iterations: self-awareness and capability. PTFL (in this research) as well as other initiatives (e.g. in Petriglieri et al., 2011 and Kets De Vries, 2007) seem to have a strong ability to facilitate expansion of self-awareness. Conceivably, development initiatives may have an effect also on the capability loop, to the extent that they facilitates in an individual the development of the resources needed for development²³⁹. It was suggested that a

²³⁹ These resources could be more 'routine' like, for example, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986)—the belief that a certain developmental step can be attained. Or, resources might stem from a therapy-like intervention aimed at restoring or repairing a specific aspect (see discussion of group counseling and group therapy, section 5.2.3).

PTFL-like initiative might want to prioritize facilitating the strengthening of implicit self-esteem when this seems too low for an individual's self-affirmation function to perform effectively. This research, however, indicates that self-awareness and capability are not sufficient for development to occur; also, that developmental initiatives can do little about the other two iterations of sensemaking--commitment and effort—which are really in the hands of individuals. As a tutor and a participant in developmental initiatives, I feel that explicitly recognizing the extent to which the responsibility of change lies within me brings clarity and contributes to my sense of personal accountability.

Working with maladaptive affirmation patterns

This research points to a maladaptive affirmation pattern associated with a disproportionate reliance on exterior accomplishments and capable of hindering development. This research points to a potential insufficiency of intervention strategies that can help address patterns of disproportionate affirmation seeking. Based on evidence from the present research and prior research on self-affirmation, some reflections were offered on how to better support individuals in when patterns of disproportionate affirmation seeking are at play: for example, increasing the level of affirmation²⁴⁰ and ensuring that affirmed qualities are in domains other than the domain under threat (external image)²⁴¹. Further research is needed to understand maladaptive affirmation patterns and the developmental strategies that might be most helpful in addressing them.

Popularity of personal development terminology

The term personal development is liberally utilized in the presentation of leadership development initiatives (Petriglieri et al., 2011). To a general concern around verifying the quality of leadership development initiatives (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Avolio, 2010; Kets de Vries, 2007) this thesis adds a concern around the insufficient definition, in practice as in the literature, of the concept and terminology of personal development. By applying the notions of development from the relatively more mature field of developmental psychology, this research proposes that personal development takes

²⁴⁰ Self-affirmation theory suggests that the greater the threat perceived by the self, the more crucial is the role of self-affirmation (reviewed in Sherman & Cohen, 2006)

²⁴¹ Self-affirmation theory suggests that if affirmation occurs in the same domain that is under threat (e.g. external image) it results in increased barriers to change (reviewed in Sherman & Cohen, 2006)

place when a qualitative systemic change occurs in individual sensemaking that involves greater integration, sophistication and self-determination. By this stringent definition, it would seem that only a portion of the management and leadership development programs claiming to foster personal development actually get close to addressing their stated aim. This discussion does not intend to negate the value of initiatives that foster change other than development. On the contrary, such initiatives are considered as foundations and complements (e.g., traditional coursework fostering the “acquisition of conceptual knowledge and analytic skills”, Petriglieri et al., 2011 p. 431) and integral part (e.g. self-awareness, e.g. in Petriglieri et al., 2011) of development. However, one interesting example is posed by the recent introduction, by Columbia Business School, of ‘Personal Leadership Online’, a 10-12 week online course where participants listen to core and elective lectures, take part in discussions and are allocated a space for reflection. The program is said to employ “breakthrough research in psychology, neuroscience, and psychotherapy”²⁴³. Among the advertised benefits of the program, “Uncover and re-script self-defeating beliefs”, “Develop a deeper understanding of, and connection with, your authentic self”, as well as “Learn to use the power of love to change yourself and change others”²⁴⁴ are listed. This thesis asks to what extent the “tangible personal improvements and greater leadership skills”²⁴⁵ that this online program aims to foster can constitute development. This question is raised on the basis that participants in this research indicated that several aspects of context, including its physicality, helped create a uniquely charged atmosphere which helped them connect with themselves and others at a greater level of depth than they had ever experienced. Although solely on the basis of this research, it is hard to imagine that an online environment would be able to provide a comparable platform. In any case, the advent of the technologization of adult education is ongoing, leaving to future research to address questions around how well virtual environments support learning, change and development. The greater point is that, more often than not, in the field of leadership development it is unclear what programs are really conducive to personal development and, indeed, what is meant by personal development.

²⁴³ <http://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/execed/plonline>, last accessed on September 20th, 2012

²⁴⁴ <http://personalleadership.com/programs/benefits>, last accessed on September 20th, 2012

²⁴⁵ <http://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/execed/plonline>, last accessed on September 20th, 2012

6.3 Validity and limitations

6.3.1.1 Validity

Several challenges of this research posed a threat to its validity. In particular, the exclusive focus on subjectivity posed a threat to credibility²⁴⁶. In order to address the limitations of subjectivity, the researcher strived in several ways to enact an epistemology of ‘negotiation of interpretations’²⁴⁷ within the research. For example, the researcher strived to keep a level tone in interviews, aimed at facilitating the mutual challenging of interpretations by participants and the researcher. All participants have at some point asked questions or restated what they thought to stress what they meant. At several points during interviews (and especially in the third round of interviews) time was devoted to verifying the understanding that the researcher was forming of each story (Charmaz, 2008). Additionally, in this thesis the researcher strived to communicate as transparently as possible about her choices (for example, on methods used and how they were used) interpretations. Finally, the researcher periodically reviewed her interpretations with the PhD review panel. Overall, it is believed that the research has produced an accurate enough representation of the experience of participants (credibility criterion, see Section 6.3)

Volunteer purposive sampling and a small sample size posed a threat to the dependability of this research. Would a re-run of this research produce comparable results? Probably it would—assuming that the sample in this research was representative of the larger population of those attending PTFL²⁴⁸. However, it is not known how representative the sample was of such population. This is partly due to a small sample size and partly due to the sampling method used. Sampling relied on volunteer participation and, as P1 said:

“I guess that some people agreed to take part in the research and some others didn’t [...] and so maybe the people who did are more likely to enjoy the opportunity for further reflection” (P1_R3)

²⁴⁶ The first of the criteria of validity in qualitative research in the framework by Lincoln and Guba (1985)—see also Section 3.4.7 of the methodology chapter.

²⁴⁷ See the discussion on philosophical hermeneutics in the methodology chapter, Section 3.3

²⁴⁸ And assuming no variation in methods

Ultimately, the reasons why some PFTL delegates opted in or out²⁴⁹ of the research cannot be established. The characteristics of those who were both PFTL delegates and research participants suggest that they are more representative of a population favorable to this type of course and inclined to volunteer time for lengthy reflective interviews. There is no way of knowing how research findings would have looked like with different participants, but ethical considerations appropriately limit research to cases of informed consent. Volunteer purposive sampling is believed to have been an adequate basis of data access considering that this research claims no generalization beyond the research context and sample (dependability criterion, see Section 6.3).

The highly interpretive nature of this research posed a threat to its confirmability. In order to address the limitations of interpretive methods of analysis, the researcher addressed her biases in a bracketing essay included in this dissertation (Appendix 8.2). Recognizing the challenges of assessing development, the researcher has sought guidance from the adult development field and developed a literature-based framework (Section 3.5) to guide her assessment of what constitutes development. Finally, the interpretive frameworks method which emerged from this research (Appendices 8.6 and 8.7) supplied a frame of reference against which to verify the researcher's interpretations of passages of interviews. While inductively derived and steeped in subjectivity, interpretive frameworks focused on the subjectivity of participants: many times during analysis the researcher reassessed interpretive route based on what she believed that the participants would have felt as truer (confirmability criterion, see Section 6.3).

Finally, the qualitative nature of this research raises issues of transferability. While this research cannot and does not aim to generalize beyond research context and sample: contributions are framed in terms of areas for further exploration; and, the models and definitions that were inductively derived from this research are proposed for validated through further research. Hopefully, enough "descriptive data" was disclosed in this thesis so to "enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (transferability criterion, in Polit and Beck, 2008 p. 316).

²⁴⁹ Or dropped out, like P2 and P4

Table 37. Validity criteria and mitigation of threats to validity

| Criteria* | Threats to validity | Mitigation of threats in this research |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Credibility | Exclusive focus on subjectivity of participant | Negotiation of interpretation (level field in the interviews, verifying interpretations during interviews, engagement with PhD review panel) |
| | Demonstrating credibility to external readers | Transparency and disclosure |
| Dependability | Sample size and volunteer purposive sampling | Research does not generalize beyond research sample and context Ethical considerations appropriately limit research to informed consent |
| Confirmability | Highly interpretive nature of the study methods | Bracketing essay (Appendix #) Literature-based framework of personal development Interpretive frameworks for each participants |
| Transferability | Qualitative research limits the extent to which findings can be generalized | Research does not generalize beyond research sample and context—contributions are presented as areas for further exploration and models and definitions are proposed for validation through future research Rich descriptive data is provided in this thesis |

Compiled by the author. Based on the framework of validity of qualitative research by Lincoln and Guba (1985, in Polit and Beck, 2008).

6.3.1.2 Additional limitations

This research aligns with process rather than with variance theory²⁵⁰. This research does not make any claim on the statistical significance of relationships observed in this research (an aim of variance theory); rather, the research aims to contribute through a picture of “the sequence of events leading to an outcome” (process theory, in Langley, 1999 p. 693). This research makes no claim of contributing to formal theory; rather, it claims to contribute to substantive theory²⁵¹. Contributions are thus best framed in terms of areas whose significance in relation to the phenomenon of interest (personal development) has been identified and hence are indicated as areas worthy of further exploration. And, the models presented in this research are fundamentally just “boxes-and-arrow charts”, but hopefully they shed some light on “how the complex system

²⁵⁰ Based on Langley, 1999. See also Section 3.4.1 of the methodology chapter.

²⁵¹ Based on Burgelman, 2011. See also Section 3.4.1 of the methodology chapter.

hangs together and its operative logic” (Burgelman, 2011 p. 22). In line with the aims of substantive theory, this research hopes to have contributed some conceptualizations that are more “parsimonious” than the raw picture of the complex phenomena that was examined. An additional limitation is that findings of this research are limited to the experience of participants²⁵²: extending the inquiry to the systems where participants operate (e.g., family or the work settings) in order to establish how perceptions of their own change²⁵³ tallied with perceptions by others is a challenge that is entrusted to future research. A limitation of the sample is that it was composed exclusively of participants of UK nationality: this research does not address cultural difference in how individuals interact with PTFL or in their sensemaking of change. Finally, this research is certainly limited in terms of how it applied methods that are native of the field of psychology as well as in terms of some of the inferences that were made around the significance of psychological dynamics. It is precisely for this reason that this thesis advocates a tight collaboration between the fields of leadership development and developmental psychology.

²⁵² Given the nascent stage of theory in this area and the broad scope of the exploration, adding the element of triangulation would have at this stage overwhelmed both the study and the researcher

²⁵³ Participants perceptions or accounts of change might have been partly biased by optimistic self-assessment or desire to do well in the interviews (social desirability).

6.4 Future research

This research has highlighted a number of areas for further exploration. In terms of the context of development, further work is needed to define and validate the inductive model of context proposed in this thesis. The use of a validated model would support comparative research on different developmental contexts, increasing the knowledge about what makes contexts distinctive and which contexts facilitate which outcomes. It would also support research on how and at which junctures context interfaces with process. Based on an affinity observed between findings on personal and leadership development in this research and the sub-constructs of authentic personal development (as defined by Avolio and colleagues), this research points to the opportunity to further study the relationship between the PTFL and authentic leadership development. In terms of process, further work is needed to define and validate the inductive model of the sensemaking of personal development which emerged from this thesis. The discussion also highlighted a need for further research and philosophical work aimed at exploring the relationship between authenticity and morality from a developmental perspective. In terms of outcomes, the use of a validated model of individual development would support research aimed at identifying the range of changes occurring at the individual level both in terms of personal and leadership development. Research could be developed in parallel to examine the associations between types of change in terms of personal development and types of change in terms of leadership development. In close collaboration with the field of psychology, research could be carried forward to study the role of affirmation patterns in personal and leadership development. The particular pattern emerging from this research whereby maladaptive affirmation is associated to a disproportionate reliance on external image and exterior accomplishments could be investigated, both in relation to development and to identity salience. Research could be done to clarify which intervention strategies might be appropriate in order to facilitate development when maladaptive affirmation patterns are at play. Generally, it is argued that a closer connection with the field of psychology would much advance the understanding of personal and leadership development. For example, more studies employing a person-centered approach promise to add to the understanding of the sensemaking of change in individuals²⁵⁴. Review work in the methodology literature is needed to gain perspective over the methods used in developmental psychology within the person-centered approach. This thesis especially advocates that an appropriately sophisticated framework for the assessment of development in

²⁵⁴ Conceivably, the person-centered approach could be extended to aggregate entities in order to examine the sensemaking of change in groups and organization

individuals is developed by drawing from the field of developmental psychology. The literature-based framework adopted in this research might be a starting point, but review work is needed to further define a tool ahead of validation. This exploratory research helps drafting a rich research agenda, hinting at the possibility that a cross-disciplinary conversation on personal development, involving the fields of leadership development and developmental psychology, has the potential for developing into a field of research in its own right.

6.5 Conclusion

Contributions to the field of leadership development were reviewed in this chapter. In addition, validity was addressed (with reference to the framework by Lincoln and Guba, 1985) by discussing threats to validity in this research and ways in which those threats were mitigated. Additional limitations of the research were identified and a rich and varied research agenda around personal development was outlined.

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8. APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix: Glossary

Adult development: “systematic, qualitative changes in human abilities and behaviors as a result of interactions between internal and external environments. Interactions and qualitative changes are influenced by genetics, by endogenous and exogenous influences, and by adaptive powers and personal interests” (Hoare, 2006 p. 8)

Authenticity: authenticity has been defined as “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know ‘oneself’” (Harter, 2002; in Gardner et al., 2005, p. 344).

Capability: Capability is the “ability to apply both skills and competencies in a particular context in a way that is perceived to add value” (Jackson et al., 2003 p. 195). Contrast with *skill* and *competency*.

Case: this word is used, interchangeably with *story*, to refer to the overall picture of each participant’s journey throughout the research. No reference to case study methodology is implied.

Change: this word change is used to indicate a generic variation within in individual (expansion of self-awareness or personality adjustment or personal development)

Competency: competency is an aggregate of skills “necessary to resolve more complex problems” (Jackson et al., 2003 p. 195). Contrast with *skill* and *capability*.

Conative: the term conative refers to behavioral disposition (Basu and Palazzo, 2008); in this thesis, it was used to indicate enactment (e.g., in Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010) and embodiment (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010) dimensions of sensemaking.

Core process of development: is the *sensemaking* activity by which an individual: 1) becomes aware of a *self-limiting pattern* and accepts the new awareness to a lesser or greater extent 2) forms a more or less determined commitment to addressing the pattern 3) exerts more or less efforts to actually address the pattern 4) assuming no capability barrier, draws from or builds new psychological resources to make a qualitative change;

Developmental ability: given a context conducive to development (see *developmental context* in the glossary below), different individuals do not have the same ability to

develop. The ability to transcend self-limiting patterns is somewhat impaired in individuals who have an unresolved relationship with a traumatic experience or have a psychological disorder of a significant intensity. In these cases, healing needs to occur before an individual can complete the ability loop.

Developmental context²⁵⁵: a physical and social place which, in virtue of distinctive and relatively stable characteristics, is ideally conducive for a specific type of developmental process.

Developmental processes: include *core* and *vector processes of development*.

Holding environment: a holding environment performs three functions that are key to development: support, challenge and continuity (Kegan, 1982).

Leadership: the *capability* of individuals to “to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (Bass, 2008, p.23)

Leadership development: understood as the expansion of the *capability* of individuals “to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (Bass, 2008, p.23).

Motive: “A motive can energize a variety of behaviors that may differ from each other but all create a similar inner affective state of goal satisfaction if consummated” (Bass, 2008 p. 178)

Personality adjustment: a adjustment, understood as not systemic, aimed at maintaining socio-emotional wellbeing (Staundinger and Kessler, 2009)

Personal growth /maturity: a definition by Staundinger and Kessler is adopted whereby personal growth/maturity includes “cognitive, emotional and motivational facets that entail: (i) deep and broad insight into self, others and the world, (ii) complex emotion-regulation (in the sense of tolerance of ambiguity), and (iii) a motivational orientation that is transcending self-interest and is investing in the well-being of others and the world” (2009, p. 242). Compare with *personal development*.

Personal development: a systemic qualitative change in individual sensemaking in the direction of greater integration, sophistication, and self-determination.

²⁵⁵ Definition developed starting from my 3rd review paper. Developmental context so defined encompasses the concept of ‘holding environment’ (e.g. in Petriglieri et al., 2011). This definition also incorporates a processual understanding of context: developmental context evolves into a platform able to support and co-determine developmental processes and outcomes.

Seeking affirmation: a type of *motive*, observed in this research, associated with reliance on external image and exterior accomplishments as a source of strength and security.

Seeking self-concordance: a type of *motive*, observed in this research, associated with reliance on internal sources (personal values and meaning) of security and confidence. Self-concordance has been defined in the literature as “the degree to which one’s self-chosen initiatives match and represent one’s developing interests and core values” (Sheldon, 2009 p.557).

Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988): self-affirmation is a mostly unconscious sensemaking dynamic dedicated to preserving self-integrity in the face of threatening information (e.g. negative feedback). Through self-affirmation, the individual draws on the sense of being overall a good person or on the sense of being good in a different domain of the self than the one that has just come under threat. Self-affirmation makes the new information less threatening, diminishes self-defensive responses and supports.

Self-limiting pattern²⁵⁶: a pattern of sensemaking determining, in an individual, a sub-optimal way to respond to certain types of events/people/circumstances. A self-limiting pattern is often justified on the basis of a prior experience. It is self-limiting because assumptions relating to the original experience that might have originated the pattern are extended by default to other circumstances.

Sensemaking²⁵⁷: a dynamic process of construction of sense which involves functionally integrated cognitive, affective, purposive, and conative dimensions and attends to inextricably linked processes of individual development, establishment of meaning, and exchange with the environment (see Section 2.4.5). In this research, sensemaking is understood as the *core process of development*.

Skill: a skill is “regarded as a specific expertise that can be taught” (Jackson et al., 2003 p. 195). Contrast with *competency* and *capability*.

²⁵⁶ Definition reflecting my current understanding (I have not looked yet into psychology literature)

²⁵⁷ Definition supported by literature which defines sensemaking as a complex “person-centered process” (Higginson and Mansell, 2008, p. 312), where various dimensions are functionally integrated (Magnusson, 2001). The function of sensemaking is to attend to inextricably linked processes of identity construction, establishment of meaning, and exchange with the environment (Magnusson, 2001; Basu and Palazzo, 2008; Higginson and Mansell, 2008). The integration of sensemaking means that its dimensions (e.g. cognitive, affective, and behavioral) operate as a whole.

Story: this word is used, interchangeably with *case*, to refer to the overall picture of each participant's journey throughout the research. Reference to case study methodology is not implied.

Value: "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state" (Rokeach, 1973; in Bass, 2008 p. 167)

Vector processes of development²⁵⁸: explicit or implicit elements of design which support the sensemaking of individuals in order to facilitate a particular developmental outcome.

²⁵⁸ Definition developed from my 3rd review paper. The term vector has emerged before in a study of a firm's long-term adaptive capability (Burgelman, 2002) and was used to describe the collection of efforts to drive the business and its client organization in a certain strategic direction.

8.2 Appendix: A personal perspective

In this essay, I want to address aspects of my motivations together with aspects of my own story. Both aspects are closely related: what motivated me five years ago to begin the journey of this doctoral research is a kernel of what motivates me today to continue to work in this area.

Personal background

My professional career began as an accountant and treasurer. Upon starting an MBA program seven years ago, I thought that I would specialize in finance and continue on the path of corporate life. Near the end of the program I took an internship opportunity as an internal auditor for a major pharmaceutical company. This position, which played to my skills and incorporated extensive travel, epitomized everything I had always wanted professionally. Or so I thought. I fully enjoyed the experience, but the realization crept up that returning to corporate life was not what I wanted. I could do auditing well, and certainly could earn a good living from it, but it did not click with my sense of purpose. What else to do? That was a time of disorientation, of getting lost and then being found again. It was perhaps my first time to consider a big life change that involved a lot of uncertainty: I knew what I would find by continuing on the same path, but I had very little clue of what would happen if I did not.

During the MBA program, finance classes were the ones that I took because I had planned to; leadership or cross-cultural management classes were the ones that I took because I wanted to. Among other things, I took from these classes descriptions of exemplary leaders (real or literary) who seemed to know how to run an organization while fostering the development of their people and benefitting their social context. I was inspired by those figures and wondered how to follow their example. In the context of graduate business school, somewhat to my surprise, I could not readily find enough information to help me shape an answer to the question of “what makes a good leader?”. My mind added up the curiosity about leadership development and my interest in the classroom cultivated during my experiences of teaching undergraduate business students and I began considering an academic career. Part of me also thought that a PhD was an impressive achievement, of a sort that uniquely enables one to uniquely contribute to the field of education. Was my next step going to be on the path of academia? I was fortunate to be able to have conversations with a number of inspiring professors and academics whose stories and viewpoints helped me explore this prospect. In the end, I decided to go for it. It was not an easy choice, because it involved turning down job offers from the corporate world. But, I thought I would trust

that, in the long run, following my instinct and curiosity on the unknown path would make sense and be rewarding.

My motivations for the research

A couple of years into the PhD program, as I was conducting the pilot study, a Praxis tutor asked me why I was interested in the topic of executive leadership development with a focus on personal growth. I told them about my background and how I came to the decision to pursue a career in academic research. They asked: ‘Yes, but *why* study this?’ I was slightly taken aback and probably started to mumble more of the same. They asked again: ‘Yes. But *why*?’. I did not quite know why, but I tried hard on the spot to find an answer within myself: I said, ‘Because I care, I really do care about them.’ Did I care about executives? I had never thought about that before. If I did, why did I care for them? And did executives need me to care for them at all? On that day I learned that if I asked myself a question and thought of an answer, chances were that later I could think a little further and deeper. And that, later on, I could revisit my thoughts again. During the following year, I learned not to be afraid of continuing to question my thoughts—essentially, not to be afraid of what I may learn²⁵⁹. To me this means that I have been exploring a reflective practice that feels intriguing and meaningfully bound together, rather than tentative and scattered, and discovering new layers of the motivations underlying my research.

Three different but related motivations have become conscious to me in the past few years which energize my work as a researcher and, more recently, as a practitioner. The first motivation is a belief that empowering individuals in positions of responsibility to do better can, by ripple effect, benefit a whole system. In a mildly heroic way, the figure of the executive evokes for me an ideal figure who is both capable and empowered to move and shape things. Ideally, for the better—not for mere self-interest, but to help others flourish and add value organizations they work for and the community they live in. How can I or anyone become equipped for a position of privilege and responsibility? Many people, like me perhaps, might never become an executive in an organization. But I believe that many people are in positions of influence and responsibility every day: what they do, for example as parents, teachers, or volunteers, has consequences for other lives. In this sense, the question of how I can cultivate, express and share the qualities of a ‘good leader’ is very important to me.

Through the years, I have realized that learning is both a right and a privilege. As a teenager, I attended a liberal arts high school in Italy but did not quite realize the value

²⁵⁹ I am paraphrasing the lyrics of a song, ‘Furr’ by Blitzen Trapper

of studying philosophy, history, and literature. I don't think I tried too hard, but I tried hard enough for things to work out. I also went to the US for a six-month exchange program and, although I enjoyed the experience thoroughly, only later I realized how much it meant in terms of opening my mindframes to new ways of thinking. I am deeply grateful to my parents for having set me on the path I am currently on by investing in my education. After high school, I did not know which direction my university studies should take. After a short lived and troubled attempt at studying law, I decided to begin working. I learned bookkeeping and accounting skills at my father's accounting firm, and that allowed me to pursue job opportunities internationally. Work has always motivated me, and I think I was always a keen and hardworking member within the teams that I was part of. My responsibilities tended to grow quickly. At some point I felt that what I could contribute was constrained because of capabilities that I did not have. At that point, I began business studies at a university on the side of work and enjoyed every time some new notion from a lecture or a book clicked with my experience. I also enjoyed applying what I learned in the workplace. This background led me to embark on a lifetime learning journey through pursuing academia as a profession. I believe, as Freire²⁶⁰ advocated, that education is a path to freedom—freedom to remain true to myself, to make the best of what life gives me, and hence to strive to contribute to others as best I can.

Then, there is a wish that I could contribute, if just a tiny bit, to improving the quality of human existence. I see children as full of vitality and hope. They try, they fall, and they try again. God knows if life does not try to hold them down at times. They may or may not understand why things happen to them, but the hope in their eyes is resilient. I cannot imagine the hopeless eyes of a child--or perhaps I do not want to, because that would be the saddest thing. It seems to me that adults, who would seem to have access to more resources than children, sadly at times give up. I am not sure how, why, and when that happens. Sometimes, I observe my sadness when I see that a child-like glimpse of hope and forward energy is missing in the eyes of a grown-up--as if, to small or large extent, they had succumbed to a compromise with life. I am not sure why I see this, and can never really know whether that it is even true in any way, but somehow the contours of this issue are visible in my mind's eye. And I wish that something could be done. I wish I could do something to help. There is a world of subtler psychological discomforts that seem able to pain and limit the ordinary person who, just like me, is by many standards of society a functional adult. If the practice of

²⁶⁰ Freire (1921-1997) was a philosopher of education and theorist of critical pedagogy

psychology were seen as an enabler of adult development and made routinely accessible²⁶¹ to adults, perhaps it would benefit many lives and the larger community.

My experience with PTFL

In 2009, I took part in PTFL²⁶² as a participant. Asked by the tutors to share a particular issue that I wished to work on, I shared that it was difficult for me to feel good about how I balanced the attention that I gave to my work and the attention that I gave to the people in my life. The two seemed to be stressfully competing for limiting resources, and I could never feel that I attended to either *enough*. On one hand, work has always been very fulfilling for me. On the other hand, I think that relating to other people must be one of the big reasons to be alive. However, at times I felt that I had to put my needs on the side or cramp my work-related efforts in little time in order to try give ‘enough’ to others. The feedback that I received from others on the course highlighted for me that I can be very warm and empathetic, and connect with others quite strongly. Equally, at other times I can be perceived as distant, as if lost in my thoughts, or cold, as if detached and not caring (a self-limiting pattern of mine). This is some puzzling feedback to make sense of, but having heard it from many people who I trust I think it is worth working with. One way that I came to understand this feedback is the following: perhaps at times I tend to treat tasks like relationships--and relationships like tasks. About work, I like how I know what I put in, and more or less I also know what I get out. I am, I believe, hardworking and dedicated—and usually achieve rewarding enough results on professional tasks that I take up. In this sense, cultivating work is a natural and pleasant affair for me. Relationships can be different. I know that in the past I have not been good at cultivating nourishing relationships. And, in a non-nourishing relationship there is hardly a way to give enough. No matter how much giving is attempted, things will still not work. Perhaps this is how I unconsciously learned a subtle safety valve mechanism of ‘checking out’ when something feels too distressing and paradoxical. As long as it was unconscious, this mechanism was able to kick in at its own will--perhaps just because I was feeling tired. This meant that, across situations, I could be warm and friendly but then quickly shift gear and ‘check out’. ‘Checking out’ is really a form of disconnection within myself; of disengaging with feelings so that more negative feelings such as disappointment, powerlessness within a

²⁶¹ I am thinking that the executive population does not normally have issues of access. However, I am also thinking that access is only partly an economic matter—there is a lot of pressure on adults to look ‘sorted’ combined with a lack of good quality and widespread adult education opportunities

²⁶² At the time it was known as OIPS. The particular iteration of the program that I joined was different from the program which offered a context to this research in two main ways: it was facilitated by a different pair of tutors and adopted a different approach. The approach pivoted around an executive coaching model known as the Centaur model, developed by Sandy Kotter a co-founder of the Praxis Centre within the Cranfield School of Management

relationships do not have a chance to rise and overwhelm me. For me, disconnecting seems to take two main forms: a more 'benign' form is when I go inside and wonder about things within myself and the universe. These are probably the times when I look absorbed and distant, but for me this is a restful place and almost a moment of meditative observation. A much less benign form of disconnection springs up when I feel threatened. In these cases, I close up and can become cold and stern. When that happens, I feel sad because I do not want to be like that with other people. In the past couple of years, I have been exploring ways to understand and work with myself better so that I, rather than the disconnection pattern, remain in charge of my responses most of the time.

This disconnection pattern has an interesting application for my research. Because I am passionate about the topic and energized by working with people, I usually stay 'connected' during interviews or practice work. However, I have felt very threatened by the task of writing and have been suffering from different forms and flavors of the writer's block. Not in the sense that I would not be able to write anything, but rather and more crucially, in the sense that I could not write anything that really said anything. For example, I would have a hard time choosing one or the other way to address a topic, organize an argument, or shape a text. I now understand this as an issue related to my disconnecting pattern. In feeling threatened by the relatively new task of writing, I would disconnect. By disconnecting, I would make my intuitive and affective dimensions inaccessible. How can just logic discern among a number of equally viable directions? Luckily my supervisor and panel did not let me get away with 'disconnected' writing: when they read my earlier papers, they kept asking me: what do *you* mean? What do *you* think? This is how I learned that if I stay connected, then writing makes more sense for me²⁶³. For me writing is still difficult and remains something I want to learn how to do better--but I feel that finding the path to myself every time I write has been helping enormously.

Critical subjectivity²⁶⁴ and the research

In this essay, I have strived to faithfully represent my present 'interpretive frame' as well as the main motivations underlying this research: I have a genuine passion for and a personal commitment to personal development: a desire to support the development of individuals in positions of responsibility; a belief that lifelong learning is a path to freedom; and a belief that personal development supports in expressing talents and living a meaningful life.

²⁶³ I experienced the same with data analysis: if I 'shut down' part of the interpretive frame, analysis could go anywhere—but nowhere at the same time

²⁶⁴ Ladkin, 2005

I embrace the philosophical stand of contemporary hermeneutics in the sense that I do not think that my interpretive frame should be factored out of my work on the basis that it constitutes bias. I would refute that bias *is* the interpretive frame—I would rather think that bias is an *unexamined* interpretive frame. I do not think that I can ever claim to know my interpretive frame in full, but striving for critical subjectivity, including through dialogue with others, allows me to observe how it interacts with what I do. Perhaps the practice of critical subjectivity is similar to the practice of yoga in that rather than being a definable achievement, it is ‘the effort to remain there’²⁶⁵—that is, the effort to continue to know my interpretive frames.

This research was transformative for me. In several occasions, a confrontation with a bit of data, a passage in the literature, or a dialogue with a participant prompted me to revise my assumptions and understandings. For example, I used to implicitly expect that PTFL would be experienced by others in ways similar to how I experienced it; perhaps I used to also romanticize the program slightly, being under the impression that it helped everybody to feel better. Having had a dialogue with a range of different outlooks and mindsets, I now see the program more as a professionally facilitated group counseling interaction that responds to a range of needs and can have a range of outcomes. In this sense, if it is true that my voice has shaped the research, it is also true that the voice of the literature and of participants shaped my voice.

In conclusion, to the question of whether my interpretive frame threatens the validity of this research, I would respond that validity would be threatened if I used my interpretive frames to fabricate conclusions that are not warranted by the data or literature that were available to me during the research. I strived to use interpretive frames to discern the directions of inquiry and analysis that I would be capable and happy to explore and substantiate—and then entrusted logic and methodologies to verify hunches, derive conclusions, and articulate arguments.

²⁶⁵ I am paraphrasing a translation by Paul Harvey of a passage of the Yoga Sutra (1.13)

8.3 Appendix: Research design

8.3.1 Pilot study

8.3.1.1 *Description of the pilot study*

The pilot study included one in-depth interview with each of three volunteer OIPS²⁶⁶ participants (cohort of November 2009). An application for approval from the Ethical Committee of the Cranfield School of Management was sought and obtained. Informed consent was sought in writing from each participant. Even though the design of the main study was going to include three rounds of interviews for each participant, only one pilot interview was carried out with each participant for practical reasons. Pilot interviews took place on the phone in the days immediately after the first module of OIPS. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed by the researcher. Interviews were based on a flexible but detailed interview guide. Consistently with the exploratory approach adopted in this research, interview guides included very little literature-derived constructs. In reality, interviews mostly departed from the guide and the conversation flowed rather organically toward directions of interest. The main areas of focus of interviews were the following:

- Professional role and organizational context of the participant
- Issues or challenges that the participant had been experiencing and had worked on during OIPS
- Change experienced in conjunction with participation in OIPS
- Implications for personal and professional life (of both issues and change)
- Plans to implement change going forward
- How the participant had experienced OIPS and was experiencing the process of change
- Feedback on the interview

One of the interviews, chosen at random, was used for testing analysis methods. Then, all three interviews were analyzed with the blend of methods described earlier (constructivist grounded theory as a main method; IPA reading and visual mapping as supporting methods). From the analysis a number of key issues expressed by the participants and addressed during OIPS emerged: participants themselves repeatedly

²⁶⁶ Organisational and Inter-Personal Skills, as PTFL was known at the time

referred to these issues spontaneously as a way to describe what was changing in their experience.

8.3.1.2 Findings from the pilot study

As mentioned above, analysis of pilot interviews focused on the issues and change experienced by participants. Substantive findings revealed a pattern of change: originally, participants were experiencing a sort of stasis due to an unresolved issue or dilemma that had ramification for both their personal and professional spheres; on OIPS, participants learned something new (mostly about themselves) and integrated the new knowledge in a novel way of making sense of the original dilemma or issue; having reframed the original dilemma or issue, participants acquired novel clarity, including on what action to take going forward. The following are summaries of the three cases in the pilot study.

Pilot interview 1: different contexts for business and friendly interactions

The first participant in the pilot study, a director of a non-profit institution, experienced a challenge when, as part of a larger initiative of organizational change, his friend and former co-director was promoted to CEO. Negative emotions emerged that were difficult to decipher and stirred up a sense of guilt about not accepting the promotion granted to his friend. On OIPS, the participant found particularly enlightening a discussion on the distinction “between business relationships and friendships” (line 140). Exposure to this discussion brought about the realization that resentment was not due to his friend’s promotion to CEO; rather it was due to the fact that many workplace interactions with his friend had started to have a more formal character. In the words of the participant, he hadn’t realized that this resentment had kept him “actually back in the squeaky lines” of organizational change. In his experience, his change was prompted by the discernment that there are different contexts for business and friendly interactions and resulted in his acceptance of the friend’s promotion as well as in active support of the organizational change.

Pilot interview 2: an epiphany about personal values

The second participant, a manager and board member for a multinational company, described becoming painfully aware of being caught in a vicious circle: even though he had achieved several significant successes throughout his career, he still felt painfully unfulfilled. Feeling unfulfilled would only drive him to seek further achievements which, in turn, would only make him feel “suicidal, and quite upset. And quite

helpless". He realized that his discomfort drove him to behave too assertively: at work, where he would at times be perceived as too harsh and directive. On OIPS, he experienced an "epiphany" around what perpetuated the vicious circle: his investment in his own career was exclusive and had left no room for pursuing other aspirations. An immediate solution, a "key to taking over", was to gradually make room for personal rest and specific activities (not work-related) that he experienced as fulfilling. He decided to give himself time, "to reflect on those things [aspirations] and make choices, based on the theory of the course, based on what I learned, based on what feels right for me, based over time". In his words, "I think I could improve how I feel and how effective I was as a result".

Pilot interview 3: standing up to bullying

The third participant, a chief human resources officer for a multinational company, began OIPS with the dilemma of how to deal with his boss' unfortunate and recurring habit of turning aggressive. The situation was complicated by the fact that his boss had been a long time friend. In the words of the participant, "you know, with a friendship...sometimes you let things go for your friends". . Discussing the issue with peers on OIPS helped the participant visualize three available options: to cope with the boss for longer, to accept a new job offer, or to confront the boss. On OIPS, he gathered the courage to take action: "Before I attended this course, I didn't have the courage to say [...], not because I am not, hem, confident, but because I do not want to hurt him, you know?". What encouraged him above all was the reassurance from peers and OIPS facilitators that he seemed to have been a good friend and employee and to be having good intentions. The group reassured him that putting up with aggressive behavior was not required of him. Immediately following the program, he firmly confronted his boss and asked him to commit to changing manners—or he would leave²⁶⁷.

Analysis of the pilot study noted a pattern common to the three participants of the pilot study: dilemma-stasis-new understanding-resolution. Analysis also noted that the issues and change described by participants were at the same time affecting their personal and professional spheres. In terms of relevance to leadership, the first participant discussed how he realized that he had been failing to support organizational change. The second participant referred to wanting to overcome his tendency to be overly directive and assertive and failure to "lead and inspire". Finally, the third participant said that due to his boss' aggressive behavior there were days

²⁶⁷ From a more recent update from this participant, I know that he eventually resolved to move on and take another job opportunity

when he felt uncomfortable in his role as HR director. Finally, the pilot study confirmed that sensemaking may be inseparable from the process of change within individuals.

8.3.1.3 *Learnings from the pilot study and implications for the research*

During the pilot study, the analysis struggled at length with the challenge of trying to understand understanding itself (Madison, 1991, in Schwandt, 2003). In particular, the researcher wrestled with trying to trace different dimensions of the sensemaking of participants (e.g. conceptualizations versus emotions). This approach, which proved ineffective, might ultimately be impossible: dissecting the participant's sensemaking in component parts caused it lose meaning and did not add any value to the analysis. It was at this point of the research that the implications of a person-centered approach were fully appreciated and taken on board: sensemaking *is* easier to grasp holistically (Magnusson, 2001). Analysis of main study interviews proceeded according to person-centered principles: by attempting to grasp the overall organization of meaning by a participant (whether in reference to a specific paragraph or overall in an interview). A major limitation of the pilot is that it included only one interview per participant: this enlarged the scope of the interviews, which attempted to capture context, issues, change, and leadership implications all at the same time. In order to contain scope in interviews (that already yield very rich data), it was decided to increase the rounds of interviews in the main study from three to four. This had the added benefit of extending the period of observation and adding a data point. In terms of methods, as discussed earlier (Section 3.4.6) testing analysis methods during the pilot study supported the selection of the analysis methods used in the main study. A learning point about interview guides is that they would be more helpful (easier to follow in practice) by being less detailed.

8.3.2 **Main study**

The main study in this research included nine volunteers among PTFL participants of the July and November 2010 cohorts. An application for approval form the Ethical Committee of the Cranfield School of Management was sought and obtained. Informed consent was sought in writing from each participant. Four sets of interviews

were conducted with each participant, with each round of interviews taking place more or less at the same time for all participants²⁶⁸. The first round of interviews was conducted in person²⁶⁹, at Cranfield or at the participants' work site, in the days immediately preceding the first module of PTFL²⁷⁰. The second round of interviews was conducted on the phone during the days immediately following the first module of PTFL. The third round of interviews, also on the phone, was conducted during the days immediately following the second module of PTFL²⁷¹. Finally, the fourth round of interviews was scheduled to take place approximately six months after the third round²⁷². As discussed earlier (Section 3.4.6), interview guides were prepared based on the research question as well as on analysis of previous round of interviews (simultaneous data collection and analysis; Charmaz, 2008). Interview guides are included in Appendix 8.5.

Data collection took place across two different PTFL cohorts (July and November 2010). The same pair of tutors (Ido van der Heijden and his wife Daniela van der Heijden) facilitated both cohorts. Four participants (shorthand: P1, P2, P3, P4) in this research were from the July 2010 cohort; two among these (P2, P4) dropped out before the research was completed.²⁷³ Discontinuation of the research was a possibility explicitly provided for in the informed consent forms; a few requests were made via email for a rationale for discontinuing the research but those requests remained unanswered. Five participants (shorthand: P5, P6, P7, P8, P9) in this research were from the November 2010. The table below summarizes the demographics of research participants.

As mentioned in the discussion of ethical implications of this research, participant demographics have been removed from the thesis to guarantee anonymity to all participants. It will be added here that the age range of participants was between 35 and 56 years old at the time of the research. All participants had senior management roles with leadership responsibilities in the private or public sectors. As part of their leadership responsibilities, participants directly managed between three and 25 employees and had budget responsibilities ranging from one to 30 million pounds.

²⁶⁸ Overall, fieldwork lasted 14 months—and approximately 11 months per participant

²⁶⁹ One exception was the first interview with P6, which took place on the phone due to inability to arrange an in-person meeting within the time required by the research.

²⁷⁰ The researcher believed that establishing a personal contact would facilitate conversations across the research

²⁷¹ The second module of PTFL takes place approximately six week after the first module

²⁷² In reality, two interviews took place later (with P1 and P3, ten and eight months later, respectively) due to scheduling challenges. Two participants dropped out of the sample after completing the second interview for unknown reasons.

²⁷³ Reasons unknown

8.4 Appendix: Informed consent form

| Research Participant Information | |
|---|---|
| Research title | “Executive leadership development through personal growth: from the sensemaking of managers to theory Building in leadership development” |
| Researcher | Linda Florio |
| Date | July 2010 |

Researcher information

Linda Florio is a full time PhD student at the Cranfield School of Management, where her work is supervised by Prof. Andrew Kakabadse. Linda is interested in leadership and personal development. She is designing her research around Personal Transformation For Leaders (PTFL), a program offered by the Praxis Centre at Cranfield. Linda has herself attended the program in March 2009. Linda has an MBA from the Thunderbird School of Global Management (AZ, USA). Her background includes work as an internal auditor, treasurer and accountant for international organizations and lecturing in accounting and international management.

About the research

Through the last six decades, leadership development has grown to a global industry worth more than £34 billion a year. Still, little theoretical understanding is available around how leadership development occurs in individuals. This research aims to address this knowledge gap by studying the experience of senior executives engaged in a leadership development program with an emphasis on personal growth.

What is involved in participation?

Participation in the study involves four interviews over the span of approximately six months. Also, participants will be asked to keep a diary where to briefly note novel considerations as they arise. The following is an approximate schedule of the interviews:

| Schedule of interviews | Description | Dates |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| First interview | Up to 1 hour, in person | before PTFL's start date on July, 05 th (June 28 th -July 04 th , 2010) |
| Second interview | Up to 1 hour, on the phone | week after PTFL's first module (July 12 th -17 th , 2010) |
| Third interview | Up to 1 hour, on the phone | week after PTFL's second module (September 08 th and 17 th , 2010) |
| Fourth interview | Up to 1 hour, on the phone | four months after end of PTFL (January 10 th -21 st , 2011) |

Interview questions will revolve around reasons for participating in PTFL and the experience of delegates. Interviews are exploratory and conversational: they are made of open ended questions which are not seeking specific responses or assessing specific learnings.

Informed Consent Form

If satisfied with the briefing received, please **complete the form and return it.**

Please email scan copies to linda.florio@cranfield.ac.uk or fax to Linda's attention +44 (0) 1234 752 382

I understand that:

- 1. Participation in the study is voluntary
- 2. I can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason
- 3. During interviews, I have the option of declining any question I do not wish to answer
- 4. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed
- 5. My personal data and interview texts will be treated with full confidentiality, in compliance with the 1998 Data Protection Act
- 6. Information from my interviews will be made unidentifiable when presented within the research as well as in other contexts (e.g. journal publication or presentation at conference)

I certify that:

- 1. I have been debriefed about the study
- 2. All my questions about the study have been answered

I have read and understood the above, and give my consent to participate:

Participant's name (printed) _____

Signature _____
Date _____

I have explained the above and answered all questions asked by the participant:

Researcher's Name Linda Florio

Signature _____
Date _____

8.5 Appendix: Focused coding

**THE SENSEMAKING OF DELEGATES IN THE CONTEXT OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON PERSONAL GROWTH:
PROCESS, CONTEXT, AND DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT**

Third doctoral review
30 Nov. 2011

Emerging analytic structure

This document includes the analytic structure which emerged from line-by-line coding of the transcripts; this structure was used to organize all data in the main study (focus coding, Charmaz 2008). Coding was carried out with the NatCen FrameWork software.

| Category | Sub-category | Codes | Sub-codes | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Person | Demographics | Age | | |
| | | Title | | |
| | | Direct reports | | |
| | | Budget responsibility | | |
| | | Seniority in the organization | | |
| | | Organization's name | | |
| | History | Personal history | | Childhood |
| | | | | Other |
| | | Education | | Executive training |
| | | | | Coaching |
| | | | Graduate studies | |
| | Professional background | | | |
| Broader context | Personal | | Family | |
| | | | Spare time | |
| | | | Health | |

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Organization | Current role |
| | | Past roles |
| | | Prospective role/s |
| | | Culture around training |
| | | Feedback from appraisals |
| | | General climate |
| | | Ongoing change initiatives |
| | Outlook | On role |
| | | On PTFL |
| | | On process of personal transformation |
| | | On organization |
| | | On future |
| | | On career |
| | | On self |
| | | On personal health |
| | | Leadership ideals |
| | | Personal challenges in leading |
| | | On leadership development |
| Process | Experience of change | What the process feels and looks like |
| | Role of the I (sensemaking) | Identifying commitments |
| | | Being mindful |
| | | Questioning |
| | | Reflecting |
| | | Comparing |
| | | Noticing |

Empathizing

Experimenting

Puzzling

Choosing

Acting upon learning/reflection

Accepting

Attributing meaning

Integrating

Being vulnerable

Working hard

Wanting to change

Envisioning

Drawing on strengths

Un-limiting

Taking on board

Monitoring

Evaluating

Discerning

Keeping it up

Practicing

Doubting

Learning from experience

Limiting pattern/s

Implications of limiting patterns (professional vs personal life)

Self: what is staying

Self: what is changing

Change

| | | |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Context | The PTFL experience | What is PTFL about? |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Why is PTFL chosen? | |
| Role of tutors | |
| Role of peers | |
| Role of 'poetic sentence' | |
| Staying in touch with group | |
| Vs one-to-one coaching | |
| Morning yoga | |
| Feedback on the program | |
| Taking part in the research | Interactions with Linda |
| Other | |

8.6 Appendix: Interview guides

First round of interviews

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Doctoral research project | Executive leadership development through personal growth: from the sensemaking of managers to theory building in leadership development |
| Linda Florio | |
| Purpose | First round of interviews This interview guide identifies broad themes and possible follow up questions |

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Purpose of interview: to learn about delegates and their reasons for attending PTFL.

- 1) About the delegates.
 - What is your job like? How long have you been in the organization?
 - What are your main responsibilities? How many people do you manage? Tell me more about the team you work with. Do you have an allocated budget? If so, how much is it?
 - Please tell me something about you--something about personal life?
 - Other demographics: age, nationality.

- 2) About taking part in PTFL.
 - What prompted the idea to take part in a program like PTFL? What played into choosing PTFL in particular? Is participation sponsored by your organization?
 - How do you feel about the program coming up?
 - Have you taken part in similar programs before? What are your expectations about the program?

- 3) Praxis requests PTFL participants to identify an issue which they intend to address during the program.
 - Which issue did you identify? Can you describe what this issue means for you? What is puzzling about it? Please describe.
 - Can you identify a couple of examples where you encountered this issue in practice?
 - Does the issue you mentioned have implications for you at work? Do you think it has implication for you as leader of your team? And does it have implications in personal life? Please describe.
 - Are there other reasons for attending PTFL that are important to you?
 - How do you think that PTFL can help with the issues you have identified?

- 4) About the leadership practice of delegates.
- What kind of leader would you like to be? What do you think is holding you back?
 - Is there something about your leadership practice that you would like to transform?

Second round of interviews

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Doctoral research project | Executive leadership development through personal growth: from the sensemaking of managers to theory building in leadership development |
| Linda Florio | |
| Purpose | Second round of interviews This interview guide identifies broad themes and possible follow up questions |

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Purpose of interview:

- To learn about impressions of delegates after the first module of PTFL
- To explore whether participants have been experiencing any change/growth.
- To learn about how delegates now make sense of the issues they had originally identified.
- To explore what is the role of the delegate in the process that is unfolding.
- To explore what is the role of PTFL (context).
- To explore the connection between personal and leadership development.
- How does this process bring something, if anything, to their personal and/or leadership development? To inquire about the way forward as seen by delegates.

1. About the experience.

- How was it to be in the program? How have you been since you've come off the course?

2. About change.

- Is there something different now compared to before PTFL? If so, what? Please describe in detail.
- Have you noticed yourself forming a different idea about something else that is important to you?

3. About issues.

- You started out with a particular issue you wanted to address during the course, what has changed in regard to that?
- Have new/different issues come into scope during the course?
- Can you tell me more about the implications of these issues for your practice as a leader?
- What is the way forward on these issues?

4. About PTFL (context).

- What was PTFL about? Was it about skills and new tools? Something else? What is this 'Personal Transformation' approach about?
- In what way was this about leadership development?
- Do you think personal and leadership development are related? If so, how?
- Could you have done the same work without PTFL? What about PTFL makes a difference between going and not going on the course?
- There was a group of peers on the course. What did that do?
- What about the facilitators, what was their role?

5. About the process

- I am trying to understand how the process looks like. Did you notice yourself going through particular phases or stages?
- One of you used the expression of 'penny on the road to Damascus'. Was there any of that?
- Has the experience been emotional? If so, why do you think?
- Where would you say that you are at in the process right now? What is next?
- What do you think will be different by the time you come back for the follow-up session?

6. About sensemaking.

- What has your role been in processing what has been going on since Monday last week? What work has 'you' been doing?
- We are always processing information, also about our own experience. (If you have been experiencing change)--when does our 'processing' result into change?

7. About the self.

- Before the course, most of you mentioned the concept of self-awareness. What, if anything, changed in terms of self-awareness?
- Some mentioned this was going to be about staying the same person, only better. Was this about changing/growing? Was this about uncovering a unique self?

8. About leadership.

- Is this experience going to have practical implications for you as a leader? If so, which ones?
- Last time we talked about the type of leader you would like to become, and what might hold you back. What do you think about that today?

9. Closing

- Is there something you would like me to ask you next time we talk?

Third round of interviews

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Doctoral project | research | Executive leadership development through personal growth: from the sensemaking of managers to theory building in leadership development |
| Linda Florio | | |
| Purpose | Third round of interviews This interview guide identifies broad themes and possible follow up questions | |

INTERVIEW GUIDE²⁷⁴

Purpose of interview:

- To get a view on what Module 2 was about and what it added to the process
- To return to the particular issues discussed with individual participants and inquire about progress (whether change in the perspective on or experience of such issues)
- To update the view on how delegates make sense of the issues they had originally identified.
- To validate the researcher's understanding of the framing of the story of each participant
- To seek out specific examples of how change is being realized
- To seek out specific examples of how change might be having an impact on leadership praxis
- To explore how participants have been engaging with the process since the previous interview
- To inquire about the way forward as seen by participants
- To explore whether change has been occurring along the dimensions of authentic leadership development (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information, internalized moral perspective)

1. About issues.

- What are your thoughts today in reference to the issue (specific issue depending on the participant) we discussed previously?
- The issue was then defined in terms of X (specific concepts depending on the participant). Is that correct? Are there new thoughts about this today? Was a matter of X? Did you come across new considerations in the past months?

²⁷⁴ This is a generic interview guide for the third round of interviews. In actuality, interviews were more focused: each interview was in large part customized based on the topics that had become relevant in previous conversations with each participant.

2. About process.

- With reference to that issue, you had an action plan in mind which entailed (specific objectives depending on the participant). How did that action plan unfold?
- Were there external challenges? Were there things that, from the outside, facilitated your efforts?
- Were there internal challenges? Were there things that, from the inside, facilitated your efforts?
- Did the action plan itself change in any respect during the last months? Did you find yourself experimenting with something new?
- What was Module 2 of PTFL about?
- What did Module 2 add/change for you compared to just before you attended a few days ago?

3. About change

- What were the outcomes of your action plan?
- Can you please give me specific examples of these outcomes (at least one relating to leadership praxis and one relating to personal life)
- In the past months, have you come across considerations that were new and critical to you? Do you have journal notes that you'd like to share for the purposes of the research?
- I'd like you to think about yourself at three points in time: before you attended Module 1 of PTFL; just after you attended Module 1 of PTFL; and, now. Do you see critical differences in yourself at these three points in time? Please describe in detail.
- Have you noticed yourself forming a different idea about something else that is important to you?

4. Relevance for leadership praxis.

- What are the implications of what we've been discussing for your own practice as a leader in your organization? Would you please share some examples.
- Where are you today with respect to the ideal figure of leader you are pursuing?

5. Relevance for personal growth.

- What are the implications of what we've been discussing for you as a person? Would you please share some examples.
- Would you say you have grown from back then? In what ways?

6. Validating the researcher's understanding of the experience of each participant.

- This is the third time we talk. From what you have shared, I have been forming a story of your experience starting when you were about to attend PTLF. What are your comments on the story?
- During the two modules of PTLF, and perhaps also outside, you have been sharing part of this experience with others in your group. What do you think you have in common with them? What is unique to your experience?

7. About authentic leadership

- What was the effect on your self-awareness of attending PTLF?
- Did you notice any change in how you make decisions compared to before the program?
- Did you notice any change in your relationships compared to before the program?
- Did you notice any change as to how you rely on your inner values compared to before the program?

8. Closing

- Is there something you would like me to ask you next time we talk?

Fourth round of interviews

In the fourth round, interviews were mostly customized based on the topics that had become relevant in previous conversations with each participant. Questions common across participants were:

- Is the experience of PTFL still active for you? If so, in what ways?
- Compared to before attending the program, do you think you have grown as a person? Please explain.
- What is the way forward for you?

8.7 Appendix: The constructivist-phenomenological interview

Interviewing in practice

I have come to describe my interviews as exploratory in nature and as constructivist-phenomenological in approach. Interviews are exploratory in the sense that they include a minimalist structure and little input from the literature; interviews are constructivist because they focus on the active construction of meaning by participants (Schwandt, 2003; examples in Isabella, 1990; Sutton, 1987; Gephart, 1984). Interviews are phenomenological in that they inquire about the lived experience of participants--where the phenomenon of interest resides (Pollio et al., 1997; Pollio et al., 2006). However, what do 'exploratory' and 'constructivist-phenomenological' mean in terms of actually carrying out interviews? Exploratory interviews are conversations where the predesigned component is limited to broad themes derived from research questions (Kvale, 1996; Kram and Isabella, 1985). Interview guides used in this research²⁷⁵ are semi-structured, with each theme incorporating as little a priori conceptualizations as possible (Charmaz, 2008). Constructivist interviews aim to elicit perceptions, reactions, and reasoning (Isabella, 1990): hence questions should stimulate descriptions and definitions by participants (Sutton, 1987; Charmaz, 2003). Also, interviews should move beyond prepared questions and reach into the reflexive layer of the participant. This research implemented constructivist interviewing by transcending the interview guide when needed, for example for exploring perplexities (Charmaz, 2002; Johnson, 2002). These could be the perplexities of a participant²⁷⁶ or of the researcher²⁷⁷. Phenomenological interviews emphasize the experience of participants and clarification of meanings. The interviewer should look for rich descriptions of what it is like to have been in a certain situation. Questions starting with 'why' should be avoided as they tend to evoke abstract explanations (Pollio et al., 1997). Short summaries should be verbalized to participants to verify understanding. This research strived to implement the requirements of phenomenological interviewing by exploring perplexities (as discussed above) as well as by revisiting with participants (usually, in the third of four interviews) the researcher's understanding of their stories. Phenomenological interviewing (consistently with philosophical hermeneutics) also requires the positive 'bracketing' of interviewer's preconceptions (Pollio et al., 1997).

²⁷⁵ Included in Appendix 8.5

²⁷⁶ For example, with P1 we explored the notion of service and the deeper quasi-religious meaning that that notion had for her

²⁷⁷ For example, in conversation with P8, I shared my puzzlement around the fact that authenticity and political behavior seem often to be at odds in organizational life; or, with several participants I discussed being unsure of what 'personal growth' or 'leadership development' really mean

There are different ways to implement 'positive' bracketing: Pollio et al. (1997) suggest either a bracketing interview or a bracketing essay, where motivations and assumptions of the researcher are explored; Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) recommend a phenomenological reading of interview transcripts where units of meaning are identified and paraphrased into more explicit terms; Smith et al. (2008) suggest that the researcher liberally take note, to the side of the transcript, of any reaction to the text; (Charmaz, 2008; 2002) recommends to write memos that record any interpretive turn taken. The researcher strived to achieve positive bracketing through a bracketing essay (included in Appendix 8.2).

8.8 Appendix: Constructivist Grounded Theory

Analyzing interview texts in practice

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Analysis of main study data began in each case with a phenomenological reading of the transcripts: the whole transcript was read and notes were taken around the interpretation (or the difficulty of interpretation) of single passages. In the pilot analysis, line by line coding (constructivist grounded analysis) was achieved by arranging transcripts on the rows of an excel spreadsheet²⁷⁸. In further abstracting from the data, it was possible to achieve a certain level of aggregation within the spreadsheet through color coding of the cells. The themes that emerged as most central during the analysis of each round of interviews were used to shape interview guides for successive rounds (simultaneous data analysis and collection Charmaz, 2008) and to shape the emerging analytic structure. Eventually, all interview data was organized in a structure which had emerged from the data (focused coding; Charmaz, 2007). The character of this structure (included in Appendix 8.4) was mainly descriptive and essentially defined a stage of data organization. All data were coded into the emerging analytic structure; at this stage, in order to facilitate reading across themes, a qualitative analysis software (FrameWork, now a part of the NVivo package) was utilized. Initially, the data thus organized only emphasized its (overwhelming, at times) richness and really led into a period of analytic stasis. The successive phase of analysis only began after data collection was completed. The emerging structure highlighted two high level themes— context and process. The next phase of analysis tackled context (possibly because context looked more manageable) through cross-sectional analysis: by cross-sectional analysis, I mean the study of data gathered across all interviews and participants. Starting from this phase, software mediated analysis was discontinued because it could not effectively support the complexity of the emerging analysis. A new round of coding took place in search for characteristics, dimensions and qualities of context. This meant that coding printed transcripts through color-coding with markers. It also meant manually compiling in a separate word document all the passages coded into the newly emerging categories. After the analytic iteration on context was completed, it was time to turn to process. I experienced the stage of analysis on process as the most complex of all data analysis iterations. Picking up on a supervisory suggestion, the first step was a longitudinal analysis of the story of each participant. By longitudinal analysis, I mean the study of data gathered from each participant across

²⁷⁸ With each line of the interview transcript on a separate line of a fresh excel spreadsheet; codes assigned to each line are noted in the next available column.

the time spanned by this research. Actually, this phase of analysis temporarily shifted the focus away from process: a third high level category emerged—around outcomes. This phase turned into the examination of outcomes: striving to grasp, for every participant, if a change had taken place; and, if so, what type of change had taken place—whether it constituted development from the angles of both adult and leadership development²⁷⁹. This part of the analysis forced the research to find tools to assess development (a framework of personal development is discussed in the next section of this methodology chapter). This phase of analysis also involved the use of matrix displays: for each participant, a synthesis of the sensemaking around key issues was compared at the four different points in time when interviews occurred. The following step involved taking up cross-sectional analysis again, this time in search of levels, characteristics, dimensions and qualities of process. The new iteration of coding resulted in the distinction between vector (external to the individual) and core processes (internal to the individual) of development. Analysis delved in both categories and resulted in models of vector and core processes of development (see Section 4.4 of the Findings chapter). Visual mapping (Miles and Huberman, 1994), initially by means of poster paper and markers, was used extensively to draw sketches of the emerging models of context and process of development. At this point, analysis had established that, within the sample, personal development had, in some cases, occurred; also, that context, vector, and core processes were all necessary but not sufficient elements leading to development. The question lied open of why personal development was found to occur in some but not all participants. Analysis of core processes had shown that there were two different sensemaking patterns in cases where personal development was found to occur compared to cases where personal development was not found to occur. This finding marked the beginning of a phase of comparative analysis: by comparative analysis, I mean analysis aimed at identifying further ways in which subgroups in the sample differed. The final phase was integrative analysis: by integrative analysis, I mean analysis aimed at eliciting and highlighting relationships among areas of findings. The table below summarizes purpose, methods, and findings of different phases of analysis.

Table 38. Phases of data analysis

²⁷⁹ In this respect, conclusions were suspended for the two participants (P2 and P4) who dropped out of the research after the second interview

| Stage of research | Purpose of analysis | Primary methods | Supporting methods | Sources of data | Findings |
|---------------------|--|--|---|------------------------|---|
| Pilot study: | Testing alternative strategies of analysis | Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008) Focused coding | Interpretive-phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith and Osborne, 2008) | Three pilot interviews | Constructivist grounded theory confirmed as primary method of analysis; alternative methods were rejected |
| Main study: | Data organization | Line-by-line coding; Focused coding; | Initial IPA reading Software mediated analysis (FrameWork) | 32 (all) interviews | Emerging structure organizes data, at a high level, into context and process |
| | Examining context | Cross-sectional analysis Thematic coding | Visual mapping | 32 (all) interviews | Context is a necessary, if not sufficient, element of development; Context as a multi-level processual entity; Context goes beyond holding environment; A model of context |

(continued) Table 3. Phases of data analysis

| Stage of research | Purpose of analysis | Primary methods | Supporting methods | Sources of data | Findings |
|-------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Main study | Examining outcomes | Longitudinal analysis Thematic coding | Visual mapping Matrix displays Framework of personal development | 28 interviews (all except those of participants who dropped out of the research after interview two) —analyzed within sets of four interviews for each participant | Expansion of self-awareness was found to occur in nine out of nine cases Personal development was found to occur in five out of seven cases (in these cases there was also evidence of expanded leadership capabilities) Personality adjustment was found to occur in two out of seven cases (in these cases, there was evidence of behavioral adjustments but not of expanded leadership capabilities) |
| | Examining process | Cross-sectional analysis Thematic coding | Visual mapping | 32 (all) interviews | Distinction between vector and core processes Vector and core processes as necessary, if not sufficient, element of development Specific vector processes of PTFL Core processes : model of four iterative sensemaking patterns leading to development |
| | Seeking differences within the sample | Comparative analysis Focused coding | - | 28 interviews | Two subgroups of participants were identified which consistently differed on a number of themes, including motives (pattern of seeking affirmation), values around personal and leadership development training, sensemaking patterns and outcomes of the PTFL experience |
| | Seeking relationships among areas of findings | Integrative analysis | Visual mapping | 28 interviews | Seeking affirmation: hypothesizing virtuous and vicious circles of development |

Compiled by the author.

8.9 Appendix: Interpretive frameworks

**THE SENSEMAKING OF DELEGATES IN THE CONTEXT OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON PERSONAL GROWTH:
PROCESS, CONTEXT, AND DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT**

Third doctoral review
30 Nov. 2011

Forming interpretive frameworks

This document includes the interpretive frameworks that were developed for each participant. Each interpretive framework consist of a description of the sensemaking of a participant at the before and after PTFL and of notes by the researcher on the overall interpretation of the story of change of each participant (the two participants who dropped out of the research after interview two were excluded from this analysis).

Participant 1, Female

| | Before PTFL | After PTFL |
|--|---|--|
| Limiting pattern | Does not believe in her own worth and merits, nor in the value of her accomplishments | “The biggest change that I am feeling is... [I’m] feeling more confident in myself” (R2, p. 2) “[there is] perhaps a bit more core belief self-belief. That makes me less difficult to knock over” (R2, p. 6) |
| | Does not feel deserving of receiving support from others. | “I deserve to have certain responses from people” (R3, p. 4) |
| Implications (personal and professional life) | Can come across as lacking confidence and as a push-over (often second-guesses herself) | “[I can say] this is what I need [...] with less messing about, because I don’t have to persuade myself first (R3, p.4) |
| | She can’t bring herself to be demanding of those accountable to her. | “[I am] not taking as much responsibility for other people as I was before” (R2, p. 6) |
| | She prioritizes serving others and tries to cope by herself with everything that happens to her | “[I have been] wanting to be less self-sufficient and more able to ask other people to help with things—[and seeing] that that’s okay (R4, p.4) |
| | | “[I am] facilitating people sorting things out themselves, rather than feeling ‘Oh I have to jump in’” |

Notes: P1 seemed to have an episode in her early life experience that affected her view of herself and her attitude to others, especially male authoritative figures. The benefit she has received through PTFL seems in large part of a therapeutic nature. These considerations were inferred from comments by P1 and other participants around P1’s story. Although P4 didn’t share the most personal details of her story

during the interviews, I feel she provided full information on her limiting pattern and experience of change.

Participant 3, Male

| | Before PTFL | After PTFL |
|--|--|---|
| Limiting pattern | Constantly interrupting and interjecting during conversations Always feels compelled to entertain | “I have stopped interrupting people to the same degree” (R2, p.7) |
| Implications (mostly personal life) | Can come across as abrupt, impatient, not a good listener; | “I probably listen more. I probably have developed greater sensitivity to other people’s needs, what they are thinking, reading their body language. [...] Probably listening and being more aware is what I take out of it” (R4, p. 2) |

Notes: P3 feels conflicted about his participation in PTFL. He seemed from the beginning to be open-minded, but only in an intellectual sense. Seems to welcome theories, tools and models but not to have been prepared or able to open up about certain areas of himself or work at a certain depth and emotional level. Overall, it seemed extremely important for P3 to maintain the belief that he was beyond the scope of PTFL—that seemed critical to safeguard perhaps his sense of pride or sense of psychological safety.

Participant 5, Female

| | Before PTFL | After PTFL |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Limiting pattern | Extremely demanding of herself Extremely demanding of others | “[I have to be] thinking far more about how, for example, I would have liked that to be done when I was little. And then, rather than doing it the way it was done with me, thinking about I would have liked it to be done with me, and therefore changing how I did it with my own daughter based on what I would have liked to have happened to me, rather than what did happen” (R2, p. 2) |
| Implications | Very tough and intolerant, with herself and others Can hardly conceive of accepting/providing much support Questioning whether she is good enough for the job | “I am less self-critical, I am also more challenging myself... In a good way. Because I take more time and the trouble to enjoy myself” (R3, p.1) “I probably need to be an awful lot kinder and less tough on myself and if I can do that, that in fact the toughness that other people perceive that I direct towards others won’t be an issue[...]because it stems from how I deal with myself” (R2, p.2) “[I am] supporting [people] in terms of meeting expectations. Whereas perhaps I wasn’t so good at that. So I think that people have warmed to me a lot more and understand me a lot better (R4, p. 2) “I actually believe that I am the right person to do what I am doing, rather than fearing that I am not” (p. 2) |

Notes: P5 seemed to have a traumatic history that was affecting her view of herself and others. She seems to have received mostly a therapeutic benefit from taking part in PTFL. These considerations were inferred from comments by P5 and other

participants around how hard her story was to listen to. Although P5 didn't share the details of her story during the interviews, I feel she provided full information on her limiting pattern and experience of change.

Participant 6, Male

| | Before PTFL | After PTFL |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Limiting pattern | <p>Tended to prioritize being kind and affiliative across leadership situations</p> <p>At times, lack of confidence</p> | <p>“To me, I guess, I suppose I’ve always made those kinds of relationships in the past, where being directive equals not listening, giving instructions equals not being affiliative. It is probably not as clear cut as that” (R2, p. 4)</p> <p>“I think it is actually much more about recognizing what the other person ins needing at that time. Sometimes they are needing an unambiguous direction because they actually are in a period of indecision themselves” (R2, p. 4)</p> <p>“The insecurities that I had, you know, other people had too. And I think everybody had that as well. I'm not sure I can speak on their behalf, but a lot of people said to me “you know, I thought that I was the only person who ever thought about that”. So from that point of view, I thought it is very useful” (R2, p. 1)</p> |
| Implications | <p>Seen as lacking energy and dynamism as a leader</p> <p>Can come across as lacking presence and as holding back</p> <p>Not as tuned in to others: “To be put in a room for nine hours a day, just</p> | <p>“I am learning to talk slowly, I am learning to sit up in the room, not to... In order to use my height, to use my physical presence. “ (R2, p.3)</p> <p>“Some more presentation coaching, which I have done actually. What I haven’t done is the vocal training I was looking to do. But I have been doing some various things with our media agency here about... Issues about presentation, particularly for giving lectures and appearing on camera” (R4, p.1)</p> <p>“I felt terrible for some people on a sympathetic and an empathetic level for some of the things that they were talking</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| listening to people talk... It sounds like the dullest think that you could possibly do” (R2, p. 1) | about” (R2, p. 3) “I don’t think I will forget the individuals, or some of their stories or some of the changes that they made, actually. Because you do get to know them very well and what makes them function in the way they do in the world [...] And you do generally get to care about them as well, even unlikely characters” (R4, p. 5) |
|--|--|

Note: P6 reflected that he might have started the journey in a different place compared to others—he had a very serene and privileged childhood and found that he did not need (and was not asked) to engage in psychological/therapy work that others undertook on PTF. The change he experienced was in terms of development of physical presence and leadership capabilities (responding to others based on their needs and the situation)

Participant 7, Female

| | Before PTFL | After PTFL |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Limiting pattern | Denial about illness Workaholic tendency | <p>“I have been a bit more honest about the fact that [...] I have an illness and I try to live my life as if that illness didn’t exist. I try to hid it from work and from everybody and I just throw myself into work and I shouldn’t throw myself into work that much because it’s a bit self-destructive” because My health really doesn’t enable me to be the workaholic that I am” (R2, p. 2)</p> <p>“It was like a taboo, you know, being unwell. It’s your problem and work isn’t supposed to know these sorts of things, you know, that is just your lot in life and that’s it.” (R1, p.5)</p> |
| Implications | Constantly worrying | <p>“Just managing to take a step back from things and taking my time to do things and think about things rather than being in a mad, hectic rush about everything all the time. I’m just a lot more calm, peaceful and relaxed” (R3, p. 1)</p> |
| | Insomnia (extreme difficulty shutting down at night) | <p>“I have been sleeping better because, as I said, I feel a bit more of an inner peace and a sense of perspective on life [...] I just seem to have an inner peace that stops that worrying” (R3, p.2)</p> |
| | Can come across as lacking confidence | <p>“I think what came across was that I didn’t really lack in self-confidence so much. It was the fact that i was an incessant worrier and got tired [...] yes, I suppose that I suffer from anxiety rather than a confidence crisis” (R2, p. 4)</p> <p>“I think interactions are different in the sense that I don’t feel the need now to have an answer in the second that follows a question. I feel quite relaxed about not answering straight away. And that therefore means that I am not going to give an aggressive answer, or a defensive answer” (R3, p.4)</p> |

Note: P7 seemed very open to work on herself since the beginning of the experience. P7 was challenged by the emotional demands of the course and was so touched by some of the stories on the first day that she seriously considered leaving the course.

She decided to stay because she wanted to give it her best and she later found that it became easier (less threatening) for her to be emotionally present with the other participants.

Participant 8, Male

| | Before PTFL | After PTFL |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Limiting pattern | Doubting his style and efficacy at work | <p>“Well, that’s the way I work’. And there’s nothing wrong with that, there’s nothing wrong with me working in a way that is very gut reaction. Rather than working through loads of spreadsheets etcetera. And what I have started to do is that—it’s about having the confidence to say ‘That’s not the way I work’. [...] So it’s given me the confidence to think ‘You know, that is not my training, that is not my background. That is not why actually I am in the job I am doing’. It’s not because I analyse things to death, I actually know the market. [...] And therefore... there is nothing wrong with that. And therefore I got them to adapt to what they can expect from me, because I know I can get them what they need”. (R2, p. 3)</p> |
| | At work, projecting a person that is “not really the person that is within” (R2,p.4) as part of his effort to not reveal his sexual preferences | <p>“It’s been good in the fact that I’m being a lot more honest with people. And I’m letting them to be a lot more honest with me” (R3, p. 2)</p> <p>“What the rest of the group told me is that I am perfectly fine as I am, I don’t need to put the wall up, and therefore I should be confident, not based on the person that they see but based on the person that I really am” (R2, p.4)</p> |
| Implications | Emphasizes roles (teaching) that allow him to maintain his ‘work persona’ | <p>“this afternoon I am talking to my managing director about actually reducing my lecturing almost to zero so that I can concentrate on doing what I really enjoy and that is building businesses within the company [...] You know, I am getting rid of the old P8, and saying ‘That’s the lecturing P8, that is finished now”” (R2, p.5)</p> |
| | “I have always been a leader that fumbles around and is scared to | “There’s been a sort of inner calm, in a sense. In the fact that I am not worried about making the wrong decision or about |

make a decision” (R3, p. 5)

Finds it hard to accept praise for a job well done

doing the wrong thing. I’m just sort of going with that guy instinct and knowing that that gut instinct is... right (R2, p. 4)

“And then this has got me to think, I think about that—somebody is actually gone through the effort of writing something nice about me and I just brush it off. That’s not... That’s not a nice thing to do. (R2, p. 5)

Note: P8 seemed extremely open from the start to considering the inputs that would come from PTFL. There is richness to his sensemaking. Since the course he is been carefully embedding his changes in his leadership praxis and noting the changes. Across the time span we have been in contact, he seemed to have discovered an inclination that he has--to view life and leadership as a bit of a philosopher. After PTFL, he seemed above all intent in practicing being authentic in the workplace as a way of cultivating valuable relationships and sustainable results. He was the only participant with whom I was able to raise certain difficult (more philosophical) types of questions. In response, P8 shared some insightful reflections juxtaposing being authentic with being political, and around morality and authentic leadership.

Participant 9, Male

| | Before PTFL | After PTFL |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Limiting pattern | Perfectionist streak Lack of confidence in own abilities (incl. ability to follow through on things) | “And my learning.... One of the key things is that I tend to look for positive affirmation for things that I do and I need to get over that and believe that what I am doing is useful and can be welcomed by others without having to be so shy and reticent” (R2, p.2) |
| Implications | Slow/hesitant in decision making (aiming at getting 95% of information before exposing his view) Often getting bogged down in details, finds it hard to see the bigger picture | “[that] puts more the onus on me to do the work, which then as I realize now alienates the team more so and gives them less chance to develop themselves, whereas it’s much more productive to go in—yes, with some directions but perhaps not as fully thought through and open up the debate and invite input which is the sharing of the task and finding potentially better ways of delivering it and certainly delivering whatever project it is quicker than trying to do it on my own. Now there are times when that won’t work but, I think the gains from doing it that way far outweigh the dis-benefits of the occasions where I would have planned it out in more details (R2, p.3) |

Note: at the time of interview four, P9 seemed discouraged about his change. He still believed in the insights he had reached through PTFL and that there would be benefits from implementing them. However, he had found himself overwhelmed once again by work pressure and by what seems a not too supportive work environment and had not been able to cultivate the change to the extent he wanted. He believed some good seed had been planted and that would flourish later, possibly in a future (and more welcoming) work environment. His confidence seemed to have been shaken by having to report in the interview that he hadn’t been able to achieve significant progress. In the last interview, we discussed the idea that he is considering a big decision around changing workplace and possibly career and how that can feel paralyzing and must be considered carefully.

8.10 Appendix: Nine individual stories of change

The following nine sections are dedicated to each of the nine participants in the main study. In every section, I first present some demographics and a synopsis. Secondly, I turn to context and offer a sense of the personal and professional settings where each individual story of change is nested. Then I bring my focus on the individual participant and, in particular, on two aspects: their outlook on PTFL and the nature of our interaction throughout the research. Next, I move on to the story of personal change that was captured and framed by the research. For each participant, I crystallize three pictures of their experience of development—a starting point, a mid-point, and an end-point picture. The starting point picture is based on a participant’s sensemaking as of the start of the research—that is, as of the first interview. The mid-point picture is based on the participant’s sensemaking just after attending PTFL—that is, as of the second interview. The end-point picture is based on the sensemaking of the participant observed in the third and fourth interviews. In a concluding paragraph, I examine the story of change in light of the framework of adult development which was presented in the literature review section²⁸⁰.

²⁸⁰ This framework identifies three markers of authentic personal development derived from the adult development literature. The three markers are greater integration, sophistication and self-determination.

8.10.1 Participant 1, Female

Context

Both of P1's personal and professional contexts were particularly taxing for almost the entire duration of the research:

"I think things are going to, both personally and professionally, going to be very difficult for at least for a couple more months. And [now] it's sort of steadying myself and coming through it that I need to be able to do" (P1_R3)

Context, then, presented for P1 significant elements of challenge rather than support while she was taking part in PTFL and then working on personal change in the following months.

Work. There are two significant themes around work context: the generally supportive attitude of the organization towards P1's personal and leadership development; and, at the same time, some steep challenges related to P1's original role within the organization and a role transition which occurred against the backdrop of organizational restructuring.

P1's organization seemed to generally be quite supportive of training and development initiatives for its senior staff:

"[There is] quite a focus on leadership here [...]—that is taken very seriously. So a lot of the discussion I would have with my line manager is about my own personal development and how I manage things. With the expectation that leadership is important, it makes a difference" (P1_R2)

In the past, P1 had attended leadership development initiatives within the organization as well as a module on strategic marketing at a University in the UK. P1 had been to a PTFL taster session; finding it promising in view of her development objectives, she had requested to attend. Despite some hesitation, the CEO eventually granted her request.

P1's background was as a psychology professional. In time, she had shifted to a managerial role and, at the time of our first interview, she was overseeing a large number of staff. At that time, P1 was being challenged to a considerable extent by her role within the organization. With reference to her role, P1 commented:

"[I find] certain aspects of my current job, hem... very anxiety provoking." (P1_R2)

Partly, this was due to the fact that she had been experiencing a difficult time in her personal life. In part, she also recognized that the job itself was not an ideal match for her. Adding a level of challenge, the organization was undertaking a large initiative to restructure its operations and management team. P1's job was put at risk twice during the timeframe of the research. By the end of the research, a new role had been defined for P1. Her new responsibilities had shifted from a focus on supporting the organization's income to overseeing infrastructure:

"Now I have a different job with a different title which suits me much better and plays much more to my skills I think." (P1_R2)

P1 had been in this new role for about five months and was finding that eventually all had worked out *"remarkably well"* (P1_R4).

Personal. P1 has two sons (teenager and early adulthood years). She talked about enjoying the support of her family:

"I have a very warm and supportive family" (P1_R1)

During the previous year, she had been going through a difficult separation from her husband. Times had been tough and there was still an ongoing court case and financial and residency hearings:

"Things which require sorting out, it is not a legal process as much which I am going through" (P1_R4)

"I've been quite harassed by [my ex-husband]." (P1_R2)

Just prior to the end of the research, the divorce was eventually sorted out. At that point, P1 had obtained residency for her sons. For the first time she sounded relieved about the situation:

"Yeah, feeling a lot lighter about all of that" (P1_R4)

It was nice to hear that in transitioning out of these times of difficulty, P1 and her sons, had enjoyed together a summer trip:

"I went with the two of them in summer, [...] we had a week in the parks and a week on the coast and it was fabulous. Really good. We had such a great time together." (P1_R4)

Outlook

On PTFL. P1's background in psychology is surely one element informing her outlook on both the course and personal change. P1's thinking was structured quite consistently with the type of process facilitated by PTFL and her language around change was always very clear. She had deliberately selected PTFL because of its approach:

"I was quite intrigued by this particular course... Because it seemed very different to usual management courses that [are] about knowledge and information [...] this seemed very much about you as a person" (P1_R1)

P1 appreciated that PTFL's approach revolved around the individual seen holistically rather than focusing on the delivery of management models. She also appreciated the emphasis on personal development. Matching the philosophy behind PTFL, she seemed to think that abstract learning, tools and models could only go so far if one was not also cultivating her personal development:

"You can go on lots of management courses and learn information on the strategies and tactics. But if there are reasons within yourself why you are not able to use that or implement some of that to its full extent... Then you can learn all you like but it's not... You are not going to reach your full potential. So for me it was more about understanding what it is that held me back in some situations, and therefore find ways where I could be more effective in the future." (P1_R2)

At the PTFL taster session, her interest had been stoked (rather than made to wane) by the realization of the depth and intensity of the experience she was potentially going to have:

"I thought it could be quite a powerful experience." (P1_R1)

Outlook on personal change. Early in the first interview she presented an issue that she was experiencing. For her, it was natural that that issue would affect her across contexts. I thought that she brought forward a good argument for this being the case:

"because, you are the same person at work and after work" (P1_R1)

Later on, she expanded on this point:

"The things that I have most difficulty with obviously come up both in my

personal life and work life. And the people that make me doubt myself most are obviously there wherever you are” (P1_R1)

In addition, when presenting her expectations of change, P1 framed them in terms of sameness and progress:

“I’d suppose [it’s] about being the same person but better. Hem, you know, I don’t particularly want to change my style completely...but I do want to learn from other people and have some other options, as to how I behave or respond in some situations.” (P1_R1)

P1 was well informed around the type of work that was going to be encouraged at PTF. She had selected the course precisely for this reason. At the same time, she never sounded like an evangelist:

“I guess there is the potential to be exposing very personal things to people you don’t know... And nervous about what it might say to be about myself, and things that I need to think about. So... yeah. And I don’t think I’ve ever been on a week course before.” (P1_R1)

She viewed the upcoming course as an opportunity to help her better understand her main issue and address the roadblocks that it posed:

“I am thinking that... what I anticipate is that the things that hold me back, the obstacles to change, or that make me doubt myself, will be a bit more obvious to me and I’ll be able to... I’ll be able to leave them behind a bit.” (P1_R1)

When, later on, I asked P1 to identify what had been her role in the process of her own change, she pointed to her openness to discuss herself:

“I think that I was open to talking about myself, open to other people’s comments, and I think I have reflected a lot during the groups and afterwards, on what happened and what that meant for me” (P1_R2)

With the comment above, P1 also described her active role in making sense of the input received from the program. This is a salient theme in the research, in terms of understanding the process of personal development. This theme will be examined later in this chapter as part of findings from cross-sectional analysis.

Interview interaction

Characteristics of interaction between P1 and me certainly include her patience with my inexperience. Also, there was a sense that we quickly became able to comfortably share our thinking with each other. A final distinctive characteristic is that P1, more than anybody else in the sample, said to have valued the research interviews as an additional opportunity for reflection.

The first interview with P1 was the only one in the research to take place at a participant's site. I remember feeling nervous—hoping to have a good interaction and that the interview guide would work out well. P1 being the first participant I spoke with in each of the first three rounds of interviews, I am afraid that she had to bear the brunt of my inexperience with interviewing. For example, especially towards the beginning, she saw a lot of my tendency to bunch a number of questions together. When talking with P1, I was trying out some questions for the first time and was still unfamiliar with some of the concepts or language that participants tended to acquire on the course²⁸¹. P1 was extremely patient in addressing every one of my questions. During interviews, she seemed to be reflecting, in a unique way compared to the rest of the sample, on what might inform my questions and on what in her thinking could be more salient to the research.

It seems that both of us became comfortable with our conversations relatively quickly. In particular, P1 did not seem to mind thinking on her feet whenever I asked more exploratory questions:

“Linda: One thing that is hard for me to answer is: okay, you are generally a sensemaking individual; you were making sense of things before the course; you were probably making sense of things throughout the course; and, you are making sense now as you speak. So, when does it happen that making sense of stuff brings you growth?”

P1: Hmmm... [chuckles]

Linda: [chuckles] I go blank usually at this point!

*P1: Hmmm... Yeah, I can see it's.... There is a sort of ...There's various points, I guess. There's that sort of... Flash of insight, when you think 'Yeah, that's it. And therefore what I am going to do differently now is...'; so, it's suddenly clicking into place—and then the realization of what you can do about it”
(P1_R2)*

²⁸¹ The course I attended in 2009 was facilitated by two different tutors and also taught through a specific framework (the Centaur model)

I also became quite comfortable within the dialogue. Perhaps a bit too much! For instance, early in the first interview I interjected to say that I had also taken the course the previous year. Or, in the opening of the second interview, I shared with P1 how I had felt coming off the course the year before and asked her if she was feeling the same. For me, the ease of the dialogue with P1 meant that these interviews were a great learning terrain and experience.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. Since the beginning of the research, P1 had significant clarity around the issue that she wanted to address. She described how she found herself often unable to have expectations around the input of others, whether at work or in personal life:

“Hem the issue for me, I think, is about having higher expectations of staff in... Well, generally probably. Of people that are accountable to me. Hem... O, are part of my personal life.” (P1_R1)

At work, this issue tended to become more prominent whenever managing people whose working style might not as proactive or internally motivated. According to P1’s descriptions, this issue was rooted in a void of confidence at a more fundamental level:

“That’s probably what holds me back, is the lack of confidence, or...” (P1_R1)

She explained this lack of confidence in terms of self-doubt:

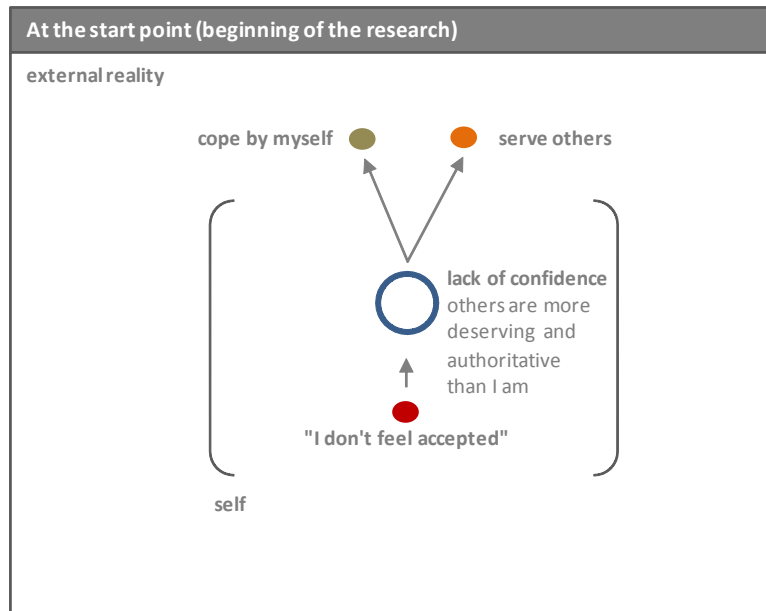
“first assumption being that if somebody disagrees with me, that they are probably right, so it takes me a little while to work around and actually [say] ‘No, actually I am right’” (P1_R1)

P1 also identified that there was a particular type of figure that more than any other was able to trigger and intensify the self-doubt:

“Generally, about men in particular, more sort of authoritative figures, hem, who are able to dump a lot of their rubbish on me [chuckles]... And that applies, obviously, wherever I am. And then a difficulty particularly of managing conflict with those men” (P1_R2)

P1 herself emphasized repeatedly that this issue manifested itself her in both her professional and personal experience.

Figure 34. P1’s sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

If soft-spoken, some frustration was evident in her words: about not being able to feel more confident and about a sense of being easily overwhelmed by circumstances.

A mid point: just after PTFL. P1 reported that the PTFL week had been an intense experience. For her, the week had been positive: it had clarified some links related to her issue with self-confidence; and, it had helped her connect to her core self which, she now felt, was a definite source of strength.

P1’s understanding of the issue had expanded during the week. Underlying the faltering confidence, there was an operating assumption she had been holding:

“It is fine for everything to be nice for everyone else, as long as I haven’t put myself first. A slightly martyr-ish quality [laughs]” (P1_R3)

“I haven’t thought about this before--like a religious perspective on it, that you.... In order to be very saintly, you have to put all other people before yourself. The servant rather than the master and that sort of thing. Which I don’t actually believe, but clearly do [laughs]” (P1_R3)

This view might or might not be related to P1's religious frame of reference. What matters more, I believe, is to note that P1's view places her on an inferior plane compared to the plane where she places other people. Her needs, happiness and views seem to be not as legitimate as those of others—P1 is not as deserving as others are. In a way that is consistent with this view, P1 thought that she had to cope by herself and be self-sufficient rather than asking others for help:

"I think that it is my default position that I will do it. And if I am asking someone else to do something, that they are doing me a favor. And really you shouldn't ask anybody for anything—which becomes impossible clearly [laughs]. (P1_R3)

Just after the PTFL week, P1 was starting to experience herself in a new way. She seemed to now own a sense of inner strength:

"I felt quite strong actually [coming off the course], and that was... One of my issues was about feeling stronger. Hem, and, hem... Showing my strength, and I certainly have felt that since I came back." (P1_R2)

"the biggest change that I am feeling is... Yeah, it is probably around the area of strength and confidence, and feeling more confident in myself" (P1_R2)

She also gave me a strong visual description of this feeling:

"Yes, I suppose [I am].... Picturing myself as a sort of a small pyramid, and inside there's a sort of an iron core which means I can't be knocked over as much." (P1_R2)

We were to return to this image in a later interview, when I inquired more about the iron core:

"Linda: [...] what is the bit in the middle?"

P1: Well, the strong bit in the middle [is] my core personality" (P1_R3)

It seems like the work done at PTFL had had the effect of connecting P1 to her core self; also, P1 was finding her core self to be a source of definite strength. I asked P1 how the PTFL experience might have helped bringing this about. P1 pointed to the validation received from the group:

“Probably [the] confidence that I have received from the group and validation from the group that I was with” (P1_R2)

From P1’s comments on the intensity with which she experienced the week, from the nature of the assumptions that she was carrying with her, and from the notion that male authoritative figures are problematic for her, I derive that in the past P1 had probably had an experience that significantly undermined her self-belief. Taken together, the evidence suggests that P1’s issue with feeling undeserving was potentially underpinned by a feeling of not being accepted, which the group validation and acceptance might helped her overcome. This would help explain why the validation received from the group had such a powerful effect on P1—of restoring P1’s connection to her core self and catalyzing her sense of strength.

There is another element of the PTFL week which seemed to have played an important role for P1. During her individual session, the tutors had worked with her to identify that she had been carrying some repressed anger. Also, the tutors had worked with her to help her channel and process the anger:

“Certainly around the time of the course, having a lot of resentment and anger about things that had been happening to me recently. Justified anger, I think. But an anger that I haven’t been able to really express. And... Hem... And we discussed that quite a lot in my session.” (P1_R3)

Once again, the input of the group was key:

“Linda: And, and if you had to say [...] to describe what is the one thing that helped you move on from this package of anger and mixed issues that we were just discussing [...]?” (P1_R3)

P1: I suppose what helped me move on were a couple of things said [the tutors] and also the background of... The context of doing that work within a group that was accepting.” (P1_R3)

The fact that the accepting disposition of the group had been critical to experiencing this shift adds some evidence to the idea that past experiences might have undermined P1’s self-belief. Although this is partly a conjecture, an element of therapy definitely seems to have been part of P1’s session on PTFL: the acceptance by the group and the validation of her anger had had a restorative effect on her sense of self.

An ending point: at the end of the research. Some practical implications of P1’s shift toward a newfound sense of strength had already begun to occur immediately after

the course. For example, P1 had decided to not accept any further contact with her ex-husband who, as seen earlier, had been harassing her. Other, more subtle ramifications developed later in the course of the research. Importantly, P1 seemed to develop a more level field on which to relate to other people. And, P1 started knowing herself better and forming a clearer picture of what her strengths and needs.

As seen earlier, the issue with self-confidence encompassed as sense of duty to serve others which was founded on the feeling of being relatively undeserving. P1 had been turning these assumptions on their head:

“I am just thinking about my self-belief. And my... Not just my expectations, but my... That I deserve to have certain responses from people. That they are not doing me a favor. So I guess then the communication is an aspect of it, but... It isn't just in the words. It is in actually, this is what I merit is for you to be doing these things” (P1_R3)

As a result, P1 had developed a sense of boundary between her responsibilities and the responsibilities of others:

“[I am] not feeling that I am responsible for everyone's happiness. Hem, so... One of my issues was about raising expectations of other people, and increasing my demands on them. And so... Yeah, just... Facilitating people sorting things out themselves, rather than feeling 'Oh I have to jump in and rescue them'. (P1_R2)

“[I am] being able to step back from things a little bit. Not taking as much responsibility for other people as I was before (P1_R2)

In dealing with other people, P1 she seemed now able to uphold that boundary:

“I suppose, not getting so fazed when people are trying to pass on all their worries to me and being able to pass it back again.” (P1_R2)

“There was a particular incident with an angry [customer] yesterday, where I felt I was able to hold a very strong position whilst empathizing with the person. And I was very aware of what the issues and what the needs of the patient were.” (P1_R2)

Previously, P1 said that she often felt overwhelmed—due certainly also to an unhelpful mix of contextual factors but more fundamentally to her feelings of insecurity and responsibility for other people:

“Prior to going on the course, I was quite overwhelmed with a lot of the things that were around both in my personal and my professional life. And, hem... And it was quite difficult to see where I was going. I think I described it to someone once as if I was swimming along in a river and there are lots of floats and jetsam, lots of debris and I couldn’t get my head above the water enough to be able to breathe” (P1_R4)

In contrast, now she tended to feel more in control:

“And I think that, over the last year, I have managed to get out of the water and have a much better view of what is right for me... And... And I feel less buffeted by what is going on.” (P1_R4)

As a consequence, P1 found that she was better able to tune in and reflect on her own needs, inclinations and prospects. For example, she started questioning whether she needed to stay in her role given that this had been for her a source of anxiety:

“Thinking about what do I want for me from a job. What’s important to me about my life. What sort of job will help me get most of what I want, or more of what I want. And so do I want the current job that I am in, or... Would I want to return to [something more like my prior] job.” (P1_R2)

“I am going through a very stressful time personally... In my personal life, and I found certain aspects of my current job, hem... very anxiety provoking. And I am thinking, do I need this? Do I want to do something that is more comfortable for me.” (P1_R2)

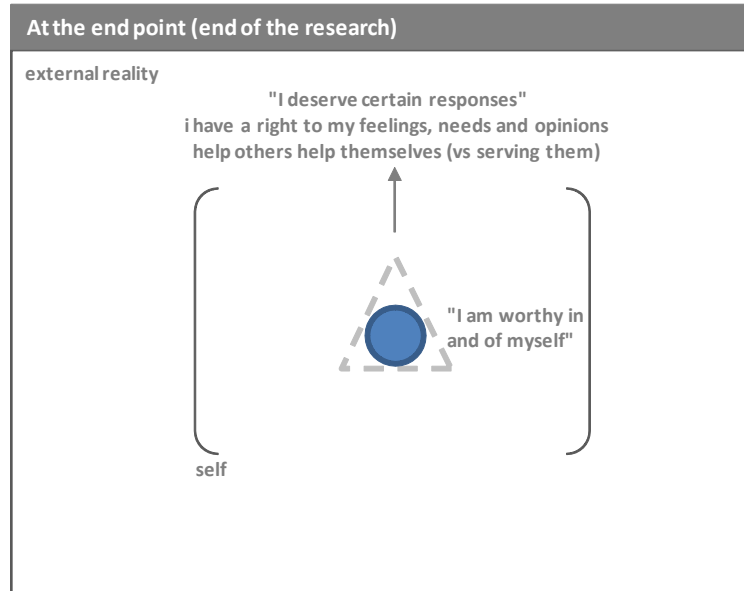
And, she started considering what type of job would be best for her:

“I think I probably have a better... A bit more clarity around what I want and what I am good at.” (P1_R4)

This eventually resulted in her pursuing the opportunity of a change in role internally to the organization. She felt that the new role was a better match of her inclinations and skill set:

“this feels much less stressful and more within my control and capabilities, I think, it’s a better fit with my skills” (P1_R4)

Figure 35. P1’s sensemaking at end of the research



Compiled by the author.

That all of the above constituted progress for P1 I think is seen in her ability to experience herself more positively and to be less affected by upsets in surrounding circumstances:

"I am much happier and more confident and I am more sure of what I want and in some ways much more willing to go with the flow and what is happening, and get less stressed about the things that are thrown at me. Because I know that I got other options. It's sort of less important in a way."
(P1_R4)

Implications for leadership practice

At the start of the research, P1 had expressed concerns about her leadership practice in relation to her issue with self-confidence. She wished she could improve her ability to be a decisive leader:

"I'd like to be a more visible leader, not just visible in terms of... Being there, physically visible, but also visible in terms of people thinking 'Yes, she is decisive. She knows where we are going'" (P1_R1)

"P1: Perhaps the only [thing] that I'd add is [a] bigger [leader], which is probably like the more visible. Yeah, just bigger and maybe more obviously visible out there."

Linda: Can you explain to me what you mean by bigger?

P1: Hem... More difficult to pass over.” (P1_R2)

Finding a connection to her core self and source of strength had implications on the workplace. For example, P1 was able to communicate her requests to the people she managed in a more direct and transparent manner:

“Less sort of messing around as to how I am going to respond to people. You know, it is much more... You know, this is the one minute manager. You know, ‘Yeah, this is really good’, or ‘No, that bit isn’t. I need you to change that, by...whenever’. And so it is more direct and I suppose.” (P1_R3)

“I probably thank people a lot for what they do and would not stop doing that. But it is about... I don’t have to explain it. You know, ‘This is what is required, this is the service that is required, this is what I need. Could you do that please?’. With less messing about, because I don’t have to persuade myself first.” (P1_R3)

Furthermore, P1 seemed to be able to delegate more effectively:

“[It has been] about just getting people to sort out their own problems with one another. And not saying ‘Well, leave it with me and I will speak to them’, so that everything then gets, all the emotions and actions then get dumped on me. So it is saying ‘What you can do is talk to that person about that’, or ‘Why don’t you just ring them?’” (P1_R4)

“As a leader I think I have become more demanding is perhaps not the right word, but more clear of my expectations of other people and more able to ask and request things that I need.” (P1_R4)

Previously, P1 had been placing a lot of value on being self-sufficient. In contrast, now she realized the limitation of being excessively independent:

“And yes, it is great to be independent. But actually that does cut you off quite a lot if you overdo it.” (P1_R4)

Feeling stronger, as well as more level with others, had an impact on P1’s ability to connect with other people. Obviously, she was an empathetic and caring personality. However, she noticed that her way of relating to others was more genuine:

“I feel a bit more in tune with people. And open to other people, and that strikes me like an odd thing to say, because before I would have said that I was always like that—very empathic and willing to go the extra mile for people. But... Yeah, just... Yeah, perhaps just a bit more linked in with people--with others.” (P1_R4)

“Maybe [I am being] a bit more.... A bit more open? Hem... I am just trying to think what I think, because I always thought of myself that I am fairly open and willing to share myself on a day to day basis. But I think it is about that... Maybe more willing or able to show the vulnerabilities within me. Which perhaps allows other people to do the same with me, and to offer support” (P1_R4)

Overall, the impact on others of this change within P1 seemed to be positive. I asked P1 how others were responding to her changed ways:

“P1: Oh, surprisingly really well! [Soft laughter] Sometimes people even seem to like being asked! Which is...

Linda: Isn't it? It helps them feel like they are contributing something.

P1: Yeah. But, but that's been quite a big deal for me—to ask people for help” (P1_R4)

These aspects of P1's change recall a passage of personal and leadership development which is commonly recognized in the literature as a key inflection point: the point when, having mastered independence, a person surpasses and begins to appreciate fair collaboration among independent individuals (inter-independence, according to the frameworks of development in constructive-developmental theory presented earlier in the literature review chapter).

8.10.2 Participant 2, Male

Context

I would like to make a premise to the presentation of P2's context. P2 contributed several pieces of information around both his work and personal contexts. However, the information tends to be quite factual. Hence it was generally hard to derive a sense of what it might be like for P2 to inhabit and operate in those contexts.

Work. At the time of interview one, P2 had been with his company for almost 20 years. He had started out first as part of a team within the organization's home operations. Then, he had been promoted into senior management roles. Eventually, he was appointed Director at a relatively young age (before turning 40). As director, P2 supervised a large team and effectively ran a multi-million dollar business. Six months prior to the interview, P2 had taken up a new role based abroad and reporting directly to the company's Vice President. Within the new role, the focus had shifted away from directorship responsibilities, such as profit and loss to safety and quality responsibilities, and toward on business development: he was working independently on negotiating contracts or acquisitions across the globe and supervising teams in diverse locations. His travel schedule had intensified accordingly. P2's work was certainly very dynamic in nature:

"If I were going to pick a large job [in a new location], I will have to find a new team, so my workload will go... Like that, in one region, and the rest of us will have to stop for a while. So my job could change in six week's time, where it could be very hands on, recruiting 50-60 people, registering companies, getting payroll set up... [...] And when it is all kind of done, then give it to someone and say 'go run with it' and then just manage that from a distance"
(P2_R1)

P2's organization seems invested in the learning and development of its staff. P2 himself had taken part in a course on high performing teams and had just been invited to also go on a leadership development program in addition to PTFL. P2's boss was a graduate of the previous version of PTFL (OIPS) from about 10 years prior. There were more training initiatives ongoing within the company: for example, four of the highest potential people, those on a trajectory to become Vice-Presidents, had been sent to a nine-month program at Harvard.

Personal. I have mostly just factual information about P2's personal context, which I will omit because they bear little relevance to the story. Definitely an extrovert, P2

highly values friends. This is one aspect of personal life that he elaborated about to a greater extent:

"I like to have lots of friends. I hate, I hate going somewhere and not having... I hate eating meals alone. I hate when you travel on business, there is like two hours of hell. You finish work, you know, you go to the gym, you go running or you go for a swim and then you go look for good food and you go to a restaurant and sit there on a table for one, take a newspaper and forty minutes later [snaps fingers]--finished. It's like... So I like to, if I've got friends, I'll try to phone them up. But I also make friends very quickly, I've got a couple of new friends down in Australia. Which is good because they have already texted me 'When you come back, we'll do this, we'll do that, we'll go there...'"
(P2_R1)

P2 also valued dynamic sports. Work, then, is not the only dynamic element of P2's context: everything in P2's presentation points towards a very busy and active lifestyle.

Outlook

Outlook on PTFL. There are two main themes in this area. In terms of outlook on PTFL, P2 seemed initially focused on the instrumental value of training. P2's outlook on change seemed initially focused on external factors and essentially void of considerations on factors internal to him.

It was not easy to get a sense of what P2's outlook on PTFL was. On one hand, he seemed generally open to taking onboard something new:

"I've never been on a course I haven't got... something. Sometimes you don't get a huge amount, but you will always go away with something, something new." (P2_R1)

On the other hand, it was hardly possible to pinpoint any specific personal reason why P2 would be motivated to engage with the program:

"Looking forward to it. Looking forward to the yoga. It used to be aerobics."
(P2_R1)

"I quickly read through the materials, does not tell you very much. And I like that there is a bit of mystery, that's nice. I am not one for... Know what I am going to do every minute of every single day. And I am very much... If it comes it comes, if it doesn't, it doesn't." (P2_R1)

“So yes, I am sure it will be very challenging. Ask me on Friday.” (P2_R1)

A specific reason why P2 was interested in the program was stated, but it related to increasing compliance with externalized expectations of career advancement rather than to a personally meaningful reason:

“I think we are just trying to put a bit of formality into... Of course I have been in the company a long time, and the next step is senior but even more senior than I am right now.” (P2_R1)

“I think we are just trying to get me some tools” (P2_R1)

“I’ve done quite a piece in our company, and they just felt it was time to formalize some of my training” (P2_R1)

In fact, it is unsure whether, just 16 hours before PTFL started, P2 was at all aware of the nature of the course. Here is a comment by P2 about a different course that he had also been invited to attend:

“This is a very American course so it’s... Stand up and sing a jingle, very much tell them about something painful that is going on in your life, bear your soul, and... So one of the guys stands up and says his daughter is on drugs and him and his wife... Are divorcing. And that’s a very American thing. For British people, they’d be: ‘Bah, I am telling them nothing!’” (P2_R1)

From this comment emerged, together with P2’s less than positive view of things he considers to be American, an essentially negative view of programs where personal disclosure might be encouraged. Although PTFL does not fit the stereotypical description in the quote above, it definitely sits firmly in the camp of programs with an emphasis in introspection and disclosure.

Outlook on personal change. In terms of P2’s outlook on change, of interest is that he could not seem to find any aspect of himself that might have been relevant for personal development. During the first interview, I would customarily ask participants whether there was anything they felt they could benefit from working on. In P2’s cases I had to push this line of questioning in several ways and I did so with little success. At my first attempt, I only uncovered that P2 had had to reschedule the courses several times:

“Ah, can’t remember. I think I’ve been on this course for two years. I’ve had this cancelled five times” (P2_R1)

I then asked P2 whether he could consider this question on his feet: could he think of anything that he would have liked to work on while at the course? His answer pushed the topic back:

"I don't know.... Ask me then, ask me after the week" (P2_R1)

Later, I tried to pose the same question again:

"Linda: Now that we have talked some more, any idea on the issue that I asked about earlier? I asked you if there was a particular issue that you wanted to work on. Not that you have to have one, just in case...."

P2: To be honest, I don't really know" (P2_R1)

Approaching the subject from a different angle, I asked P2 about company appraisals and whether they had been pointing to any specific strengths and weaknesses. However, while he seemed to carry out thorough appraisals with his own staff, his own appraisals with his boss seemed to be a lighter affair:

"We do annual appraisals for all our staff. So I do all my staff, my direct reports. I do that, continued professional development and there will be opportunities to do external courses. Mine, mine with my Vice-President, lasts about two minutes. So, very much down the way. Up the way no." (P2_R1)

I remember thinking that I would try a more indirect style of inquiry and explore more general directions of conversation. I began with inquiring about the future, but found that P2 would not discuss the longer term:

"Linda: So where are you going to go? Where do you see yourself in a few years?"

P2: I never look that far ahead" (P2_R1)

Then, I tried to direct the attention to the past:

"Linda: What have you learned about yourself in these years through work?" (P2_R1)

Through P2's response, I got an insight into a prior learning experience of his:

“P2: Maybe to be less competitive sometimes, because I can be very competitive. But then, my twin and I are both very competitive.” (P2_R1)

Learning to be less competitive had had ramification for his leadership praxis as well:

“I just think people want more responsibility. Five years ago I probably would have kept everything to me, working 15 hours a day, making sure that everything is done right. And over time I have learned to trust people and give them responsibilities. To say ‘You can do this’. Because I can’t do everything. I’ve been very fortunate people have taken a lot of responsibilities off. And I am still accountable and I will always be accountable. But responsibilities have been devolved to, pretty, much, my team” (P2_R1)

P2 gave a further example of past personal change when he described learning to be more patient with his team:

“[I’ve] probably [grown] a lot more patient, probably a lot more patient than I was... Probably 10 years ago, a lot more relaxed. [...] As in, I can’t see myself losing my temper, or shouting if someone... Or even good or bad news, I’ll take good or bad news the same way. I’ve probably matured quite a lot in the last five years” (P2_R1)

These examples indicated to me that, even though talking about personal change in the present seemed challenging for P2, I should not take that as a sign that he did not *experience* personal change.

However, I could not help but observing that attempts to explore the aspect of personal change consistently resulted in P2 shifting the focus of the conversation on the external. The following is the continuation of a quoted presented earlier, where P2 is answering my question around what he would like to work on at PTFL:

“To be honest, I don’t really know. Because my job changes depending on... I mean, I am very much... I manage my team remotely, so I spend a lot of time on Skype speaking to them, and they come to visit me, and a few of them have this past week [...]. I do see them but not every day and I am pushing hard in [country A] right now [...] I’ve got a lot of stuff going on right now in [country B], got a lot of stuff going on in [country C], got a lot of stuff going on in [country D]...” (P2_R1)

In this response, P2 immediately diverted to talking about his team; then, about geographical areas where he was doing business development work. As a further

example, P2 later identified two specific challenges. However, both these challenges, work pressure and conflict, were external in nature:

"I don't like conflict... I don't like, I don't particularly enjoy conflict. I mean, if I've got to, I will do it."

"Pressure of work—some days are just so busy, you can't.... You'd love to spend long sometimes doing things, but sometimes you've got to react very quickly. And we're across many, many different cultures, many different parts of the world" (P2_R1)"

As the theme of cultural differences came up, P2 introduced a third external challenge that he had encountered in working with American colleagues:

"P2: I need to be more understanding of our American cousins."

Linda: You've been encountering.... Issues?"

P2: Yeah. They just, they just think differently to us. I'm working on it. [...] I went, I worked in the States—spent there the best part of a year, so I probably understand them a lot better now than I did two years ago. And they've learnt, they've learnt a lot." (P2_R1)

A shift onto the external, in this case to other people, also happened when I asked P2 what he thought of leadership development:

"I think it's understanding the people you lead, and it's not just... Yeah, give me... Bob, Bob is a good worker. It's about what makes Bob tick, and understanding what drives him, what he enjoys doing, and what he's uncomfortable with... And now and again I give jobs to people because I know that they are uncomfortable." (P2_R1)

In sum, P2's outlook was characterized by a view of the value of training as instrumental and by a view of change and development where the self was consistently subtracted.

Outlook on the research. No information available.

Interview interaction

I admit to having had mixed feelings about interviewing with P2 and working with his transcripts. P2 was always friendly and respectful toward me. And, even though I would have liked to be able to follow his trajectory until the end of the project, I certainly respect his decision to drop out of the research. My uneasiness is mostly due to the conversational dynamics that developed during the interviews. In response to P2, as it seemed in my eyes, detouring the conversation or sounding a bit bragging, I found myself feeling frustrated or accommodating what he said.

As noted earlier as well, one pattern in P2's speech was to divert the conversation into different directions. Often P2 would give a short and fairly diplomatic answer and then take a tangent about something else. Sometimes, this took the form of jumping onto a different topic:

"I have always taken my accountability for my position very seriously, like... safety. And you see, in our business if we do it wrong, people get killed. So... That's a level of growing up.... I don't like being very grown up. I love humor. I like to have humor in the workplace. I like to have a laugh, because it can get you through the tough times, if you can have a laugh. Because if you're serious all the time... But no, I like to have a laugh" (P2_R1)

At other times, it took the form of a lecture-like detour:

"Under corporate man's law, it's not just the director, it's the senior management. Go read the clause. I've actually got a lawyer, in December, to say to all my management team, and to explain to them what corporate man's law is about. Corporate man's law is actually not as bad as the Health and Safety Act. You can go in jail through that for longer and, as a person, get fined hundreds of thousands of pounds" (P2_R1)

"I need to be perhaps a bit more understanding of our American cousins. [...] They don't seem to take some things as seriously maybe as we do. They are a lot more laid back, probably a bit more frivolous with some of the decisions and it's just a shrug of the shoulders.... Some things are very serious, I find that strange sometimes." (P2_R1)

"Your preference is always to do the safe things, you'll never... You will stifle your growth. Sometimes you have to do things that you don't... I've got people who hate standing in front of a room, just hate it. 'No I can't do this', 'A few sentences—you are going to have to do this, because I can't always do it'. So we'll encourage him in smaller groups to go do a presentation, and... Eventually, I think the more you do it the better" (P2_R1)

A second noticeable pattern in P2's speech is his recounting of details that would emphasize and add luster to his image, giving the impression that he was bragging. For example, a not insignificant part of our first interview was a review of P2's virtues as a leader:

"I am quite compassionate with my workforce. I encourage them to think outside the box, and I also encourage them to make decisions, right or wrong. And if they made the wrong one, we'll laugh about it" (P2_R1)

"I am meant to develop the tools and the toolbox, so no point... No point in me making all the decisions and there's no point in me coming up with all the ideas, because I don't know them all. [...] Let them contribute, and if it is a good idea they can go and work with it, and if it's not—so they still think it's a good idea. So, a lot of brainstorming and all" (P2_R1)

"give everyone a chance, even the people who don't like to speak have something to say. [...] So encouraging people to say anything without being seen as 'this is bum silly, and a stupid idea'. Basically, free talking—say what you want, when you want and no idea is a bad idea." (P2_R1)

At times, I also could not help thinking that there was a somewhat heroic streak in how P2 tended to describe his function:

"P2: So, I've got a lot of stuff going on right now in [country B], got a lot of stuff going on in [country C], got a lot of stuff going on in [country D]..."

Linda: Everywhere.

P2: Yes, kind of everywhere. And it's all.... Kind of bubbling away, and eventually one [bubble] is going to break and I will be the one who is going to have to go and spend there four or five months" (P2_R1)

The tendencies to detour the conversation and play up his accomplishments became really visible for me only at the data analysis stage. I then became aware that during interviews I had been moving back and forth from hardly concealing frustration about the detours and expressing affirmative comments in response to the bragging.

For example, I felt frustrated in the ten minutes of interview one when I was trying to nudge P2 into formulating a personal reason for why he was going on PTF. The following are just some examples of my attempts:

"Linda: And [before we began the interview] you had started telling me a little bit about why you ended up here for this course... Do you want to tell me

again?

[...]

Linda: How was the choice made to go on this particular course?

[...]

Linda: Did [your boss] say that this [course] was a good...?

[...]

Linda: And, hem, Praxis, on the application form, in the very beginning, they usually ask to specify one particular issue that you'd like to work on during the course... Did you write something?

[...]

Linda: And, if you had to think about it now, is there one particular something that you would like to work on while you're here?

[...]

Linda: Do you think that there is anything that holds you back at all from becoming the type of leader that you'd like to be?

[...]

Linda: Okay. Anything in...I don't know if in your company you have yearly evaluations, talks or assessments.... If you had to say what your strengths and weaknesses are?

[...]

Linda: Okay. I guess what I am trying to get at is—is there something that is difficult for you? Something that gets you stuck?" (P2_R1, between minutes 04.30 and 14.21)

It is in this context that I incurred in a lengthy stretch on P2's leadership style, which he concluded with a comment about valuing other people's background and hence having a habit of inviting them to contribute. At the end of that, I burst into asking:

*"Linda: Where have **you** [emphasis in the recording] come from?" (P2_R1)*

I remember my frustration at this point, which my tone of voice must have given away. To my question followed a moment of puzzlement by P2. What I really meant was—you have developed all of these qualities, can you give me an insight into how you learn and why it matters to you? But what I did instead of making this explicit was accommodating the default direction of the interview—I switch gear again and tweaked my question to a more agreeable tone and a direction:

“Linda: If you think about yourself 10 to 15 years ago...” (P2_R1)

And in fact, I then got an answer that was mostly a dry overview of P2’s prior career trajectory. Another way in which I accommodated P2 was to talk in an affirming way or with a slightly ingratiating tone. For example, early on I found myself asking the following question:

“Linda: What do people look up to you for?” (P2_R1)

This question was not in the interview guide and was never asked to any other of the research participants. In a different instance, I found myself reinforcing P2’s evaluation of himself as very empathetic:

“P2: No, I am quite... I’ve got quite a bit of empathy for people anyways. Because, in front of the [PTFL tutor] you get good and bad stories [...]

Linda: Maybe that’s a bit of how you are. I don’t think that everybody would automatically be... Empathetic” (P2_R2)

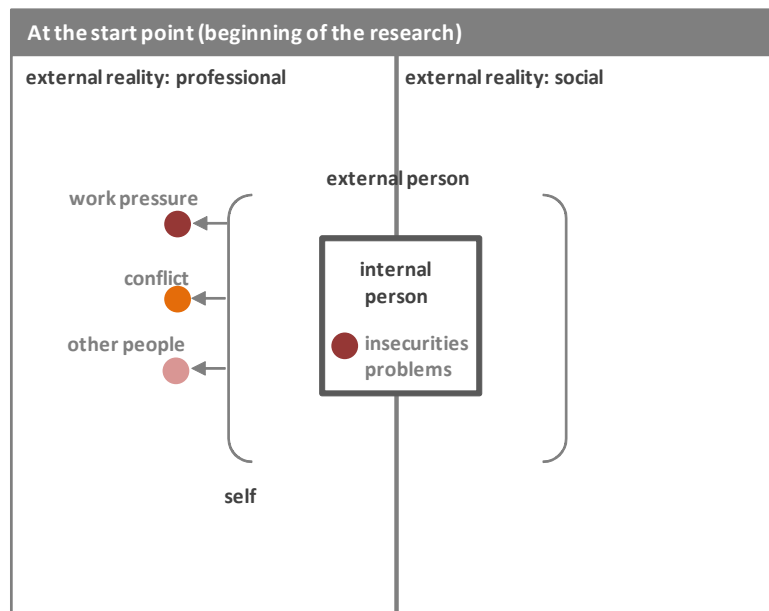
This dynamic is interesting in two main ways. First, I was accommodating and affirming P2 despite the fact that he really did not seem to need my encouragement to inventory his strengths. Secondly, this last exchange around empathy is particularly interesting in light of the outcome of P2’s session at PTFL: tutors and the group ended up indicating to him that he seemed to overlook what effect he has on people—a fundamental link in the exercise of empathy.

My attempts to arrive in interview one at some type of self-disclosure mostly failed. My insistence meant that in all likelihood the interview was a less than pleasant exercise also for P2. Notwithstanding a degree of reciprocal discomfort, by the end of the longest interview in the first round (39 minutes), P2 and I had exchanged a lot of information. And, as I would realize only later during analysis, P2 had indirectly and probably inadvertently presented precisely the issue that was going to be pointed out to him on the course.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. It could be that at the time of interview one P2 was aware of something that he chose not to discuss with me. However, taking P2's initial comments at face value, one concludes that there simply wasn't at the time a particular issue which he might have gained from working on. However, it is quite evident that self-awareness itself was not demonstrated by P2. As discussed earlier, the focus of our conversation consistently tended to shift outwards—onto other people or external conditions. Also, P2 did not seem to think highly about introspective training and expected to derive forms of external validation (formalization in view of promotion) as a result of attending PTFL. At the beginning of the research, then, there was potentially a blind spot in self-awareness.

Figure 36. P2's sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

This is more than a conjecture: P2 himself said as much, if indirectly and inadvertently. P2 was taking PTFL essentially because of a recommendation by his boss, one of the Vice-Presidents of the company. P2's boss was himself a graduate of PTFL (or, more precisely, OIPS as the program was earlier known) and hence was surely aware of the introspective and developmental nature of the work done at the course. With this

knowledge of the course, P2's boss thought that it was possibly going to benefit P2. This is how P2 reported the motivation of his boss for his referral to PTFL:

"He thinks it's going to give me a better understanding of me--my strengths and weaknesses. Because it's very easy, everyone knows what their strengths are, but someone needs to tell me about my weaknesses" (P2_R1)

And then added:

"You never admit your weaknesses" (P2_R1)

The key words in the quote from P2's boss above are, I believe, *"a better understanding"*. Perhaps, the boss wished for P2 not as much that he identified his own weaknesses—but rather that he realized in the first place that he was behaving as if he did not have any. This interpretation builds on hindsight: in the next section I will discuss how PTFL pointed out self-awareness as the main area for P2 to work on. At the time I was simply at a loss, lacking direct input from P2 and given my difficulty of focusing the interview on P2 himself.

A mid point: just after PTFL. There are two main highlights of the second interview. Surprisingly, in contrast to the prior interview, P2 discussed himself directly and transparently. In addition, a theme emerged of P2's dual view of his own personality and of personality in general.

The second interview with P2 started similarly to how the prior interview had ended—with a focus on others. In this case, P2 talked about the other PTFL participants. There was some genuine respect in his words as he recounted how honest, trusting and sharing other people had been on the course:

"It was a surprise how open people were, and very quickly went straight to a great depth and you kind of got to see everything they are made of. There was no... Holding back and we certainly had a group that participated to a great depth and beyond what you could possibly imagine. So that's just... That just blew me away" (P2_R2)

Then, the interview took a totally different turn as P2 went straight into talking about himself. He surprised me by being brutally honest about what he had discovered:

"It's my personality. I... I... I can be... Larger than life." (P2_R2)

"I can smother people with my personality. I can answer people's questions before they even ask them." (P2_R2)

At PTFL, tutors and the group had pointed out to P2 that he had a habit of ‘taking up the stage’ by continuing to talk about himself. Early on during the course, apparently P2 had jumped into talking about his story. The lead tutor had called him out with a poignant comment:

“No one else is getting a chance. No one else can tell their story. You see, it’s only you, you, you” (P2_R2)

This comment had the effect of stopping P2 in his tracks. He asked the group whether others shared the same view. Apparently, the view was unanimous:

“And they said: ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah” (P2_R2)

This must have been a difficult moment for P2. He said so, although he also said that he did not experience that moment as hurtful and that he appreciated the honest feedback:

“You have nine people in a room telling you something, you know.” (P2_R2)

*“Oh maybe I need to change **some** [emphasis in the recording] things—I don’t want to lose things either, because that’s who I am, but there is still things that I need to be aware that I do” (P2_R2)*

P2 realized that he had gone into the experience with a blind spot:

“I now understand, when going on the course, why my boss who had been on the course said ‘I think you’ll get a lot out of this’. And, and... But... And it wasn’t because... I was abandoned as a child [...] It was just... An opportunity to see what effect you can have on other people” (P2_R2)

P2 had not been aware that he makes an impact on others. Also, he had not been aware of the diversity of reactions that he might cause:

“Some good insights into what you can and cannot do when you’re in a room with a group of people, or how one comment can affect three people in three very different ways” (P2_R2)

Based on these realizations, he formulated his resolution to become more aware and thoughtful:

"I must see more through other people. And see that other people actually have feelings and want to be considered and want to be heard" (P2_R2)

"Thoughtfulness in human relations probably [is something] that I need to work on"

In particular, there were two areas in which he had started to develop greater thoughtfulness. One was the area of conversation. There he was letting other people finish what they were saying and taking time to reflect before answering:

"I have been a lot more thoughtful at the minute [...] I think how I am going to respond and what kind of an answer I was going to give them, rather than just come about with a quick one.... 'Bang-there-you-go' sort of answer. (P2_R2)

"[I am trying to be] a lot more thoughtful about what I say to people. [...]. A little more humble" (P2_R2)

The other area was the way he tended to develop relationships. P2 realized that other people should be allowed to signal when they wanted to interact more closely with him:

"People obviously say 'This is my space', and I tend to take over their space. So I will quickly get up close to someone and.... You know, [BREAK IN THE RECORDING] rather than holding back until invited into their space. So I need to... Work on that" (P2_R2)

P2 sounded genuine about these realizations. I will mention, however, that there was an element of saving face that seemed to be important for P2. As seen previously, in interview one he had repeatedly said that he did not know if there was something he would benefit from working on. In interview two, he introduced his reflections as follows:

"No, I wouldn't say it was mainly a surprise for my sake, I kind of know... Who I am. I know my character" (P2_R2)

And, concluded the summary by saying:

"It was refreshing to hear people feedback exactly what I expected to hear as well" (P2_R2)

Later, he underscored that he had also received validation on the course:

"[They said] 'You're wise, you're good at what you do but... Just take it down a notch.'" (P2_R2)

"It goes with the job I do, because... When you are selling a company, and selling... You have to be bigger than life, you have to have that" (P2_R2)

During the interviews with P2, I seemed to develop a tendency to accommodate and affirm him. Taken together, this evidence gives me a sense that maintaining external image was a critical function for P2. As will be discussed later on in the section on comparative analysis, attending to external image versus internal (personal) development emerged a significant distinction within the research sample.

Lastly, a theme emerged from the analysis of P2's second transcript: he seemed to have a dual view of his personality. P2 expressed this in two ways. First, he articulated a distinction between how he behaves in the social versus the professional areas. According to P2, holding back and letting people have their space and time is something he had been already practicing in the workplace. But, somehow the skill had not carried over to his social life yet:

"So [at the course] I just let everyone else go and I just stood back. It was... like I normally would do it at work, really, but didn't do it in the social" (P2_R2)

"And when I am out working, probably, I am very... I very much do tend to sit back, tend to let people volunteer and come up with their ideas... But for some reason I [...] I don't necessarily do it in my whole life." (P2_R2)

P2 also articulated a general view of personality also characterized by a dual element:

"[There is] the internal person. And then you have the external person that everyone gets to see. And, very few people get to see the real inside person" (P2_R2)

"I definitely think that... There are definitely those two parts to every person" (P2_R2)

At this point I need to make an admission: my question leading up to these last two comments was rather unclear. It was also, at least in part, a leading question. I had introduced my question by sharing with P2 that I was trying to get my head around what leadership development is. Borne of genuine puzzlement, my question had

turned out a muddle. Moreover, I had articulated my own thinking along a duality: I had expressed that there were probably two dimensions relevant to leadership development—a dimension of a core self versus a dimension of a more surface layer of personality. It is possible that this led P2 to articulate his explanation along a dualism as well. However, P2 himself had earlier articulated a duality when he made a distinction between how he behaves in the professional versus the social domains. Also, the atmosphere of the interview was such that, if in disagreement, P2 could have easily contradicted me. In contrast, he seemed to autonomously put a lot of emphasis on the concept:

"There's definitely... Two people in me." (P2_R2)

"It's a two-piece person.... For sure." (P2_R2)

It is also interesting to look at what type of spontaneous interpretation P2 joined with this dualism:

"The person who is inside... I think is very much how you are raised and nurtured and know what you are confident in and what your insecurities are, because everyone has got their insecurities" (P2_R2)

The internal person, then, is the result of nurture. But also, the internal person is a controversial place which houses insecurities and problems:

"You can keep that away from people and not allow other people to see you" (P2_R2)

"Some people have got a very, very deep person. But you don't know if you met them because they are very outgoing and social and you wouldn't think that there are any problem in their life" (P2_R2)

From the comments above, the internal person seems almost instituted for its function of secluding insecurities from the view of others. I tend to think that this might have been P2 speaking about himself. That P2 understood himself as a two-piece person is a stated fact. Also, the surface characteristics described in the examples he gave closely resemble the descriptions he had been giving of himself. Here is, as an example, a description of how his view of personality applied to his twin brother:

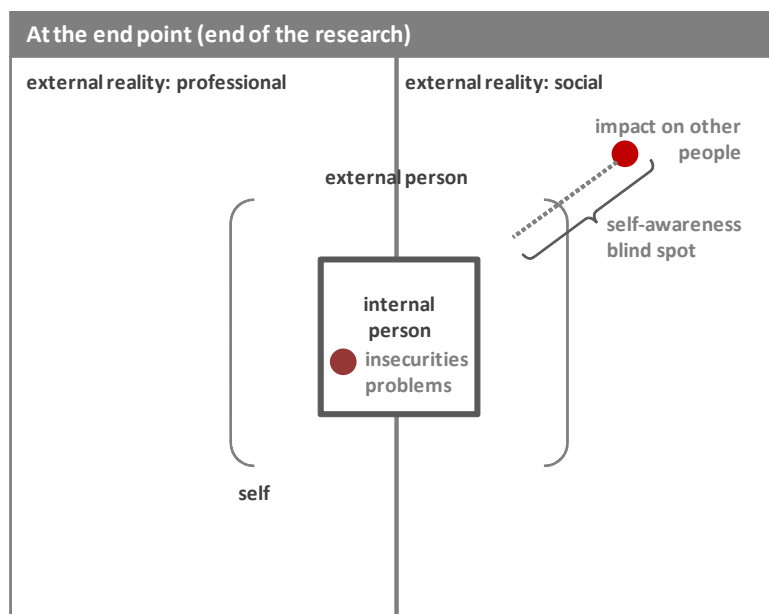
"Look at my twin brother [...] we are socially both outgoing but we handle life totally differently—internally wise. He... He would be very much the center of attention and well-loved and highly respected, but internally [BREAK IN THE

RECORDING] the next person and probably most people will never know that about him [...]. He just comes across as very fun and carefree and I know him a lot deeper."

While the internal person is problematic, the external person seemed to be less so. P2 seemed confident that all sorts of learning can happen within the external persona:

"And I think with the external one you can work on. You can do a huge amount of work on the external. You can change it up here, you can choose to go on courses..." (P2_R2)

Figure 37. P2's sensemaking at the end of the research



Compiled by the author.

Neither P2 nor I attempted to explore in further depth whether he might see the internal person as potentially having a dynamic nature as well. I highlight this theme because it is salient to the comparative analysis of the research sample, as will be discussed in detail in a later section of this chapter on findings.

An ending point: at the end of the research. As mentioned earlier, P2 interrupted any contact after the second interview. I have not received from P2 any explanation for his decision to drop out of the research. I also do not have directly from P2 any information about how his story might have evolved in the month following our

interviews. I am able to provide a further small bit of contextual information thanks to another participant in this research. When this other participant, who was in fact P2's buddy on the PTFL course, learned from me that P2 had dropped out he did not act surprised. This other participant had been in contact with P2 and shared that there had been some significant changes shaking up P2's life both personally and professionally. Because P2 never directly shared this information with me, I will on my part also not share any further details.

Implications for leadership practice

Greater self-awareness and improved listening ability both have a certain place in leadership development. This is commonly recognized in the literature but, on its own, is scarcely a basis for discussing implications of P2's PTFL experience for his leadership practice. I don't feel that I have collected enough data from P2 around the relationship between his change and leadership practice in order to make a meaningful analysis of this theme.

8.10.3 Participant 3, Male

Context

Work. P3's professional sphere stood out as very salient to his sense of self. P3 has a two-fold professional role including the function of Director within his organization. In his professional context, he is renowned for his ability to achieve any target objective, no matter how difficult. Many accomplishments stand as testimony of his professional achievements. P3 also believes that he is known among his team for his fair and warm ways of relating to them and for his availability to offer advice. P3 seems to have a sense of pride about the organization's purpose and impact:

"We make an impact [...]. There's fantastic technology. [...] We contribute very heavily to national demands." (P3_R1)

The organization seems very supportive of training initiatives for its employees:

"My organization sponsors me. Not only does it sponsor me, but because of the benefit and perceived change by my boss, [...] there is possibly another half a dozen people being sent on the back of that, two of which are at another programme on leadership starting tomorrow. A second course, there have been people put through it, people who are going to be put through it." (P3_R1)

"[At Cranfield, I took] High Performance Leadership and Power and Influence [before]" (P3_R1)

Professionally, P3 has two roles; both are high profile, with many responsibilities and involving a substantial level of complexity. Overall, P3 seems to find his profession greatly rewarding:

"Five years ago I became a Director [...], and ever since then the job changes continuously. We're improving on eight pages of strategic objectives to complete per annum, and I came in 100% on target, or completed on budget—0.02% underspent." (P3_R1)

At times, P3's comments emphasized his professional merits and standing:

"I get results. No matter what can of worms I am given. I change it around. If I am given a [BREAK IN THE RECORDING], or if I'm given a difficult thing to do. I have always returned a good result." (P3_R1)

"I am good at what I do and I am very successful at it." (P3_R4)

“You know, in general terms I am in the top 1% of income, in terms of professional excellence, I got more [BREAK IN THE RECORDING]. I am the director of one of Scotland’s biggest companies”²⁸² (P3_R3)

While P3’s professional life is a source of many satisfactions, his work context is not unproblematic:

“People I deal with are... the Heads of [...] Boards, [other organizations], and people within our own organization. And some of the stakeholders I have fantastic relations with and some we have very difficult relations with” (P3_R1)

At times, this conflicted aspect was underscored by strong language as in the examples below:

“I had to learn how to defend yourself and your company. Which was a good... I did this by... either be on top of all the facts and read all the papers and machine-gun them all the data, all the costs, all the legislation. Basically the night before I read them cover to cover so I could remember it and nobody can argue against it” (P3_R2)

“[This particular manager], I like him as a human being because in one way, I think he’s a great guy. He’s looked after me extremely well, I respect what he does. [But] I also see him with his boss: cross him and you’re dead. Unforgiving. Don’t challenge his authority. And there are ways of dealing with that.[...] You don’t overdo it because... otherwise it tends to be like the spider, once at the center of the web, the spider can turn around and bite you at any point in time” (P3_R1)

Overall, the professional sphere seems a positive factor in P3’s life. However, I would argue that it is not an element of straightforward support to P3’s experience of change. First, his work context seems a less than ideal terrain where to practice the behaviors that P3 was encouraged to cultivate: listening and introspection. Based on his comments, the work environment emerges as the opposite of the context nurtured within PFTL. On one hand, PFTL tries to be a safe context where it is possible to be vulnerable; on the other, P3’s work context is portrayed as one requiring constant alertness and the up-keeping of an image of strength. In addition, as I will be exploring later, P3 operates quite a stark division of the professional and personal spheres: this

²⁸² Note: this particular comment is in answer to a specific type of criticism, around credibility, that P3 had been presented on PFTL. This will be discussed later in more detail.

has made me wonder whether, as a prop for personal change, the connection with this area of strength in the professional domain would be fully available to P3.

Personal context. I begin the discussion of P3's personal context with an example that I believe reiterates the importance of work in P3's life. When I moved the interview on to personal life, P3 answered with a hiccup-like reversion back to the professional before proceeding with the personal:

"Personal life is good. Professionally, I am a [role]. I am married to..." (P3_R1)

P3 is married to a doctor and seems to quite take pride in his wife:

"[My wife] probably has got a hundred publications and 61 letters after her name. Age of [...], she is still a size eight. She's well fit; she runs 15 to 20 miles a week. She climbs ice, she skies black and... Very fit lady, always trying new things. She was kayaking a fortnight ago". (P3_R1)

Perhaps, mixed with P3's admiration, there was also a degree of competition:

"I used to do the Munroes, which are Scottish hills over 3000 feet. There's 284 of them. In 1989 I climbed lots of famous things, [BREAK IN THE RECORDING] and 14 alps over 14000 feet. I was in the Ben Nevis mountain rescue team for 21 years. I got a medal from the Queen, for community service." (P3_R1)

This sense of a competitive vein in the relationship was confirmed later, when it was put into the relational context of a couple where both partners have a strong career drive:

"Both my wife and I are very, very busy. Working days and very important jobs. More often job is more important than the partner and certainly it is in my case." (P3_R2)

"You've got two people who are very able, very gifted. [...] But the way things are, they are addicted to work instead of to each other." (P3_R2)

Their relationship having been subordinated to their careers has had a repercussion much regretted by P3:

"Both of us being career people, we didn't get around to having a family. That is difficult to talk about. [At the course] I was told to take a breath, but hem... Yeah, there are things in my life that are uncomfortable." (P3_R2)

Not having had children and the current disconnect in his marriage seem to greatly weigh on and sadden P3. At the time of the research, P3 was trying to make some things right, but that was not proving to be an easy task:

"[I am] working on my personal relationships—with my wife. Working on that. [...] I am trying to work on that and make the partner more important than the work. [...] I am working on that" (P3_R2)

"Linda: Last time you mentioned that you wanted to spend more time with your wife, because you work 60 hours a week and you are very work-focused—both of you".

P3: Yes. No, that.... That didn't work out. [...It is] more for me to get her to [...] retire" (P3_R3)

All of this, however, is in the context of what seems to be a rich and rewarding life, not just because of professional achievement but also thanks to much enjoyed travel and sports activities. At the time of interview three, P3 and his wife had returned from a cycling trip abroad. We spoke a bit about future travel plans:

"I'm off to [BREAK IN THE RECORDING] in February which [...]. And I'll do winter sports there for a week and I am looking forward to that. I am going with my wife and a couple of friends. And we have got some [BREAK IN THE RECORDING] organized end of April, when the Royal wedding is on, to get away from that. And then something back... In back end of the year, I was hoping to go to [Asia]." (P3_R3)

"In [the next] four years we are [planning two more major cycling trips abroad]" (P3_R3)

Another element that I would like to underline is his P3's the difficulty he experienced in his early life:

"I came from a very poor background, my mother was a widow. [...] I've never forgotten where I came from, or the difficulty my mother had. Hem... Probably, I wouldn't quite say impoverished, but she wasn't exactly very rich. Way back in the 70s things were difficult for family." (P3_R1)

"Father was... very religious. He almost was Victorian in his attitude--that children should be seen, not heard. In the late 60s he had a stroke and eventually died of a heart attack [...]. My older brother [and I] went out to [find] [as manual workers]" (P3_R4)

"My father was probably... He believed probably that if you had a roof over your back and a belly full of food that would be the best for you. He was

probably not a person who would either spend time or show his emotional side to you. He tended to... To be well thought of in the public eye, and in the Rotary, and as a manager and an elder of the church, and [...] committing good to the society. But he didn't practice this at home because he probably gave too much of himself away and he thought probably if he clothed us and fed us it would be good for us. I'd dare say now that he was probably proud of the things I have done." (P3_R4)

P3 made himself, surpassing the economic difficulties experienced in his family of origin:

"My first job was as [manual worker]. And it was the actual... [my boss] who said to me: "You should do more with your life [...]. [I] went to [graduate] school through the back door [BREAK IN THE RECORDING] and... Going from [manual worker] to director, the rest is all history" (P3_R1)

Hem... To a degree, I always carried this... This baggage, hem, my perception of myself as somebody who came from a poor background, with a Rupsy Nisbett accent. Rupsy Nisbett is one of the Scottish caricatures, who is far from politically correct [chuckles]

I cannot draw an unambiguous conclusion around the possible role of P3's personal context in his experience of change. While his life seems blessed in many ways, I do wonder in what ways P3 might be affected within himself by a disconnect in his relationship with his wife which does not seem to have been bridged yet. Also, I wonder whether P3's early experience of adversity has been reinforcing in him the need to cultivate and assert a strong image—something that he might perceive is at cross purposes with the type of vulnerability involved in deeper introspection.

Outlook

Outlook on PTFL. A significant theme in interviews with P3's is his tendency to be more at ease when the focus of our conversations is turned to external rather than the internal reality. This was first evident when, just before PTFL, I asked P3 what he wished to work on at the course. On one hand, P3 seemed genuinely interested in progressing his self-understanding:

"I think it's going to be a journey of self-exploration. Hem, to make you very aware of how... You are going to react with others." (P3_R1)

On the other hand, when I asked him to think about what specifically he would like to address, P3's description tended to zoom out to a more high level and generic view:

"Linda: Why did you come back to Cranfield for this course?"

P3: Extension. Probably developing emotional intelligence... Understand the concept of networking. [...]"(P3_R1)

"I've probably taken the leadership think as far as I can [...]. It's time to probably move laterally." (P3_R1)

Or else, the description tended to shift to external issues:

"Linda: Why PTFL in particular?"

P3: The financial downturn. It is going to be a lot of change management, a lot of difficulty handling people. [...] already we are doing plans for 5, 10, 15% cutbacks." (P3_R1)

This response from P3 contrasts with my experience of other participants who tended to put their finger on and describe a very specific challenge that they experienced, whether it was connected to a particular external circumstance or not. As the interview went on, I was struggling to get much under the surface of broad or externally-focused explanations.

Outlook on change. Because I was interested in P3's outlook on change, and not just on PTFL, I tried to sidestep this issue by inquiring about past courses:

"Linda: And can I ask you, because you said you attended courses at Praxis before—what sort of things did you get out of it, in the past?"

P3: [...] Basically, they gave you a way to assess what sort of person you are dealing with. Five... The Centaur model, five different types [of people] and how to deal with them. [...]" (P3_R1)

Also in this comment I read a shift of focus to the external--in this case to other people. While it is true that the teaching of the particular course P3 is referring to is based on a model which broadly categorizes physiognomies and personalities into five types²⁸⁵—

²⁸⁵ The Centaur model was developed by psychologist Sandy Kotter (a co-founder and co-director of the Praxis Centre at Cranfield). The model relates experiences in formative years (0-6) to enduring patterns

the notion that the model would primarily help “*assess what sort of person you are dealing with*” and guide in “*how to deal with them*” is just one possible interpretation of the model’s application. As an interpretation, it makes an interesting contrast with a different one that I have heard from others who are also familiar with the Centaur model. Others observed that the model is first useful as a tool to learn about and accept yourself and your history; and then as a tool to see that others are different and are likely to have a history to sympathize with as well. Later, I made one further attempt to get under the surface:

“Linda: Did you... Would you say it helped you learn something about yourself also, going through [that course]?”

P3: Yes.

Linda: What types of things?”

P3: Hem, probably there’s a few ghosts I’ve put to rest.” (P3_R1)

At this point P3 referred to his early life experience. On the personal level, then, P3 had experienced personal change in terms of coming to terms with his past. In contrast, on a professional level, he had experienced change as gaining awareness of his style and implementing alternative and better ways:

“You find out things about yourself you didn’t know, probably the Johari window. And suggestions are given to you, and you take them up. And also... the things you’re supposed to change, which you take back to the organization. And, it might not be in a practical way. It may be the way you coach, counsel or mentor your staff. Do it differently, and more importantly, have a greater understanding of their needs you haven’t perhaps seen before.” (P3_R1)

To summarize, P3’s outlook on change is characterized by a relative ease with discussing external realities, but also by a relative difficulty with discussing inner realities. His outlook on change seems also framed by a preference for a separation between the professional and personal sphere.

of personality and body structure visible in adult age. These patterns manifest themselves as “character styles” (Johnson, in Kotter, 1998) in psychologically highly functional individuals. The patterns described embody deep-seated habits of thinking that have visible impact in a person’s behavior. Kotter’s model integrates Lowen’s psychological theory of bioenergetics, as well as Klein’s work on object-relations theory (Kotter, 1998).

In terms of P3's outlook on PTFL, here is a comment that he volunteered at the close of the first interview:

"For history recording, rather than... my anticipation and expectations, really: I'll keep an open mind about [the course]. And... See how it goes." (P3_R1)

However, it later turned out, P3 experienced a strong clash with the program. This was expressed also through a harsh criticism of people who, on the course, explored more personal issues:

"P3: [The course's] therapy is for fucked up fuckers.

Linda: Oh, okay. So, like... for very extreme cases, is that what you mean?

P3: Yeah, there was one or two basket cases there.

Linda: Okay, so...

P3: People whose whole life has been crap, generally due to some mental issues they didn't deal with" (P3_R2)

"Basically people... Whose bottom line is being unloved and abandoned" (P3_R3)

P3 was less than enthusiastic also about the fact that the program had an element of psychotherapy:

"P3: [The program] was quite similar... To group therapy.

Linda: Okay. Was it really what it says, about personal transformation?

Respondent: No. If you go to the website you will find that it was probably misrepresented.

Linda: What was it about then?

Respondent: It was, probably, there was... it was basically transforming people's characters [...] to open them up to change management, change management. [...]. Therapy... is treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder, treatment or healing of psychological disorders by psychological means. It comes from Latin therapia, or greek, meaning healing, therapia means you start treating medically, there you go. Therapia." (P3_R2)

As seen earlier, it is not that P3 would deny the existence of personal issues in his own life as well. Rather, P3 described his own approach to dealing with personal issues and life's blows as contrasting with that of others on the program:

"You know, it's... in terms of reflectiveness, most of the things that I have in my life, which were goners... most of those things have been chased away"(P3_R2)

"Things like that... that belong mostly to the past have been chased away. So I am fairly comfortable with where I come from." (P3_R2)

In response to this distinction, I proposed that perhaps at the course P3 had witnessed precisely that: people working on chasing away things that they had not chased away before. Perhaps, I suggested, he was somewhat ahead on a curve of chasing things away. P3 did not quite endorse that:

"Yeah.... Well, to a certain degree."(P3_R2)

Just a moment later, he described his approach to dealing with the harsher blows of life. As an example, he brought a recent cycling accident in which he had lost an arm:

"Okay, I have a funny mindset. If something happened, it happened. And you just deal with it. Say for example when I lost the arm. The normal process would be to have denial, to have anger, to have depression, and then acceptance. But when it happened, I was just "Okay, it happened." How am I going to look at it? Cut the four stages and come to the same end point [acceptance]" (P3_R2)

It sounded then as if for P3 there was something unnecessary and possibly overly self-indulgent in allowing oneself to transition through phases of denial, anger and depression before getting to the end point of acceptance. In describing his approach to dealing with difficult blows, P3 compared himself to Terminator:

"Almost like Terminator, [...] perhaps by magic effect, Terminator puts all the pieces together and he comes back better and stronger than he was before. [...] He is born again." (P3_R2)

P3's self-image of strength seems tinted with stoicism and invincibility. This image seemed to rely on a firm separation which he operates between the professional and the personal spheres. In fact, the main criticism of P3 toward PFTL's emphasis on personal development is:

*“You cannot be a personal leader. Those two things don’t go together”
(P3_R2)*

This view separating the personal and the professional was emphasized again as P3 articulated his thoughts further:

“If they took the personal problems away from the professional problems [...] if you split the personal from the professional, and put the professional in front, [the course] probably would be a bit more leadership oriented” (P3_R2)

P3 also contrasted PTFL to other management programs that he had attended, and found more appropriate, which rather tend to deliver management tools, techniques and frameworks. It is interesting to observe that while PTFL attempts to be a safe context for self-exploration, it certainly did not achieve this effect with P3:

“After the week... Hem... Probably I feel, hem... I wouldn’t say pissed off is the word, but certainly... a bit more reflective” (P3_R2)

In admitting his discomfort, P3 sounded conflicted: the use of *“pissed off”* as a substitute expression for *“reflective”* underscores the paradoxical quality of some of P3’s comments. As already mentioned, a first reason why P3 felt *“pissed off”* was that the course’s emphasis on personal development. Even as a personal development initiative, the seven-day group format was found to be essentially inappropriate:

“And in terms of learning in seven days, and probably in terms of coaching you would perhaps do a better a job... in less than a day. Establish what you need and work on the scales--rather than 2.5 days, a day of learning, and go away and apply, and come back for half a day of coaching. But seven days... for benefits... questionable. And if you remember, when I left at the end of Module 1 I was approaching disillusioned (P3_R3)

P3’s outlook on the program itself was initially open-minded, but seemed to become more closed as he experienced a clash with the program—especially, with the emphasis on the personal and the presence of elements of therapy.

Interview interaction

Interaction with me. Conversations with P3 were varied and colorful, certainly far from monotone. There were also a number of difficulties with communication, starting

with an unlucky series of bad connections in occasion of our three phone interviews. Also, at times I failed to grasp some of P3's language in real time, due not just to a difficult line but also to his regional accent, marked enough to really challenge my non-native ear. As discussed earlier, bringing the focus of our conversation on what was going on within P3, rather than around him, was also often difficult to achieve. Despite these difficulties, I believe that P3 and I found a modus of communicating that seemed to be working well enough for both and the interview data resulted in a very rich contribution to the research. I believe that is also thanks to the fact that interviews and analysis were really an emotional journey. In interviews, P3's choice of strong language would at times shock the conversation into a new and telling direction. At other times, a new paradox would frustrate me and pushing me to think harder. In some occasions, caring questions by P3 about the unfolding of my research or my future career aspirations would reenergize my effort. In the analysis, I was most struck in noticing in the transcript that I would often say something to praise or affirm P3: typically, in response to a comment by P3 asserting his abilities or accomplishment. It is interesting to me that I accommodated P3 during the interviews in this way, making it more plausible that it is very salient to P3's pattern of speech to uphold a high image of him. Lastly, work with P3's transcripts has been teaching me more than any other to observe my emotional states: in lack at times of a fully articulated logic, I would inquire with myself about the reason of my emotional response and derive some hunch which I would then return to the data to investigate. Tuning in emotionally was for me really the channel that made an analysis of this story possible.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. The following passage condenses the reasons which, according to P3, were originally driving him to attend PTFL:

"Extension. Probably developing emotional intelligence... Understand the concept of networking, and probably.... As well, I've probably taken the leadership thing as far as I can [...]. The financial downturn, it's going to be a lot of change management, a lot of difficulty handling people. [...]already we are doing plans for five, the, fifteen per cent cutbacks" (P3_R1)

Later in interview one P3 shared a more personal view:

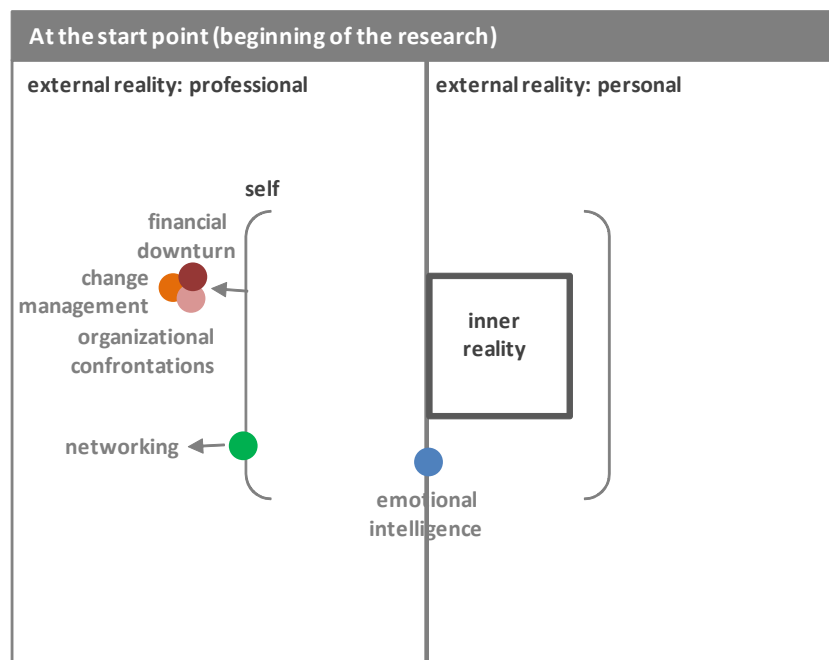
"Probably I need to be a lot more self-aware." (P3_R1)

"I always question myself. I don't really know... Why I handle something one way, why I explode at something. And, hem, there's always more unknowns.

*It's a quest for knowledge, there's always more questions than answers.
(P3_R1)*

These answers do not quite disclose whether there was something more specific in P3's mind. In retrospect, this would make sense in light of the hypothesis that P3's relationship with self-awareness was at this stage the very crux of his personal development challenges. At the time of interview one, however, I simply noted the external challenges mentioned by P3 and resolved to wait until after PFTL for further light to be shed.

Figure 38. P3's sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

A mid-point: just after PFTL. To my surprise, interview two began with an admission with the tone of an apology:

*“Hem, before we start.... Probably I wasn't totally honest last time insomuch that...when I left [the program] I had quite a lot of things to take on board”
(P3_R2)*

On the program, P3 had received controversial feedback on his dressing style as well as on his manner of speech and his way of interacting with the rest of the group. With regard to the dressing style:

"I got a bit of a lashing for the dressing, my flamboyant... dressings" (P3_R2)

About his manner of speech, some participants had pointed out that his choice of words at times makes his speech difficult to understand:

"There one or two people objected to my... language. [They said] 'esoteric', that I was using obscure words." (P3_R2)

There was also something about his marked regional accent which, I have to admit, was also for me impenetrable at times:

"[The tutors] had difficulty understanding what I said." (P3_R2)

P3 firmly rejected these points of feedback. About his dressing style, he commented:

"I wouldn't say this is feedback for me. Feedback is not what people think about my dressings, or what I think of their dressings. This is my dressing, it's a combination of shirts, ties and socks. Try say to them that... Their dressing is non-existent, insomuch... bland colors, bland styles." (P3_R2)

And, talking about the critique to the language he uses:

"[If I walked around] with a dictionary, which is probably about six or seven inches thick, in two volumes... Then, there is no jargon, there is only English language. And to me that appears to be ignorance, to ... [fail to have a] grasp of the language" (P3_R2)

Finally, about his accent:

"Most of the people, once they tune in, and if I talk slowly... It's not a problem. (P3_R2)

There is one point of feedback, however, that P3 found fair: people had pointed out to him that he had a habit of interrupting others and interjecting in their speech, as if he were striving to entertain an audience through a running commentary of what was being said.

*“Probably I have been interrupting and interjecting for the last twenty years”
(P3_R2)*

I asked questions around why he thinks that he interrupts and interjects. He said he finds at times that people,

“Are either too slow, or moving laterally... I don’t get their point. Often an idea is not good enough.” (P3_R2)

In these situations, impatience (or “*enthusiasm*”, P3_R2, as he called it at times) drives him to jump in and seek a faster resolution of the matter that is being discussed. P3 realizes that there is a better alternative:

“Let [people] finish their sentence. [...] then ask them questions and then wait until they answer. [...] You are supposed to give them a measured response, [one] that you have thought through”.(P3_R2)

P3 said he had started practicing not interrupting, which he also demonstrated with me during our interview. Although open to working on the habit of interrupting, had been feeling conflicted since coming off course a few days earlier:

“Probably I left with hem... confidence dented rather than... I’m probably more aware to other people, but as a leader... I think I’ve gone... probably in retro.” (P3_R2)

This self-confidence gap is something he tried to reconcile during the interview—partially by affirming his abilities and achievements in other contexts:

I’ve taken a risk, and then... Usually, what I do is... I’m quite brave at... I will see the way things are, come up with good ideas, good suggestions, and hem... you’ll see from my objectives [BREAK IN THE RECORDING] ...I, you know, if something is a hard task to do... I complete it.” (P3_R2)

“I get things... I get things done. Whether or not I am corky, and whether or not people don’t believe me. I know what things to do to get results. (P3_R3)

It came across as really important to P3 to specify that the hit in self-confidence was only temporary and that his core self-esteem was unaffected:

“There’s two parts here. One is self-esteem, which is what you have done over the years, your qualifications, your experience. That is a combination of

knowledge and experience, all these things. Then there's self-confidence, which is the top part of the tree. Hem ... The head has got... has come along for a good haircut and quite some confidence may have been temporarily reduced. But, because your self-esteem is there and is very strong, the top bit grows back... eventually, but stronger than before.” (P3_R2)

P3 also questioned whether the 'haircut' he received had been a good one:

“Linda: So that's the plan? To grow stronger than before?”

Respondent: Hem... Maybe, but that is if it were a good haircut. But you know what I'm saying, that the difference between good surgeries and bad surgeries, and good and bad haircuts, is three weeks. Which means, you know, a bad surgery takes three weeks longer to heal. A bad haircut takes three weeks longer to heal.”(P3_R2)

It seemed important for P3 to distance himself somewhat from these attacks on his credibility:

“... You know, in general terms, I'm in the top 1% of income. In terms of professional excellence, [...] I'm the director of one of Scotland's biggest companies, and yet these guys don't see enough credibility!” (P3_R3)

There is a stark contrast with the other participants in the sample, who reported having done hard work on themselves, but also feeling better and stronger for it—rather than dented in their confidence. Incidentally, P3 saw himself as someone who put in hard work on the course in the context of a group comprising, in his typically polarized view, a few pathological cases and a few by-standers. There is, of course, the possibility that P3 did not get as 'good' a 'haircut' on the course as others did. Indeed, there are some indications of a less than optimal chemistry between P3 and the course tutors. However, my attention is drawn to my own difficulties in initiating an introspective conversation with P3. Here is an entertaining example:

“Linda: Are you comfortable with this type of interview?”

P3: Yeah.

Linda: ...That has these very open questions, and...

P3: I'll answer anything. Hopefully you wouldn't get a Bill Clinton hand-face gesture... fiddling [chuckles]. That answers that.” (P3_R1)

My hunch is that the feedback P3 received was offered for its literal meaning. Rather, it might have been given with an end in mind: perhaps the tutors and group were trying to catalyze a process of introspection. After all, P3 himself said he worked hard on self-awareness during the week. In the case of P3, however, the PTFL context did not seem sufficient to fully support this experimentation.

An ending point: at the end of the research.

By the end of the research, P3's experience with PTFL had mostly settled. In part, this had gone through positively dismissing the part of the feedback that he had never quite accepted in the first place:

"[There were] A lot of things to take on board. And then for a while I dressed very demurely, back to grays and blacks all the time. But then I thought 'Hell, I am me—and I am going back to being colorful'. Not outrageously so, just really smart ties and things. [...] probably cost me about 75 pounds at Harvey Nichols. I'll dress with style, rather than being gray and bland!" (P3_R4)

One clear outcome of this story, however, is that P3 had succeeded at interrupting and interjecting less. He found that had positive ramifications in his personal life, including making him a better listener. P3 summed up his experience with PTFL as:

"From that course, probably listening and being more aware is what I take out of it" (P3_R4)

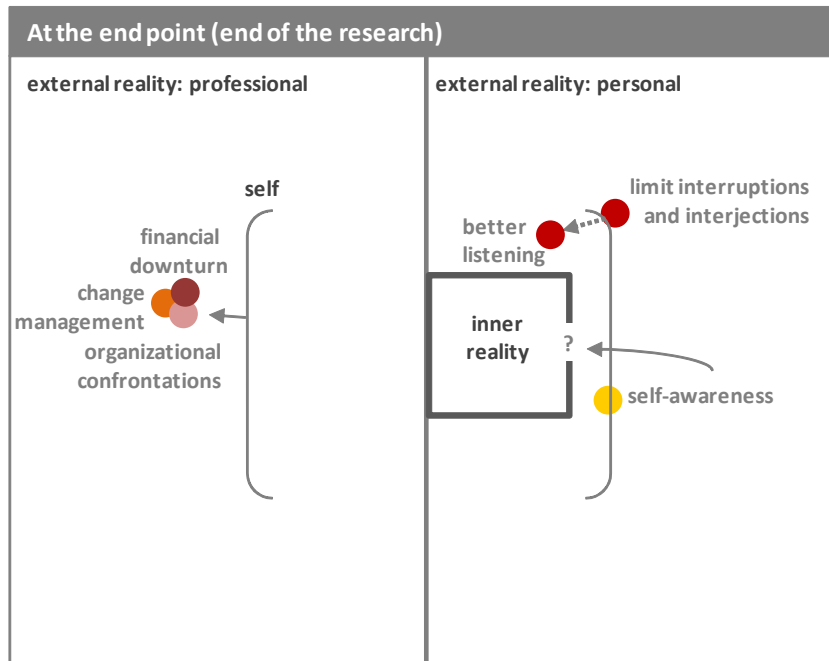
To the question of whether he felt he had grown as a person, P3 responded:

"I have. Probably a period of reflection. I think between number one and two I was pretty pissed off, and almost considering not going back.[...] And it's not that I didn't like it so much... it's a personal thing for a jumped-up Jock²⁸⁶ [chuckles]!" (P3_R4)

This last remark might be telling: to the side of a self-deprecating comedy line, there is also a half-veiled hint that introspection to the degree encouraged by PTFL (and perhaps also by my interviews) is something P3 is not a stranger too, but that he is more comfortable in carrying out privately. Whether this is true is a question bound to remain open.

²⁸⁶ Jock is an informal, often offensive, form of address indicating a Scotsman, according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

Figure 39. P3's sensemaking at the end of the research



Compiled by the author.

Implications for leadership practice

P3 never brought up issues with his team and always seemed at ease with his managerial style:

“My good friends, the ones who know me really well, know I’m very kind, very sensitive guy, very sociable” (P3_R2)

“[At work] I tend to be very touchy-feely. People can wander in to see me. There’s coffee machines, I’ve got fridges with Coca-Cola in” (P3_R1)

In contrast, he did refer to situations of confrontations with some of his superiors or with external stakeholders and to his hope that there would be a more constructive way of doing business:

“You know, it’s been a lot of political games the last five years. And, I usually win. There might be 16 of them and one of me, but I usually... I gun them facts and figures. But it’s always hard going. It’d be so nice to live in harmony as I do with [others]” (P3_R1)

Immediately after the PTFL week, P3 seemed to see a work-related application of his realization around interrupting and interjecting:

“Probably. At some meetings, I am very abrupt, I interrupt people. I interject when I shouldn’t. [...] I can’t be bothered to take half an hour to have a debate, because there’s a lot to do. So just telling people what the solution is, then they can get on with it” (P3_R2)

“And particularly [...] with the directors... It pisses them off that I am constantly interjecting and interrupting” (P3_R2)

By interview four, however, this had been partially renegotiated:

“Particularly in my personal relationships, I listen to my friends instead of cutting them off or changing the conversations” (P3_R3)

“I probably listen more. I probably have developed greater sensitivity to other people’s needs, what they are thinking, reading their body language.” (P3_R4)

It’s worked particularly well on the personal circumstances, but in terms of corporate life it has not been as useful.” (P3_R3)

“Professionally, with your own people, that’s very applicable. But when you are on head to head with [people on] boards [...] and you squabble [...]... And when I am in certain meetings, I probably actually need to be more aggressive and more cut and thrust, to get what I want, rather than the softer option. So the course worked quite well for personal relationships and relationships with the team, but not for corporate life I am afraid.” (P3_R3)

As noted earlier, P3’s work context seems one requiring high level of alertness and assertiveness and the fact that P3 would differentiate how he behaves with his team from how he engages with organizational confrontation seems just sensible. For me, it is rather interesting to underscore that the separation between the personal and the professional is once again evident in P3’s sensemaking. Also, to tease out a paradox: at an earlier stage, P3 seemed to resent that PTFL had taken a personal focus, to which he would have preferred an emphasis on leadership training and the professional sphere. Yet, at the conclusion of the research, P3 is finding that it is in the area of his personal relationships that the experience with PTFL has engendered beneficial change.

8.10.4 Participant 4, Male

Context

Work context. P4 is the most senior manager below director level in his organization. He has management responsibilities across three offices and, in his home office, heads two different teams. He also oversees five different budgets across the organization. P4, who has learned his way up in the organization and is recognized as knowledgeable and hardworking, is on the track to directorship. Currently, P4 is effectively performing a bridging role between the three existing managing directors and the operations of the business. This is not unproblematic and sometime means being “*pushed as the bad guy*” (P4_R1). Generally, however, P4 seems pleased with the organization as well as with his role and career progression. In terms of training, the business had been sponsoring initiatives in the past and was supporting P4 in going to Cranfield for attending PTFL.

Personal context. P4 has a young family and described himself as a happy guy:

“My personal life--Yes, I am [AGE] years of age, I am married [and] have two small children [...]. I am, obviously, a full-time father at the minute and husband. Very busy with a small family. I enjoy taking time off with my family, playing golf, take some sports, I am quite a happy guy.” (P4_R1)

Both work and personal environments seem, in P4’s case, generally positive and supportive.

Outlook

Outlook on change. In terms of P4’s outlook on change, there is a significant difference in his comments between first and the second interviews. A theme around change emerging from the first interview is about its existence and has a binary character: on one hand, P4 seemed to conceive of change in terms of progression that is visible externally; on the other, he did not mention change in terms of inner progression. An example of change as exterior progression as identified by P4 is the career advancement and expertise that resulted for him from taking up a challenging career opportunity:

“I’ve grown with the business, you know, from many years ago to where I am now, so I have done quite well in that period” (P4_R1)

“Now actually within the business, I am pretty much rounded to all the markets, so whenever anybody in the business is talking to me [...], whichever market they are talking about, although I'm not an expert, I still have an understanding, and would be able to give advice, would be able to advise, would be able to kind of have an understanding.” (P4_R1)

“It's actually pushing yourself to take that... Quite a big leap. A new market, and take on a new team, grow that team. Really, to kind of take a lead. And now, when I look back, previously I would've said "no, never". No way, never I would a) be able to do it, or b) would want to do it, but now sitting back and looking at it I am thankful that I have.” (P4_R1)

Leadership progression is explained by P4, once again, in terms of external circumstances—of a “game of chance”:

“Linda: [leadership development] indicates change, or growth... But, what changes?”

P4: yeah, I would say change for the better I hope. I think sometimes the management, whatever, leadership, whatever you want to call that... I think pretty much it is a game of chance” (P4_R1)

An additional explanation of leadership progression was volunteered that revolved around perceptions:

“P4: It's very much down to how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you, and I think that if you can strike a balance between the two of those...”

Linda: You mean if they coincide? What do you mean by striking a balance?”

P4: well, yeah but... I think... Whatever role you are going to be doing within management, you're not always going to be the nice guy. You know, I think that's an important side of things, it's always going... It's an easy job when everything is going well, everybody's happy, everybody's making target, everybody's making bonus... It's a really nice, rosy street. But, you know, it's when things are not going that well, and... Within the business you maybe have to make somebody redundant, or you maybe have to say "actually, you're not performing. It's Friday morning: I'll pay you up till the end of the day". So, it's a tough job” (P4_R1)

P4 talks about the importance of striking a balance around perceptions. Initially, I had interpreted this notion as the efforts involved in reducing a gap between self-

perception and perception by others. In contrast, P4 seemed to interpret that as having to balance the frequency with which an outer image of 'nice guy' rather than of 'bad guy' is projected depending on different circumstances. A further explanation of leadership development referred to learning from external examples: that is, to taking up habits (good and bad) from other leaders:

"Maybe a current person that you aspire to, which is not always the right way, but what you tend to do is pick up maybe their good habits, but probably a lot of their bad habits as well, and you take that as a written rule and that tends to what happens throughout the business you're working at"
(P4_R1)

At this point, I suspected that P4 would not contemplate that changes within himself could have a role at all in career and leadership progression. I asked P4 to think retrospectively and to try and define what had changed in his approach to management throughout the years. Interestingly, he did respond that nothing had changed:

"Linda: and, as far as you changing, if you think you changed, what was about? You think your acquired more knowledge, skills, experience, whatever? Do you think it's been more about uncovering who you are, and how you do....?"

P4: I do things in the same way, I suppose." (P4_R1)

In stark contrast with interview one, in interview two P4 tended to answer questions more readily by providing an insight into himself. He expressed a novel view on the personal change that he was now experiencing:

"I think you need to have the ability to take on board what people are saying to you. And, to listen to what is being said. A lot of what was said actually was self-realization" (P4_R1)

"Then it's tying yourself to actually do something about it. Instead of just sit there for a week and say "yes, yes, yes", and listen to everybody else's story, and then go home and not do anything. [...] it is more what you do after the week that is the important bit" (P4_R1)

This comment, which in addition to showing a novel understanding also seems injected with conviction, exemplifies this shift of focus from external factors onto the 'I'.

Outlook on PTFL. A clear theme in P4's initial interview is the instrumental value that the PTFL training was going to have for him in the work context:

"I am really at a moment where I am looking to develop within the business. [...] The plan moving forward is for me to become a [...] director of the business" (P4_R1)

"And, really this is kind of a stepping stone to achieving that. As with some other objectives and so on, set out within this year" (P4_R1)

Despite this instrumental focus, P4 said that he was approaching the experience with an open mind:

"I am one of the kind of people that will come with an open mind. I am quite open, I am not here with one goal to achieve or anything like that. [...] I think if you were looking at it like that, you would probably come away white dissatisfied or disheartened from what you were looking for"

"I am here with an open mind to walk in tomorrow and go with it. [...] We'll see how it goes." (P4_R1)

However, I remember thinking at the close of interview one, that P4's inner domain felt like a 'no go' territory'. I did wonder how that would play out in the context like PTFL where a great deal of introspection is encouraged.

Interview interaction

Interaction with me. From interview one, I got the impression that P4 and I probably had very different ideas concerning what was relevant to discuss. On one hand, P4 seemed at ease with discussing the business. For example, we talked about the dynamics leading to his upcoming promotion to director, the communication lines within the business, and the value of the business model of recruitment. On the other hand, I was trying to get behind these topics and closer to a view of P4's thoughts around himself. However, P4 seemed to react somewhat defensively at times to this type of questions:

"Linda: do you have an idea of what type leader would like to be?"

P4: Oh, hem... dictatorial and hard [chuckles]. No, I think I am quite a fair guy. I have worked myself within my organization. I am knowledgeable, I am approachable... I am passionate about what I do, and I think that's maybe one

of my kind of... You know, we'll work out through the weaknesses I'm sure as we go through the questions" (P4_R1)

"Linda: and, I was not going to ask you about weaknesses. But, since you mentioned it [chuckles], do you have something in mind in particular?"

P4: Weaknesses. I like to call them challenges.

Linda: Okay.

Respondent: Weaknesses, we have all got weaknesses. I think – yeah, maybe... Maybe sometimes [quote continues...]" (P4_R1)

"Linda: [...] Do you have any personal opinion is on what leadership development is about?"

Respondent: ...I mean, that's quite a big question!

Linda: Yeah it is a big question, I am aware... I am painfully aware of that, after two years of working on that!" (P4_R1)

The dynamic presented above is representative of a general sense of uneasiness that I felt on the interviews; having felt uneasy myself, I imagine that the interviews were also not a greatly comfortable experience for P4.

Always in interview one, another pattern was that P4 tended to offer descriptions and explanations emphasizing external more often than internal factors. When asked about reasons to attend the course, P4 first talked about his boss selecting it:

"P4: [the course] is as recommended by my director.

Linda: and, do you know why exactly this course?"

P4: we had a look... Well, I had a look at a couple of courses. My boss had a look at a couple of courses. We have previously--well, the company has previously sent people to Henley. And, we looked at a course there. Although we thought it may be suitable, we then looked at further [opportunities] within Cranfield. And this course seemed to kind of meet each of the criteria that they were looking at, and also that I was looking at as well. " (P4_R1)

When I inquired about what criteria were behind his boss' choice, P4 initially discussed the managerial issue of having to effectively communicate in different directions:

"Linda: what where these criteria?"

Respondent: really, I suppose I am moving in kind of that next stage in my career and currently although I am managing down, or managing a team, I am also having to manage up as well, [...] to other directors." (P4_R1)

Later, however, P4 supplied a hint that his boss might have had something more specific in mind:

"Really I suppose it's just raising my awareness of how I am portrayed and how I come across within the business [...] I think just a bit of self-realization, maybe just a little bit of a kind of... At the work place, trying to... Maybe get [an idea] in my head about how I come across, how I am perceived, and from there maybe make more of the picture of who I am in the workplace, and how I come across in the workplace" (P4_R1)

All throughout interview one, it was rather difficult for me to try and bring the focus of the conversation on P4 as opposed to external factors. Perhaps, this was not totally unrelated to P4's boss rationale for recommending a course clearly focused on introspection. Incidentally, this is reminiscent of what the boss of another participant (P2, presented earlier) had indicated as a reason for recommending PTFL.

Perhaps, P4 was more reserved as a person compared to other participants. However, as will be seen in the upcoming section on outlook on change, P4 became much more likely to talk about himself and his own role in pursuing change during interview two.

Outlook on the research. No information available.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. As anticipated, in identifying reasons for attending PTFL, P4 emphasized external challenges. It was with some insistence on my part that in the interview we came to identify possibly a personal implication of these issues. Notwithstanding the fact that P4 was generally very positive about his work context, when I asked him to identify a rationale for attending PTFL, he tended to identify workplace issues. A first challenge that he identified is around colleagues who might not be as passionate about the business as he is:

"P4: maybe I find difficulty in finding people that maybe are as passionate as

myself. And that's maybe another one thing that I will learn from this course is working alongside people that are maybe not giving as much as I do, and how to do that...

Linda: not as driven?

Respondent: Less driven... Maybe it is driven. I don't know, maybe they're... Their ideals, maybe what they are looking for their life is different from where I stand, you know. I've grown with the business, you know, from many years ago to where I am now, so I have done quite well in that period than they... And I kind of look around, the good people, and think... "Oh, maybe they're not looking for the thing I'm looking for. It can be frustrating sometimes" (P4_R1)

In a similar vein, a challenge for P4 was to find and train his replacement in view of his upcoming promotion to director:

"And I think also, if you're relying on other people – that's another part of my objectives, is to become a director. I need somebody to come and sit where I sit in your organization now, and that's one of my objectives: to take a couple of people that I am managing up to where I am, at my level. And that, at the moment, proving quite difficult" (P4_R1)

A further challenge was that of influencing his colleagues. Especially, effectively communicating sideways those decisions coming from higher up:

"Maybe [at times] the M.D. and the directors feed me what to say and what to do. And to some extent they do, and actually what they're saying is right, but it's how to get that across to other managers without being for them... The fore guy position, where it's not really me saying that, it's them saying it, it's my boss saying it. "If we have any problems, we'll revert to them instead than to him in any case, so....."(P4_R1)

"It's quite a difficult position to be in, because obviously you have the three owners of business. They are the decision-makers, the Board of Directors, and I am, I suppose, in that middle ground. But I would hope that what does come across is that I am experienced, I have been profitable within the company, and that puts you in a good step we're trying to influence others. It's... You've actually been successful, you know how to do it, you have proved that you can do it. So, that goes to a long way: but it's also maybe taking that to a step further" (P4_R1)

P4 was also finding it difficult to challenge the (sometimes set) views of the directors:

"[I would like the course] to assist me with the kind of managing up within my organization" (P4_R1)

"The other three directors are more senior than me, and have been within the business for the last 25 years [...]. [They] are quite, some respect, "Been there, done that, bought the T-shirt" kind of mentality. And if something gets proposed it's usually, "Oh, we have already tried that, doesn't work" kind of mentality. So it's how maybe overcome that kind of attitude" (P4_R1)

Also, he wished that the directors would challenge him more:

"In some respects, would I want a better boss, who would kind of kick me on the backside every so often, and maybe push me a little bit more? Probably. Yeah." (P4_R1)

Finally, the other Senior Manager had recently left. For P4, this implied more work but also, in many situations, standing out as the 'bad guy' even more:

"My equal left the business three months ago, so we had two senior managers and... I have now then probably taken on more pressure, you know, because of where the balance was between the team of managers and myself. The other senior manager who would hold a lot of management one – to – ones, and chair the managers' meetings and doing everything else. And so now it is with me – [...] I am now maybe left with that kind of "Okay so it is now all your decision". And you are having to drive this forward and there is no real indication of a second person being there, so I have a little bit of pressure" (P4_R1)

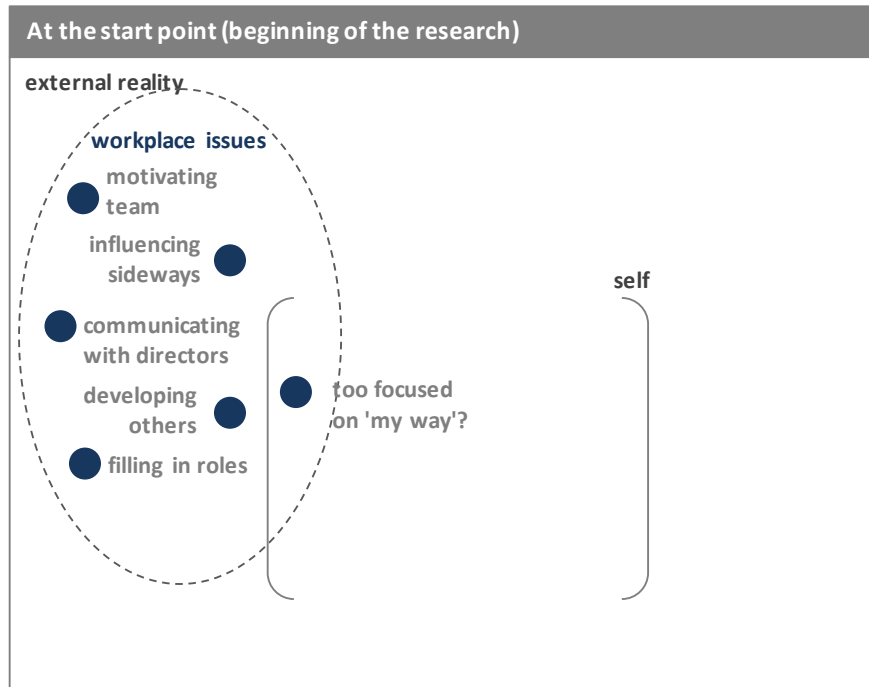
Mostly, P4 had discussed external challenges. When I inquired further around what, within P4, could be current challenge, he indicated that perhaps his style was at times too prescriptive:

"Although I like to be approachable and so on, sometimes I can be quite... Maybe too involved in me knowing what's right and what's to do, rather than maybe looking at other people's abilities and maybe mindsets to think... "That is not actually what I..."...Maybe it's different from the way I think it should be done, that may be different. You know, somebody else may have another idea, [but...] "I know it, that's right. So listen to me". That is probably one of those things, but I don't know." (P4_R1)

In addition, he indicated that he was generally looking forward to receiving feedback and better understanding how others might perceive him in the workplace:

“It's quite intriguing, to get... I would imagine that other people on the course are going to give feedback on how I come across, on how I... On how I deliver myself. That feedback would be worth taking note of” (P4_R1)

Figure 40. P4’s sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

The one link between greater self-awareness and leadership development that P4 discussed explicitly has an interesting flavor:

“Maybe seeing, maybe seeing how I could maybe develop myself to kind of get more out of the people I am working with and the people I am managing” (P4_R1)

The interest in getting more out of people recalls a managerial view emphasizing yield rather than people. In addition to what was observed earlier around the prospective value of PTFL as a “stepping stone” (P4_R1) to promotion, this comment perhaps provides a further point around a view colored by a degree of instrumentality.

A mid-point: just after PTFL. The course turned out to be an intense experience for P4:

“Very good. Very... Not what I expected, but really I didn't have any huge plans going into the course, any real kind of expectations. But yes, it was a very good course. Certainly very demanding. A bit tiring, but certainly interesting. I took a lot from it. [...] No, I think it was a very good group of people. Obviously, very mixed backgrounds, and positions, and so on. No, I think it was a great week. It was well delivered from [the tutors], it was fantastic.” (P4_R2)

“Certainly an interesting experience. Which I think you feel difference afterwards” (P4_R2)

For P4, the biggest change occurred during PFTL was an increase in self-awareness. Explaining self-awareness is generally not an easy thing to do and it is also something that very much concerns the ‘I’. Yet this time P4 really tried to explain himself:

“I'm trying to be... To use my awareness a lot more, my self-awareness, and, you know, and... [...] trying to use my thought process more. Yeah, it's difficult to describe, to be honest. I certainly feel different” (P4_R1)

“I certainly am conscious that my approach to certain situations and certain decisions I'm making on the work aspect differently” (P4_R1)

“I am definitely aware that I can approach things for deal with things slightly differently from how I would have previously to going on the course.

“Maybe [I] wisened a little” (P4_R2)

There are three major areas around which P4 had gained more awareness: the need to listen more and reflect more in his interactions at work, and the need to integrate his personal and professional personas. To begin with, listening:

“[I] Try to listen a lot more in my working week” (P4_R2)

Listening is relevant because it would allow P4 to acquire more information and a fuller picture. Also, listening allows ideas to flow:

“And really listening to all--is there a story-- or listening to all the details, not maybe taking on the aspects of the decision or the process. [It is] worth taking the other side or the consequences into account” (P4_R2)

“I am being quite closed as a leader, and quite closed as a manager, and trying to probably be more defensive, when actually I should have been more open and getting the ability to lead rather than manage” (P4_R2)

P4 was also encouraged to be more reflective when considering work-related issues:

“And maybe, just having that slight you different outlook on things, and just that different thought process to previously. Giving things a little bit more time. And actually thinking about it before diving in with both feet” (P4_R2)

Reflecting is relevant because it would allow P4 to make better informed decisions:

“I am infinitely more conscious of that when approaching a big decisions--more of a thought process on who it affects, and what would be their thoughts be instead of “well, that’s just what needs to be done, and just do it”” (P4_R2)

“In the last kind of few days back, because I’ve been here since Monday... Where situations have arisen, I certainly stepped back a little bit more, and thought about consequences, and, you know, what the best kind of action would be. So I am certainly more aware from that respect” (P4_R2)

On the course, P4 had also received positive feedback. It must have been encouraging for him to hear that he appeared to be a fundamentally thoughtful, considerate, funny, and warm person. It looks like that came across easily in personal life, for example within the family:

“What I tend to do is I’ll try with my kids to be kind of stupid and laugh and play songs” (P4_R2)

Somehow, however, he would leave this part of him outside of the workplace:

“And I drop that man on the corner and walk into the office a completely different person” (P4_R2)

What was indicated to him at the course was that the way he is at work does affect other people:

“The way how I come into the office can affect other people, as it does with my whole life” (P4_R2)

“The way that I am with my children affects them very much” (P4_R2)

At work, he tended to be perceived as impassive and overly serious:

“The way I come across at work is quite deadpan, basically, and that maybe is limiting my effectiveness” (P4_R2)

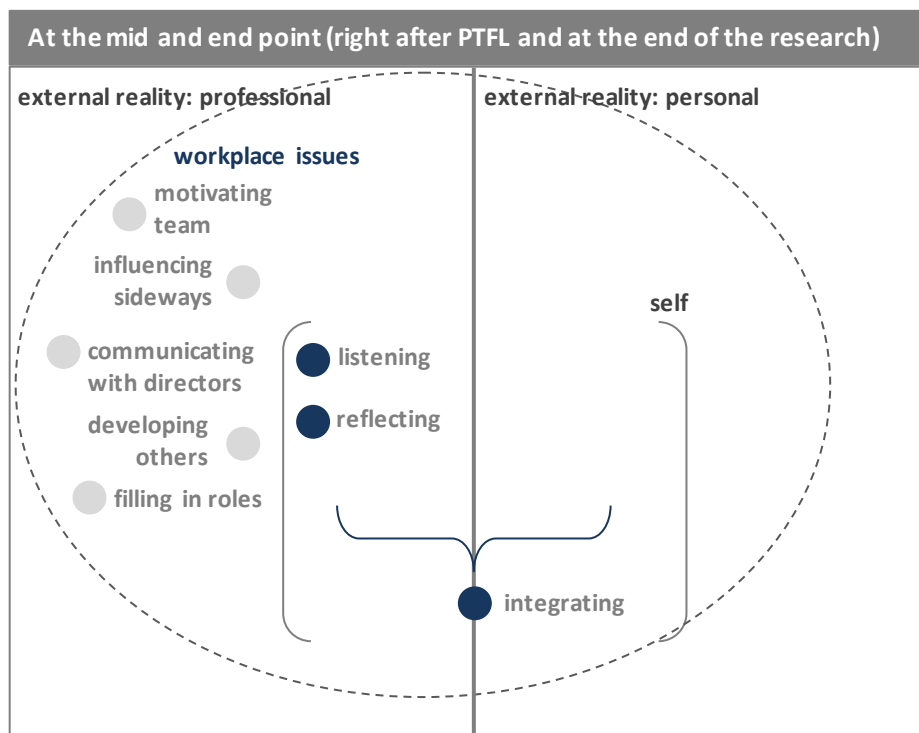
A recommendation for P4 that fits very much the personal development theme of integration was to try to be in the office a little more like he was at home:

“I should be obviously not playing songs and being daft, but having a bit more of that fun aspect of myself go through the door and into work. Not automatically switching from one person to the other, and having that balance between the two” (P4_R2)

Only in interview two it became clear to me that P4 was operating such a rigid separation between his personal and professional sides, which he was now being encouraged to bring together:

“I made this kind of relationships on the course [...]—what I do in my home life, how I can bring more of that kind of caring side and fun side and integrate that in my work life as well” (P4_R2)

Figure 41. P4’s sensemaking at the end of the research



Compiled by the author.

The week after the course, P4 was trying to implement this recommendation:

“I am really trying to bring across maybe more of the way I am with my children, to put that more into my work life if that makes sense.” (P4_R2)

‘So I’ll try to be a little bit more warm... Not to change my character completely, but just to be a little bit more subtle” (P4_R2)

Unfortunately, there were not going to be follow-up interviews after this conversation (P4 dropped out of the research, no reasons given), so it is not known to me how P4’s efforts around integration might have developed.

An ending point: at the end of the research. P4 having ended his participation in the research at the end of interview two, no data are available or how his story had evolved up to when the research ended.

Implications for leadership practice

There are several points of change in P4’s story which potentially have implications for his leadership practice, as P4 himself had started to identify in interview two. Notably, the distinction he had just acquired between management and leadership. However, no data is available around the extent to which these implications eventually carried into P4’s reality.

8.10.5 Participant 5, Female

Context

Work context. P5 operates—and, I believe, thrives—in a highly demanding professional context. Challenges stem from the sophistication of P5’s role, her transitioning to a new position with expanded responsibility, and a backdrop of ongoing organizational change. At the start of the research, P5’s role included governance and directorship across several sites. She had supervisory and indirect budget responsibilities over the institutions that she oversees. She was also responsible for a lot of the networking between the institution and key external stakeholders. In P5’s words:

“It is a very complex role. It is also a role where my power and influence has to be really high, because... It’s a role without a lot of authority, given that technically the [...] directorship still sits with our chief executive. So it is [a] slightly unusual position in that normally part of doing my job would be [being...] on the Board of Directors and things like that and, yeah, I don’t have that so it’s quite challenging from that point of view” (P5_R1)

At the end of the research, P5’s job had been extended to include legal supervision of operations as well as a direct leadership role in the shaping of the ongoing organizational change initiative. In the new role, P5’s direct involvement in organizational change included a “*hard line decision making process*” (P5_R3) around reshaping the leadership team of the institution. In our first interview, P5 had manifested dissatisfaction with some entrenched ways within the organization:

“It is far easier for me to exercise influence comfortably outside the organization [...]. This is an ancient institution, with a lot of people who have been here many, many years and haven’t moved perceptibly in the time being. There is a core of really committed and dedicated people, but there aren’t a lot of really strong leaders [...] at senior levels” (P5_R1)

By the end of the research, a lot of change had already happened under P5’s lead—and more was underway:

“I always know that there was going to be a huge amount I was going to change and some of the changes are structural, and procedural, and.... Some of them are people. [...] I am making a move in the right direction and I am removing some of the weak leaders and replacing them with much stronger leaders. [...] I am in the middle of that at the moment” (P5_R4)

P5 seemed to not take lightly the implications of her decision-making. Despite having referred to herself at some point as capable of being “ruthless” (P5_R4), she also seemed to value taking decisions conscientiously:

“Times are hard in[this sector] so you know it’s... In my new role it is going well and I am trying to deal with some very challenging times with a kind of a... A kindness, but a willingness to take difficult decision that comes from that belief that actually the direction that I am setting is the right direction. You know, things are very hard and they are going to get tougher next year. So I am being confident in terms of the [...] direction that needs to be set. That’s, you know, that’s really important because there are going to be some very tough decisions” (P5_R3)

For many, a demanding work context such as P5’s would be a less than ideal backdrop for personal change. However, my impression is that overall P5 is comfortable with her role and energized by a substantial level of challenge.

“[There is at present] a whole combination of challenge really, but you can’t be in an executive director position and not deal with challenge, it is part of taking responsibility.” (P5_R4)

If anything, the level of challenge seemed to motivate rather than hinder P5 in her pursuit of personal change:

“Looking at how my role has grown over the last two, three years... I’ve been looking for some [form of training] to sort of prepare me to do well at the next level” (P5_R1)

In the next section, I will further explore the quality of P5’s motivation in taking part in PTFL.

Personal context. P5 is a single mother of two:

“I have quite a complicated set up in that I am doing this for the job, but I am also a single mother of two small children” (P5_R1)

Overall, her personal context is not one offering a significant level of support vis-à-vis the demands of her work and those possibly arising from the process of personal change. The course tutors later encouraged P5 to engage with dating, but by the time of our last interview there were still no good news to report:

“Oh, I have had endless dates. But... Yeah, I’ve been... But there are no decent men out there. That is what I have decided. [...] I just split up with somebody

over the weekend, just because... Lovely guy! But his life is a mess. I just don't need that level of complication in my life, really. [...] And, particularly when you've got young children, because it affects them. [...] I've been getting out there and I've been dating and I've been seeing various people. But, hem... No one right yet." (P5_R4)

P5 seemed prepared to front personal and work challenges essentially on her own, speaking perhaps of the high level of motivation that she said she was approaching the course with.

Outlook

Outlook on PTFL and personal change. Overall, P5 received PTFL very positively. She explicitly indicated to me that her own outlook helped her make the most of the transformative input received at the course. In particular, P5 recognized starting out with a high level of motivation to change; later, she also talked about her willingness to be honest about herself and make herself vulnerable and her alertness to the need to remain mindful in order to pursue the change. Initial motivation was a key factor according to P5:

"I guess, people who go on the course on the whole are very motivated to do it. So you are starting out with a high motivation level to do something differently" (P5_R2)

As P5 later also mentioned, it does not seem that a high level of motivation was uniform across the group. However, a strong motivation did play a role in how P5 engaged with the week:

"I was hugely motivated going into it" (P5_R2)

I guess I... I was avidly sucking up everything that I possibly could from the week. So there were some evenings that my buddy and I really working really late on stuff and really try to maximize what I could take out of it." (P5_R2)

Once on the course, P5's motivation expressed itself in specific ways:

"Being prepared to be open and honest. Being prepared to allow myself to be vulnerable." (P5_R2)

Having come off the course, P5 showed a determination to remain mindful of the awareness acquired and the change that she wanted to realize:

"It's finding the time to constantly be mindful of it all really, and review and

revive and keep it constantly at the fore of my mind and that's not often been possible at all. It's all about mindfulness, really, it is just about maintaining that constant awareness. Which is really hard. It is really hard." (P5_R3)

In this respect, it is interesting to compare P5 with other participants: for example, initially P7 was emotionally overwhelmed by the course; P6 maintained a slightly skeptical outlook all throughout; and P3 had a negative reaction to the course. In comparison, I believe that P5's case exemplifies an uncontroversially positive and open attitude to both the PFTL program and her prospects for personal change.

Interview interaction

Since the beginning of our conversations, I was struck by the clarity and precision with which P5's described her initial situation:

"I expect that the program will provide an in-depth understanding of how my background impacts on my role as a leader [and] enable an understanding of my limiting patterns" (Extract from P5's summary of pre-program expectations, which she filled out on the Praxis' application form and forwarded to me in response to my interview question around expectations)

P5's background in psychology, and the fact that she had taken part in a PFTL program taster, had plausibly contributed to her ability to pinpoint a link between her background and current response patterns. Also to her ability, ahead of the course, to identify and describe the focal issue that was going to emerge:

"I am probably not the most tolerant of leaders and I set very high standards and I think at times this is quite challenging for people around me and I need to get better at building relationships with others and bringing them along with me. So I would like to be better at that." (P5_R1)

"I don't regard myself as being particularly great or brilliant. I just believe in striving to be the best you can be and I think perhaps if people can see that the reason I set such high standards is maybe because it sets a goal to aim for, rather than a sense that I'm making people feel like they have failed" (P5_R1)

P5's clarity of thought and word in this respect were unique in my sample. Still, interviewing with her was more like hard work than it was like free flow. I never felt like P5 was trying to be opaque—for example she did not hold back from admitting to some anxiety about the upcoming course:

"I'm a little bit... I feel slightly... Slightly nervous" (P5_R1)

Early on, however, I got the impression that information would not be volunteered and that I would have to pursue answers by asking precisely the right questions and by continuing to ask past the first response. Interviews with P5 had the quality of a real dialogue, within which both of us contributed, questioned and clarified meaning.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. As seen earlier, P5 knew from the start that she wanted to explore her tendency to come across as overly demanding on the workplace issues in relation to her background. When asked about her own opinion of what might be causing the issues she was experiencing, P5 pointed to her own personality:

*“My personality, I suspect [laughs]! I always like to do the best or be the best”
(P5_R1)*

And to a gap between what she intends and what is perceived by others:

“I think I am quite misunderstood.” (P5_R1)

“I think that people read a lot in the way I am inherently.” (P5_R1)

It really seemed to matter to her to eventually get to the root of this perception gap. On one hand, she perceives herself as high-aiming and hard-working:

*“The reason I set such high standards is maybe because it sets a goal to aim for, other than a sense that I’m making people feel like they have failed
(P5_R1)*

But others tend to perceive her as exceedingly demanding towards them:

“There is quite a few people that I make quite nervous and are quite scared of me” (P5_R4)

*“P5 sets such high standards that I feel they are impossible for me to achieve”
(A piece of feedback received at work, P5_R1)*

P5 provided some examples of why people tended to perceive her as fierce:

“Also I am under pressure a lot of the time, so I won’t sit around and give time to people when the answer is very clear to me” (P5_R1)

“An example would be at the meeting of the board, you know, I challenged someone about something. One of the other directors and, you know, I’ve been taken on the side afterwards and “when you plan to challenge them in that way, you should have spoken to them at separately outside of the meeting”, not spoken to them in the meeting--which would have led then to an extra meeting. And my view is, if you're on the board you should be able to take a challenge, and if it's an issue that is relevant to the board you shouldn't have to have a separate meeting to deal with it. (P5_R1)

At the time of our first interview, P5 offered some explanations of what might generate this gap in perceptions. Some explanations contrast P5’s view with that of others:

“Not everyone thinks like [me], so I have to sort of find a middle ground that works, really.” (P5_R1)

“When you are in the leadership position your expectations of achievement are... you expect [the best] from everyone else and not everyone can get to that point.” (P5_R1)

“So it's about understanding the position of others more really” (P5_R1)

Another explanation focused specifically on one group of others (i.e. men):

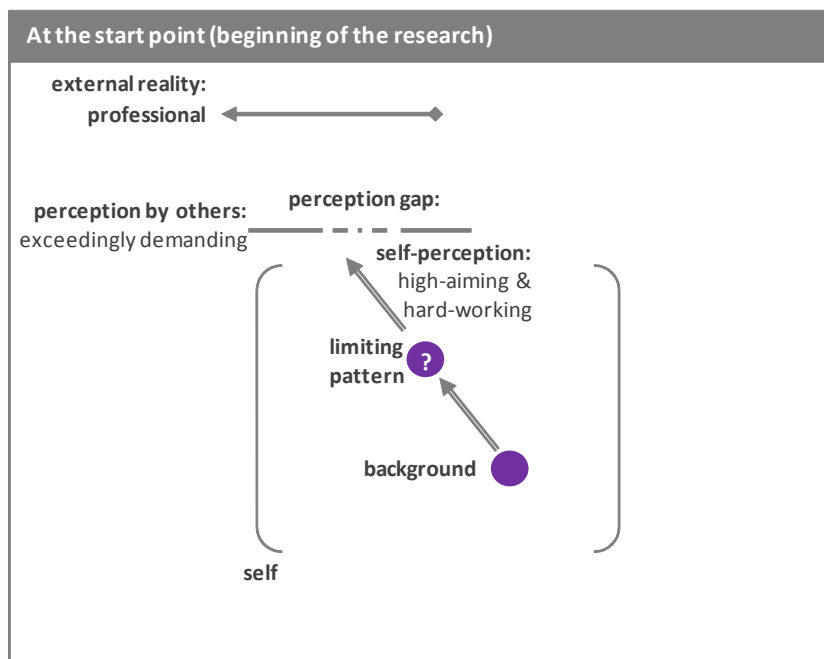
“So... I’m quite tall, I’m quite a physical presence, I have a... You know, I give a lot of lectures and speeches, and things... So I’m a confident speaker. I think as a woman I really get labeled as arrogant and that this is just the way I am. Or I’m imposing. If I were a man, nobody would think twice about me being that way. So I think there is a gender issue of how you come across if you are reasonably powerful, tall, confident woman. And how people interpret that.” (P5_R1)

Whichever the underlying reason, this gap in perceptions is a source of frustration for P5:

“I don't want to alienate people” (P5_R1)

“I’d rather be in a position where I actually can bring other people along with me. I want to be the person who can be a really good leader and have people’s respect and have mutual understanding of each other's positions, and do a good job.” (P5_R1)

Figure 42. P5’s sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

The gap in perceptions had also been undermining her confidence:

“I think there is an extent to which perhaps [the course] may assist me with not being apologetic about [...] things anymore. I mean, not ignoring other people’s perspective, but actually being comfortable and confident in... In the perception of whom I am with... Being able to communicating far more effectively... that what I bring the table is a positive and not a negative.”

“It’s about feeling... Getting to a point where I feel more confident in my role as a leader. Almost that I accept that that’s what I am, so that I don’t have to keep proving myself over time” (P5_R1)

The figure above is a representation, as of the end of our first interview, of the key elements of P5’s sensemaking around the focal issue that she was going to focus on during the PTFL week.

A mid point: just after PTFL. At PTFL, the picture was validated of a high-aiming and hard-working character. The week of group work added four main elements to this picture: it identified a self-critical pattern in how P5 thinks about herself; it hinted at a link between this pattern and P5’s background; it illuminated a way to break the pattern; lastly, it broadened the scope of P5’s change to include not just her professional life but also her personal life.

P5 tends to look at herself and her accomplishments in a critical manner:

"[The change is about] recognizing the positives I have rather than just all of the... Negative thoughts that I have" (P7_R3)

"I am very good at... performing [chuckles]. But that is very different from how I perceived myself. So I can do it, but do I believe it? That is the question" (P7_R3)

It appears that this negative type of self-assessment had been the basis of P5's need to constantly prove herself, and hence also the fuelling force behind P5's constant drive to do more and be better.

There is hardly any basis to establish with certainty where this self-critical pattern comes from. One speculation is that it might be linked to P5's background in the early years. From P5's comments, it is clear that there had been a severely straining experience:

"Yeah, my early years in my life were... Pretty difficult. So I talked about that in some detail. [...] Members of the group.... Two particular members of the group were weeping uncontrollably" (P5_R2)

"That was a really intense experience, seeing the reaction to... You know, what I was talking about" (P5_R2)

"[My] individual session [on the course] was very.... Very intense for me. You know, I sort of thought "If I am going to do this, I am going to do it properly. [...] So I did and it was an intense experience" (P5_R2)

Furthermore, the comments of a fellow participant (P7 in this research) give a clue of what might have been the intensity of this early experience of P5:

"I was really heart-wrenched by the first experiences²⁸⁷ that were shared" (P7_R2)

"The stories, particularly one of them, were particularly hard and I felt really emotionally affected by the stories. I felt incredibly upset and I thought that, psychologically, if everybody's story was going to be as heart-wrenching, that then I was going to be a nervous wreck and completely destroyed by the end of the week and I was not going to be able to cope with the emotional level of the course" (P7_R2)

²⁸⁷ P5 was the first on the PTFL course to present her story to the group

P5's self-critical attitude might be related to feelings of being generally unworthy and undeserving that were engendered by these early experiences. Wherever the pattern of negative thinking and compulsive need to aim high originated from, and whatever P5's childhood experiences might have been, what really is significant is that P5 acquired a new awareness of what might break the cycle of:

"I need to be an awful lot kinder and less tough on myself" (P7_R2)

This would then also address the issue of P5's projecting of excessive demands on others:

"How people perceive me has a lot to do with how I perceive myself" (P7_R3)

"If I can do that, in fact the toughness that other people perceive that I direct towards others won't be an issue because.... You know, the view of [the tutors] and the group is that actually it stems from how I deal with myself and if I deal with myself in a different way... Then actually it will just flow out in terms of others' perceptions of me" (P7_R2)

In addition, P5 came to acknowledge and accept that the same pattern that was affecting her in the workplace also affected her in the home environment:

"The big difference, probably, from those comments [which I made in the first interview] to now, is that from me it [is] much more about my life as a whole rather than just my working life." (P7_R2)

The comment above refers to P5's challenge with being more tolerant—something that had been having an impact also on her relationship with her children:

"The tolerance thing—and this is why I said it applies to my whole life—thinking differently about how I do things with my kids. At the weekend I needed to do math practice and things with my daughter. And [I was] thinking far more about how, for example, I would have liked that to be done when I was little. And then, rather than doing it the way it was done with me, thinking about how I would have liked it to be done with me, and therefore changing how I did it with my own daughter based on what I would have liked to have happened to me, rather than what did happen." (P5_R2)

"I found it very different this weekend compared to the weekend before [...] [My daughter] loved it. And therefore as a result I am being much more tolerant, because it was a much nicer experience" (P5_R2)

P5 realized that she was directing onto others the criticism and harshness that had once been directed towards her. This realization seems to have enabled P5 to imagine an alternative way—that is, things as she would have liked them, rather than things as they actually happened. Having acquired the image of an alternative way, P5 was now in a better position to choose how to relate with others. Since the moment that she gained this position, P5 showed no hesitation around what she would rather to: she wanted to do better with others than had been done to herself.

An ending point: at the end of the research. P5 summarized her takeaway from PTFL as having become more aware of how she had been thinking about herself and of how to go about changing that:

*“It’s a difference in attitude, I guess, rather than something really concrete”
(P5_R3)*

“I have a different... Kind of attitude probably toward myself, and also hopefully also toward other people. And also some clarity of thought about, you know, how I can take this forward” (P5_R2)

Essentially, P5’s new attitude is in contrast with the past tendency to criticize and keep proving herself:

“I am less self-critical, I am also more challenging myself... in a good way, because I think I take more time and trouble to enjoy myself” (P5_R3)

When asked about the way forward, P5 further reiterated the concepts seen earlier:

“Oh, be nice to me and my children, just making sure that I enjoy my life really and allowing myself to not beat myself up all the time. Which I usually do, so...” (P5_R3)

In evaluating herself on her commitment to be nicer to her children, P5 found she had been doing well:

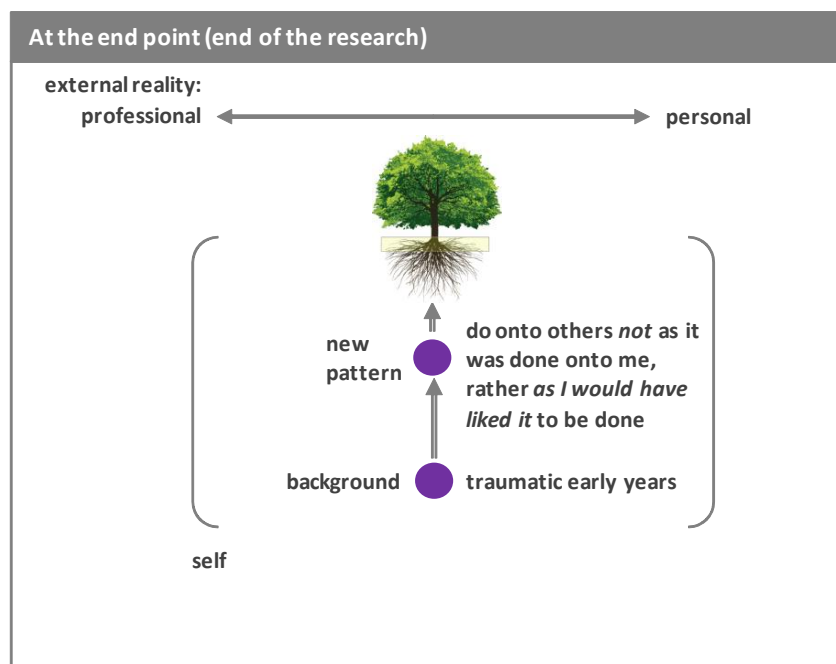
“Been nice to my children [chuckles] yeah... Well, I would say 95% of the time I have done much better on that” (P5_R4)

At the same time, she also recognized that the demanding side of her character might be a part of her that will stick around:

“We have a really nice time, so I think I am much better in that regard. But I am still quite tough [laughs]!” (P5_R4)

At the starting point of the research, P5 was puzzling over how to bridge a gap between how she perceived herself, as high-aiming and hard-working, and how other perceived her, as exceedingly critical and demanding. By the end of the research, P5 had more clarity and acceptance around a pattern of self-critical thinking, which perhaps she had internalized from a difficult experience in early life. This self-critical attitude, which was at the basis of her drive to constantly do better and be better, had a way of transferring onto other people at work or at home, in the form of excessive demands and criticism. P5 became able to picture and draw from the reality that she would have liked to experience rather than the reality that she had been experiencing. She had reflected, in our interview, on her belief that she valued bringing people with her as opposed to alienating them. As soon as she acquired more of a choice as to how to relate with others, she showed no hesitation around doing it better with others than it had been done with her. In the context of our later interviews, it felt that this new found ability to be better towards herself and others had had a restorative effect on P5: she captured this idea with an image of her being like a tree (P5_R3).

Figure 43. P5’s sensemaking at end of the research



Compiled by the author.

The image of a tree is salient in light of P5's hesitation, manifested early in the research, that she would be deserving of support by other people and capable of a positive contribution to her environment. A tree draws nourishment from the earth through its roots and releases oxygen in the air through its leaves: there is a sense that P5 now feels herself more as connected to and exchanging with a meaningful whole.

Implications for leadership practice

P5's story of change has three types of implications for leadership: first, her confidence in her capability to make a positive contribution was restored; secondly, she came to recognize and accept that she needs the support of others; and, lastly, she increased her ability to flex her style to best meet different circumstances.

As mentioned earlier, the gap between how P5 perceived herself and how others perceived her, compounded by her self-criticism, had been shaking her confidence. A more positive self-attitude seemed to have a repairing effect:

"[I am] focusing on, on... You know, on the strengths and inherent talents that I bring to the table rather than on those that I don't. (P5_R3)

"[I am feeling] possibly a lot stronger. A lot stronger. Much more confident in terms of what I bring to the table, I don't feel like I constantly justify that (P5_R4)

"I would sit in a meeting with the other executives and I will say exactly what I bring to the room that they can't bring to the room and that's why they need do listen to what I am saying. Whereas before I wouldn't have believed in myself enough to be able to do that. Believing in my value and not being worried about voicing that" (P5_R3)

Given the ongoing challenges related to organizational change, this more positive self-attitude was proving to be a more resourceful state from which to operate:

"[I am] being a bit more mindful, taking a step back sometimes rather than diving straight in" (P5_R4)

"I am trying to deal with some very challenging times with a kind of a... A kindness, but a willingness to take difficult decisions that comes from that belief that actually the direction that I am setting is the right directions" (P5_R3)

At the course, P5 had also been prompted to reflect on her leadership style:

"It enabled some thinking about.... What is the best style and way for you to operate. Definitely. And what adaptations you needed to make in terms of that now that you have sort of a better understanding of yourself" (P5_R2)

One adaptation P5 is referring to is the same one involved in improving her attitude towards her children and herself: her choice to make things the way she would have liked them to be rather than the way they had been for her.

"I've had a couple of meetings already this morning, and I think I have quite surprised people [laughs]. So, you know, it's just a thing of thinking about how I would have liked it to happen to me, and therefore behaving that way, rather than perhaps the way that I would have behaved before" (P7_R2)

P5 described a further adaptation: the broadening of her ability to flex her style in consideration of the variety of personalities and circumstances that she encounters and manages.

"I am also much better at considering... Perhaps areas that I didn't consider before... You know, making space for the quiet person, or utilizing a whole different range of skills to bring the best out of people, rather than... Kind of having one or two approaches... [chuckles], now I have about fifteen." (P5_R4)

What was just described represents a change that is commonly recognized as a progression in terms of leadership development²⁸⁸.

Lastly, P5 had started out from a position where it was difficult for her to accept that she also needed the support of others:

"People perceive me as being very, very capable and strong and so probably that means that they don't necessarily think that I need much support or input" (P5_R2)

²⁸⁸ As seen earlier in the review of the leadership development literature through the lens of constructive-developmental (Chapter 2)

That difficulty also seemed to stem from her attitude towards herself:

“[It was] far more about how I needed to think about and treat myself and how much I needed to accept the support of other people” (P5_R2)

These three main changes on the leadership front, in aggregate, had started to have positive repercussions in the workplace:

“I think they were totally surprised! They wouldn’t know that I have been on the course. You know, I think people left my office this morning in a good state. So that’s always a good sign.” (P7_R2)

“I think people understand me a lot better, I am far more open in terms of letting people know where I am coming from. And, supporting them in terms of meeting expectations. Whereas perhaps I wasn’t so good at that. So I think that people have warmed to me a lot more and understand me a lot better” (P7_R4)

Because P5’s story tends to come across as unequivocally good news, I questioned within myself whether P5 was really painting for me an overly rosy picture of her change. Overall, however, I did not get the impression that she was trying to frame her progression as a 180 degrees turn. For example, she reiterated that she remains quite a tough temperament:

“And if none of those [approaches] works, then I am really tough and really ruthless still, which I was always regarded as being [chuckles] (P5_R4)

P5’s case, then, does not exemplify aiming at perfection, which, in terms of personal development, would be quite suspect. P5’s case, however, does exemplify personal development as defined in this thesis. The following processual elements²⁸⁹ are present: a substantial and well-defined change on an issue that is salient to the person’s history and current experience; a gain in perspective over a limiting pattern is positively attained; a greater freedom to choose a course of action alternative to the limiting pattern; and clearly identifiable positive repercussions in both the personal and professional domains.

²⁸⁹ Presented previously in Chapter 2 as a part of the personal development framework

8.10.6 Participant 6, Male

Context

Work context. Within his organization, P6 leads a special team project serving clients internationally. The team includes cross-functional experts from other areas of the organization. Team members tend to not work solely for the project and hence have responsibility multiple reporting lines. Both the team and the nature of the project seem to incorporate a high level of complexity. P6 seems to be thriving in his environment as well as with this level of challenge. He also seems to be enjoying his role as project leader. The organization was supportive of P6's initiative to seek training. He had discussed PTFL with a colleague who had previously on the course. Both his bosses and the training department participated in identifying what type of program might be a good fit.

Personal context. Both of P6's personal life and background seem a definite positive. P6 lives in London with his partner. Their temperaments seem similarly inclined towards a very logical ("*straight-up*", P6_R3) mindset. Together, they enjoy the arts, cooking and entertaining. They travel regularly to visit their respective families, who live at "*either end of the world*" (P6_R3). Nothing seemed to change in the relationship, which always seemed to be a mostly serene one, as a result of the PTFL experience. P6's early background had been without incidents:

"I think that compared to some of my colleagues on the course, there was... You know, I have been very lucky in my life experiences, in that I have not had such difficulties that some other people had." (P6_R2)

Context, then, is relatively unproblematic for P6 when compared to other participants in the research.

Outlook

Outlook on PTFL. PTFL was the first intense 'soft skills' training that P6 had been part of. PTFL was selected precisely because of its focus on personal development, in addition to pragmatic considerations of expected yield, timing and logistics. P6 received the course extremely well:

"I have found it absolutely terrific" (P6_R2)

"[It was] actually a very good experience for me" (P6_R2)

This reaction was despite his characteristic skeptical and demanding outlook. P6 was an especially discriminating delegate. He was decidedly open to the learning experience:

"I don't think I was guarded at all, I do think that I was very honest in the process" (P6_R2)

"I was completely up for it. And I... No, I didn't hold back at all." (P6_R2)

At the same time, he remained firmly in control of discerning the circumstances that he was going to experience:

"I went into it with a very open mind, but also knowing that, I suppose, naturally I tend to approach some of these things with a degree of healthy skepticism" (P6_R2)

"I always had a slight critical distance during the process and maybe more so than others--but not as much as some." (P6_R2)

There are some of elements of the experience that encountered P6's criticism. For instance, the simplicity of one particular brainstorming activity, the emphasis put by the yoga teacher on spirituality, and the fact that the group did not continue to be a supporting network beyond the end of the program. However, P6 never allowed his criticism to detract from his opportunities for learning:

"I'm pleased to say that that didn't affect my experiences at all." (P6_R2)

P6 was satisfied with the quality of the core processes facilitated at the course:

"I thought of it—the way the course is run--and I think, all the credit to [the tutors]" (P6_R2)

"I did talk about being sort of slightly skeptical, and I did have a conversation with [one of the tutors] on the last day just about the process. Because, I'm always quite keen to see the mechanics behind these kinds of things. And we had quite a long conversation where I asked him whether in some ways the methodology that he uses effectively creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. [...] So is there a tendency to look for a pattern purely based on the evidence that is presented. And he was actually....He gave very reassuring answers to that" (P6_R2)

"[The tutor] talked about the fact that [...] it doesn't really matter what the

person is saying, it's actually how they are saying it. So what they could be telling you could be a bunch of rubbish, but what you are looking for are ways of enforcing the behavioral patterns based on what they're saying" (P6_R2)

Outlook on change. P6 indicated that his expectation was to become more aware of his default responses:

"My expectation is that it will actually make me slightly more self-aware in those kinds of situations where I tend to rely on instinct or my gut reactions or my natural tendencies to do things. We all have moments when we come out of a particular situation and we think 'Ah, actually, I could have handled that better', or 'I admire the way in which that colleague of mine dealt with their particular role in that session or discussion' ... And I mean... That's really what I am looking to do, the ability to take a third perspective, almost." (P6_R2)

P6 was interested in exploring his default responses especially in relation to the challenges he had experienced in his leadership role within the organization:

"[I want to be] developing awareness of some of the challenges that I personally have been facing in this role. The role is very much about... getting our organization to work in a new way and that can be sometimes personally challenging." (P6_R1)

"Essentially it's all about organizational change, as much as it is about delivering a service. And that can be... It can be, personally, quite a difficult process sometimes" (P6_R1)

P6 presented these issues as personal challenges encountered in dealing with external circumstances. This is in contrast to other research participants (see P2 or P3) who framed the external circumstances as the challenge. I will discuss this distinction in greater detail in a later section of this chapter (findings from comparative analysis).

Interview interaction

P6's communication style tended to be concise and to the point. Especially at beginning, I thought that he was also very reserved. At times, I thought that it was unlikely that he would share more personal views. In order to understand him better, and understand the balance of what was being made explicit with what was remaining implicit, I eventually had to ask directly:

“Linda: How reserved do you think you are as a person?” (P6_R4)

P6 was not reserved, as much as he valued precision and logic. This is how he described himself:

“I think as I am speaking to you now I am trying to choose my words carefully because I am trying to be precise, I suppose. But then we all have different degrees of reserve in different situations. [...] Yeah, I don’t know whether reserved is the word. I think that sometimes it’s maybe not wanting to be misunderstood, my search for precision. It’s a different thing” (P6_R4)

“I am a logician, I suppose. You know, and that doesn’t mean that I am not emotional or that I am not able to look at these kinds of things. But there are kinds of approaches that I tend to better like. (P6_R3)

Questions which were open and exploratory were also the less precise ones from a strictly logical point of view: in some cases, as P6 was leaning to remain on the more rational and evidence-based side of the dialogue, I bumped into some dead ends

The picture of PTFL and personal change emerging from this account of P6’s story is undoubtedly a positive one. However, I would like to point out that P6’s view of both PTFL and personal change was far from being naively rosy. In evaluating the experience, P6 had formed a thorough (as well as fair) critique of some of its elements. In addition, interviews with P6 were intellectually very engaging. They exposed more than others my expectation of finding positive news about PTFL and the progress of individuals²⁹⁰. As a result, I think that my understanding of the program and the stories of the research participants was significantly advanced. The elements of critique highlighted by P6 brought new insights in the workings of PTFL and personal change. I will not discuss here these elements of critique. Rather, I will discuss them in two later sections focusing on PTFL as a developmental context and on developmental processes (findings from cross-sectional analysis). My rationale is that in no way the elements critiqued by P6 seem to have compromised his experience and gain from the program.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. One challenge that P6 was experiencing in his role was that of enlisting sufficient commitment from the people on his team whom he shares with other departments:

²⁹⁰ See bracketing essay, in Section 8.2

“I think that the key challenge is convincing people who have not necessarily signed up to working on the project to deliver things for me anyways. I think that's really the way that our project is structured. You know, we have a number of people who we rely on across the organization. But for them, the project is not really that meaningful or something they are committed to” (P6_R1)

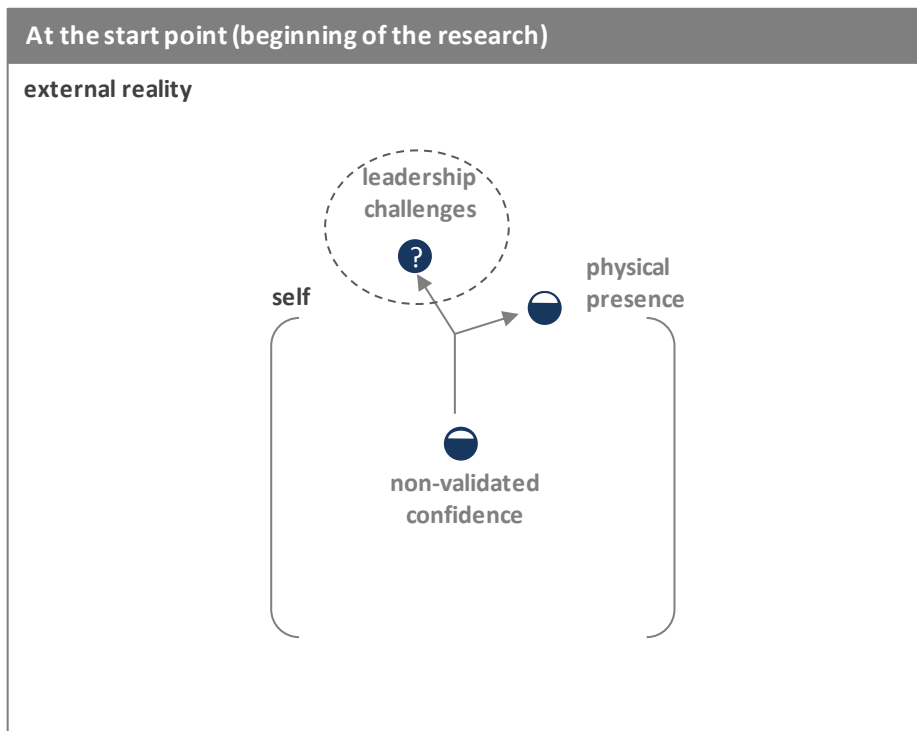
“Sometimes the work in process is quite alien to them, or ethically they feel that this project that, although their skills are required, it's something that they have not committed to in their existing job” (P6_R1)

P6 wondered if being a more decisive type of leader would help:

“I think to be more decisive is something that I would appreciate the ability to become. I think that my general tendency is to be more affiliative, and that's not necessarily always the way to do things in all kinds of situations. And, in the kind of roles I am in the moment. Sometimes decisions or...Less discussion in various areas is required. And I think I am somebody who is kind of seen as a beacon for the team as much as a member of the team; that is certainly something I have been struggling with.” (P6_R1)

Aside from the hunch around being more decisive, P6 was not sure about what he could have been doing better. With taking part in PTF, he was hoping to gather feedback around his personal style.

Figure 44. P6's sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

A mid-point: just after PTFL. PTFL was a validating experience for P9. The great majority of the feedback he received on the course was positive:

“Generally everybody said ‘You come across as somebody who is open and friendly, and somebody we would trust.’ (P6_R2)

“The insecurities that I had, you know, other people had too.” (P6_R2)

P6 seemed quite a confident person already before attending the program. Yet, having this self-confidence validated had important effect on him: he actually did not have major blind spots and was not failing in his efforts as a leader in any major way:

“Recognizing that every individual has a story to tell and, in some ways, some of the kind of things... The insecurities that I had, you know, other people had too.” (P6_R2)

This reassurance seemed to add to his confidence:

“I suppose, I am aware that I do often have an ability to... Be useful in brainstorming sessions or generating alternative points of view and those kinds of things. And, you know, that is very useful if you work in cultural

development because you are able to kind of... Weave things that are a lot of intangible ideas. So I think that that is a strength that I bring to things and I think it is important to recognize that" (P6_R4)

"It's hard to generalize, I'd say... [...] There are circumstances where I certainly felt I handled myself better or I felt more confident and not felt as self-conscious or threatened as I might have done in similar circumstances previously. Yeah, absolutely." (P6_R3)

Also, P6 made a shift in how he empathized with others. P6 seemed to be an empathetic type of person already before the course. This is reflected, for example, in his values around how to manage people:

"It's [about] wanting to be, I suppose, somebody who really does focus on personal relationships and builds consensus as a way of moving forward" (P6_R2)

"I've always not enjoyed giving people bad news or asking things of people that I know are going to put them under distress or I feel might be unreasonable given... what I know about what it would take them to achieve those things" (P6_R3)

[As a leader] my general tendency is to be more affiliative" (P6_R1)

He demonstrated his empathy on the course, in hearing the stories of people whose background had been less smooth than his:

"I didn't find it hard to empathize with who... with people. But that's, you know...I guess compared to them I've been quite lucky, that I didn't have to go through certain things growing up... I felt... I felt terrible for some people on a sympathetic and an empathetic level for some of the things that they were talking about." (P6_R2)

Yet P6 would not have imagined that he would be able to connect even more closely—especially not with a group of strangers (the other delegates on PTFI):

"To be put in a room for nine hours a day, just listening to people talk... It sounds like the dullerest thing that you could possibly do" (P6_R2)

Also, he had not imagined that he would get to care about these strangers quite so much:

"I will never forget the individuals or some of their stories or some of the changes that they made" (P6_R4)

"You do get to know them very well, and what makes them function in the way they do in the world, in quite a short amount of time. And you do generally get to care about them as well" (P6_R4)

"It's getting on to a year since we first did it, and I can remember everybody's story, in quite good detail" (P6_R4)

The realization struck P6 that there is a greater depth behind individuals than one would normally think about:

"Actually... Recognizing that every individual has a story to tell" (P6_R2)

"Even quite unlikely characters whom you think 'That's not a person I would I could get on with', you know, you see behind that very quickly" (P6_R4)

This realization brought with itself a more mature ability to empathize at a deeper level, which is something that P6 brought into his working context. In a general sense, he started to approach people considering the multiplicity of views and assumptions that might be underlying their words and actions:

"I realized that [there are] things that individuals are bringing with them or things outside of the immediate circumstances--and you can make a parallel with that in the work circumstances--that affect how they respond. It might be things about human relationships, it might be things as well... The experiences or associations they had from previous points in their lives" (P6_R3)

"That is the major thing that I developed more of an awareness of in the course of that week is and looking back it sounds like a really obvious thing. It was amply demonstrated during the course of that week" (P6_R3)

Realizing that other people see things through lenses had an additional positive side-effect in terms of strengthening P6's confidence:

"Sometimes [...] in work situations, insecurities that I may have of how I am perceived because of other people's reactions... That is not really the issue...." (P6_R3)

"maybe it's just.... I realized that it's things that individuals are bringing with them" (P6_R3)

It is also something that P6 had been able to leverage to the benefit of others during work interactions. P6 had a new understanding of how to identify an appropriate response:

“I think it’s actually much more about recognizing what the other person is needing at that time.” (P6_R2)

As an example, someone on P6’s team called a meeting to request something of him. Rather than just considering whether to grant the request, P6 inquired about what reasons stood behind it. The team member expressed a concern with the reporting structure that seemed to limit him unnecessarily:

“I had a meeting yesterday afternoon, with a middle manager from the department who came to see me, who essentially was asking something of me potentially. And I said, what is the issue behind what he was asking? He said that he was feeling disabled by the communication protocol he had been forced into.” (P6_R2)

At that point, P6 felt that an issue had been uncovered that he had the authority to intervene on:

“And, you know, that is something that I can resolve. As a senior manager, I can sort that out for him by talking to people who work in the environment around him. And empowering him a little bit more to make the decisions he needs to make to work with my team. And that is a better use of my time and my level in the organization. Actually, trying to talk to him directly about something that is actually quite a minor issue. It’s quite a useful thing to feel that I am more aware about now.” (P6_R2)

There are more examples of this type, which I will share later in the section on implications for leadership practice.

In addition to the positive feedback, on the course P6 received some practical advice on how to improve his physical presence. What others found on the course is that his posture and vocal expression came across as a bit shy compared to his stature:

“Your physical presence, you know, you are a big chap but you seem to occupy less space than your body occupies, you don’t look as if you put yourself out there”(P6_R2)

“We don’t feel your physical presence as much’. Maybe that’s about the way

you stand, or your posture, or your usual... Your physicality. Yeah, that was an interesting thing. I have become more aware of that, I suppose” (P6_R3)

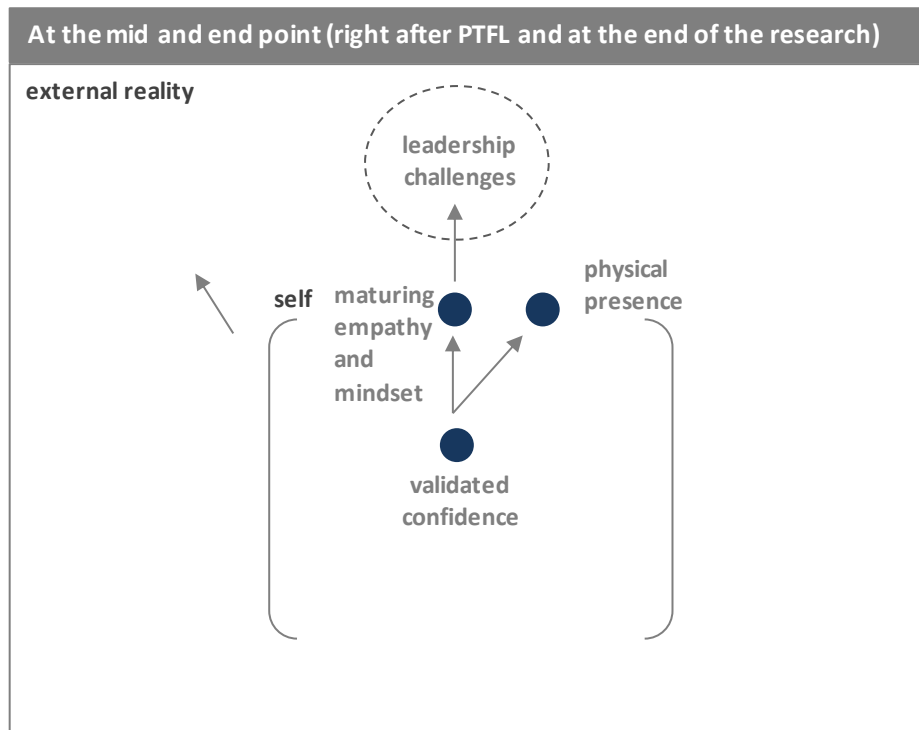
The advice P6 got on the course was to straighten up his posture, do some vocal coaching and also some presentation training:

“[It was] Real food for thought. I said ‘Ok, if I project that image on people whom I had never met, then really these are the kind of things that I want to address over the course of this week” (P6_R2)

“[They] were things around, I suppose, personal image, posture, and the way I use my voice. Those kinds of things. I'm learning to talk slowly, I'm learning to sit up in the room not to... In order to use my height, to use my physical presence. And I think that is very good advice” (P6_R2)

P6 thought that, if everybody at the course perceived him in a similar way, then he would probably benefit from taking on board the suggestions he had been given.

Figure 45. P6’s sensemaking at the end of the research



Compiled by the author.

An ending point: at the end of the research. A picture of P6's change had firmed up soon after PTFL. Interview four was a short touch base and did not really highlight new dimensions of change. P6 was still mindful of being empathetic and taking perspective in work interactions. He had been following up on the practical training ideas he had been given: he had done some presentation coaching as well as some additional training with the media department within his organization. He was still looking into whether to do vocal coaching. Also, he had not yet found the mentor figure that he had been looking for. So overall P6 was doing good. In his own opinion, he had grown as a person since attending the course:

"Linda: Yeah. No, it's clear now, it's clear. Absolutely, thank you. So overall, now compared to before PTFL started, do you find that you have grown as a person?"

Respondent: Yeah, I think I do. But I think it is more maybe in terms of growing my empathy and also my emotional intelligence in a certain kind of difficult situations if anything else" (P6_R4)

"I think I am becoming better at analyzing my own feelings and the feeling of the third or the second party, when I am in the conversation as well" (P6_R4)

P6 and I had been discussing about what type of change he was undergoing. He had introduced a useful distinction: he thought that, compared to other people on the course, he had needed more pragmatic advice rather than personal advice, psychological advice, or therapy. It does seem that he had not entered the course with any type of issue requiring that type of attention. Hence, in his opinion, he might have "moved less" than others during the course. In my view, the issue is less one of quantity, and more one of direction: given P6's starting point, it seems that he did move along a trajectory of development that made sense for him.

Implications for leadership practice

A lot of the content in P6's story clearly translates across to leadership practice. As seen earlier, P6 had a new realization about the multiplicity of views and backgrounds of other people. Generally, he was finding himself able to empathize with others at a deeper level. And, in the workplace, he was more engaged with exploring what deeper issues might at play below the surface of things. According to constructive-developmental view, the realization of multiple perspectives is a milestone of leadership development. The ability to see multiple perspectives proceeds from a more mature empathy; and, it enables more sophisticated leadership responses. P6 did think that he was handling things better in a number of occasions. In the example

that was presented earlier, he had identified and resolved an underlying issue affecting a team member. In addition, he was finding he could be more constructive within some key relationships with others at work:

“I think my relationships have improved with some people. Particularly with.... With my immediate boss actually. My own relationship with him has improved. Partly because I am able to see what motivates him a bit more and then I don’t think he is always right” (P6_R4)

He was also finding that his communication of decisions was becoming more effective as he got better at building consensus:

“I think it is more about the communication of decision making and getting buy-in to it” (P6_R4)

Finally, he found himself better able to influence demanding negotiations. The following is an example:

“There were a couple of times in recent contract negotiations where I had to think ‘Okay, let me look at this situation from an external perspective. That occurred only last week, when I had to present a fee claim for the coming year that was [significantly] higher than the client was expecting. And initially the reaction was very bad, but the issue wasn’t actually the quantum of the figure, or the fact that we put in more than that. The issue was more about the fact that the person who was receiving that figure had already been through a budgeting forecasting process for the coming year and had not anticipated that what we were doing might change. So we needed to have a different kind of conversation. The conversation was ‘Okay, we can get part of this now, let’s not focus on how much money we have got to be claiming from you this year. Let’s look at the way we can improve the way we send your company information at different points during the year’. Because that was the thing that was going to makes sorted in the longer term, you know, that was a good example of that” (P6_R4)

Working with the awareness of multiple perspectives had been benefitting P6’s leadership practice in several ways.

Another aspect of change revolves around P6’s understanding of his role within a more sophisticated frame. He had a natural inclination and preference for an affiliative style of leadership. His notion of his inclination, however, rested on a dualistic view of leadership being either affiliative or directive. In this frame of reference, affiliative

corresponded to being a good listener and able to motivate others; in contrast, directive corresponded to not listening and to imparting orders--

"To me, I guess, I suppose I've always made those kinds of relationships in the past, where being directive equals not listening, giving instructions equals not kind of being affiliative." (P6_R2)

After the course, P6 painted a more nuanced picture of leadership style: one where the needs of different people have a role in determining what response is appropriate. Being directive does not automatically mean being dictatorial: it could mean, for example, providing instructions to somebody who at a particular point in time does need guidance:

"It is probably not as clear cut as that. I mean, I think it's actually much more about recognizing what the other person is needing at that time. Sometimes they are needing an unambiguous direction because they actually are in a period of indecision themselves. And they are coming to me to seek some clarity, or to seek some solution that they cannot find by themselves. So, based on the signals that they are giving off, it could be very appropriate for me to say sometimes 'Well, actually this is what you need to do'"(P6_R2)

P6 thought that this insight around role was especially relevant to his current role, where, compared to the past, his responsibility had shifted a long way from that of being the "ultimate technician" (P6_R2):

"I don't feel pressured to sort of actually being sort of the ultimate technician in the room anymore. It's more about... My role is there to preserve the relationship and actually bring in more people from my team into the discussion so that they can actually give the technical answers" (P6_R2)

"It allows the other people to be seen as the expert, so there's that in it for them, and actually it allows me to be much more calm in those meetings. Not sitting there thinking 'Okay, I need to have a sticky business conversation here, and I've got to preserve the relationship. You know, I can preserve the relationship and uphold the principles, and other people can actually deal with the detail" (P6_R2)

Both these changes in P6's leadership practice (working with the awareness of multiple perspectives and redefining his role) seem to proceed from a greater breadth, depth and granularity of understandings around people and leadership. For this reason, I believe that these changes are an example of greater sophistication and demonstrate personal development.

8.10.7 Participant 7, Female

Context

Work context. Through my conversations with P7, her work environment emerged as a positive force in her life, with senior management engaging her in ways that she appreciates and positively supporting her personal and professional development. In 2010, the year of our first interview, P7 had just taken up a manager role at the national level after working for the company for nearly two decades. The new role entailed a change in functional area as well as greater responsibilities: overseeing expanded business and geographic areas and a team of managers. P7 seemed pleased and somewhat humbled by the trust she perceived the company was according to her by offering her this new role:

“I was surprised because [previously] I was focused on customer service or marketing [...] I was like ‘wow!’. I didn’t expect that to be the proposition, and I said ‘Why are you offering me this?’, and they said ‘Because we think you are going to be good at it’, and I said “You think I’ll be good at it, but I am not too sure myself that I will be good at it!” (P7_R1)

Remarkably, at the time of the interview the company was simultaneously supporting P7 in three different education initiatives, including a Master degree. P7 was nudged toward attending PFTL by the company’s Chairman, himself a PFTL graduate from 20 years prior. Once again, P7 sounded very appreciative of the opportunity presented to her by her organization—if after the initial reflex of wondering why she was being invited to attend a personal development program:

“He asked if I would like to do this course, and I kind of thought... Hmm, I wonder why. And then I thought, well, ‘Why not?!’ You know, he’s offering me the opportunity—such a fabulous opportunity to do something like this, so... You don’t get offers like that every day” (P7_R1)

Personal context. P7’s closest personal environment seemed to also be a positive factor. P7 and her husband seemed to share a lot of their time and passions off work. The couple does not have children—something, however, that they seem to have an examined serenity about:

“We don’t have any children, and we are not bothered by the fact that we don’t have children. We are quite happy as we are.” (P7_R1)

Later on in the research, I asked P7 if she had noticed any change in her personal life, for example in the quality of the time she spends with her partner:

“The time that I spend with my partner was always a very good time anyway. So, I didn’t really have an issue, there was never an issue there.” (P7_R3)

I interpreted her answer as a further clue pointing to a fundamentally positive and constructive relationship with her partner.

Outlook

Outlook on PTFL. In P7’s outlook on the PTFL experience, I mainly detected enthusiasm and a high level of commitment, as well as a pragmatic angle on making change happen. When P7 and I first spoke, she had a lot on her plate in terms of work and training-related commitments. Nevertheless, she had welcomed her chairman’s invitation to attend PTFL as a *“fabulous opportunity”* (P7_R1). She said she was looking forward to the course, even though she had heard that it could be emotionally demanding. P7 seemed confident that a fundamentally positive experience awaited her. This turned out to be true even though once PTFL was underway her strong ability to empathize made the beginning of the program almost unbearable for her:

“The stories, particularly one of them, were particularly hard and I felt really emotionally affected by the stories. I felt incredibly upset and I thought that, psychologically, if everybody’s story was going to be as heart-wrenching, that then I was going to be a nervous wreck and completely destroyed by the end of the week and I was not going to be able to cope with the emotional level of the course. And so I felt like running away actually.” (P7_R2)

In the face of this difficulty, there emerged this expression of P7’s level of commitment to the experience:

“I did really have the intention of sticking it out, because I hadn’t come all that way and decided to commit to doing the course not to stick it out. [...] I was really heart-wrenched by the first experiences that were shared but as the week went on, I think it became—I’m not sure whether it became easier, but perhaps it was less of a shock and perhaps emotionally I began to take control better of my emotions.” (P7_R2)

Outlook on change. When asked what her own role might be in the process of change that she was pursuing, P7 pointed to commitment explicitly:

“I think [it is] along the lines of being just... A bit more determined about making a conscious effort.” (P7_R2)

Later in the research, P7 further commented on her level of openness to the experience:

“There wasn’t any resistance [from my part]. The only resistance was the first couple of days of the course, when I thought ‘Gosh, this is emotionally very, very, very, very draining. I don’t know if I am going to be able to do the course’. But as time went on during that week I Was fine and I was very glad that I did it.” (P7_R2)

As mentioned earlier, P7 also seemed to exemplify a pragmatic approach to creating change in her life. P7 pragmatically defined the issue of personal change in that her definition seems to demystify a just human anxiety that ‘I am the only one to have an issue’:

“I think that my reaction in the end was that in fact everybody has a story and everybody’s got things [...] in their minds that they are not at ease with within themselves. And it doesn’t really matter what level of... sort of emotional tragedy they are on. It did not always have to be tragic events, but everybody’s got things that upset them and that [...] they have difficulty coming to terms with.” (P7_R2)

Perhaps this approach makes the task of personal change more amenable, more like something to simply get on with. P7 started scoping some practical solutions that she would leverage and draw support from:

“I loved the yoga sessions in the morning. [...] I think it set me up well for the day. [...] The yoga that [the teacher] did with us is a very similar style of exercises to the Pilates exercises that I do, so I decided this year to go to Pilates twice a week now. [...] Once a week was obviously not enough for me. And I am starting a book about meditation.” (P7_R2)

Regular physical exercises and meditation had a particular significance in P7’s case, as I will return to soon, given her health condition.

Interview interaction

From the first instants of our first interview, my conversation with P7 felt quite pleasant. In part, this is certainly due to her considerate and friendly manner. Possibly, it is also related to her approach to the interviews: she did not seem either particularly intimidated or flattered by interviews. P7’s voice was typically soft and her speech somewhat understated, even when she was describing what hit me as an impressive level of engagement with work, her team, and with the three simultaneous training initiatives she was taking part in. P7 was gracious about our second interview, which felt rather drawn out, and still volunteered as much of her time as was going to be needed for the research. I felt that P7 gave a genuine try at working with all questions that I posed, even those questions that seemed to make less than good sense on the spot. With all her kindness, I did not feel like P7 was driven by trying to please the

interviewer: in a number of instances, she asked me for clarification, fed back a correction of an interpretation, or signaled that a particular question was unclear. It also seemed that P7 felt free to interact with me as much as I was interacting with her: for example, she asked me questions about my experience with PTFL and my rationale for the research, demonstrated a kind interest in the challenges of my work and offered suggestions. One challenge for me in speaking with P7 was a sense at times that some of the more open questions might trigger in her a degree of anxiety—as if she could not be reassured that she would answer ‘correctly’. At times I did as I felt and attempted to reassure her, and I think that eventually we negotiated our way into a relatively comfortable space:

*“Linda: Sorry if so many of my questions are like taking a stab at things.....”
[...]*

P7: I am thinking that maybe I am not giving you very much for your dissertation!

Linda: No, that is not true, that is not true. If you have that impression it is largely my fault! I mean, my fault... It’s the nature of the research.

P7: It’s quite difficult because it’s all quite subjective. Because, it’s all about what goes on in your mind, isn’t it?

Linda: Exactly! And that’s why I just can’t have a lot of standard questions with everybody... It’s more about getting into your shoes, and behind your eyes, and see if you are [now] seeing things differently [after the course], and what’s.... What you are getting out of that.

P7: Also it’s quite difficult to be conscious of things that you do differently, and conscious of the impact that you have on others. I mean, that is what I am trying to do—be much more aware of that, but it’s very difficult for me to say to you ‘Oh, yes, I’ve done this, and this, and this--and it’s had that, and that, and that result’. Because it’s not that clear-cut yet.

Linda: I think this is absolutely fine.” (P7_R3)

I then realized later in the research why that was the case, in connection to her comments about generally feeling put on the spot by questions.

In conclusion, a word on how our interaction might have carried into my analysis. Having perceived P7 as responsive, helpful, consistent and transparent during the interviews, I have leaned towards taking most of her comments at face value during my analysis and interpretation of the data. As mentioned earlier, there was a stage

during interviews when I felt a certain question was a bit threatening to P7 and that perhaps, in those moments, specific questions were not explored in as great a depth as they could have. I did not however attempt to pursue that exploration further, believing that that was really outside of the intent and also the purpose of this research. From my perspective, a satisfactory level of interpersonal trust eventually built up between us and our conversations yielded overall reliable information about what was really salient and relevant in P7's story.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. When asked in the first interview what she would like PTFL to do for her, P7 identified two main issues. The first issue was a contradiction around self-confidence. On one hand, P7 felt herself to be a relatively strong and confident person,

"I think I am somebody that's... I think my head is quite squarely, firmly attached to my shoulders." (P7_R1)

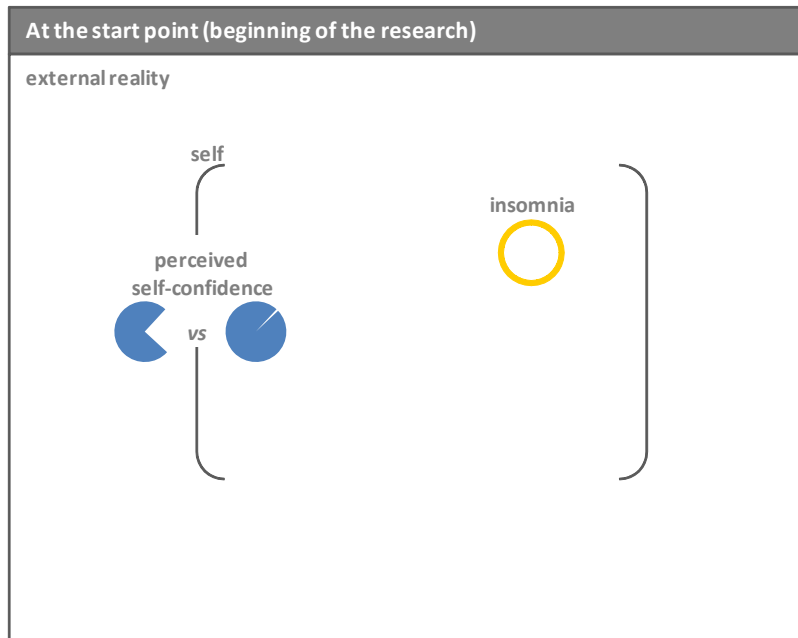
But on the other hand, people close to her will at times pick up a form of hesitation:

"I do sometimes suffer from a lack of self-confidence. And I think that sometimes perhaps my boss and the chairman perhaps see that and... But I don't really know what this could be about." (P7_R2)

The second issue related to her difficulty in unwinding after work and sleeping at night:

"For me personally what I would like to... I find it really difficult to shut down. To detach myself from things. I wake up at night and I've got 50 million things going through my brain about work—in particular about work. [...] I have trouble sleeping, because... [...] At night what seems to happen is that I wake up and then things start slotting into place into my brain. [...] I will be awake for two or three hours in the night and then I wake up in the morning feeling really tired again. So I think my biggest problem at the moment is that. I need to find a way of finding some better balance between work time and rest time, and not be so tired" (P7_R1)

Figure 46. P7's sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

A mid-point: after PTFL. The piece of P7's life story relating to her suffering from a serious illness for twenty years remained completely covert during the first interview. P7 suffers from a serious illness, a long-term condition with symptoms fluctuating from mild to debilitating. While symptoms can be ameliorated somewhat, their treatment is not standard and there is no known cure for the disease. P7 told me about her illness when, in our second interview (right after PTFL), I asked her whether she felt that there was something different compared to the previous time we had talked (before PTFL):

"What has changed fundamentally for me is that... I have been a bit more honest about the fact that... [...] I suppose the only way for me to answer this question is to tell you what was really bugging me in the first [place]: [...] my story is that I have... I have an illness and I try to live my life as if that illness didn't exist." (P7_R2)

The remainder of our conversation articulated an implicit logic that P7 had been running by for 20 years:

“It was like a taboo, you know, being unwell. It’s your problem and work isn’t supposed to know these sorts of things, you know, that is just your lot in life and that’s it. And I always thought that if I ever acknowledged the fact professionally, I thought that that would stop my career progressing. Which I is why I always kept it undercover” (P7_R2)

P7’s perceived need to conceal her health condition seemed to drive her to over-compensate through work:

“I try to hide it from work and from everybody and I just throw myself into work and I shouldn’t throw myself into work that much because it’s a bit self-destructive. Because my health really doesn’t enable me to be the workaholic that I am” (P7_R2)

But, exerting herself to that extent had been counter-productive and started undermining her psychological as well as physical health:

“I have too many things in my mind, because there is so much going on during the day, there is all too much going on. [...] The night is the time when, you know, I’ve got time to think about things instead of just go go go go go.... [...] The night is the only time where I could have space to think—even though it’s against my will, I don’t want to.” (P7_R2)

In addition, not having sufficient time to think, or rest, had been making the whole of reality look quite worrisome in her eyes:

“What happens with me is I just worry about everything. At night, I just start worrying about the most ridiculous things. [...] I just lose the sense of proportion of things and because I ‘m worried about these things that are in my mind, and because I can’t get them out of my mind, I don’t sleep. And because I don’t sleep, then I am tired, so I’m just going into a downward spiral.” (P7_R2)

P7 pointed out to me the link between this dynamic and the contradiction around self-confidence that we had discussed in the first interview:

“What came across was that I didn’t really lack in self-confidence so much. It was the fact that I was an incessant worrier and got tired. So it was more of that than self-confidence. And then the self-confidence [issue] was more about worrying. [...] I suppose that yes, the self-confidence [issue] moved across to more anxiety, actually—yes, I suppose that I suffer from anxiety rather than a confidence crisis” (P7_R2)

An ending point: at the end of the research. Already at the time of the second interview, a new way to make sense of her health condition and work life had mostly taken shape in P7's mind. This novel sensemaking was starting from the acceptance of a renewed awareness of her illness:

"Fundamentally [...] it's admitting that my health is part of my life, really. And not just go[ing] on like a Trojan soldier because it just doesn't do me any good and it doesn't do anybody else any good either." (P7_R2)

"So perhaps that's part of my psychology at the moment, so that is something that I need to learn to live with or deal with" (P7_R2)

P7's sensemaking continued with the identification of actual situations where a concrete action on her part could begin to shift the balance away from an excessive dedication to work:

"I came back and I talked to [my chairman], who sent me on the course, and I said: "Look, that's what I need to do, I have a health issue and I need to get better work-life balance". And he said he just completely agreed with me, and so that was kind of a weight off my shoulders, that I could admit to work that it was okay for me sometimes to say "Hey, no I am not going to do that, because I'm taking a bit of... You know, I've got to go now, or whatever." (P7_R2)

Later on, in the months following PTFL, P7's novel sensemaking around the illness further consolidated and was gradually translated into action. The following comment refers to the PTFL follow up session:

"I reported back to the group that I was feeling a lot better; that I was feeling a lot more honest with myself and with my colleagues about my lifestyle. And, I really think I was looking after myself better."(P7_R3)

For P7, looking after herself better came to include a range of things. Fundamentally, however, it pivoted around reclaiming time to attend to anything in a way that was more respectful towards herself:

"[I am] taking my time to do things and think about things rather than being in a mad, hectic rush about everything all the time."(P7_R3)

At some point in the conversation I could not help but wonder how much of P7's reclaiming her own time and asking for people's help and support involved her

disclosing her illness more often. Her answer quite emphatically underscored that this was not about publicizing the illness more:

“Oh not at all! Never. Never! No, no, no. Not at all! Not at all. .”(P7_R4)

Rather, the change seemed to be about a new way of relating to the illness:

“The illness has become less relevant. And I think it’s probably part because I am taking care of myself and I’m not letting myself... Not letting stuff pile up at work and getting under a lot of pressure and that has done an awful lot of good as well.” (P7_R4)

I mentioned earlier the significance of regular physical exercise in P7’s case. Understandably, in the greater time now available to her, P7 introduced activities aimed at supporting her physical wellness:

“I’m going to Pilates class twice a week and the swimming training that I do for diving on a Friday night—[that] I started this year. [...] We do some sophrology sessions, because it helps you keep your breathing for longer underwater” [P7_R3]

“We’ve decided to put a swimming pool in the garden at home as well [...] that will improve our lifestyle as well” [P7_R3]

“For the time being that’s sufficient [for me] in terms of relaxation” [P7_R3]

Benefits of this course of action seemed to be an inner feeling of calm and peace and hence also the ability to rest better:

“I’m just a lot more calm, peaceful and relaxed” (P7_R3)

“I just feel... I feel calm, I just feel calmer about everything. I feel less worried and anxious about everything all the time. [...] I just seem to have an inner peace that stops that worrying” (P7_R3)

“[And] I have been sleeping much better.” (P7_R3)

Consequently, as it was pointed out to P7 by other PFTL delegates on the PFTL follow-up module, her looks were noticeably healthier:

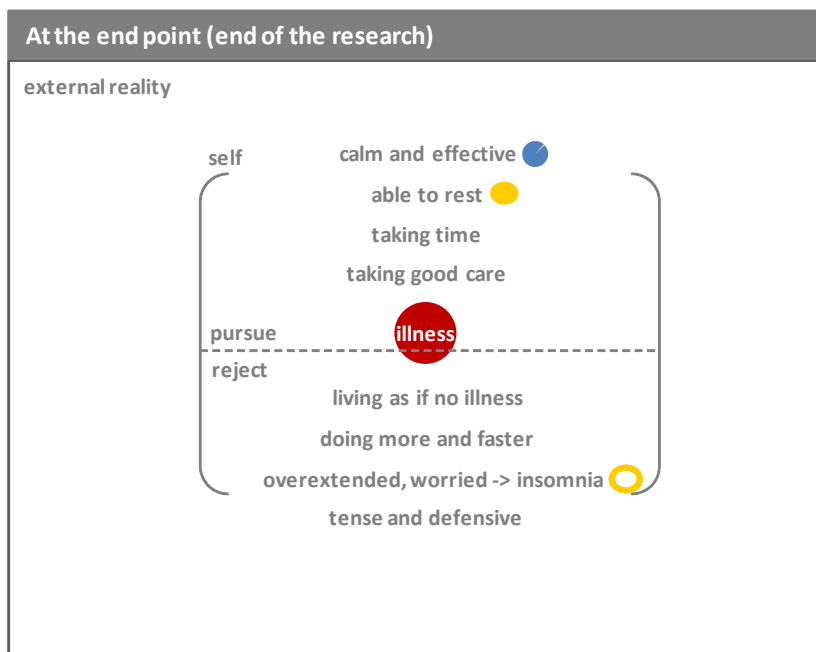
“I had very nice feedback from the people on the course. They said “Oh, you just look very different! You look really relaxed! And.... Your skin, your face, and skin and things... You don’t look grey; you look like you are living!” (P7_R3)

P7 looped her improved state of being all the way around to the issue around confidence:

“When I take time to think about things, [then] I can think “Oh, I can do it this way”, or I can get somebody else involved, or actually it doesn’t really need to be done anymore” (P7_R4)

“I have been around for a while [laughs]! I am quite at ease with the fact that if I don’t know something, it doesn’t matter because, you know, I will find somebody that can help me.” (P7_R4)

Figure 47. P7’s sensemaking at the end of the research



Compiled by the author.

Implications for leadership practice

At work, P7 found that taking time to think about things eliminated her anxiety about being found without an answer. Having become more inclined to involving others in the process of reflection, she perceived an improvement in her relationships with both her team and bosses.

“I don’t feel the need now to have an answer in the second that follows a

question. I feel quite relaxed about not answering straight away. And that therefore means that I am not going to give an aggressive answer, or a defensive answer.” (P7_R3)

“I think that makes me a nicer person to be around also, for other people. [...] Probably my relationship has been the best it has ever been with the person with whom I’ve worked with for the longest period of time, because I am just able to—okay, let’s just sit and listen to this and take time to think about it and not have a knee-jerk reaction.” (P7_R3)

“I find that [people] respond really well to [me asking for support]. Because, in general people like you asking for help and getting them involved. It makes them feel... I find it makes them feel quite.... More... It makes them feel important, and that they feel that they are contributing something as well” (P7_R4)

“I think I have a better relationship now with the people who work above me. [...] I don’t feel like in front of them I always need to have the answer either so... I just feel much more at ease with myself and relationships in general, which makes me less worried and more confident about things I suppose” (P7_R4)

“Because everybody has a story, to a greater or lesser degree, which takes up a greater or lesser amount of... Space, in their mind, in the way they are thinking, in the way they are reacting. And so I think I am a lot more tolerant of other people now. I know how under stress I feel anxious sometimes and it is not a nice feeling, so I Don’t want to put that sort of pressure or worry on other people either. So I Am more aware of the way I interact with people, because [...] People, you know, give the best of themselves when they feel good about things and about themselves. So I am conscious of trying to help unnecessary pressure on them” (P7_R4)

8.10.8 Participant 8, Male

Context

Work context. P8 is appreciated within his organization for his ability to successfully and profitably develop new business divisions. The core of his role is that of identifying new market opportunities and creating a product and a team to deliver to market. P8 seemed fully pleased with the organization and his role, which seemed a perfect match for his inclinations and skills. Senior management was supportive of him both in the business and in terms of training. P8 had himself identified a need to find training that would address his personal development, and the company promptly accepted to support his initiative.

Personal context. There is not a lot of information around P8's personal life, which seems happy and rewarding. In terms of background, P8 shared that he had a fortunate childhood:

"I certainly had good parents, and a younger brother. And yes, it was pretty happy" (P8_R3)

Also his current home life seems happy:

"Stable. Pretty happy. I've got a good partner. I love holidays. Got two dogs. No children. So my personal life is relatively stress-free. The challenge is juggling the personal life and the work life." (P8_R3)

With the only exception of a struggle at times to preserve work-life balance.

Outlook

Outlook on PTFL. In the organization, P8 had increasingly become responsible for managing people. Previously to PTFL, he had only taken part in technical training related to his professional focus:

"I have never been formally trained in [management], and I've... So it just had to be a lot of gut reactions, gut instinct. Whereas a lot of the people working around me at that level have had some sort of formal training, analysis training, RMD, McKensey, for example. And so I felt that... There's things that I was doing well, but I could certainly be doing better"

For this reason, P8 was seeking out training that would support him in his leadership role. P8 was looking for this training to have two main characteristics. First, he wanted the training to provide some theory and so that he could understand his own leadership responses in the context of a broader perspective:

“I do feel that I need to formalize what I am doing’, I need to understand... You know, rather than just doing things, I just need... A theory around it” (P8_R1)

Secondly, he felt strongly that the course should focus on himself as an individual, and on his personality; this, as opposed to focusing on management models and techniques. In his opinion, the core process of leadership is a very human one: the encounter between different personalities.

“If you are to influence people, I think number one is you’ve got to be able to treat people as human beings, and they’ve got to see you as one” (P8_R1)

“I have a diversity of staff that report to me, I have to deal with each of them differently. Some you have to constantly cajole and throw bones to them and say ‘You are doing a good job’, and give them all that love and attention, and others, if you do it, they feel they are being smothered. So you have to deal with it very differently. So, it is about people. If you are managing people, they are people. And equally, they have to deal with me” (P8_R1)

Hence, management training based on frameworks and models is often missing the mark:

“Actually, management training is in a bubble... You know, you do management training and it is all about techniques about management yet it is not addressing the person, it is not going to develop people” (P8_R2)

“I didn’t want just a standard... You know, ‘This is what you do’. It seemed to me that the course was working with me, and my personality, and my role, rather than saying ‘This is what management....’...I am not into that. And because I think management is about your personality, I thought this was working with you rather than just giving you a check list” (P8_R1)

In contrast, P8 was seeking a training opportunity that would focus on himself as a person:

“I wanted something that was going to challenge me. I wanted something that it looked like it was focused on the individual” (P8_R1)

“So what I want is to bring this course... this course work with me, to make me—to make the personality I’ve got even more effective. By helping me work out what is important and what isn’t” (P8_R1)

It was based on these criteria that P8 researched and selected a course like PTFL.

Outlook on change. As seen in terms of P8’s outlook on PTFL, he was mostly interested in training that would focus on himself as a person. This rested on his broader view of the self and leadership, this view pivoted around the notion that the person is in integer entity acting in different contexts as opposed to a different entity in different contexts:

“You are not two people. A person isn’t a person in their private life and another in their work life. You are fundamentally one person” (P8_R2)

These issues are as likely to be triggered in leadership situations than they are in other situations:

“If you understand yourself and how you react to things... if you unlock something in your private life, it will unlock something in your business life. And vice versa, you know, because you are only one person.” (P8_R2)

Going on a course like PTFL was for P8 an opportunity to face those issues, which otherwise would tend to remain concealed:

“[The issue] wouldn’t [be exposed], because you wouldn’t know that it’s got to come out. Because it’s never... You have never been forced to deal with it. You have never properly faced your demons” (P8_R2)

There were other elements that were salient to P8’s theory of change. One concerned his attitude to the issues that can potentially be uncovered. It would be unnecessary and unproductive to wallow over issues or build resentment towards what originated them. This emerged in P8’s reaction, after the course, as he was contemplating his own issues:

“I left and perhaps a week after the course I started to feel a little bit of resentment about my past, thinking there were a few years in my life, through nobody’s particular fault, that could have been much better for me and they weren’t. And I saw I was starting to get resentful about that and I thought ‘That is bloody negative. That is going to get me nowhere. And I got

over that'. I think some of that you have to almost detox and get out. Let go of all that negative feeling" (P8_R2)

Another element around change concerned P8's own role in the process. When I asked him what had been his role in his process of change until then, P8 responded that his role had been precisely *to change*:

*"Well, I mean, my role has actually... Has actually been **to** [emphasis in the original] change" (P8_R2)*

"I could have just gone away from the week saying 'Oh, that was an interesting week', but not having changed the way I behaved. You know, that is true only if I make it, and therefore being consciously making those changes. And, dealing differently with other people" (P8_R2)

"And, yeah I have... Sometimes I have... You know, in a busy environment, I haven't always been successful, you know, I've slipped back into reacting in the way that I would have done before the course." (P8_R2)

This view seemed balanced: that is, it recognized the difficulties as well as the occasional stumbles. The comments above give a bit of depth to P8's rationale for the choice of PFTL. Also, they give a clue of how he was framing the process of change for himself: as a process where the 'I' is firmly driving.

Interview interaction

There are two distinctive characteristics of my interactions with P8. One is the great ease with which P8 and I shared our views on abstract topics, such as leadership development or authenticity. P8 came across to me as a bit of a philosopher: he seemed to really value understanding things and thinking about ideas. More than other participants, he stressed his interest in understanding—whether himself, his boss, other people, the theories behind management, or emerging situations at work. More than other participants, he engaged me quite actively, already in the first interview, to inquire about my experience when I had previously attended the course and to test his ideas around how it was going to be like. Also, P8 seemed to have particularly clear theories about things: for example, he had a well-articulated theory of leadership as well as a theory of personal change. While these theories were clearly communicated, P8 seemed to hold them not as set in stone, but rather as theories-in-progress. Finally, while some of my more wondering questions disconcerted other participants, they seemed to intrigue P8—who was quite comfortable with testing and

trying his thoughts in conversation with me. Thanks to the ease with which we conversed about these things and, I believe, the high degree of thoughtfulness behind P8's comments, interviews were often illuminating for me.

A second characteristic of my interactions with P8 is that I quickly began to like him! I enjoyed the ease of conversation and certainly I relaxed when I realized that P8 did not feel as threatened by some questions as others seemed to be. Also, I enjoyed P8's speech, which is precise but also energetic. I appreciated being able to work on some difficult points with him and the insights that ensued. Finally, I was aware that P8's case looked like the epitome of the change that I wanted to be able to describe. My taking a liking to P8 was also a source of worry from the point of view of the research. For example, would I be challenging him as much as I challenged other participants if that was needed? By the mid of interview two I started wondering whether there was any chance that P8 was exceptionally good at presenting himself as a success case. Did I have any evidence to support that this success case was not just a story? My conclusion is that P8 was exceptionally good at presenting himself *and* that for him there indeed was a substantial progression taking place²⁹¹. Among my reasons is that P8 generally did not seem to need to play himself up. While he openly acknowledged his strengths and achievements, he also promptly brought up his challenges and limitations. A second reason is that he tended to discuss other people in terms of how he could be better with them: even when he recounted examples of people behaving less than fairly with him, his focus was on how to respond in as constructive a way as possible. From this, I derive that he possibly had a genuine motivation to change—rather than to just portray that he had changed. I did at some point openly question whether I was reading P8's narrative too positively. P8's response was actually to point out that he is an experienced storyteller:

“Well, I mean, part of what I do is I train people... My background is training people and development, so therefore... Essentially, a big part of what I used to do, not so much now, but it's storytelling. Because you have to tell a story so that people connect... you have to make people follow you. Otherwise they are not going to learn anything from you” (P8_R3)

To which I questioned further:

“Linda: Yeah, that's true. That's true. And it is a nice story. But you are not

²⁹¹ This conclusion is understood within the limitations imposed by the methodology of this research. By accessing only the participant's subjective world, I am unable to conclude on whether significant change was occurring or consolidating in the eyes of other observers (a boss, a partner, a friend). However, I believe that P8 was being honest about what he thought was changing within himself and about the external implications that he thought were deriving from that change.

just telling me the story I need to hear--are you [chuckles]?

P8: No! What I am telling you... is genuinely, genuinely innocent!" (P8_R3)

P8 then spontaneously stressed that the situation was not completely rosy:

"I am feeling pretty good. I still... At times I still get, although nobody would notice it externally, but internally I get the old wobble now and again" (P8_R3)

Arguably, P8 was being honest about what he saw happening within and around him. Where I do think that I overestimate his case is when I tend, in my mind, to equal P8 with the epitome of personal change. Even if his story in this research is a clear instance of personal development, as will be argued, there are probably more limitations to it than I am inclined to think. Certainly, his change was a work in progress and did not only have positive ramifications. For example, P8 was starting to make some adjustments in the way he was interacting with some colleagues at work (examples of these will be given later). Although I am inclined to think that P8 was trying his best, it is unlikely that his attempts were perceived unfailingly and unequivocally positive by others around him. Actually, this has made me reflect on the discontinuous and embedded nature of personal change: even assuming that a person is unquestionably making a change for the better, just the fact that its early implementation will be a novel experience means that they might be clumsy and unlikely to result in a definite gain for everybody involved in the situation.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. As seen earlier, a key aspect of P8's 'starting point' is his firm view that he needs to be at the center of the process of change. His expectation on the course is that it will focus on his personality and that it will help him challenge himself:

"How I understand it, the course challenges you to look at what you do, how you are doing it, why you are doing it. And makes... I think it's very much about making me challenge myself"(P8_R1)

P8's outlook on change builds on the assumption that, for any change to occur, he would need to proactively drive it. In addition, P8 identified that managing is about people: hence, it is crucially related to how personalities (his and those of others) interact. Generally, P8's starting mindset is to look within himself for additional keys to interpret his own responses and consider his interactions with others more effectively.

“My challenge is managing above me”(P8_R1)

Throughout our first conversation, P8 identified two particular external challenges with which he would have liked to deal more effectively. One is the challenge of managing above himself; the other is the challenge of switching from an operational back to a strategic focus at the completion of each new strategic initiative.

In terms of managing above, there were two particular instances of this challenge that mattered for P8. One was the communication of his business strategy proposals upward in the chain. This represented an issue because P8 primarily relied on his knowledge of the market and his intuition. Even though this had proven successful time and again, senior management tended to require detailed analyses justifying proposed new strategies:

“I am very much a gut instinct person. This feels right, and I don’t spend lots of time on analysis. I do research, I understand the customers, the customers tell me what is needed, I go deliver it. That’s the way I work. Whereas, for the management above me, there has to be a lot more analysis and I don’t do that. Therefore I have to convince them that the way I do it is still going to deliver the right result. And so, that’s the challenge”(P8_R1)

A second instance of challenge in managing upward was P8’s relationship with his boss:

“And my boss is still very... Trying to understand him is one of the missions I have got for next year to try understand him more”(P8_R2)

In terms of the second issue, this focused on P8’s need to switch from an operational back to a strategic focus at the completion of each new strategic initiative. As seen earlier, the core of P8’s background and expertise is business development strategy. The company very much valued P8’s expertise and had assigned him the responsibility, in his area, to keep scoping *“where are we going to be in five years’ time”* (P8_R2). When P8 identified a new strategic opportunity, he would also be in charge of creating a product and building a team that would deliver it:

“[What I do is say] ‘This is where the hole in the market is, this is what nobody is delivering into’, this is what now we are delivering into”(P8_R1)

“[There is] a first stage of execution when that person reports to me for the first twelve months to allow the products to bed in and then to allow that person to go report elsewhere”(P8_R1)

After the launch, however, P8 was required by the company to pass on the operational responsibilities around the new product and to return to his role as strategic business development outpost. This had just happened after the delivery of the last strategic initiative driven by P8:

“What the MD said to me was ‘Great, you’ve got the strategy, you’ve got the people to deliver the strategy, you’ve got the product range, your role has moved away from being strategic again to being operational’, he said, ‘and I don’t want the operational, I want you to step back again and go back to strategic.’”(P8_R2)

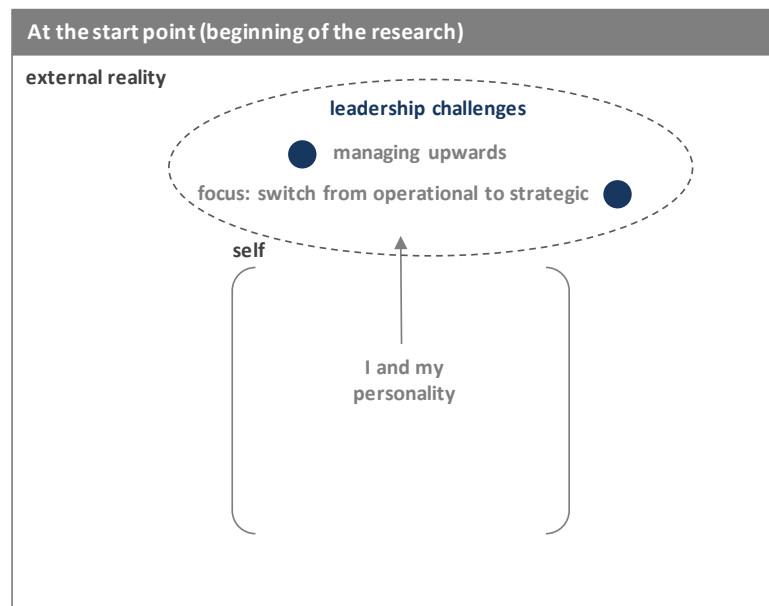
However, P8 was finding this switch to be challenging:

“I think that the concern is that I get too absorbed with the operational. And then the strategy gets.... Gets sidelined, whereas it should be my focus” (P8_R1)

“Part of it is that I want to see it all the way through” (P8_R1)

“Then you are mixed in that operation of then penetrating it into the market. And now I’ve got to stand back and say ‘Ok, that’s gone to market now. On with the next one. Leave other people to take it to penetrate” (P8_R1)

Figure 48. P8’s sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

In conclusion, P8 started out with a determination to learn about himself and drive his own change. He was hoping knowing himself better would help him handle himself better in dealing with external challenges, of which he presented two main current examples.

A mid-point: just after PTFL. Taking part in PTFL brought to P8 a confirmation that his change was going to be very much about himself. In our second interview, right after the course, P8 shared with me the crux of his situation:

“What it was is that over a period of time I put up a wall and I don’t let people behind, that outwardly is very confident, inwardly is far less so” (P8_R2)

“I got in the habit of burying who I really am and it became a way of life” (P8_R2)

P8’s putting up a wall and burying his real self, had taken the form of maintaining an outwardly professional persona:

“That sort of lecturing persona, which has always been the person, you know, very much out there, very confident... that’s the person that a lot of the professionals see. And to be fair, there is a lot of respect for that person” (P8_R2)

The reason why P8 had been maintaining this well-respected professional persona was long-standing and sensitive:

“The person that I portray in my professional environment, and to a degree in my personal life, is not really the person that is within. And that’s basically because since the age of about 14 I got in the habit of burying who I really am and it became a way of life.” (P8_R2)

“So if I kept that real person in the shadow, I would never...People would never know who I really am. And that was basically around me keeping my sexuality to myself for many, many years” (P8_R2)

The professional persona had grown out of a self-protective mechanism: in teenage years, P8 had decided to not reveal his homosexuality outside of his closest personal circles to protect himself from discriminations. This outer person was socially very adaptable:

“I was hiding behind a persona--And, I could be a social chameleon” (P8_R3)

P8's own friends showed surprise when he described to them the outcome of PFTL as having identified an issue with confidence:

"They said 'So what came out of your course?', and I said 'A thing around self-confidence', and my friends laughed and said 'We don't know anyone more confident than you,'" (P8_R2)

In P8's adult life, however, this also had non-beneficial implications for P8—primarily, on his self-confidence:

"That [person] outwardly is very confident, inwardly is far less so" (P8_R1)

An example of how this separation had been affecting P8's confidence is his relationship with praise:

"Taking compliments [is] something I was very bad at in the past. If people said nice things and said, 'Oh you did a nice job with that. Well done'--even though I liked hearing it--and if I didn't hear it I would sort of wonder what people did think--but I'd acknowledge it and I'd sort of move on" (P8_R2)

"I've got a lovely note from somebody after I got my award. And in the past I would have opened the email, read it, looked horrified and then just sort of closed it down thinking 'Oh, she can't mean that'" (P8_R3)

It was hard for P8 to internalize praise, because his confidence had so far been building on the image that he portrayed as opposed to his true self. What happened on PFTL is that the group had laid a basis for P8 to build a more genuine confidence in himself—confidence which was based on his true self:

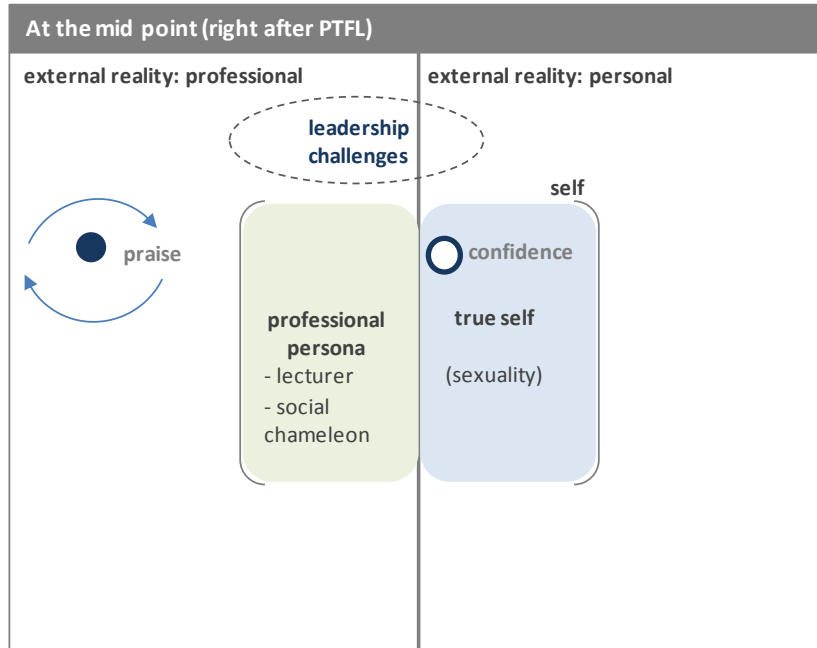
"And what the others, what the rest of the group told me is that I am perfectly fine as I am, I don't need to put the wall up, and therefore I should be confident, not based on the person that they see but based on the person that I really am" (P8_R2)

The realization, for P8, was that in order to build up genuine confidence, it would have to be based more on himself and less on the outer image he had been holding up:

"Unless I expose that person, and I let other people see that person, how can I build the confidence because nobody would ever see it. And so if I kept that real person in the shadow, I would never...People would never know who I

really am” (P8_R2)

Figure 49. P8’s sensemaking at a mid-point



Compiled by the author.

As will be presented in the continuation of P8’s story, a number of other implications followed for him from this central realization.

An ending point: at the end of the research. The main realization for P8 was that he could be more himself across situations, and that this would be beneficial for him and for his self-confidence. P8 had embraced the advice received in this respect and, following the course, he began to implement it in several ways. A first notable way concerns the discarding of P8’s lecturing persona. Upon reflecting further on this, P8 concluded that lecturing was not something that he was doing because it was very meaningful to him:

“I’ve always said, you know, if... I think I am always going to keep lecturing, because if I keep that person out there then if my company gets fed up with me and wants me to leave, then I always have that to fall back on” (P8_R2)

Hence, he had decided to phase the lecturing out of his schedule:

“In fact at 3.30 this afternoon I am talking to my managing director about

actually reducing my lecturing almost to zero so that I can concentrate on doing what I really enjoy and that is building businesses within the company” (P8_R2)

“So I am doing what I’ve always said I wouldn’t do. You know, I am getting rid of the old P8, and saying ‘That’s the lecturing P8, that is finished now’ and keep that out there because it’s useful from a business perspective, but I want to do is not lecturing anymore” (P8_R2)

With the time and energy freed up of the lecturing commitments, P8 was able to focus more on business development. Also, he realized that he had an inclination to help other people develop and hence started volunteering for coaching and mentorship roles within the organization.

A second way P8 was being himself more was through sharing more of his personal life with others at work. The way people responded was encouraging:

“What I’ve observed is that people.... People see a human being rather than, you know ... They see--because I achieved a lot, I’m in quite a senior position. [...] When I bring people in a bit, people realize there is actually a human being under there. And I always thought--I’ve always known there is a human being underneath the way I am generally. But others don’t seem necessarily to see that. And so by letting people in a bit, they are starting to feel a bit more engaged, if that’s the right word” (P8_R2)

Thirdly, P8 was presenting his own style more confidently:

“What it has done is it’s given me the self-confidence to say ‘Well, that’s the way I work’. And that’s nothing wrong with that, there’s nothing wrong with me working in a way that is very gut reaction. Rather than working through loads of spreadsheets etcetera” (P8_R2)

“You know, that’s not my training, that’s not my background. That’s not why actually I am in the job I am doing. It’s not because I analyze things to death. I actually know the market. I know what the market expects from us, and deliver it. And therefore... there’s nothing wrong with that. And therefore I got them to adapt to what they can expect from me, because I know I can get them what they need” (P8_R2)

Also, P8 found that having made progress in understanding himself, and having witnessed on the course other people’s relationships with their own stories, was helping him deal with situations differently:

“Hearing people’s stories [at the course], what really drove home to me is that everybody is a result of their experience. Everybody that you meet has got their stories. And therefore understanding the other people’s story, and understanding your story, does help you deal with other people because” (P8_R2)

The ability to deal better with situations can be captured in two main themes: more genuine and constructive relationships with others at work; and, a more reflective approach to considering situations. In his relationships at work, P8 felt he was better able to understand the position of others. This had brought by an improvement, for example, in his relationship with his boss:

“Since I did the course, I’ve been so much more relaxed with him. [...] And he’s been more relaxed because he is leaving, but I really... In the last few months I really got to understand him. And [...] we’ve built up a relationship that really works. And I get him a lot more and he understands me a lot more. And we’ve both got a lot more respect for each other. So even though he is going, I still worked on that.” (P8_R2)

P8 also felt that he was becoming more upfront with people—better able to clarify misunderstandings while also stand his ground more. One example is how he interacted with his new boss around a request that he could not address in the timeframe required. The first reaction was to doubt himself:

“We have got a new MD, [...] he was demanding that he wanted X amount of statements by two weeks’ time, and it was just impossible for me do it. And the logical thing to do is to email him back and say ‘we haven’t got that, can we just push that back into May, etcetera etcetera’. But immediately I started getting very uptight, thinking, you know, ‘You are being unreasonable’, and then.... Then, I start self-doubting myself” (P8_R3)

But then he was able to communicate his point of view:

“And then I thought ‘Don’t be so stupid, he is just being unreasonable. Let him understand where I am coming from and I really want to deliver what he needs, but he is just going to have to give me a bit longer. And he’ll understand because he is a good guy’. And guess what? He understands.” (P8_R3)

With the people on his team, P8 he was being able to be more inspirational:

“It’s making the relationships at work even stronger. What... It is interesting

the impact that it has, because it's actually people that don't directly report to me but I have to work with, who will work even more closely with me. And actually, in some cases, people were saying... in the past said 'Oh we quite like being separate teams because we have our own set of ways that we do things'. And now, I am getting people saying 'Do you know, I want to work for [P8] now, because I think I can work with him more effectively than...'"
(P8_R3)

The second theme relating to the ability to deal better with situations is around a tendency to reflect more before reacting.

"It's mainly sort of step back a bit. You know, there are situations where you think to yourself 'That situation has annoyed me a bit'. Rather than react, I stop to think 'Why did that person do that?', 'Oh, that's because they misunderstood what was going on there, I need to correct them'. Rather than just reacting. And then going and having a quiet word with [that person]"
(P8_R2)

"So it is much more about, you know, stopping and thinking before reacting. And, you know, people have been quite surprised with that" (P8_R2

P8 clarified that, rather than the course having increased his ability to read other people, the course had demonstrated to him the need and importance to do so:

"I am actually now reading other people a lot better--I am actually taking the trouble to read other people" (P8_R3)

Figure 50. P8's sensemaking at the end of the research



Compiled by the author.

Of the two external challenges that P8 had mentioned ahead of the course, one was managing above him. In light of the above, it seems that that was being addressed: P8's relationships both his old and new bosses had improved; and, he had been able to show confidence around his method of working and deflect requests for detailed analyses (which, incidentally, management had agreed to outsource to a different staff member). The other challenge that P8 had mentioned concerned feeling conflicted about abandoning the operational side of a project once a new project had successfully launched. This situation had improved too. In part, by reducing his lecturing load P8 had freed up more time to work on other projects. And, in part, P8 had agreed with his director to a new system and departmental structure that would better support him in this switch. In conclusion, then, it seems like P8's change efforts were being positively rewarded on all significant fronts.

Implications for leadership practice

A way to summarize the implications for leadership for P8 of his change is the motivational sentence²⁹² that he had created for himself on PTFL's second module:

"I lead as myself" (P8_R3)

As presented, P8's efforts to lead as himself had been having a positive impact on the workplace in a number of ways: P8 was developing more genuine and constructive relationships across the organization, finding that he could be more inspirational and motivating as a boss, and becoming more reflective rather than reacting to situations in a knee-jerk fashion. P8 was also starting to take up within the organization more roles dedicated to helping others develop: for example, he was personally coaching a team member that had been recently promoted, was volunteering in mentoring roles, and had taken the initiative of organizing a workshop around happiness at work. A lot of these changes stemmed, according to P8, from his realization of multiple perspectives and experiences standing behind people's responses. The aggregate of these changes indicate a significant increase in sophistication in how P8 view and enacted his role as a leader.

²⁹² A facilitated group activity towards the end of the course's second module requires everyone to form a motivational sentence which, in future and especially in case of stressful circumstances can be used as a reminder and an encouragement.

8.10.9 Participant 9, Male

Context

Work context. During the year and a half leading up to the research, work had presented P9 with some challenges as a result of a special project he had been given the leadership of. As a leader of the special project, P9 had been managing the closing down of some of the company's international locations. The project, which had just concluded at the time of interview one, had naturally brought a significant increase in workload. In addition, it had presented P9 with a novel leadership challenge. On one hand, P9 was accomplished in his profession and was familiar with his own strengths:

"And I guess I got to where I have through innate skills and development [and through] being able to do things on my own and making things happen"
(P9_R1)

On the other hand, even if he had driven the project to successful completion, he had had difficulties bringing the team along:

"[The project] also exposed that I need to find better ways of working with the team and getting the team to develop more. But also how do I keep the team moving in the right direction and meeting the deadlines." (P9_R1)

The challenge had not been experienced as insignificant:

"There were times where I did very much struggle going through this project. That was January and February time this year, I was very much suffering through the way." (P9_R1)

"It has had an impact on family as well, so if I can find ways to structure my work, not just work but the whole life area, then I will benefit from this."
(P9_R1)

P9 seemed relieved that the project had ended and that he could return to a more normal workload. This would also allow him to give more consideration to the challenge that the project had exposed. However, as I learned later, things on the work front never really eased:

"Personally, I had gone through some tough times at work [prior to returning to Cranfield for the PTFL follow-up]" (P9_R3)

"I am not... I am not overly enjoying the position I am in because of the workload at the moment." (P9_R3)

Given steepening conditions, P9 was starting to question his (fairly stoic, I sense) commitment to delivering:

“Linda: You are not really doubting your current job for the longer term, or are you?”

P9: Hem...I do have some concerns, but I mean... That is my internal challenge at the moment. Try to hold on to the fact that I have been able to deal with it this far. So... What has changed? I mean, I think there is more.... There is more and more expected of people all the time. As the business gets tougher. Hem... and my internal challenge is to see that I am still up to delivering on that. (P9_R3)

P9 seemed to question whether he would be able to negotiate a change of rules within the same game and achieve better conditions:

“I do need a change in environment and something.... Something else needs to happen to remove some the history that I am tied up with, perhaps tied down with” (P9_R4)

Overall, work seems to have been a complicating factor for P9 both leading up to PTFL and in the ensuing months.

Personal context. P9 seemed to enjoy a serene family environment, perhaps only sporadically strained by work pressure. When I first spoke with P9, he and his wife were planning celebrations for a milestone wedding anniversary. P9 also mentioned his keenness on sports, both in terms of active practice and as a follower of athletic sports. In terms of his background, P9 is one of the participants in this sample²⁹³ to have specified that he was fortunate to have had a good upbringing, with *“two loving parents and my sister who were very supportive” (P9_R2).*

Outlook

Outlook on PTFL. PTFL was something of a tradition in P9’s organization:

“My boss and my boss’ boss both have been on it. And there are a number of other senior [...] people I know that have been on it as well. They found it very useful and I have had a debrief from both of them prior to coming here. I’ll be sure that I’ll be going in with an open mind and, yes, listening to what they

²⁹³ See also P2, P4 and P6

said—and then I'll find out for myself..." (P9_R1)

The course was certainly endorsed in the company. But did P9 have a significant personal motivation to attend? He seemed to be valuing the opportunity:

"[The] last 12 months has been tough. And again it is a good time for me to do this course, because it is... It's up on a few areas that I know I need to develop on." (P9_R1)

"If I can find ways to structure my work, not just work but the whole life area, then I will benefit from this." (P9_R1)

Although he had been briefed by his managers ahead of time, P9 was still surprised by the course:

"We tried to be warned about the content involved and the sort of emotional attack that can take place [...] [laughs] but it still comes as a surprise to see quite how it affects people in different ways" (P9_R2)

Overall, P9 experienced the course positively:

"It is a real eye-opener" (P9_R2)

"Quite an incredible week really" (P9_R2)

"For me it was a very good journey to go on" (P9_R2)

"... [The second module] came at the right time to join up with the other members again [...] in the end it was a very positive... A very positive time for me." (P9_R3)

Outlook on personal change. Since the beginning, P9 seemed interested in the course and keen to attend. He had the expectation that the course could help him address some of the issues that he had been experiencing. Also, his did not seem to be a passive reliance on external help:

"I'm not expecting PTFL to suddenly [snaps] with a light bulb moment, just because it hits me.... I know I need to work around it." (P9_R1)

"[The course] has made me look at it in a number of different ways and realize that things don't have to be in a certain way. And to try take more action myself. They don't just change, they need some help. And it is up to me

to drive that" (P9_R4)

P9's attitude towards change seems proactive also in light of his comments on a different initiative that he had been independently pursuing. Having read David Allen's 'Getting Things Done', he had been reorganizing his workflows and routines to achieve efficiencies:

"I have started learning a methodology to enable me to process day to day items much better. I'm using David Allen's 'Getting Things Done', I don't know if you have come across that but... That's, there still... There's a lot of practicalities what I'm putting into it but I know I'm not a 100% there yet but I think that enables me to move out of the detail [...] I got to a zero inbox on Friday night which is great!" (P9_R1)

"And that has been a real benefit to me. So that is more the day-to-day and dealing... and how you deal with the avalanche of input that comes in" (P9_R4)

During initial interviews, P9 continued to seem open and proactive toward change. However, as will be presented shortly, in the months following PTFL his morale around being able to change eroded, perhaps impairing somewhat his actual ability to change.

Interview interaction

As a research participant, P9 was a very kind and helpful. He made himself available timely and for as long a time as needed at every interview round. A good observer and a clear thinker, P9 provided great descriptions of what he experienced as well as valuable insights into the workings of PTFL. I want to stress that P9 was distinctively and admirably transparent about discussing his challenges, including that of attaining the change that he was pursuing.

In addition, I would like to point out a dynamic that came into play during interviews which only became visible to me during the analysis of transcripts. In our dialogue, often I would say something aimed at reassuring or affirming P9. As seen earlier, a version of this had happened also in interviews with P2 and P3. However, P2 and P3 were very different characters compared to P9. P2 and P3 tended to emphasize their positive image—through mentioning their accomplishments and qualities frequently and in what I experienced as a boastful manner. In contrast, P9 tended to downplay his achievements and understate himself. My response was to accommodate P2 and P3 by offering assent. In contrast, my response to P9 was to accommodate him by lifting him

up and encouraging him. There are quite a few dialogues interspersed in the interviews where this dynamic is evident:

“P9: I think that can be a weakness of mine that I need to have fully weighed out every pro and con of a particular decision [...] I need to be able to move things forward quicker.

Linda: It seems that the reason why it is important to you to absorb information before the decision-making point is to be able to communicate to other people the rationale...” (P9_R1)

“P1: But I have got a bit more work to do, before I can say that I am anywhere near as strategic as I want to be...

Linda: ...hmmm, it is a process. And it sounds like this project [around business forecasting] would be really good to test out this new approach. Now that you have the avalanche of data a little bit more under control and have opened up a little more space. It can be a good pilot project.” (P9_R2)

“P1: But I know it is something that I need to work on.

Linda: Yeah. No, it takes time. I guess also being on the learning curve for all these things also makes confidence shaky per se. So it is kind of a double challenge... for everybody.” (P9_R3)

“P9: Potentially, there is a downwards spiral so this came at a good time for me to try... Try and reinforce confidence.

Linda: Yeah. And I guess it is challenging also to juggle at the same time smaller questions, about yourself and where you are going, together with bigger questions ‘what do I want to do with the position, with the job overall’. Maybe, again, this is not the best time for you to think about all of this together.” (P9_R3)

“P9: Probably I haven’t been able to prepare well enough for this [interview], to go over my notes... It was probably a bit of a disjointed response, but I hope there is enough there for you!

Linda: No, no, no—this is great! This is great. And I really want to avoid making people feel unprepared, but sometimes I’m afraid... It happens still, but sometimes it is really a matter of how my questions are, and I realize that. This research is very exploratory, and I tend to like explorations to... So sometimes I sound tentative, and I am sorry if that sometimes impacts people...”(P9_R3)

"P1: Yeah, I am sorry if it is not as positive as I would have liked it to have been..."

Linda: No, actually it sounds... It strikes me as a positive change but experientially, for you who are on the boat, it is probably not as nice because the boat has been rocked. So... I can empathize with that.

P1: Yeah.

Linda: No, best of luck! I am sure you will do great." (P9_R4)

This dynamic is especially interesting considering what P9 was found out about himself on PTFL—that is, that he had a tendency to seek positive affirmation from external sources.

Story of personal development

A starting point: before PTFL. As mentioned earlier, P9's recent experience as leader of a special project team had highlighted to him the challenge of bringing a team along. For P9, one determinant of this challenge was that he felt he needed to extensively prepare before interactions with his team or his boss. His ideal level of preparation was very high--and a bit impractical:

"I think that can be a weakness of mine that I need to have fully weighed out every pro and con of a particular decision that I am trying to put through so that I can explain it to people. There's times where I need t make these decisions a bit quicker, perhaps with less information. Be able to make the decision with 70-80% of the data rather than... Perhaps I am still looking for the 90-95%. So I need to be able to move things forward quicker." (P9_R1)

"I am comfortable being able to talk to anyone at senior levels [...] but choosing the right time to do that and basically if, again, I don't have the full information available, but I have enough information to provide them with something that they need to know and they need to action I need to be able to assess the right time to communicate upwards, and I think that's a part of what I need to learn" (P9_R1)

Being often absorbed in preparation, he would tend to postpone communication--sometimes until too late:

*“I would put [things] off to a time when it was too late for some things”
(P9_R2)*

A second aspect, related to the need to over-prepare, is P9’s high level of attention to detail:

“How [do] you perk yourself up and say ‘Yes, you’ve done this for detail work and the model comes together and this number pops out of the side—but from here does that really make sense? Yes, you’ve done all this work down here, but when you look at it from up here—that number, does that really make sense?’” (P9_R1)

Large and continuous inflows of information involved in everyday communications seem to only provide more details calling for attention:

“How you deal with that day-to-day stuff bombarding you” (P9_R1)

“How you deal with the avalanche of input that comes in” (P9_R2)

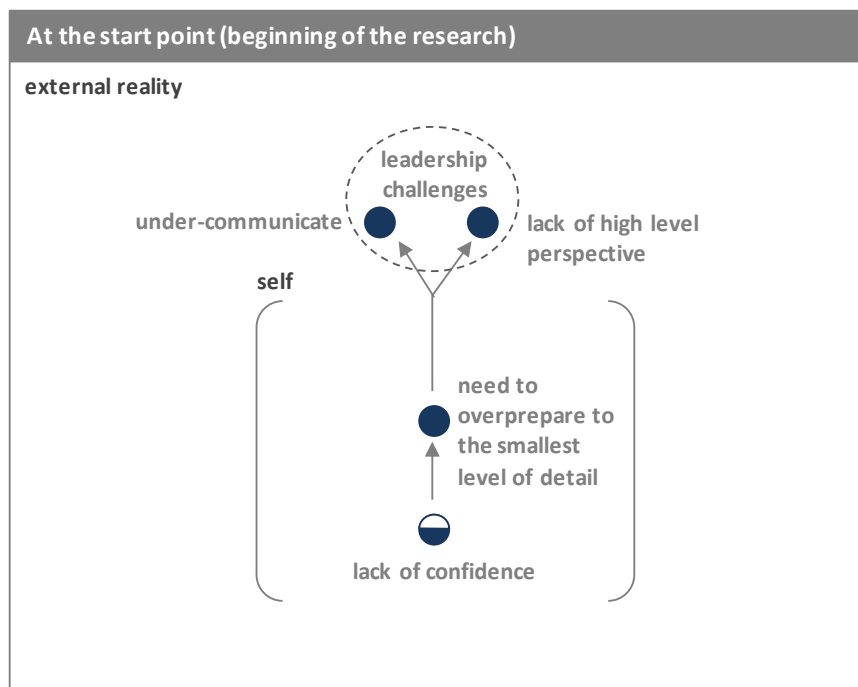
P9 had been considering these questions. He was aware that focusing excessively on detail was holding him from seeing things from a higher and more strategic perspective:

“[It’s] being able to step back and see the bigger picture [...] from a number of different ways. And change the viewpoint around” (P9_R1)

Finding a solution to this paradox mattered to P9 professionally, but also personally:

“No one is going to [have on] their obituary ‘Oh yes, he got his inbox to a zero’” (P9_R1)

Figure 51. P9’s sensemaking at the beginning of the research



Compiled by the author.

P9 seemed aware that his preoccupation with the day-to-day was somewhat at odds with cultivating thought around larger issues, such as what may be meaningful to him.

A mid-point: just after PTFL. One effect of the PTFL experience was to confirm the aspects of challenge which P9 had identified for himself:

“It was holding up a mirror in front of myself and hearing what I was doing in the way I was framing responses to things and my detailed logical training was being reflected in what I was asked to do to go through the life story and explain how I got to where I was. So I automatically went through and from almost sort of day one [chuckles]... didn't do it in day by day steps, but...” (P9_R1)

PTFL also helped P9 put the finger on the crux of the issue:

“I tend to look for positive affirmation for things that I do” (P9_R2)

This explanation resonated with P9 because he identified an antecedent in his past experience. While he stressed that he had been fortunate to have very good upbringings, his relationship with his father had lacked the aspect of farther-son validation:

“My identification was through my father who found it difficult to communicate with me and vice versa I ... We would rather talk about the sports and have a discussion around the back pages of the newspapers but not much more than that. So I always found myself looking for positive feedback from him on things I had done and he found it very difficult to give that, I believe. I could hear him talking very proudly of me to others, but he would very rarely do that to me.” (P9_R2)

Lacking this aspect in the relationship with his father, P9 seemed to not have internalized the ability to evaluate, reassure and validate himself. Rather, he would seek that in others:

“And I think that was one of my root causes for needing positive affirmation in whatever I did--whether that was from him or from anyone else” (P9_R2)

One implications of P9’s seeking affirmation pattern manifested itself during the PFTL course. He found it really hard initially to offer his feedback to other people, in fear of running into conflict rather than approval from his peers. As mentioned earlier, another implication was his *“be perfect’ drive”* (P9_R2). He would over-prepare for things to increase chances of encountering approval:

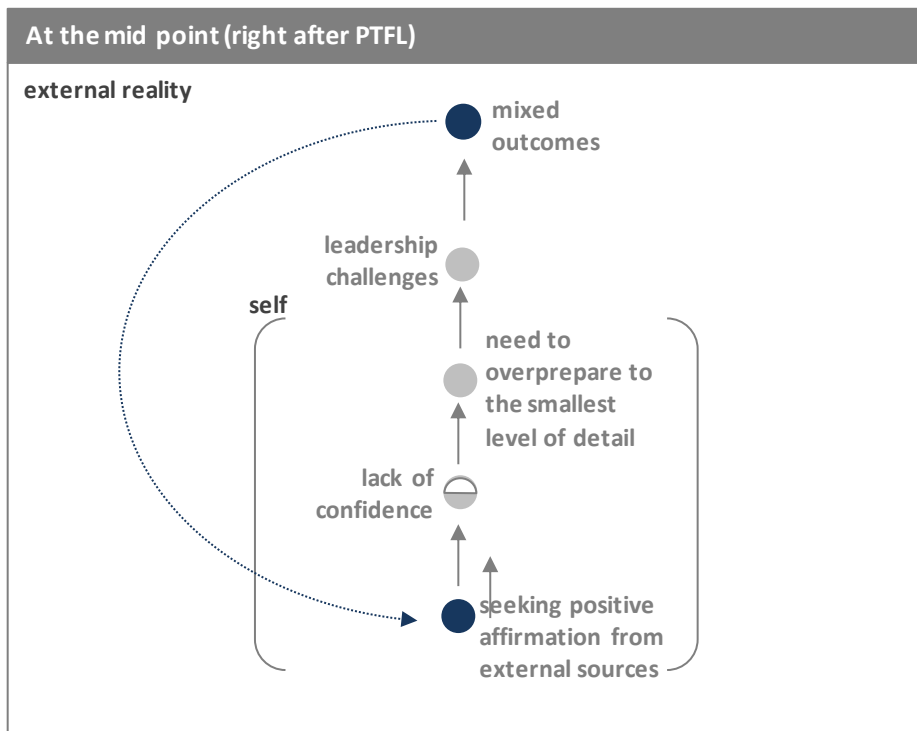
“I’ve always wanted tried to get that perfect result as I was looking to get that positive feedback and that positive affirmation. And I wanted to make sure that everything worked out perfectly” (P9_R2)

“[I have been] trying to be perfect when the timescales and the amounts involved... [do] not allow that” (P9_R3)

While driven by a need for affirmation, P9 realized that over-preparing actually achieved the opposite effect at times. Especially in situations where he had a leadership role, over-preparing caused him to under-communicate:

“I would perhaps put off meetings until I had planned everything to the nth degree and by that stage I might have missed the opportunity” (P9_R2)

Figure 52. P9’s sensemaking at a mid-point



Compiled by the author.

P9 seemed to really value achieving greater clarity around these dynamics and around how he could begin to change them. When we spoke for the second time (only two weeks after the course), P9 had been actively changing some of his routines at work. He had realized the importance of discussing direction with his team:

“[I need to] not [be] making assumptions that people know what I’m thinking or are already working towards particular targets. But to keep following up and reaffirming and being positive in the communications that I make. It’s the avoidance of procrastination in that there are decisions that need to be taken to move things forward” (P9_R2)

Hence, he had set up new communication points with his team:

“I am making sure that I get everyone together on a weekly... once a week— 15 minutes at the start of the week, to run through the key things that we need to deliver that week and make everyone aware of any resource issues or deadlines that we have got coming up, and to share any concerns about delivery. Yeah, so we are not trying to spend the whole time in meetings, but we are trying to focus them and keep them short and to the point.” (P9_R2)

“The meetings are useful grounding, it is not just going over the to do list and

showing them how much they have still got to do. It's assisting and helping to prioritize and understand where things have hit blockades and what I can do to assist them and break down those blockades. Or, kind of to move on if we believe that part of it is not important to the overall." (P9_R2)

Also, P9 had reframed what was an appropriate level of detail, preparation and timeframe involved in communicating with his bosses:

"[It's] around boiling the variances down to three or four key actions that have caused a particular variance—whether positive or negative. That can then be used by the business instead of going through all the reasons at every lower level segmentation that in the end had maybe made no difference on the bottom line. But caused some in-and-outs in other areas... That is not important at the top level, so it is not even worth commenting on." (P9_R2)

Hence, he had been making an effort to communicate more promptly with his bosses:

"Not everything that I produce is going to be perfect at any particular time. But, when I know it's less-than-perfect, I can either give an update and say 'It's not going to be available at this time, it needs a bit more work', or say 'This is where we've got to, can we have a discussion on potential future steps'. Instead of sitting on it and thinking I'll get to it" (P9_R2)

P9 had already started receiving positive feedback from both his team and his bosses as a result of his efforts on communication. P9 also commented on how his new approach was benefiting also the home environment:

"Our communication has improved to no end--with my wife. Partly because we are forcing ourselves to make time for it. And it is one of those things that has slipped. And just having the weekend away last weekend was great. Just to spend time. That... To set us up for the future and reminding ourselves that it is not all about work and it is about the relationships that we've got going on" (P9_R3)

P9 was leveraging his new understanding also to achieve a higher perspective and a more strategic outlook:

"One of the key areas now is around our budget process, which is for the financial year from the 1st of April through to the next three years. I think this will be a key measure for me as to how that budget process goes and the strategic view that I can take from it so that I am not spending my whole time putting the details in. And ensuring that the team are pulling that, so that I

can review it at a higher and more strategic level. And I think that I started already, I'm getting good feedback from my manager on it--on the forecasts. (P9_R3)

P9 seemed to be strongly motivated and to feel the momentum for change:

"Absolutely, because I think that is the only way to make use of [this experience]. I think it is a very good course and it would be foolish to throw away those learnings and the time spent in coming to them. So, I mean, that is absolutely vital. And without it, potentially, there is a downwards spiral so this came at a good time for me to try ... Try and reinforce confidence" (P9_R3)

"I'm not going to be able to deliver fully against [my objectives] unless I learn from the session" (P9_R2)

"[I'm] finding potentially better ways of delivering [...] and certainly delivering whatever project [by involving others] is quicker than trying to do it on my own. Now there are times when that won't work but, I think the gains from doing it that way far outweigh the dis-benefits of the occasions where I should have planned it out in more detail." (P9_R2)

However, the sense of momentum was going to fade during the months to follow.

An ending point: at the end of the research. To the overall positive outlook of P9 during interview two, there followed a downturn. P9 seemed somewhat disappointed with himself with regard to all of the aspect he had been working on. First, his ability to snap out of self-limiting habits and thoughts was not yet fully reliable:

"Having an antidote to come away from [my limiting] patterns is absolutely vital to me. I don't think I am fully using that into work yet. Have I built it into my normal working patterns? Has it become a habit? No, probably not enough yet. But I know it is something that I need to work on." (P9_R3)

His progress around relating to other people was in his eyes underwhelming:

"Not as much as I thought it would have done." (P9_R3)

His ability to lift out of the details and gain a more strategic outlook was not yet in a good standing:

"Strategic outlook... I don't believe I... I'm there yet, because I was so buried in the day to day, trying to deliver on the things that we need to do in the short

term" (P9_R3)

"Once we can get through this year end now and that's when we can set things up for the new year, that's really when I want to make a change to my working patterns that forces me to look forward more, so that I can build that into my habit for when the next seasonal workload hits." (P9_R3)

His decision making was still held back by his perfectionist drive:

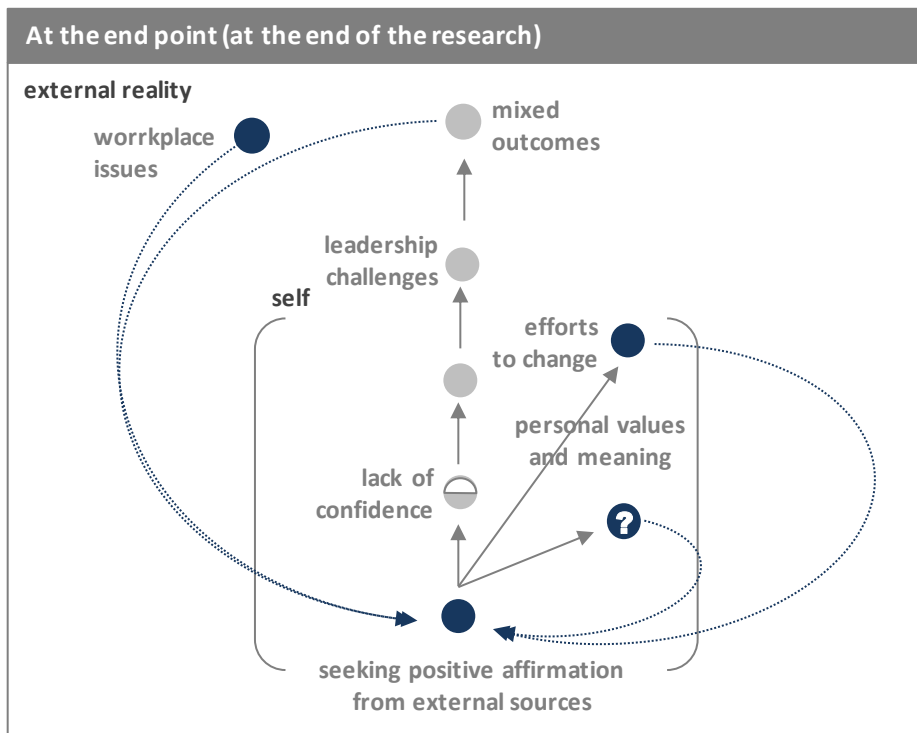
"Not... Not yet, again. I think. At the moment... Hem, particularly at present... I'm not... I need to improve on my decision making and my speed of getting to the point. And has it... has it helped? I think it is still work in progress for me. In practical terms it probably hasn't yet. In theoretical terms, I think it should do. And I think it is one of those learning points that I am much more aware of now, but I haven't been able to build it in yet." (P9_R3)

His progress on the methodology he had been implementing to manage his workflow (David Allen's 'Getting Things Done') was still imperfect:

"I mean, I am trying to use a system better now to keep track of my commitments that I am making to individuals along the way. So that I can track that better. Because that was where I was really struggling. And there was so much that was coming in that I did lose track of the commitments that I was making. So that's a more practical... A more practical change that I am trying to do. But I haven't got that working 100% yet, because when the workload builds up I get buried again. So, I've still got work to do on that process." (P9_R3)

What I derive from this series of responses is a pattern of 'not yet' and 'not enough' — of not believing in the progress that has already happened.

Figure 53. P9's sensemaking at the end of the research



Compiled by the author.

There is really no indication in P9's answers that he had seriously fallen behind or stopped making progress altogether. Scattered in the interview text are references to some positives: for example, the more regular communication patterns at work and the much improved communication with his wife. Yet P9 was disappointed. Were my questions having a disheartening effect on him? Perhaps so. But it was very easy for P9 to tip into seeing the half empty rather than half full glass—that, without any intention on my part to be destabilizing with my questions. It really sounded like, however much progress P9 had made to that point, he did not believe it was really progress, or that it was sufficient. This downward spiral of morale seemed to be at play not only within the interviews. Apparently, it was affecting P9's experience: after the first PTFL module and the ensuing enthusiasm, P9 had lost the positive outlook. The messages from the course had started to lose strength:

"It's six months since the first module. So and everything starts to fade"
(P9_R3).

At work, his confidence in the quality of his work had been turning shaky:

"When we are pulling together a lot of information and you know... You

doubt yourself as to whether it is all there and I needed to push myself together and an image to say 'Right, it's there. It's done, to the best of my ability that is the output. And I am happy to stick with that'. (P9_R3).

And, he also seemed less confident that he was doing well in the interviews. In fact, when I asked P9 what the second PTFL module had done for him, his answer pointed to a boost in morale:

"A very positive time for me. [...] For me personally it was about keeping that positive outlook and not getting buried down in the detail—getting lost and losing the perspective. And two days out of work was absolutely vital for that, for me at the moment." (P9_R3)

This pattern of deflation only became stronger in interview four. P9 emphasized how progress was not quite there yet:

"I am not sure I fully got a bypass that helps me get around it but I am certainly dealing with it much better than I was" (P9_R4)

"I am still very much working in the present rather than trying to deal with things into the future. Which.... is not a good state to be." (P9_R4)

"At times [the PTFL experience] has drowned out in the day to day and the impact from stress that I have got going on through work—for which it hasn't had the impact that it might have had." (P9_R4)

In addition, some new challenges had arisen. A first one was about coping with a change in the nature of his role at work. He had increasingly involved in leadership functions:

"It is a big change in my career as I move from more of a doer to trying to make things happen through leadership and I am not entirely comfortable that at the moment and I am finding it difficult to keep track of everything. That is causing some internal frustrations for me." (P9_R4)

P9 was not satisfied that he had made good progress as a leader:

"I'd like to think I've been able to change but I don't think that I've been able to build that into my standard patterns yet. I think that is something that... I believe that is something that I could get that with a fresh start. And I think there are learnings that I will have taken out of PTFL with the pressure to go through the information...Then I think that there are benefits that will come

to my leadership style but I can't say that they have yet. " (P9_R4)

A further challenge was posed by the work environment, which was starting to look less than optimal:

"I am still fairly convinced that I do need a change in environment and something.... Something else needs to happen to remove some the history that I am tied up with, perhaps tied down with" (P9_R4)

Aggravating these challenges, PTFL had opened a new window on P9's inner world:

"I think internally I have had a lot of things going on and I would say that the course specifically started these things going on, but it has certainly formed part of the way I try and think about my life and what is coming into here"(P9_R4)

The opening of this new window had been complicating matters. For example, an inner interrogative had arisen around whether pursuing a different type of career would be more meaningful for P9:

"I always thought it was around advancing my career and going the next level in [my functional area], and I am less convinced that is what I really want now. And perhaps I want something on a different level, and perhaps even a lower level, but that gives me more time outside, for wanting to spend more time with the children or giving things back to the community, trying to volunteer or get involved in community or sports clubs I am interested in." (P9_R4)

Finally, P9 was disappointed that, as he had been experiencing new challenges, he had not been talking more with his close friends as well as maintaining contact with his PTFL buddy:

"I am disappointed that I haven't taken more input from my network around. I am trying to put that right, I am trying to get regular visits in with good friends of mine whom I can talk to, and I want to try get my sessions going again with my buddy." (P9_R4)

Certainly, P9 thought, he was not presenting a positive picture for the research:

"Sorry if it is not as positive as I would have liked it to have been..." (P9_R4)

However, at that point P9 had consolidated some important progress. Significantly, P9 seemed to have gotten somewhat of a hold on his limiting patterns:

“I think it is about recognizing when limiting patterns come in. I think that is the key thing. Perhaps previously I found myself freezing and not really getting anywhere, and I can now recognize when these moments are happening. And take a step back, take a breath. And if necessary take a walk away from what is causing it and trying to come back with a fresh look, a fresh idea and with a commitment to trying to move something forward. Maybe define the next action I can do to move that forward rather than trying to deal with the whole thing in one go” (P9_R4)

As I mentioned directly to P9, I believe that he was in the middle of a huge transition. It was natural to not feel fully comfortable and confident in such circumstances. What I derive from the data is that P9 was having an extreme difficulty trying to surpass the central pattern that he had identified—his seeking of positive affirmation from external sources. At several points during the research, P9 himself had identified this as the crux of his change:

“I need to get over that and believe that what I'm doing is useful and can be welcomed by others without having to be so shy and reticent. [Rather,] going forward with opinions” (P9_R2)

“Trusting a bit more that the information that I can impart on to others will formulate in my mind as I go into this sessions. So I may not wait to be as fully prepared as I would have been in the past” (P9_R2)

“I needed to push myself together and an image to say ‘Right, it's there. It's done, to the best of my ability that is the output. And I am happy to stick with that’” (P9_R3)

However, to summon an internal source of validation and authority seemed painfully difficult for P9:

“This is one of my limiting patterns, seeking affirmation from others, that... And, so, understanding that it's okay to be me and to come up with what I believe is right, I think that is a learning that I got out of the course. Do I look at the... At an internal standpoint more? Yes, I believe I do. But it is linked back to the decision making process that I need to improve on the decisions that I make by using more of this internal review rather than what are people are expecting.” (P9_R3)

P9 and I, individually or together, were never able to settle the issue of whether there some deeper change in this respect was positively underway. My impression is that, by interview four, we were possibly just reenacting the dynamic—P9 in doubting himself and in attempting to provide validation and encouragement.

Implications for leadership practice

Nested in P9's stories are two key leadership learnings. One is a shift from an independent to a collaborative view of work. A second learning relates to the flexibility needed to manage a diversity of personalities and situations.

P9 had previously concentrated primarily on his own performance (in particular, on the need for it to be as irreproachable as possible). As a leader of a team, he has experienced the limitations of this view, which tended to set him aside from the team rather than driving the team. Part of his learning following PFTL was that his role as a leader is more about relating to people than about focusing on tasks:

“To keep following up and reaffirming and being positive in the communications that I make. [...] in terms of how I relate to people, I'm going out of my way much more to spend time talking to people--even when it's not specifically about putting a tick in a box that something is done and it is about learning and sharing with others.” (P9_R2)

As a leader, he cannot people have their needs, for example they need to know the direction of a project and to feel that they are contributing:

“Everyone has their own ingredients to bring. Some of which are the recipe. So no the ingredients at all, but how to mix the ingredients. But it's something I got to accept is that one of my roles is not to bring all the ingredients and I have specialists in my team who will bring each of the necessary ingredients--which I'll have a reasonable idea about--but I need to know how much of each to mix in to get the end result”. (P9_R2)

In addition, allowing others to contribute advances the efficiency of the team:

“I'm] finding potentially better ways of delivering [...] and certainly delivering whatever project [by involving others] is quicker than trying to do it on my own. Now there are times when that won't work but, I think the gains from doing it that way far outweigh the dis-benefits of the occasions where I should have planned it out in more detail.” (P9_R2)

The second learning was that there is not one single way of being a good leader. For example, being a good leader cannot be a question of being inclusive or directive:

"I think it's understanding when to use each of the tools. And that is one of the learnings: so, understanding in which situation it's important to make a decision and tell everyone to get on with it, and there are other times where... [...] It's being able to pick between the two, because you can't be totally inclusive and you can't be totally exclusive. And again it's not finding the middle ground, it's finding the right ground for each individual, for it to work." (P9_R2)

P9 was receiving positive feedback at work around the outcome of his efforts as a leader of his team. In terms of what can be seen at the very least as personality adjustment, P9 had been able to introduce changes in the way he responded to his team. This new style, however, requires a lot of flexibility in adapting responses to different personalities and situations. Given P9's challenge with internal authority, this might have developed into a further challenge: in absence of an internal reference point around which to pivot, increased flexing can be quite disorienting. I question whether in the interview data there is enough evidence in the research that the changes P9 was working on in his practice as a leader were yet in a stage close to being consolidated.

8.11 Appendix: Analysis of context

THE SENSEMAKING OF DELEGATES IN THE CONTEXT OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON PERSONAL GROWTH:
PROCESS, CONTEXT, AND DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Key decisions in data analysis around context--Supporting information

Third doctoral review
30 Nov. 2011

This document includes some sample quotes supporting key decisions taken during the analysis of context.

- **Key decision 1: Context as necessary (not sufficient)**

| Participant | Sample quotes |
|-------------|---------------|
|-------------|---------------|

| | |
|----|--|
| P1 | <i>"I suppose what helped me move on [...] The context of doing that work within a group that was accepting"</i> |
| P6 | <i>"[The tutors] made it feel like a very safe environment for people to go through that process of reflection and self-analysis"</i> |
| P8 | <i>"Some gently probing in an open environment can be very emotional because you are not just like with a counselor one on one, you tell something to 12 strangers"</i> |
| P9 | <i>"Other courses try to put people into roles and into role-playing, which never really gets to the bottom of it because people are pretending about the causes for doing things. But this is real life and people are talking from their own experiences and reacting to it which you would never get on your own"</i> |

▪ **Key decision 2: Developmental context > holding environment**

| Participant | Sample quotes |
|--------------------|--|
| P2 | <i>“And I’ve heard it from other people as well, but to hear it from someone in that very highly charged and emotional setting, and hear it honestly . [...] it was the way it was delivered, the honesty it was delivered with, it made it sink in probably a little bit more”</i> |
| P7 | <i>“I think that [sharing such an emotional process] contributes to bringing a level of honesty to.... To not hiding things, to just being totally open and honest</i> |
| P4 | <i>“But when you're in a room where somebody is sat on a chair with 10 people that are sat around them, you don't have anywhere to go. So, actually what you experience is emotion that normally wouldn't have to deal with. [...] You can't go and hide”; “We became kind of a counseling loop why the end of the week”</i> |

▪ Key decision 3: A process-view of context

| Participant | Sample quotes |
|-------------|--|
| P9 | <i>“The environment that is created is the key thing. That everyone, if not initially, then certainly by the end of day one or day two are all very open and honest and are opening up in a way that they have possibly never done to anyone before.”</i> |
| P2 | <i>“We became very protective of each other so that was quite funny. [...] very quickly, there was a level of support and we didn’t want anyone else, from the outside, disrupting the group, or... So, yeah, it was... It was interesting to see ten people coming together like that.”</i> |
| P6 | <i>“There’s a mutually supportive environment created immediately that enabled people to very closely focus in on some of those... Some issues and behaviors that they might have not considered on a personal level, or that might affect their work relationships”</i> |
| P7 | <i>“As the week went on, I think it became--I'm not sure whether it became easier, but perhaps it was less of a shock and perhaps emotionally I think I began to take control better of my emotions. [...] I think I also became more emotionally attuned to the other people around me in the group.”</i> |

▪ Key decision 4: Multiple levels of context

| Participant | Sample quotes |
|-------------|---|
| | Scope (program characteristics: focus on personal histories and limiting patterns) |
| P8 | <i>“Everyone was open to share knowledge of what their limiting patterns were and be honest with each other. And everyone else in the room can probably see it and you can’t because you are in the middle of it. Yes, because that has become a habit, you know, with the way you behaved over years. And then somebody points out something that is really obvious and you think ‘Bligh me’.”</i> |
| P9 | <i>“Part of it is identifying the limiting pattern in the first place. So not everyone can identify those to start with and there were examples of people going for completely different area than where their big gains eventually came from. So being able to identify where the limiting pattern was coming from to start with was part of what they provided, but then also yes, getting down to the causes for that, which is where [the tutors] helped.”</i> |
| | Agenda (people characteristics: diversity, peer group, previously unfamiliar) |
| P9 | <i>“There’s benefits for having those [discussions]... Outside of your social group, for many reasons”</i> |
| P8 | <i>“[I] actually got 12 different people telling me different things about me. And that.... And therefore you can actually... There is almost more faith in what.... If just one person said what they think about me, but 12 people said things and they were very similar things. And therefore they must be. And that’s very effective”, “Yeah, we were from very different industries, but very similar sort of stage. Quite senior professionals, done very well, and still have further places to go”</i> |
| | Tone (tutors role modeling vulnerability) |
| P8 | <i>“But certainly in that environment, we didn’t just want to see a facilitator, we wanted to see the man behind him. And we got some. Not... Not as much as we all gave, but certainly giving... You know, he gives something of himself”</i> |
| P1 | <i>“I think the difference was perhaps seeing other people’s vulnerabilities.</i> |

P5 *Hem, and.... People who are clearly very successful and present very well. And recognizing what you already know [chuckles] that everyone has got issues. But just... I suppose, feeling it with them, hem, that made a difference."*

P2 *"And it's... It's... You are there, you know, warts and all"*

P8 *"[The tutors] led the insights really. I think having a clarity of insights and being able to drill down to the issues far more quickly than people who didn't have that background or training. And also stopping people, you know, when the group members were questioning, stopping people when they were going on the wrong track"*

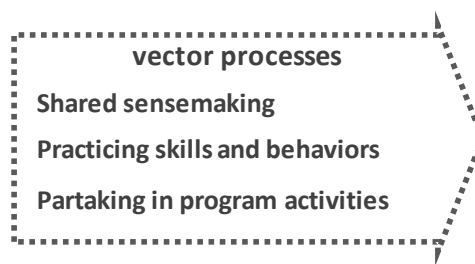
8.12 Appendix: Analysis of vector processes

This section includes a detailed analysis supporting findings around vector processes (presented in Section 4.4.3).

Vector processes

Vector processes were identified relatively²⁹⁴ easily: they mostly coincided with a host activities taking place on the PTFL program; they seemed to be initiated and take place mostly externally from individuals; and, they often involved an exchange with other people. One common denominator that characterizes external processes identified in this research is that they all seem to consistently serve the same purpose: they seemed to hold more fundamental processes of change (occurring at the individual level) and direct them towards a specific type of self-inquiry. Because of this function (of holding and directing) I have termed these processes **vector²⁹⁵ processes: *explicit or implicit activities taking place within a developmental context which are aimed at holding core processes of development and directing them toward a main developmental direction.***

Figure 54. Vector processes of development on PTFL



Compiled by the author.

²⁹⁴ Compared to core (internal) processes of development

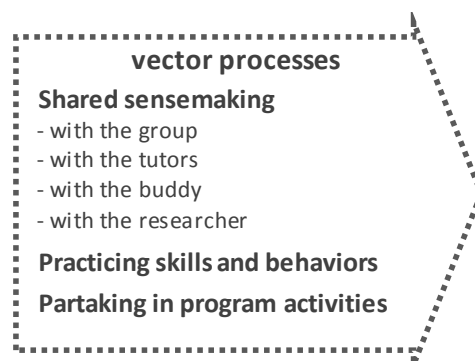
²⁹⁵ The term vector has emerged before in a study of the long-term adaptive capability of a firm's strategy-making (Burgelman, 2002), to describe the efforts to drive the firm as well as the client organization in a certain strategic direction. Vector is "a quantity having direction and magnitude, denoted by a line drawn from its original to its final position (Oxford English Dictionary)", in Burgelman 2002 (p. 326).

Three categories of vector processes were identified in this research: shared sensemaking, directed at identifying and surpassing the limiting patterns of single individuals; the practicing of skills and behaviors that were conducive both to self-inquiry and more effective interpersonal interactions; and, the partaking in program activities which facilitated self-inquiry and shared sensemaking.

8.12.1.1 Shared sensemaking

A key process that would not have happened if participants had not taken part in PTFL (or in a PTFL-like activity) is sensemaking shared with other delegates and with the tutors. Shared sensemaking focused on the life story, limiting patterns and resolutions for change of single delegates.

Figure 55. Shared sensemaking on PTFL



Compiled by the author.

As shown in the figure above, shared sensemaking took place in four key interactions: with the PTFL group; with the PTFL tutors; with an assigned buddy; and, with myself as the researcher.

Sensemaking with the PTFL group

As seen earlier (findings around context), PTFL “works mostly as a group” (P2_R2). Four different shared sensemaking processes were taking place at the level of the PTFL

group: taking perspective, handling feedback, exchanging validation, and processing of emotions.

A central activity on the PTFL program is an inquiry into the life story of each delegate. The purpose of this is to identify any aspect of their story that an individual might benefit from further processing; and, the purpose is also to identify any limiting patterns characteristics of the sensemaking of that individual. In the context of single stories being processed collectively, individuals seem to gain a 'boosted' ability to take perspective on themselves. Some participants described a more insightful or powerful process of self-inquiry than could have been attained on their own (or even, as some participants noted, in one-to-one interactions with a coach):

"Being able to identify where the limiting pattern was coming from to start with was part of what they provided, but then also yes, getting down to the causes for that, which is where they helped" (P9_R2)

"People probing into the links that may or may not be there was one thing. [...] I think the whole process of... Signing up for such a course and doing the in-depth history and hearing back on links that people think about you, but also recognizing them in others " (P5_R2)

"I just found [the feedback] very insightful of everybody in the room, really. And yes, that gave me ... Real food for thought. I said 'Ok, if I project that image on people whom I had never met, then really these are the kind of things that I want to address over the course of this week'" (P6_R2)

"[Module 2 was] a lot of reminders and reinforcements [...] It did do that, but it also took me a step further I think. Because it helped me to look in addition at what my strengths and my qualities were. And look at how I could use them very proactively or give myself.... What sort of... I guess what sort of persona I can draw upon when needed" (P1_R3)

Others rather emphasized that making sense of their story in front of the group was like holding up a mirror: just hearing themselves talk in front of the group facilitated a process of realization:

“I think it was actually talking in front of everybody. It kind of became a bit... It became the obvious thing to do” (P7_R2)

“Part of it was holding up a mirror in front of myself and hear what I was doing in the way I was framing responses to things and my sort of detailed logical training was being reflected in what I was asked to do” (P9_R2)

Sharing their sensemaking with the group allowed individuals, whether through enhanced inquiry or mirror-like reflection, to gain with surprising immediacy a significant degree of perspective on themselves.

A second key process carried out within the group was the handling of feedback. A lot of frank feedback was exchanged during the week:

“[It] enabled people to very closely focus in on some of those... Some issues and behaviors that they might have not considered on a personal level, or that might affect their work relationships” (P6_R2)

“When I left I had quite a lot of things to take on board, personal habits... hem... interrupting people and interjecting. And... what I’ll do probably don’t listen to them, going deaf, hem. I got a bit of a lashing for the dressing, my flamboyant... dressings, and a few habits” (P3_R2)

“I could be a social chameleon, and therefore what I was told is to make it real and show a bit of the true me rather than always give what I think people want to see” (P8_R3)

“It was great to hear and give a very honest feedback session.[...] ‘You’re wise, you’re good at what you do but... Just, take it down one notch.’ That was... that was a vital piece for me” (P2_R2)

“So the people on the course were saying ‘P7, the way you’re acting with work is just like you’re pressing your self-destruct button’. And, why don’t you

tell your bosses.... Not that you are going to be less dedicated to work or anything, but hey, that you need to get a good work work-life balance. Because, you know, your health is important” (P7_R2)

This level of feedback could potentially be uncomfortable or distressing. However, virtually everyone²⁹⁶ in the group construed the feedback as non-threatening and helpful. As explained by P2:

“You have nine people in a room telling you something, you know. And... And it’s not painful or hurtful, or... I mean, I was not mad or anything. But you need enough time to think: ‘Oh, maybe I need to change some things’” (P2_R2)

One reason why the feedback was less threatening in the PTFL context than it could be have been in other contexts is related to the type of environment that had been created²⁹⁷. Perhaps that is also because at the same time the group members were effectively exchanging validation:

“I think the gaining [the sense of inner strength] is... Probably confidence that I have received from the group and validation from the group that I was with (P1_R2)

“People perceive me as being very, very capable and strong” (P5_R2)

“Generally everybody said ‘You come across as somebody who is open and friendly, and somebody we would trust” (P6_R2)

“I felt that I was putting that into practice because I had kind of had the okay, or the approval--if you like--from the group that the way I was acting was

²⁹⁶ On this point, the only feedback that was controversial was the one offered by P3 who generally resented the course’s emphasis on counselling: *“I got a kicking from [the lead tutor] on a regular basis” (P2_R4), “At Cranfield, it was suggested that I didn’t have any professional credibility--that I was too quirky and untrustworthy” (P2_R3)*

²⁹⁷ As seen in the prior section on developmental context

really not appropriate, and that was a better or a different way of acting or seeing things” (P7_R3)

“And what the others, what the rest of the group told me is that I am perfectly fine as I am, I don’t need to put the wall up, and therefore I should be confident, not based on the person that they see but based on the person that I really am” (P8_R2)

In addition to taking perspective, handling feedback and exchanging validation, a fourth key sensemaking process shared by the group had to do with emotional processing. For some participants, this took the form of experiencing the acceptance of the group while they were themselves processing a strong emotion. P1 described that her session had an element of processing anger:

“P1: [...] Certainly around the time of the course, [I was] having a lot of resentment and anger about things that had been happening to me recently. Justified anger, I think. But an anger that I haven’t been able to really express. And... Hem... And we discussed that quite a lot in my session. [...]I suppose what helped me move on [...was] also the background of... The context of doing that work [processing anger] within a group that was accepting.

Linda: Accepting also of negative emotions?

P1: Yeah. And thinking that I am still okay.” (P1_R2)

The case of P5 offers a different example of shared emotional processing. P5 saw others in the group process a range of emotions that were stirred by her difficult story. Somehow, this seemed to help her take stock of how she had been affected by her early experiences:

“I think people’s reactions to me [were also helpful], you know, it was pretty intense. [...] Members of the group... Two particular members of the group were weeping uncontrollably whilst I was in the chair. So I mean, that was a really intense experience and seeing the reaction to... You know, what I was

talking about” (P5_R2)

A further example is offered by the case of P7. P7 felt that the reactions of others (to the fact that she was had been denying her illness) directly supported her realization of what that meant for her:

“And it was the reaction of... Of other delegates to the course--of the other members of the group. And the reaction of [the tutors], who were like.... You know, it was the reaction of everybody that led me to think that this is right thing to do [...] So that is what helped me in thinking ‘Hey, I shouldn’t be hiding what is inside me, because look at how these people have reacted!’ [...] yeah. ‘Ah-ha’, so you think, ‘if all of these people are reacting like that, why wouldn’t other people?’” (P7_R2)

In summary, four significant aspects shared sensemaking emerged from the cross-sectional analysis of the vector processes of development activated by the PTFL experience. These four aspects were: taking perspective, handling feedback, building validation, and processing of emotions.

Sensemaking with the tutors

Significant shared sensemaking occurred also within the interaction between PTFL delegates and the tutors. Earlier, it was seen how tutors had a key role in creating the developmental context²⁹⁸. In addition, during interactions with delegates tutors made available their expert advice, led the group inquiry consistently to the core of matters, and supplied adequate support during more counseling-oriented sessions.

Most participants²⁹⁹ perceived the expert psychological advice from two experienced practitioners as a valuable addition to their sensemaking:

“And the second aspect for me there was [the tutors’] professionalism [as psychologists] in it all, in the feedback that they gave everybody all the way

²⁹⁸ By role modeling behaviors that established a holding environment as well as distinctive behaviors that were going to be essential to the functioning of the group (see previous section on developmental context).

²⁹⁹ The only feedback that was controversial was the one offered by P3 who generally resented the course’s focus on counselling. P3 showed some resentment for the criticism received especially by the lead tutor, although eventually conceding that “[The tutors] probably knew their stuff” (P2_R2).

through and specifically after their sessions. And the advice that they gave to us all, you know, that was invaluable professional experience, that--if they hadn't been there, we wouldn't have had the benefit of that professional advice, which is invaluable.” (P7_R2)

“I suppose what helped me move on were a couple of things said by [the tutors]”³⁰⁰ (P1_R2)

Other participants particularly appreciated that, without the expertise of the tutors, it would have been hard to consistently pursue helpful directions of inquiry for every participant and identify the core of matters in every case:

“Very often people were exploring directions that they didn't imagine they were going to explore” (P5_R2)

“A lot of it was just the group actually discussing [...] our ideas, and [the tutors] just validated what was the right way. And if it won't maybe go in the right way maybe just make sure we stuck along the right path” (P2_R2)

Additionally, from the case of P5 it can be inferred that the expertise of tutors became crucial when an individual session turned out to have a strong element of counseling:

“I think the individual session in the chair was very...Very intense for me, you know, I sort of thought ‘If I'm going to do this. I'm going to do it properly’. So, you know, I wasn't... So I did, and it was an intense experience. [...] My early years in my life were... Pretty difficult. So I talked about that in some detail. I think [the tutor] was very direct about her views of what I needed to do. [...] And the very clear direction from [both tutors] about the meaning of that I think gave me a lot to think about in the present” (P5_R2)

³⁰⁰ In addition to “The context of doing that work within a group that was accepting” (P1_R2), as per the original quote.

Interacting with tutors, then, gave individuals access to their professional expertise. For group members, this meant accessing valued professional advice, consistently getting to the core of issues presented and receiving adequate support in more counseling-oriented type of work.

Sensemaking with a buddy

On the first day at the course, delegates are paired with a buddy. During the first evening, buddies go over each other's story in preparation for presenting their story in front of the group. Buddies become relatively close during the week and, in some cases, stay in touch after the end of the course. This one-to-one interaction seemed to aid the sensemaking of individual delegates because during this preparation phase the buddies take up the role of challenging and supporting each other³⁰¹. In terms of challenge, buddies would exchange follow-up questions—to help their partner jog memory but also to probe about the deeper links in their stories:

“We had to buddy up and talk to someone else. I hope that I was able to help her bring out things that she hadn't thought about before” (P1_R2)

“Also I think the work with my buddy. I got on really well with my buddy and we did quite a lot of work together outside the meetings as well. [...] There were some evenings that my buddy and I really working really late on stuff and really try to maximize what I could take out of it. [...] You do this intensive piece of work with your buddy to look at what are the things that you'd like to change” (P5_R2)

“The other evenings were probably spent thinking about things, going through the notes and starting to formulate what you were learning” (P9_R2)

In terms of support, buddies became a primary source of acceptance and listening during the week:

³⁰¹ In the previous section on developmental context it was seen how the group mirror behaviors demonstrated by tutors which aim at instituting a holding environment (with its function of support, challenge and continuity). The character of the interaction between buddies indicates an additional way in which the group mirrors holding environment behaviors.

“I think that worked really well with my buddy--with my partner, who was able to open up around a... Who had a real history to go through, and I think we learned a lot of each other through the sessions that we had” (P9_R2)

“The person I was working with was very, a very nice chap. I had a great time working with him during the course of the week. I mean on the personal level I think we got on quite well” (P6_R2)

In a few cases, buddies continued to keep in contact after the course:

“[My buddy and I] are keeping, we’ve promised to be mentors for each other which would be very difficult to find” (P9_R2)

“The buddy was good. He went through a bad time with his wife [...] and he needed support to the Nth degree. He is a good guy. [...]. My heart goes out to him” (P3_R2)

“I’ve kept in touch with my buddy, he lives in Saudi Arabia” (P7_R2)

Sensemaking with the researcher

Compared to ‘regular’ PTFL delegates, participants in this research had one more interaction relevant to the discussion of vector processes: that is, the interaction with me during research interviews. Interviews implied at times extended reasoning on the same topics that participants were working on in conjunction with their attendance of PTFL. For this reason, interview interactions are considered here among other external processes of development. A common theme across participants³⁰² is that they found research interviews to be a useful contribution to their sensemaking: conversations seemed to be aiding them in reviewing progress, revisiting reflections and resuming mindfulness. Two participants (P1 and P8) seemed to especially appreciate the interviews:

³⁰² The impact of research interviews is a topic that I investigated during the fourth round of interviews. Because P2 and P4 dropped out after interview two, no data is available on what they thought of the interview interactions.

“It has been useful for you to remind me of what I said before [chuckles]. [...] For me that has been really helpful! [...] I think that [discussing with you] has been an important part of the process, because it gives you a chance to reflect again. And every time you do that I think it takes you a little bit forward” (P1_R3)

“I would say yes it has [had an impact] because it has made me focus back again on... It’s made me think again about what PTFL has done for me. It has made me reflect more. And I think I... I may not have actually... Because, I think, in explaining to you what PTFL has done, I had to think again how have I changed, what have I done. It makes me do that reflection, and in order then... It’s made me more mindful of what was done, because in order for it to make sense to you I have got to put it in order in my own mind” (P8_R4)

Other participants also agreed that the interviews added a useful interaction during which they could make sense of their change:

“I suppose it makes you reflect. It makes you stop and think. You know, if you know that you have a phone call coming in, you make a space and time to think about things” (P5_R4)

“The interviews have made me think about it all again, so that’s been quite helpful. I think I am quite lucky because I had my interviews with you, which... You know, to think about the course and what I got out of the course, those interviews also helped me do that. [...] I think about the course from time to time and then your interviews have certainly helped me to think about it a bit further, because they are kind of thought-provoking, because you asked thought-provoking questions!” (P7_R4)

However, participants tended to exclude that interviews had a primary impact on their process of change:

“[Interviews helped] focusing the mind a little more at three time points” (P5_R4)

“Equally, there could have been a hundred time points where I stopped and reflected of my own true will rather than because you were phoning me. So... [...] I doubt that there was a major impact” (P5_R4)

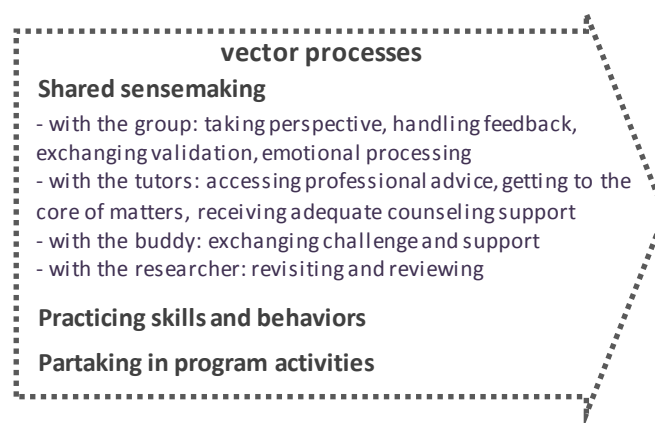
“Yeah, I don’t think it’s a primary impact either.” (P7_R4)

It seems like interviews established on further interaction where some form of shared sensemaking could take place. They found this type of interaction helpful, although unlikely to have had a major impact on their process of change.

Shared sensemaking: a summary

In with the context of PTFL, shared sensemaking seems to be occurring within four key types of interactions: with the PTFL group, the tutors, a buddy as well as (for participants in this research) with me as the researcher. The figure below recaps the major types of shared sensemaking that were taking place within each of these four interactions.

Figure 56. Detailed view of shared sensemaking processes on PTFL



Compiled by the author.

8.12.1.2 *Practicing skills and behaviors*

Another set of processes taking place on the course consists of the practicing of some counseling-specific (but generally helpful) skills and behaviors. These include: listening, empathizing, and the framing of constructive feedback.

Listening

As hinted at by the following comment by P6, intense listening is outside the scope of what many people do on a normal basis:

“To be put in a room for nine hours a day, just listening to people talk... It sounds like the dullest thing that you could possibly do” (P6_R2)

On PTFL however, with people taking multiple turns of up to three hours to present and discuss their story, listening inevitably becomes a big part of everyone’s week. Following to the comment above, P6 recognized that all the listening turned out to have a beneficial effect:

“Actually... Recognizing that every individual has a story to tell and, in some ways, some of the kind of things... The insecurities that I had, you know, other people had too. ” (P6_R2)

More generally some participants seemed to benefit directly from learning how to listen more and better. For P2, listening had admittedly always been a challenge. The week offered him multiple opportunities to listen, including an informal situation (at the pub) where he realized that another delegate had something to get off his chest:

“I just spent a huge amount of time listening to him, giving him advice, and the next day he went back and said: ‘I’ve been... I’ve been holding something back and I feel the need to tell the group, but first I want to thank P2 for being there and listening to me’. And I was like: ‘Oh man, no one has ever thanked me for listening in my life!’” (P2_R2)

“I don’t think... I don’t think I could have done that in the first couple of days. I don’t think I would have been able to have that detached... Stand back, with

my personality, long enough to let him open up. And I... I don't like silence. [..] and this time it just happened that I had no problem sacrificing myself and that made him very comfortable, and that's something I... I felt really good about... I felt very good that he could trust me so that he could actually open up" (P2_R2)

P2 seemed very pleased in this occasion to have been able to listen in a way that was not available to him before. For some, better listening, seemed to have stuck also after the PTFL week:

"Particularly in my personal relationships, I listen to my friends instead of cutting them off or changing the conversations" (P3_R4)

"I think [at work] it's actually much more about recognizing what the other person is needing at that time. [...] based on the signals that they are giving off [...] It's about active listening and it's about adapting your communication style to the individual in responding to the situation" (P6_R2)

"I try to listen a lot more in my working week. [...] And really listening to all-- is there a story, or listening to all the details [...] instead of "well, that's just what needs to be done, and just do it [...] And, you know, there haven't been many situations between now and Monday to do that, but I am definitely aware that I can approach things I deal with slightly differently from how I would have previously to going on the course" (P4_R2)

As discussed next, the practice of listening turned out to be closely related to the practice of empathy.

Empathizing

A number of participants highlighted a link between better listening having becoming better able to empathize with others. The level of listening on the course and meant that people generally got to know each other quite closely:

"Because you do get to know them very well, and what makes them function

in the way they do in the world, in quite a short amount of time” (P6_R3)

In addition, some of the stories prompted strong feelings of compassion:

“I felt terrible for some people on a sympathetic and an empathetic level for some of the things that they were talking about” (P6_R2)

“The content of some of the individuals’ stories was naturally emotional. Some quite distressing. Some quite incredible. And I think naturally when you deal with things you are uncomfortable with, usually you work around and see if you can either go upstairs, or walk around, or go out, or go to the shop, or do something else... But when you're in a room where somebody is sat on a chair with 10 people are sat around them, you don't have anywhere to go” (P4_R2)

“The stories, particularly one of them, were particularly hard and I felt really emotionally affected by the stories, and I felt incredibly upset.” (P7_R2)

“It’s hard for me because... You know, putting myself in their position from what I have witnessed, people would come face to face with how their childhood has shaped the way they are now (P8_R3)

The realization of what sort of things can stand behind the surface of people potentially present in everyday interactions seemed to enable a greater sense of acceptance among participants:

“One of the other things that struck me was that the people in the group that I found most difficult to get along with on initial impression, were actually the people that, hem... I liked more, hem... And I suppose I had more respect for at the end of the group. And so that was hem... At first for me, was obviously... I suppose what that was telling me was what I already knew intellectually about not jumping to conclusions and hem... Yeah, and the people I might initially back away from they would end up being the ones I work better with” (P1_R2)

“Even quite unlikely characters whom you think ‘That’s not a person I would I could get on with’, you know, you see behind that very quickly” (P6_R2)

With greater acceptance, people witness themselves starting to care more for others. Even quite a rational type like P6³⁰³ emphasized how he got to care about people on the program:

“I think—let alone the personal benefits of it, I don’t think I will forget the individuals, or some of their stories or some of the changes that they made, actually [...] you do generally get to care about them as well” (P6_R2)

As with listening, the practice of empathizing at PTFL seemed for some participants to carry forward, for example into workplace interactions:

“Now I am better at being tolerant with other people and the course definitely underlined that. Because everybody has their hang-ups. Everybody has a story, to a greater or lesser degree, which takes up a greater or lesser amount of... Space, in their mind, in the way they are thinking, in the way they are reacting. And so I think I am a lot more tolerant of other people now.” (P7_R4)

“But I am also much better in considering.... Perhaps areas that I didn’t consider before... You know, making space for the quiet person, or utilizing a whole different range of skills to bring the best out of people” (P5_R4)

“... I think I am becoming better at analyzing my own feelings and the feeling of the third or the second party, when I am in the conversation as well. I think increasingly I am becoming better at [...] being empathic towards that person” (P6_R4)

³⁰³ See the presentation of P6 within the individual stories earlier this chapter or within appendix 8.7.

“I probably have developed greater sensitivity to other people’s needs, what they are thinking, reading their body language” (P3_R4)

“Again, a lot of the benefit of the course comes from hearing and seeing other people’s journeys and how you can relate that to either your own team or your own family or the experiences that are going on around you.” (P9_R2)

Framing constructive feedback

As presented earlier³⁰⁴, a prominent process during the PTFL week is that of offering constructive feedback. P8’s case provides one example of how the practice of raising and framing constructive feedback also carried over into interactions after the program. Part of P8’s efforts following PTFL was to invest in making workplace relationships with his team members more transparent³⁰⁵. At times, this meant trying to get behind the first responses he would get from his team members:

“Essentially what I am doing is, obviously with a new sense of awareness of other people, I am now delving much more into what makes other people tick and therefore I am challenging people in one to ones—when I think they are telling me what I want to hear instead of what they really mean. And then actually stopping them and saying ‘Do you really mean that? Or do you think that that is just what I want to hear? Because if you are telling me this because you think I want to hear it, then I don’t want to hear it. I actually want to hear what really is coming from you’. And challenging other people. I said ‘Because, in the long run’ I said, ‘it’s not... you are going to be left feeling that the outcome of this conversation is unsatisfactory and then that wouldn’t be my fault, it would be yours. Because, you are giving me a line that you don’t believe. I’m going to make life a little bit harder for you now, by forcing you to tell me what you really think, but in the long run I will be making your life much easier because coming to this meeting will actually leave you in a position where you are empowered to carry on and do your job” (P8_R3)

³⁰⁴ In the previous section on context (holding environment functions role modeled by tutors) and also in the current section (shared sensemaking)

³⁰⁵ The core of P8’s story was that of being himself more--at work as at home.

P8 realized that this approach could surprise people and make them uncomfortable and was experimenting with ways to develop a more transparent approach to workplace relationship without coming across as threatening:

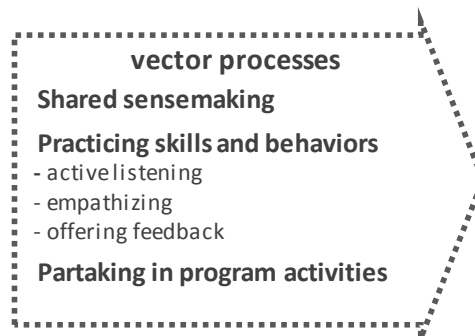
“And the looks I’d get when I first started to do that was ‘Bligh me’! And then... But I am softening that up because I am saying ‘But I want to hear what you really think, because I want to keep you motivated and I want to keep you as a member of the team. Therefore, I want to understand you a bit more. So, work with me’. I said, ‘And anything you want to ask me, I will give you a honest answer’” (P8_R3)

Giving frank feedback was tangentially relevant to the stories of other participants in the sample. For example, P1 took a strong stance with her ex-husband (who had been harassing her), eventually interrupting communications. Or, P5 directly confronted her Board about some changes in leadership that she believed were needed. This surge in the ability to externalize feedback prompts a question of whether, following the course, people were just becoming bigger ‘fighters’. However, all three the participants just brought as an example seemed to especially value taking people along versus engaging in confrontation. As manifested by P5 in the comment below, the overall sense is that, equipped with a strengthened confidence participants were able to be more direct and assertive about what they believed was right or important:

“I would sit in a meeting with the other executives and I will say exactly what I bring to the room that they can’t bring to the room and that’s why they need to listen to what I am saying. Whereas before I wouldn’t have believed in myself enough to be able to do that. Believing in my value and not being worried about voicing that” (P5_R3)

The figure below summarizes this discussion on the PTFL vector process of practicing skills and behaviors by listing the three most salient activities that the course offered opportunities to practice.

Figure 57. Vector processes: Practicing skills and behaviors at PTFL



Compiled by the author.

8.12.1.3 *Partaking in program activities*

This discussion offers an opportunity to recap some key and distinctive activities that are formally part of the PTFL program and that were discussed earlier in this thesis³⁰⁶. These activities, which take place during the PTFL, are:

- Inquiring into individual life stories
- Exchanging feedback
- Working with a buddy
- Receiving an induction on (limited) theory of human and leadership development

A further activity (related to but distinct from the inquiry into individual stories) that emerged from the analysis:

- Learning by comparison with others

This activity was defined quite effectively by P9:

“Working through 12 different case studies of practical behavior is so much better than spending hours on a theoretical [lecture]” (P9_R2)³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ See the presentation of PTFL as a program (methodology chapter) and the paragraphs above on shared sensemaking and the practicing of skills and behaviors.

³⁰⁷ In the previous section on context it was highlighted how the core content of the program is provided by individuals and consists of their life stories and live interaction on the course.

Many of the participants at some point or another referred to having learned from the comparison with others:

“I felt like I learned a lot from other people’s situations and the difficulties and obstacles that they faced. I thought they were similar to my own and therefore I could learn from those” (P1_R2)

“It gives you a [...]... A benchmark as to what people are getting from it and some things you might then be missing out by yourself if you weren’t able to see what they were learning” (P9_R2)

One last program activity is included here on the basis that it seemed to have had a support role during the PTFL program:

- Morning physical exercise

Generally, participants recognized that a form of morning exercise seemed to help physically and mentally prepare them to the main program activities:

“The yoga element of the course. And I can understand why that is there because, if people are being put in ...Emotionally in certain types of situations during the course a week and there is a structured opportunity for them to learn ways of relaxing.... It’s actually a very beneficial thing to do... [...] And I can see the value in that and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed giving it a go” (P6_R3)

“[The course is] also pushing people to the limits. Some people are not comfortable with it. It’s pushing them toward areas or zones they are uncomfortable with, to get them to try new things. [At yoga] in fact I fell asleep during the breathing exercises, and nodded off and started snoring. But, when a few times I lost control of my life... First thing I did was apply the breathing exercises. So actually they have been drummed into me. Three months ago, when... I had a major accident. I crashed [...] and my arm was totally pulped, [...] so I switched on to breathing exercises. [...] And, although I was always skeptical and cynical about it, I actually did them”

However, yoga was not necessarily the best form of exercise for all. Yoga was perceived as more useful by some of the participants:

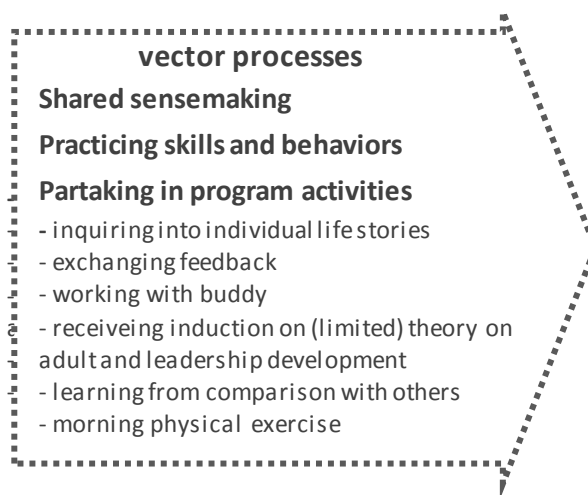
“I loved the yoga sessions in the morning. [...] I think probably that's why I liked it so much, I think it set me up well for the day” (P7_R2)

While other participants, for example P9, thought they could better prepare with some other preferred method:

“In terms of the yoga, I did go with that for the first two days, but I felt that I got more out of going off and doing my knowing exercise. So I took the opportunity to go for a run and have a swim. I'm used to doing this sort of exercises and taking the chance to go and do that. I thought I would get a little more out of the breathing and stress relating things within yoga than I did” (P9_R2)

Regardless of the extent to which yoga was favored by single delegates, a form of physical exercise was generally appreciated as preparation to intellectually and emotionally challenging work. The figure below offers a recap of the processes grouped under the category of partaking in program activities.

Figure 58. Partaking in PTFL activities



Compiled by the author.

8.12.1.4 *Interrelations between developmental context and process*

PTFL initiated a number of vector processes which *facilitate* development. Vector processes were found to be distinct from but interrelated with developmental context. In the previous section of findings, developmental context was described as a processual entity, emerging from the interplay of certain key elements³⁰⁸ of a developmental initiative. Some of the behaviors earlier identified as instituting a holding environment (notably the exchange of feedback and support) were just presented also as vector processes of development. Rather than from a duplication of evidence, I believe that this stems from an actual interdependence between developmental context and processes. Some of the same behaviors (role modeled by tutors and mirrored by the group) functioned initially as ‘starters’ of context and later (once developmental context became relatively stable) functioned as vector processes throughout the course.

8.12.1.5 *Distinctive quality of PTFL: a heightened emotional charge*

The significance of the interdependence between context and process seems to be that it creates a distinctive quality of a developmental initiative. At PTFL, this interdependence seemed to bring about a heightened emotional charge. Having noticed that several comments by participants revolved around a sort of ‘emotional zone’, I decided to further inquire in this direction. I was particularly interested in what participants thought might be the source, purpose or value of this unique emotional zone. Perhaps the best explanation was hinted at by P5³⁰⁹, who said that experiencing that emotion allows one to fully connect to reality:

“P5: It connects you with the reality... With the real pattern. [...]

Linda: Yeah, it's a means of connection?

P5: Yes, to reality” (P5_R2)

³⁰⁸ Scope, agenda, tone and quality of the overall context (affected by program characteristics, people characteristics, role modeling by tutors and mirroring by group, respectively).

³⁰⁹ P5 has a background in psychology

This is a possible interpretation of P5's comment, based on the knowledge that her life story had been in some aspects dramatic: if a certain reality has not been fully processed, bringing it back to memory will also bring up the emotions connected with it. Bringing all of this back to the present seems to have a purpose only if the present offers a context more conducive to processing that reality than was available before. PTFL is the type of context where less straightforward aspects of reality can be further processed. This idea seems supported by a comment by P1³¹⁰ around what might be the function of the 'emotional zone':

"I think that is how [change] gets integrated into who you are" (P1_R3)

The broader context of this quote in the transcript suggests that P1 was referring to the integration of the strength that she felt she gained on the course. If the course had been more intellectual in its approach (for example, if it had been focused on rational analysis) perhaps elements of healing would not have been realized and felt in the same way.

Another participant (P7 who, at the beginning of the course, was about to leave because of its emotional intensity) expressed that a heightened emotional charge possibly motivates people to become more honest with themselves and others:

"I think it contributes to bringing a level of honesty to... To not hiding things, to just being totally open and honest. [...] Because it was emotionally charged, you become more open and you become more honest in what you are saying... Either about yourself, and also about what you say to other people, in your reactions to other people. It becomes almost... Instinctive, if you like? I don't know whether that helps as an answer" (P7_R2)

According to P9 and P8, the emotion is stirred up by coming face to face with a limiting pattern. Maybe, it is useful in terms of jolting people out of the old ways:

"Yeah, I think it takes... It does take a lot shock you out of your inbuilt patterns within which have been with you for 30 or 40 years. It takes something fairly big to knock you off those rails, and that's where this comes in" (P9_R2)

³¹⁰ P1 has a background in psychology

“Why have I got those limiting patters?’ And that can be very emotional [...] because that has become a habit, you know, with the way you behaved over years. And then somebody points out something that is really obvious and you think ‘Bligh me’. And that could be very emotional” (P8_R2)

The environment that was created at PFTL, in interaction with the activities that took place during the course, undoubtedly created a zone with a heightened emotional charge. Some participants suggested that this emotional zone helped connect with the realities at the root of their limiting patterns; or, that it helped them integrate the validation (or healing) spurred by the group interaction. As others said, the heightened emotional charge provided a shock needed to ‘knock’ people ‘out of the rail’ of their limiting patterns. For others still (for example P6 and P8) the emotional zone helped access a new quality of empathy in recognition that other people had been less fortunate in life than they had been. Whichever the explanation ventured of the reasons and purposes of this ‘emotional zone’, there was a consensus³¹¹ that working within that zone was overall an enriching and valuable experience.

³¹¹ The only exception was P3 who generally resented the course’s emphasis on counselling. He seemed to not appreciate that personal (and at times dramatic) stories were shared during the course and was at times harsh towards those who shared those stories: *“[It did not help that] some people on the course with severe hang-ups” (P3_R2); “There was one or two basket cases there [...] people whose whole life has been crap, generally due to some mental issues they didn’t deal with” (P3_R2).*

8.13 Appendix: PTFL as a form of group counseling

Vector processes³¹² were identified in this research as those initiated within the PTFL context and facilitating development. A continuum by Joo (2005) was used to preliminarily locate PTFL on the counseling (versus consulting) end of executive coaching initiatives. However, data from this research showed that a range of processes took place on PTFL that varied from individual to individual: in some cases (e.g. P6), the focus of individual session was closer to consulting, while in other cases (e.g. P1, P5, P7, P8) it was closer to counseling. In addition, it was inferred that in some cases (P1 and P5) the counseling focus seemed more intense than in others (P7 and P8). The literatures reviewed at the beginning of this research also do not provide sufficient guidance to operate a distinction between these subgroups in the sample. In addition, the definition of counseling by Joo is rather inclusive and tends to merge definitions of counseling and therapy. This discussion then turns to the field of psychology for guidance. While in the management area notions are still blurry around the functioning and effects of group work, for over a century interpersonal and process-oriented work has been recognized in psychology as:

“an effective tool to assist counselors and other mental health professionals in their work to improve the lives of the people to whom they provide services” (Ward, 2011; in Coyne 2011, p. 548)

In terms of distinguishing different types of group work, this thesis adopts a framework by the ASGW (Association for Specialists in Group Work, a subdivision of the American Counseling Association)³¹³. The ASGW 2000 typology refers to the aggregate of interpersonal and process-oriented work as “group work”. Within group work, it identifies four distinct specializations:

“task and work group facilitation, group psychoeducation, group counseling, and group psychotherapy” (Wilson et al., 2000)

Group work seems to enter the territory of counseling and therapy when there is a shift from educational strategies to systemic intervention strategies (see next table).

³¹² Including shared sensemaking, practicing skills and behaviors and partaking in program activities

³¹³ Meanwhile debates continue on how each specializations can be best defined (as demonstrated by Ward’s description of field-wide and ongoing brainstorming about definition of different sorts of group work, 2011)

As advocated by the ASGW, the practice of each specialization must be supported by appropriate professional skills in the figure of a facilitator. With preparation and experience in psychology and psychiatry, the PTFL tutors potentially cover all four of the specializations. However, definitions highlight that the type of group work carried out also has to do with the needs of individuals in the group. Counseling seems focused on facilitating development in a relatively functional population of individuals seeking to increase awareness and optimize behavior (Coyne, 2011; Wilson et al., 2000).

In contrast, therapy seems focused on facilitating remediation in a relatively dysfunctional population of individuals seeking remediation of psychological issues that prevent them to carry out their roles in family and society (Coyne, 2011; Wilson et al., 2000).

The population normally selected³¹⁴ into PTFL is an average to highly functional population, including individuals who have achieved executive roles in prominent organizations.

Table 39. Specializations of group work and training standards

³¹⁴ Both in terms of self-selected and admitted--see also the presentation of the PTFL program in the methodology section of this thesis

| Type of group work | A definition | Present in PTFL? | Training standards (ASGW) include but are not limited to: | Present in PTFL? |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------------|--|------------------|
| Group work (generic) | “refers to the dynamic interaction between collections of individuals for prevention or remediation of difficulties or for the enhancement of personal growth/enrichment through the interaction of those who meet together for a commonly agreed-on purpose and prearranged times” (Gazda 978, p. 297) | (see below) | (see specializations below) | (see below) |
| Task/work group facilitation | Focuses on the “application of principles of normal human development and functioning” through “group based educational, developmental, and systemic strategies [...] that promote efficient and effective accomplishment of group tasks” (ASGW 200, p. 3) | yes | organizational development, management, and consultation, theory and practice of task/work group facilitation | Yes |
| Group psycho-education | Also focuses on the “application of principles of normal human development and functioning” through “group based educational and developmental strategies”, to “promote personal and interpersonal growth and development and the prevention of future difficulties among people who may be at risk for the development of personal or interpersonal problems ” (ASGW 200, p. 3) | yes | organizational development, school and community counseling/psychology, health promotion, marketing, program development and evaluation, organizational consultation, theory and practice of group psychoeducation | Yes |

(continued) Specializations of group work and training standards

| Type of group work | A definition | Present in PTFL? | Training standards (ASGW) include but are not limited to: | Present in PTFL? |
|-------------------------|---|------------------|---|------------------|
| Group counseling | “Focuses on the application of principles of normal human development and Functioning, through “group based cognitive, affective, behavioral, or systemic intervention strategies” to “address personal and interpersonal problems of living and promote personal and interpersonal growth and development [...] among people who may be experiencing transitory maladjustment, who are at risk for the development of personal or interpersonal problems, or who seek enhancement of personal qualities and abilities” (ASGW, p. 4) | no | normal human development, health promotion, theory and practice of group counseling | Yes |
| Group therapy | Focuses on the “application of principles of normal and abnormal human development and functioning” through “group based cognitive, affective, behavioral, or systemic intervention strategies”, to “address personal and interpersonal problems of living, remediate perceptual and cognitive distortions or repetitive patterns of dysfunctional behavior, and promote personal and interpersonal growth and development among people who may be experiencing severe and/or chronic maladjustment” (ASGW, p. 4) “attempts to remediate psychological problems that seriously interfere with the ability of individuals to function in work, social, or family roles” (Wheelan 2005b, p. 175; in Ward, 2010, p. 44) | no | normal and abnormal human development, assessment and diagnosis of mental and emotional disorders, treatment of psychopathology, theory and practice of group psychotherapy | yes |

Compiled by the author. Source: ASGW, 2000)

While acknowledging a consensus that in actuality different group work processes often overlap, this discussion leans toward categorizing PTFL as an instance of group counseling. While PTFL is situated on the counseling extreme of Joo's consulting to counseling continuum (2005), in light of the psychology literature just presented the program is really situated in the mid-range of a consulting to therapy continuum.

8.14 Appendix: Individual sensemaking as the core process of personal and leadership development

This research finds that individual sensemaking lies at the core of both personal and leadership development. This finding is fundamentally in accord with extant literature based on constructivist assumptions, but it is novel in the sense that sensemaking has rarely been identified explicitly as the core process of development.

Constructivist assumptions derived from the work, in the field of psychology, of Piaget. In particular, they derive from the notion that individuals actively make sense of reality and construct their learning and change (Scott et al., 2007). As later theorized by Vygotski³¹⁵ (1934-1987), all learning is acquired or refined in social interactions. Hence, a social dimension was added to the constructivist notion of active sensemaking by individuals (Scott et al., 2007). Today, the term constructivist ('social' is often left implicit), is used to refer to a research paradigm (e.g. in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hepburn, 2003), or an epistemological stance (e.g. in Schwandt, 2003; Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve, 2003). As a result, the role of sensemaking in processes of change is often posited at the level of epistemological assumptions informing research. It is argue that an emphasis on sensemaking is often more representative of:

"an everyday, uncontroversial, garden-variety constructivism"
(Schwandt 2003, p. 305)

rather than being representative of the study of sensemaking per se. Schwandt (2003) adds that:

"In a fairly unremarkable sense, we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge"

(Schwandt 2003, p. 305)

³¹⁵ Vygostki developed a psychological theory of social learning

Some areas of research are identified here that have focused more directly on sensemaking³¹⁶: CD theory, areas of organization theory, management learning, adult learning and psychological theories of individual change.

The whole family of research areas derived from CD theory descends from the work of Piaget and relies on constructivist assumptions. CD theory has always focused on meaning making, believing that the identification and revision of operating assumptions is the very fabric of constructive development. As a testament of the centrality of sensemaking to CD theory, McCauley et al. (2006) proposed that CD theory has the “potential to act as an integrative framework” (p.650) in the field of leadership and leadership development,

“because it deals with [...] the generation and development of meaning for individuals and social systems” (McCauley et al., 2006 p. 650).

An example of integrative efforts is the work of Torbert³¹⁷ who describes how the different ‘action logics’ of individuals at different developmental stages influence their leadership styles. The work of Torbert and other CD theorists has traditionally tended to focus on cognitive rather than systemic aspects of sensemaking.

In the camp of organization theory, Weick (1995) has been the main proponent of sensemaking³¹⁸ as a motor of change on the organizational level by describing sensemaking as the interface between the individual and the organization—as informing decision-making and hence dynamic organizational processes. Until recently, Weick’s work on sensemaking has also focused on cognitive rather than systemic aspects of sensemaking: in the area, there is a recent call for the inclusion of emotional (Weick, 2010; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010), purposive (Sheldon, 2009; Weinberg, 2008), and enactment (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Basu and Palazzo, 2008) dimensions of sensemaking.

Further evidence of the centrality of sensemaking to change processes is to be found in the area of learning. An example in the management learning literature is the work of Argyris (1978, 2001) who discusses how ‘theories in use’ guide the behavior of individuals. Schwandt (2005) has endorsed this notion advocating that managers

³¹⁶ In addition, sensemaking, as reviewed in Section 2.4.5.4 is the focus of a lot of research on organizational change.

³¹⁷ Reviewed in the literature section of this thesis

³¹⁸ As reviewed in the literature chapter of this thesis

become better learners by striving to be more like philosophers. In the field of adult learning, Mezirow (1991) construes sensemaking as the core of transformational learning: by reflecting on their own sensemaking, individuals can bring about perspective and behavioral change. Also in the field of adult learning, the work by Marsick and Watson on informal and incidental change (1990, in Marsick et al., 2009) also sees sensemaking as central to the process of change. Learning is thought to proceed from greater awareness of "tacit, hidden, taken-for granted assumptions"—and to lead learners to "re-frame their understanding of the kind of learning they might need to undertake" (Marsick and Watkins, 1990 pp. 6-7; in Marsick et al., 2009 p. 571). The model of developmental sensemaking processes emerging from this research has commonalities with the original model of informal and incidental learning: both models are iterative, proceed from a trigger experience and expanded self-awareness; and incorporate further steps that are essentially iterations of sensemaking³¹⁹. All of the learning theories just mentioned have also tended to focus on the cognitive dimension of sensemaking. In a recent critique of their own work, Marsick et al. (2009) have stressed that the process of learning encompasses emotions and intuition and not just cognition as originally implied by the model of informal and incidental learning.

Another field that has held sensemaking as central is part of the greater psychology area and has focused on individual change. The earliest contributions were traced to Bandura (1986) and Kolb (1984). In his social cognitive model of learning and development, Bandura has underscored the role of self-efficacy in individual change. Self-efficacy is:

“an individual’s confidence in their ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task” (Wigfield et al., 2006 p. 935)

Hence, an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs around learning and development might be able to boost or hinder the extent to which change is attainable³²⁰. The assessment of self-efficacy seems to take place at the level of individual sensemaking; and, self-efficacy so defined strikes mostly as a cognitive self-assessment of capability to change. Kolb focused on experiential change. His renowned model of change begins

³¹⁹ In Marsick and Watson (1990), the steps are: frame experience, diagnose problem, interpret context, and draw upon or develop a new skill

³²⁰ Based on the findings of this study, it would seem that the battle of self-efficacy is fought in the capability iteration

with a concrete experience and then articulates three additional steps that pertain to the domain of cognitive sensemaking: reflection on the experience, abstract conceptualization, and then construction of experimental ways to engage with new occurrences of the experience. Building on work with Kolb, Boyatzis (2006) has developed intentional change theory (ICT):

“ICT describes the essential components and process of desirable, sustainable change in one’s behavior, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. The “change” may be in a person’s actions, habits or competencies. It may be in their dreams or aspirations. It may be in the way they feel in certain situations or around certain people. It may be a change in how they look at events at work or in life” (Boyatzis, 2006 p. 608);

Hence the core process of Boyatzis’ ICT is also sensemaking, this time intended in a more systemic way (that is, including behavior, feelings and perceptions in addition to thoughts). The model of intentional change proposed by Boyatzis is in the form of a spiral and comprises a number of discoveries about the self. In particular, these discoveries are about: the ideal³²¹ and real self; any overlaps (strengths) and gaps (limitation) between ideal and real self; and, a learning agenda. The model then includes experimentation, practice to mastery, and the recruiting of (resonant) relationships that support the new behaviors. Boyatzis describes intentional change as follows:

"The change process is often non-linear and discontinuous, appearing or being experienced as a set of discoveries or epiphanies"(Boyatzis, 2006 p. 608);

Another model stemming from the field of individual change was developed by Proshaksa (1992) to describe recovery from addictive behaviors. Once again, the model is iterative (represented by a spiral) and non-linear³²². The model is also

³²¹ With the term ‘ideal self, Boyatzis indicates the purposive dimension of an individual, which includes values, belief, aspirations and sense of meaning. He argues that positive intentional change is the process of getting closer to the ideal self. From the angle of this research, and in light of its findings, I would rather call the purposive dimension the ‘real self’ and argue that development is the process of uncovering and progressively enabling the internal purposive dimension.

³²² “Linear progression is a possible but relatively rare phenomenon with addictive behaviors”, (Prochaksa, 1992 p.1104)

composed of sensemaking processes. precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance³²³. Finally, a popular model is the change curve by Kübler-Ross (in Slocum et al., 2002), which aims at explaining the grieving process³²⁴. Once again, the change curve is understood as iterative and non-linear and the model is composed of sensemaking stages with a focus on emotions: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance³²⁵.

Table 40. Examples of research on change based on constructivists assumptions and focusing directly on sensemaking

| Examples of research on change based on constructivists assumptions | Cognitive dimension of sensemaking | Systemic view of sensemaking ¹ | Model of sensemaking of individual change | Sensemaking iterative and discontinuous |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| CD Theories (Kegan, 1982; Torbert, 1994) | primary | no | no | yes |
| Organization theory (Weick) | primary | no | no | yes |
| Management learning (Argyris, 1978, 2001; Schwandt, 2005) | primary | no | no | yes |
| Adult learning (Mezirow, 2001; Marsick and Watson, 1990 in Marsick et al., 2009) | primary | no | yes | yes |
| Psychology of individual change (Bandura, ref; Kolb, ref; Boyatzis, 2006; Proshaksa, 1992; Kübler-Ross, 1969; in Slocum et al. 2002) | primary | yes | yes | yes |

Compiled by the author.

³²³ From Proshaksa (1992): "Precontemplation is the stage at which there is no intention to change behavior in the foreseeable future" (p.1103); "Contemplation is the stage in which people are aware that a problem exists and are seriously thinking about overcoming it but have not yet made a commitment to take action" (p. 1103); "Preparation is a stage that combines intention and behavioral criteria. Individuals in this stage are intending to take action in the next month and have unsuccessfully taken action in the past year" (p.1104), "Action is the stage in which individuals modify their behavior, experiences, or environment in order to overcome their problems. Action involves the most overt behavioral changes and requires considerable commitment of time and energy" (p. 1104); "Maintenance is the stage in which people work to prevent relapse and consolidate the gains attained during action" (p.1104).

³²⁴ Throughout the decades, practice has found the change curve to be applicable not just to grieving, but to a range of changes of dramatic nature—hence the curve’s popularity in management circles

³²⁵ In the original model, grieving is referred to the coming to terms with a terminal illness. In the denial phase, a person "does not accept the diagnosis and may even refuse to acknowledge the existence of the terminal illness" (Slocum et al. 2002, p.275); the anger phase is marked by "feelings of anger, rage, envy and resentment. The logical question is 'Why me?'" (p. 276); the bargaining phase "occurs when friends finally convince the person that he or she is really sick and should take steps to fight the disease. However, the person has not yet accepted or acknowledge the seriousness of the condition" (p.277); a depression stage ensues, during which individuals tend to "lose their self-esteem. There may be the added loss of a job due to many absences or inability to function" (p. 277); finally, there is acceptance "He or she accepts the inevitable end when reaching a state of physical exhaustion, weakness, pain and helplessness. They are willing to seek help from any source available" (pp. 277-8).

In summary, research based on constructivist assumptions which has focused on sensemaking directly has identified sensemaking as an iterative and non-linear process intimately involved in change processes at the individual level. The understanding of sensemaking is increasingly surpassing the cognitive dimension and encompassing emotive, purposive and conative dimensions. Rarely, however, has sensemaking been studied for the sake of understanding sensemaking. This research joins this stream of literature focusing directly on the sensemaking of change; in addition, it provides some direct empirical evidence that sensemaking is the core process of individual change. If that is so, understanding sensemaking is crucial in differentiating the types of change that may occur at the individual level.

8.15 Appendix: Sensemaking as process and outcome of development

Sensemaking as the process of development

Evidence that sensemaking is the process of development begins with the identification by participants of the beginning of their process of change with an initial flash of insight. The following is a description offered by P4:

“I think there is certainly, in the week, when you are on the course, I think there is a point when something clicks. And I experienced that with... Looking at the room, I experienced when something kind of clicked, and: ‘okay, actually what they are saying is pretty accurate. I can see what I need to do differently’. And you can see that click with other people in the room as well. Some people on the last morning. [...] could suddenly feel “oh, you’ve got it”. You know, it’s clicked” (P4_R2)

Other participants talked about an initial moment of epiphany—an original flash of insight—accompanied by a feeling of surprise:

“There’s that sort of... Flash of insight, when you think “Yeah. That’s it, and therefore what I am going to do differently now is ... So, it’s suddenly clicking into place--and then the realization what you can do about it.” (P1_R2)

“And [the tutor] stood there and looked at the group and said: ‘No one else is getting a chance. No one else can tell their story. You see, it’s only you, you, you’. So I just stopped... I stood back and ‘Do you guys also think so?’ And they said: ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah’. So I just let everyone else go and I just stood back. It was... like I normally would do it at work, really, but didn’t do it in the social. So I had to stand back and started to think: ‘Hmmm this is what people see, I might just as well have a go’. This was a revelation for me.” (P2_R2)

“And then somebody points out something that is really obvious and you think ‘Bligh me”” (P8_R2)

“... It dawned on me that the whole point of being there was not for people to hear my relatively mundane story compared to others but to drill down to the reasons for why I react the way I do certain things and” (P9_R2)

Initial insight aside, P4 described the process of change as a process of realization rather than a process of ‘fixing’:

“With some of the things and the issues that were raised, it wasn’t the case with the 10 people there that they were going to cure us, or change these things by the Friday, and then you go home and on Monday it’s great. What it is... You, know it’s not a fixing process. It’s a realization process” (P4_R2)

P7 described it as an awakening:

“It’s more of an awakening process of trying to be more conscious of all that” (P7_R2)

The evidence just presented refers mostly to a gain in self-awareness. Further evidence around how individuals construct their commitment and effort to change also supports the notion of the centrality of sensemaking to the process of change. Such evidence is presented later when discussing more in detail core processes of development.

Sensemaking as the outcome of development

In the data, there is direct evidence of the centrality of sensemaking to the process of development. However, there is less and more obscure evidence around sensemaking as the outcome of development. The idea was suggested by a comment by P4:

“We all left with a bit better of an understanding: ‘Oh, these are the things I really need to look at. These are the things that are really triggering the other parts of...’--or, maybe trying to pinpoint at least two or three things, but... It could be a challenge, it could make you nervous, but I think it’s realizing that you have them in the first place, it’s part of the battle” (P4_R2)

P4 described realizing some 'things' which are capable of triggering a particular (unhelpful, it can be inferred) dynamic. Additional light was shed by the comments of two other participants:

"[These] are issues about what you think of yourself, which is probably the most difficult thing you can think about [chuckles]" (P1_R2)

"For me it was [...]...Far more about how I needed to think about and treat myself" (P5_R2)

I believe that participants were describing gaining awareness of the ways they think about themselves. As spoken by P1 in the quote above, this is a very difficult thing to think about: it is a sort of meta-thinking about how to change the way we think about ourselves. Perhaps, at the most fundamental level of development, what changes within individuals is the very way they make sense of themselves. At times, this change has to do with reframing one's relationship to problematic past experiences. P4 shared his understanding of how problematic past experiences might affect people in the present:

"I think that history is... What's happened has happened. It's how you deal with what happened, and how you look at it. With certain things... You know, you can't leave them and think 'I am going to go back and change certain things that happened in my past'" (P4_R2)

The past cannot be changed. But, as P4 was saying, in any case the *issue is not the past*. Rather, the issue is *how one relates* to the past:

"But it's relating that [past experience] to your current life, today, and your work-life if it is work-related, or if it's personally... If it is a personal situation then it's how you that is related to your work. But it's how you deal with it... Not only how you deal with [it], because it may be a case where there is nothing you can really do about it. But it's how you look at it. How it affects you" (P4_R2)

A parallel explanation surfaced in the conversation with another participant (P6). On the course, P6³²⁶ had sought out a one-to-one conversation with the PFTL lead tutor to discuss the methodology they use on the course:

"[The tutor] talked about the fact that the kind of process that he leads on this course can be used also in other psychological processes. And he talked about the fact that people often do things like... Criticism, or projection, or past life, and things like that. And it doesn't really as matter what the person is saying, it's actually how they are saying it" (P6_R2)

What the tutor had explained is that the way the people talk can give away the way they make sense of things. And, the way people make sense of things also tends to drive the way they behave:

"What [people] could be telling you could be a bunch of rubbish, but what you are looking for is their way of enforcing the behavioral patterns based on what they're saying. The things they attach significance to at a sub-conscious level are significant because they are the things that resonate with them. Which I think... I was convinced by that." (P6_R2)

For development to occur, it is not necessary that the reframing relates to a traumatic past experience. In some cases, participants described reframing their relationship to everyday challenges. In the words of P7 and P1:

"It doesn't really matter what level of... sort of emotional tragedy [people] are on, it did not always have to be tragic events, but everybody's got things that upset them, and bother them, that are going on in them and they have difficulty coming to terms with (P7_R2)

"It feels more like... Actually 'Where do I want to be? Who do I want to be?'. And a sort of... Perhaps more a relief from where I was, which will enable me to get to wherever it is that I want to. And, yeah, just reminding myself of that. And I think things are going to, both personally and professionally, going to be very difficult for at least for a couple more months. And it's sort of

³²⁶ Who sees himself as somebody who is generally approaching things "with a degree of healthy skepticism", P6_R2)

steadying myself and coming through it that I need to be able to do. (P1_R3)

Processes of personal development, then, are not only relevant for people who have traumatic experiences in their past. An example supporting this conclusion was provided by P1.

8.16 Appendix: Comparative analysis

Virtuous and vicious circles of personal development

Structure of the analysis

Draft paper for consultation with the panel
March 30, 2012

The following table summarizes key differences that I have found/inferred by comparing the two subsets of participants (those who made a change versus those who did not make a change). I organized these differences according to whether they related to: 1) a fundamental *value* that, as I inferred, was held by participants; 2) a key *motive* that seemed to energize participants' reasoning and actions; 3) the *sensemaking* of participants and its distinctive characteristics; 4) the *types of developmental outcomes* attained by participants.

| Dimension | Those who did not make a change/dropped out of the sample (P1, P3, P7, P9) | Those who made a change (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Value: | Form | Substance |
| e.g. in the PTFL experience | Looking good and looking trained. Taking part in the program is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a stepping stone (P2) - a way to formalize authority (P7) - a tradition in the company (P9) - will regularly attend a high profile program (P3) | "I want to be me, just better" (P1; same concept in the others) |
| e.g. in the relationship with others | How am I perceived? | How do I impact on others? |
| e.g. as a leader | Looking good and looking trained | Becoming better—in personal performance and in interacting with others |
| Motive: | Seeking positive affirmation | Seeking the right thing to do/the right way forward for me |
| | In the interviews, these participants either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - were experienced as boastful and using one-up positioning (P2, P3; maybe P4) | In the interviews, these participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seem to honest about what is going on inside them - seem to use the interview to |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | - tend to sound accommodating and use one-down positioning (P9) | revisit and clarify their theories about themselves - don't seem to seek/need my approval |
| Sensemaking: | Treading water | Actively constructing change |
| e.g. talking about limiting patterns | Avoidance. Going on about others, context or other variables. - P2: at interview 1, could think of no issue he might have. - P3: his issue was going to be with 'change-management' with regard to reorganization efforts. - P4: unsure, but mentioned 'managing upwards' - P9: mentioned 'Areas [I am told] I need to address' | Owning the sensemaking around themselves (more presence of "I"—'my challenges', 'what works for me', 'I have a difficulty with', etc.). Also, actively developing models and theories around their limiting patterns and how to surpass them. |
| e.g. talking about change (not just with me: also, it seems, with the group during PTFL) | "Smoke and mirrors" | Honest about what goes on inside them |
| e.g. speech | - Chaotic (confused, looping or aimless) - Often impersonal | - Sense of meaningful progression, of incremental clarity - Owned ("I") |
| Leadership is all about.... | ...Tools and tactics | ...You and your values, and about <i>people</i> (as people, human beings) |
| Time horizon | Short term | Long term, concern with figuring out what is sustainable |
| Types of outcomes | No change Dismissing previously acknowledge feedback Discomfort with reflection | Clarity about most salient change for me at this point in time Clarity about how to attain it Change is already visible |
| E.g. effect of feedback received by others | Not dependable and not nourishing. Within themselves, these individuals would know that the feedback they received is not about who they really are, but rather about the 'façade self' that they maintain and project. Whether positive or negative, the effect of feedback seems to be that it impoverishes the sense of self and self-efficacy (see next). One participant referred to the feedback received as a 'bad haircut', implying that things would go back to being fine in just some time, once the 'hair' would grow back. | Dependable and nourishing. These individuals would know that they are striving to be and show themselves. Also, then, that the feedback from others is in response to their real self. Whether positive or negative, the effect of feedback seems to be that it strengthens sense of self and self-efficacy. One participants said: "if I kept the real person in the shadow [...], how can I build the confidence, because nobody would ever see it!" |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| E.g. effect on sense of self | <p>Split and weakened:</p> <p>P2: there is an external vs internal self and they can be very different;</p> <p>P3: the professional self is different and must stay distinct from the personal;</p> <p>P4: there is personality (visible to others) and there is a core where things are internalized</p> <p>P9: personal values are at odds with pleasing others</p> | <p>Whole and strengthened:</p> <p>P1: "you are the same person at work and in personal life"</p> <p>P5: "I want to bring together person and leader that I am"</p> <p>P8: "you are not two people"</p> <p>P7: "I am being more honest with myself and others" (incl. at work)--about having an impairing health condition</p> <p>P6: frames issues with work situations as "personal challenges at work"</p> |
| e.g. characteristically displayed emotion/attitude | Fear (of void of affirmation, of discomfort...) | Courage (this might be uncomfortable in the short term but it is for the better) |
| e.g. personal development outcomes | Mimicry of change—surface mimicking (inconsistent) of the speech/behaviors of more mature people | Access to more mature and wiser patterns of sensemaking and behavior; connection and integration with deeper aspects of self. |

Compiled by the author.

8.17 Appendix: Coding for Authentic leadership development

THE SENSEMAKING OF DELEGATES IN THE CONTEXT OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON PERSONAL GROWTH: PROCESS, CONTEXT, AND DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Third doctoral review
30 Nov. 2011

Coding for authentic leadership development

This document includes the coding template that was used to analyse data for affinity with authentic leadership development. The template includes as codes the constructs included in the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Authentic Leadership Questionnaire, by Bruce J. Avolio, Ph.D., William L. Gardner, Ph.D. & Fred O. Walumbwa, Ph.D).

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Authentic Leadership Development | Self-Awareness | Seeking feedback to improve interactions with others (ALQ #13) |
| | | Accurately describing how others view own capabilities (ALQ #14) |
| | | Showing understanding how specific actions impact others (ALQ#16) |
| | | Knowing when it is time to reevaluate his/her position (ALQ#1%) |
| | | Other |
| | Relational transparency | Saying exactly what I mean (ALQ#1) |
| | | Admitting mistakes when they are made (ALQ#2) |
| | | Encouraging everyone to |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|--|
| | | <hr/> speak their mind (ALQ#3) <hr/> |
| | | Telling the hard truth (ALQ#4) <hr/> |
| Internalized perspective | moral | Demonstrating beliefs that are consistent with actions (ALQ#6) <hr/> |
| | | Making decisions based on core values (ALQ#7) <hr/> |
| | | Asking others to take positions that support their core values (ALQ#8) <hr/> |
| | | Making difficult decisions b/o high standards of ethical conduct (ALQ#9) <hr/> |
| Balanced processing of information | of | Soliciting views that challenge deeply held positions (ALQ#10) <hr/> |
| | | Analyzing relevant data before coming to a decision (ALQ#10) <hr/> |
| | | Listening carefully to different points of view ahead of decision (ALQ#12) <hr/> |
| | | Other <hr/> |

8.18 Appendix: Authentic leadership development

Affinity of personal development with authentic personal development

A comprehensive review of the authentic leadership conversation is beyond the scope of this discussion, which relied extensively on a thorough review by Gardner et al. (2011). Personal development as described and observed in this research is found to demonstrate contiguity with the most recent conceptualization and operationalization of authentic leadership. In recent years, Avolio and colleagues assembled (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) and began to validate (Walumbwa et al. 2008) a model of authentic leadership based on four components: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information and internalized moral perspective. The table below displays the definition of each of these sub-constructs.

Table 41. Core constructs of authentic leadership and their definition

| Authentic Leadership Construct | Definition (based on Walumbwa et al. 2008) |
|---|--|
| Self-awareness | "refers to demonstrating an understanding of how one derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time. It also refers to showing an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and the multifaceted nature of the self, which includes gaining insight into the self through exposure to others, and being cognizant of one's impact on other people (Kernis, 2003)" (in Walumbwa et al. 2008 p. 95) |
| Relational transparency | "refers to presenting one's authentic self (as opposed to a fake or distorted self) to others. Such behavior promotes trust through disclosures that involve openly sharing information and expressions of one's true thoughts and feelings while trying to minimize displays of inappropriate emotions (Kernis, 2003)" (in Walumbwa et al. 2008 p. 95) |
| Balanced processing of information | "refers to leaders who show that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision. Such leaders also solicit views that challenge their deeply held positions" (Walumbwa et al. 2008 p. 95) |
| Internalized moral perspective | "refers to an internalized and integrated form of self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2003). This sort of self-regulation is guided by internal moral standards and values versus group, organizational, and societal pressures, and it results in expressed decision making and behavior that is consistent with these internalized values" (Walumbwa et al. 2008 pp. 95-6) |

Compiled by the author. Based on Walumbwa et al., 2008.

Findings of this research can be examined through the lens of this framework of authentic leadership:

- Self-awareness: in nine out of nine cases included in this research sample, there was a gain of self-awareness. This gain was in terms of awareness of how participants made sense of themselves; awareness of how their sensemaking impacted themselves and others; and, awareness in terms of advancing their understanding of themselves to a greater level of complexity;
- Relational transparency: in the five cases where personal development was found to occur, there was also an improvement in leadership-relevant relationships and communications. This improvement seemed to stem from a better understanding of personal values, priorities, or motivations as well as from a greater confidence in self-expression.
- Balanced processing of information: in three out of the five cases where personal development was found to occur, there was an improvement in how information was managed in view of a decision-making point. This improvement seemed to stem mainly from a more secure connection with internal reference points and sources of strength. In the two cases where there was no improvement, participants said that they felt they had been really careful in processing information from before.
- Internalizes moral perspective: in four out of the five cases where personal development was found to occur, there was an increase in the extent to which participants were able to tune in with their personal values and meaning; also, in the extent to which they were able to integrate their personal values and meaning in steering the directions they pursued. This increase seemed to stem from greater clarity about their needs, values and meaning. In the one case where there was no increase, the participant said that he felt he had been very in tune with his internal principles from before.

Evidence from this research which supports the observations just outlined is presented in the following table.

Table 42. Evidence of authentic leadership development in this research

Authentic Leadership Constructs* **Findings in this study**

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| <p>Self-awareness</p> | <p>P1: of her tendency to doubt her inner strength, hence her inability to be assertive and a tendency to easily become disoriented P2: of his tendency to put himself at the center of attention, interrupting others and invading their space (<i>"I can smother them with my personality"</i> P2_R2) P3: of his habit of interrupting and interjecting and how it affects others (<i>"pisses them off"</i>, P3_R2) P4: of his tendency to split the professional from the personal, and to be, in the professional, less (deadpan) than he is in the personal (warm and caring) P5: of her attitude toward herself (being overly self-critical) and others (excessive pressure on others) P6: that his character is perceived as personable and trust-inspiring character but his physical presence is perceived as shy and understated P7: of the negative impact of her taboo (around her illness) on her psyche (anxiety and insomnia), her health (self-destruction), and her relationships (impatience, defensiveness) P8: of the negative impact of his taboo (around sexual preference) on his self-confidence and relationships (insecurity, tentativeness, impulsiveness) P9: of a pattern of seeking affirmation from external sources</p> |
|------------------------------|--|

*Based on Walumbwa et al. 2008

(continued) Evidence of authentic leadership development in this research

Authentic Leadership Constructs*

Findings in this study

Relational transparency

P1: having connected with her inner strength, ability to issue clearer and more transparent communications around her actual needs and (at work) requirements. A feeling of being more truly able to empathize with others.

P2: no data

P3: no definite change observed

P4: no data

P5: greater ability to show more of herself across contexts (her rationale, her intentions); as a result, a sense that “*people have warmed up to me*” (P5_R4)

P6: greater ability to read his own and other people’s feelings and integrate that additional information into his approach to leadership situations (specifically reported an improvement in the relationship with his boss); having reconciled it with his values, ability to own and endorse the facet of his role that is as guide and advisor.

P7: greater honesty (with herself and others) around her illness; improved relationships bases on diminished defensive reactions with her superiors and a greater ability to involve her team and collaborators

P8: “*I lead as myself*” (P8_R3); integration of his whole self and his intuitive sense in his professional interactions; sharing his genuine reactions with others (not without reflection);

P9: no definite change observed

*Based on Walumbwa et al. 2008

(continued) Evidence of authentic leadership development in this research

| Authentic Leadership Constructs* | Findings in this study |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Balanced processing of information | <p>P1: <i>“Perhaps [I am] a bit more focused on what I want the outcome to be as opposed to the process of getting there”</i> (P1_R3); less buffeted by circumstances (indirectly relevant to decision-making)</p> <p>P2: no data</p> <p>P3: no definite change observed</p> <p>P4: no data</p> <p>P5: <i>“I am trying to deal with some very challenging times with a kind of a... A kindness, but a willingness to take difficult decision that comes from that belief that actually the direction that I am setting is the right direction. [...] I am being confident in terms of the hardline decision making process and the direction that needs to be set. [...] that’s really important because there are going to be some very tough decisions. So, that being said... I am straightforward but equally coming from a position of strength”</i>(P5_R8)</p> <p>P6: no further change, in the sense that he reported having always been a clear-minded and decisive leader <i>“I don’t really think this has been something important for me. I think it is more about the communication of decision making and getting buy-in to it. But yeah... I am fairly decisive about things, I know what I think”</i> (P6_R4)</p> <p>P7: no further change, in the sense that she reported having always been a leader who weighs information carefully in view of decisions (<i>“I still want to have the right and the necessary information before making a decision. You know, I am still very... I don’t take decisions... Lightly, because some of the decisions I have to take are quite far-reaching in the company”</i> (P7_R3)</p> <p>P8: greater thoughtfulness before reacting to situations and communications; in addition, <i>“I have always been a leader that fumbles around and is scared to make a decision. What I... I get that I am making decisions with more confidence. And I am making them even quicker than I was before. I am being a lot more thorough in getting the facts and challenging people on facts”</i> (P8_R3)</p> <p>P9: no definite change observed</p> |

*Based on Walumbwa et al. 2008

(continued) Evidence of authentic leadership development in this research

**Authentic
Leadership
Constructs***

Findings in this study

**Internalized
moral
perspective**

P1: greater ability to pursue directions based on what is right for her (e.g., on the personal front: discontinuing contact with her ex-husband who had been harassing her; on the work front, changing position internally to a role better fitting with her skills and inclination)

P2: no data

P3: no definite change observed

P4: no data

P5: new ability to engage in relationships based on a newly identified and integrated core value: to be with others as she would have liked others to have been with her (as opposed to as others had been with her)

P6: no further change, in the sense that he reported having been in tune with his inner values from before: *“I think I have a very strong sense of what my internal reference point and values are, and... I think they... They do mean that I am quite principled in what I do”* (P6_R4)

P7: new ability to manage her life based on is good for her (in her case, gaining a healthier lifestyle)

P8: new ability to orient his professional choices based on his sense of meaning. E.g., he discarded aspects of his profession that he found were just parts of a *“professional persona”* (P8_R2), in favor of pursuing aspects that resonate with him as more meaningful (strategy and mentoring)

P9: no definite change observed; crucially, P9 himself observed that his pattern of seeking affirmation from others made it difficult (and somewhat scary) for him to tune in and trust his internal sources of orientation, *“This is one of my limiting patterns, seeking affirmation from others, that... And, so, understanding that it’s okay to be me and to come up with what I believe is right, I think that is a learning that I got out of the course. Do I look at the... At an internal standpoint more? Yes, I believe I do. But it is linked back to the decision making process that I need to improve on the decisions that I make by using more of this internal review rather than what are people are expecting”* (P9_R3)

Compiled by the author. Based on Walumbwa et al., 2008.

What the evidence presented above implies is that this research might have stumbled in the observation of the development of authentic leadership (as constructed by Avolio and colleagues). These findings are relevant in terms of a research priority highlighted in the literature around understanding how authentic leadership can be developed:

“A great deal of energy and interest is emerging in the leadership development literature that suggests there will be a lot more activity in trying to discover what impacts genuine leadership development at multiple levels of analysis, from cognitive through to organizational climates” (Avolio et al., 2009 p. 426).

The moral element in authentic leadership development

Across the leadership field there is a divide around definitions that focus on what leadership *is* and definitions that focus on what leadership *ought to be* (Ciulla, 2008). In a review of authentic leadership theory, Gardner et al. presented thirteen different definitions of authentic leadership (originated between 1967 and 2009). Overall the balance is in favor of normative, as twelve of these definitions are colored with a positive moral characterization. For example:

“[Authentic leadership is] a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (Avolio et al., 2009 p. 424).

These definitions attribute to authentic leadership a positive moral valence³²⁷. The one exception is a definition by Shamir and Eilam (2005) which (intentionally) preserves value neutrality:

“[O]ur definition of authentic leaders implies that authentic leaders can be distinguished from less authentic or inauthentic leaders by four self-related characteristics: 1) the degree of

³²⁷ This mirrors the argumentative choice made in a past discussion by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), who attributed a positive moral valence to authentic transformational leadership by distinguishing it from pseudo-transformational leadership (which works through deceit and manipulation)

person role merger i.e. the salience of the leadership role in their self-concept, 2) the level of self-concept clarity and the extent to which this clarity centers around strongly held values and convictions, 3) the extent to which their goals are self-concordant, and 4) the degree to which their behavior is consistent with their self-concept” (in Gardner et al., 2011 p. 1122).

As noted by Shamir and Eilam,

“All definitions are arbitrary. They reflect choices and cannot be proved or validated” (2005, p. 396).

This discussion agrees with such observation and adds that, as long as definitions are used to operationalize research, they inevitably define the scope of what can be found empirically. In addition, moral valence does matter:

“The pivotal issue in making moral judgments is the legitimacy of the grounding worldview and beliefs that grounds a set of moral values and criteria. Depending upon such worldview and beliefs, a religious leader may morally justify a holy war and a Marxist may justify class warfare and dictatorship of the proletariat” (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999 p. 182).

In other words, if authentic leadership research is limiting its focus on leadership with a positive moral valence, it is likely to continue to find that it is associated with positive outcomes. In fact, research to date tends to explain the significance of authentic leadership in terms of its association with positive outcomes such as: ethical leadership, psychological well-being, follower empowerment, follower job satisfaction, follower job performance, and discretionary behaviors like as organizational citizenship behaviors (among others, in Gardner et al., 2011). This remains a precious line of inquiry, but does leave the question unanswered of whether authentic leadership can only be good. Across the literature, a defining aspect of authentic leadership seems to be concordance with a reference point that is internal to each individual. Avolio and Hannah stress values and core beliefs:

“The important message we wish to convey is that leaders must

know what is important to them—they must be totally immersed in their core beliefs and values. This constitutes a fundamental sense of self-awareness” (Avolio and Hannah, 2003 p.249).

The classic understanding (reviewed by Gardner et al. 2011) is that authenticity is related to self-knowledge (Socrates) and to acting in concordance with one’s sense of meaning (eudaimonia, derived from Aristotle). In a more modern sense, authenticity is related to gradual uncovering of a core sense of self and achieving greater concordance with it. A modern understanding of authenticity is the result of numerous turns in philosophical thought. Kernis and Goldman (2006; in Gardner et al., 2011) have concluded:

“that [authenticity] documents a range of mental and behavioral processes that explain how people discover and construct a core sense of self, and how this core self is maintained across situations and over time” (Gardner et al., 2011 p.1121).

Contiguous life story approaches (e.g., Shamir and Eilam; Bennis and Thomas, 2002) tend to stress a sense of personal meaning. What all of these approaches have in common is the notion of gradually going inward³²⁸, getting to uncover an internal reality (core self, core values); this, in order to act in ways increasingly concordant with this inner reality. From a developmental perspective, this raises an interesting moral interrogative: can this internal point of reference only be ‘good’? In a way, this is tantamount to asking whether human nature is fundamentally good or not. This question, bound to remain open for the foreseeable future, might ultimately be a matter of personal belief. Still, it highlights a line of inquiry that is relevant to personal and leadership development. The following is one way to summarize the moral dilemma in leadership:

“What is the relationship of ethics to effectiveness in leadership?”

(Ciulla, 2008, p. 59)³²⁹

³²⁸ These explanations usually account for context

³²⁹ Ciulla (2009) refers to the leadership problem of “was Hitler a good leader?” and highlights how this question hinges on whether ‘good’ refers to his ethics or competence. As interesting a question, in light of this discussion, is: “Was Hitler an authentic leader?”

Here, the question is paraphrased into: What is the relationship of ethics to authenticity in leadership? In a piece on key concepts of ethics in leadership, Ciulla (2009) refers to the leadership problem of “Was Hitler a good leader?”³³⁰ (p. 59). Here, this other question is paraphrased into: Was Hitler an authentic leader?³³¹.

Based on the evidence from this research combined with the general tone of authentic leadership literature, it would be tempting to conclude that whenever personal development occurs, individuals further connect with an inner source that is fundamentally ‘good’ and only become more capable of ethical behavior (or more mature ethical behavior). It is not known that that is the case, however, academics as well as practitioners increasingly encourage leaders to tune in their deep seated values and follow them. This discussion points to the need and opportunity to explore this question further, philosophically as well as through research.

³³⁰ Ciulla highlights how this question hinges on whether ‘good’ refers to the ethics or competence of the leader

³³¹ It is interesting to observe that while the conceptual move of defining authentic leadership with a positive moral valence seems to appease many academics, in my personal experience as a practitioner it remains not compelling for an audience of leaders—the question of authenticity and morality remains one of the most hotly debated during session, with many delegates believing that human nature and, hence, authenticity are not necessarily good