Exploring the everyday processes of becoming a leader: micro-disjunctures, woodshedding and informed, responsive practical coping

Christopher John Saunders, MPhil, MBA

Supervisors: Dr Marian Iszatt-White and Professor Mike Reynolds

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Lancaster University

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Department of Entrepreneurship and Strategy

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Abstract

Author: Christopher John Saunders

Thesis title: Exploring the everyday processes of becoming a leader: micro-disjunctures, woodshedding and informed, responsive practical coping

This thesis seeks a deeper understanding of the processes of becoming a leader which allow the emergence of practices or principles used by organisational leaders in their everyday acts of leading. A narrative literature review of theoretical and empirical literature relating to becoming a leader, manager and professional revealed a duality of approach by leadership scholars. Studies conceived of becoming a leader as something that mostly happens in the workplace, either across a lifetime or beginning when transitioning into a role of organisational leadership. I posit that becoming a leader is a whole-life process, not just influenced by the workplace. It happens across a lifetime and in an accelerated manner once in a position of organisational hierarchy. I contribute to the literature by providing a conceptual frame depicting the process of becoming a leader as a whole-life and through-life process interspersed with moments of accelerated becoming and intentional choice.

The empirical research of this thesis draws on 27 reflexive MBA dissertations focused on how practices and principles for leading develop over time, and 12 diary studies followed by nine interviews with senior organisational leaders exploring practices and processes of becoming emerging in their everyday practices of leading. Using evidence from the dissertations, I argue that becoming a leader over time involves surfacing and resolving micro-disjunctures through the articulation of principles for leading and managing. This surfacing can be triggered using reflexive narrative writing.

The diary studies reveal that when transitioning into a role of organisational leadership leaders operate in a mode of non-deliberative practical coping using practices honed for previous roles. Through experimenting and mistake-making, followed by a process of withdrawal I have called woodshedding, these leaders develop practices and processes that are intentional, a mode of informed, responsive practical coping. These finding have implications for researching and theorising about leadership learning, and for executive programmes that help leaders to develop.

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Acknowledgements

This PhD thesis has emerged from a vastly disrupted process that began in 2016. Some of this disruption was my own fault, initially leaping into a post that required me to travel internationally for the University, and then being thrust into the more senior position of Associate Dean for Postgraduate Education just when the world Covid 19 pandemic was starting. The impact of these roles on my time has led to two intercalations, and many periods where I, and perhaps my wife and supervisors, were seeing very little progress.

There are a number of people I need to thank for encouraging, supporting and enabling me to complete this PhD process. At Lancaster University I must thank my supervisors, Dr Marian Iszatt-White and Professor Mike Reynolds for their words of encouragement, their wisdom, their appropriate criticisms and suggestions for my work, and their patience throughout. You have both been brilliant.

I should also thank our Dean, Professor Claire Leitch who, as my HoD, encouraged me to start this process and then, as Dean, signed off a sabbatical that has enabled me to finish it! Thank you Claire!

Of course, this research would not be possible without the research participants. It has been so incredible to revisit the reflexive MBA dissertations of my former students, and to catch up with some of them as I organised the research and analysed their work. It is heartening to know that many continue to think about and utilise the principles for leading that they first wrote about in these dissertations.

I am also in debt to the extraordinarily busy senior leaders who took the time to write a diary for five weeks about their everyday acts of leading. It was very pleasing to hear stories of how much they had benefitted from this process themselves – doing research and helping individuals on their path of becoming a leader at the same time is, indeed, a sweet spot to accomplish!

Most importantly of all, my deepest thanks and love go to my personal project manager, my wife Fiona, whose experience in completing her own alternative format PhD and her project management skills ensured that I made it to the end of this particular project! Thank you to our children, Callum and Kiah, our wider family and friends, all who have played a vital part in keeping me sane during this process.

Author's Declaration and Statement of authorship

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted by me in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. All original research has been undertaken after the date of registration for the PhD (December 2016).

I am the single author for the journal article that can be found in chapter 2: *Becoming a leader: a literature review and emerging conceptual frame.*

I am the lead author for the journal article that can be found in chapter 4: *Becoming a leader: micro-disjunctures and the articulation of guiding principles.* I conducted all the research, analysis and writing for this paper, with guidance, challenge, suggestions for improvement of the text, and possible further literature to explore being provided by my supervisors, Dr Iszatt-White and Professor Reynolds.

I am the lead author for the journal article that can be found in chapter 5: *Intentionality in leading: from non-deliberative practical coping to informed responsive coping.* I conducted all the research, analysis and writing for this paper, with guidance, challenge, suggestions for improvement of the text, and possible further literature to explore being provided by my supervisors, Dr Iszatt-White and Professor Reynolds.

Christopher John Saunders.

We concur with the statement of authorship presented above.

Dr Marian Iszatt-White   Professor Mike Reynolds

1: Introduction

1.1   Introduction

> "Leadership is hard. No one talks you through items like this, you'll never learn this stuff on a leadership course, leadership is so in the grey zone! Just got to do what you think is right in that moment" (Interview Participant 7).

It is commonly accepted that leaders today face a complex, fragmented world in which numerous unexpected demands require quick decision making (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010; Kempster and Stewart, 2010). Leaders are called to act using ambiguous, uncertain and, often, confused information (Nonaka, Chia, Holt and Peltokorpi, 2014; Alvesson and Jonsson, 2018; Flynn, 2018). In such environments what is it that guides how a leader decides what to say, how to act and what do?

Popular business literature suggests that throughout their working life leaders can develop a set of principles that guide action (e.g., Ferguson and Moritz, 2016). Academic theorists would argue that these principles are, in fact, a set of practices or dispositions developed through a process of becoming a leader, either chronologically across a lifetime (Vendette, Helmuth, Intindola and Spiller, 2022; Siew and Koh, 2023), or intensively when being thrown or leaping (Segal, 2017) into an organisational position of leadership (Hill, 2003; Benjamin and O'Reilly 2011; Moorosi, 2020). Theorists contend that practices associated with leading emerge or are brought into existence through everyday acts of leading, influenced by the situation faced and the culture and history of the organisation itself (Chia and Holt, 2023). This emergence is thought to be largely unconscious and non-rational a mode of leading that is described as non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006; Dreyfus, 2007). However, the development of these everyday practices of leading; the processes involved in becoming a leader; and the development of personal principles that may guide action are all under-researched areas in the leadership literature (Oliver and Jacobs, 2007; Hibbert, Beech and Siedlok, 2017; Alvesson and Jonsson, 2018; Siew and Koh, 2023).

This thesis seeks to address these under-researched areas through an exploration of the process of becoming a leader, guided by two core questions:

- How are practices or principles developed through a lifetime, and what does this reveal about the processes of becoming a leader?

- What does the everyday practice of senior organisational leaders reveal about the processes of becoming a leader? Specifically, do practices emerge as non-deliberative practical coping or do leaders act in a more intentional way?

These questions about the process of becoming a leader have been explored through the development of three journal articles. The first journal article (chapter 2) is an overarching literature review chapter for this thesis. It contains a narrative review (Fan, Breslin, Callahan and Iszatt-White, 2022) of the empirical and theoretical literature on the processes of becoming a leader. Drawing on literature that has explored becoming a leader, a manager and a professional in different contexts, and using process theory as a lens, the literature review chapter identifies commonalities and disparities in the approaches taken. The theoretical contribution of this article is the proposal of a conceptual frame for the process of becoming a leader that incorporates three perspectives: becoming across a lifetime; becoming across the whole of life (i.e., not just focused on becoming in the workplace); and, becoming once assuming a role of organisational leader. The paper discusses the implications emerging from this frame for researching leadership.

Following chapter 3, which provides an overarching methodology relevant to both empirical papers, the second journal article in this thesis (chapter 4) is an empirical paper which explores the idea that, in the process of becoming, a leader may develop their own set of practices or principles which guide action. This article analyses the origins and development of principles for leading identified by MBA students writing reflexive dissertations. The theoretical contribution of this paper is the emergence from the data of small everyday moments that I have termed micro-disjunctures. These micro-disjunctures occur across a lifetime of becoming a leader, combining over time and emerging in situations to influence the practice of leading. Left unconscious and unresolved micro-disjunctures can become practices that are potentially undesirable to a leader, and so the article suggests a method of triggering the surfacing of micro-disjunctures in order to articulate the emerging practices as principles which guide acts of leading.

The third journal article in this thesis (chapter 5) is also an empirical paper, focusing on the everyday practices of leading in order to reveal the processes of becoming a leader whilst in the role. This article seeks to generate an empirical understanding of whether

leadership practices are acts of non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006), or whether leaders are consciously intentional about how they respond to situations. Data for this article come from qualitative diaries kept by senior organisational leaders over a period of five weeks. The diaries detail the acts of leading from each week thought to be important by the leaders themselves. Analysis of the diaries and subsequent interviews reveals some evidence for leaders new into a role operating in a mode of non-deliberative practical coping. However, the data show that the accelerated process of becoming that happens whilst in the role, coupled with a process of withdrawal and reflection that I have termed woodshedding, enables leaders to be more intentional in their coping. The theoretical contribution from this paper is the process of woodshedding and the emergence of a mode of informed responsive practical coping, with leaders becoming more intentional about their acts of leading as they become more experienced.

The three articles described briefly above are a unified set, with the narrative literature review being informed by and informing the two empirical articles. Together the three articles further our knowledge and understanding of the processes of becoming a leader.

This introduction will proceed by setting out the personal and research contexts of the research; the research process and the contributions to knowledge that have emerged from this process; and, the thesis structure, demonstrating the overall unity of the theme and approach brought by the core focus on becoming a leader.

1.2   Personal context

I have always had an interest in, and been involved in leading, even if as a young adult I rarely thought of what I was doing as leadership. I have tended to be thrust into (Segal, 2017) a position of leadership in most of the organisations I have joined. As a teenager I joined a youth group and quickly became treasurer and then vice-chairman, and in the process had to deal with a leader of the group who was embezzling group funds. On starting at Newcastle University I was elected to be chair of the Classics Society; and after starting what would become my first big job as a deck-hand and school tour guide on the Golden Hinde Educational Museum Ship, I was asked to be General Manager and first mate at sea within six months of joining the crew. I came to Lancaster University to study for an MBA degree and ended up as Director of the MBA and subsequently Associate Dean for Postgraduate Education during the recent pandemic.

At Lancaster I started a leadership programme for the UK housing sector and became a non-executive director of a social housing company. I have led youth groups; been part of leadership teams for my local church; and, have co-written a bestselling textbook on leadership.

All these roles have involved leading, and they have all involved very different practices of leading. Living with and leading a team on the Golden Hinde required a different approach to leading a youth club; nevertheless, leading a crew at sea in a storm and leading the teaching of a faculty in the grip of a global pandemic require surprisingly similar practices! Each position of leading I have experienced has required different approaches to leading at different times, requiring me to construct and re-construct my practices of leading to fit the situation (e.g., a storm at sea). At the same time, I have been aware of my 'gut feelings', or intuition that has suggested something is not quite right, that a decision needs to be changed, or that the actions of myself or others need questioning.

The experiences of leading, and in particular the prompting of intuition and the development of practices that make leading seem more natural the longer you are in a role, led me to undertake a PhD. Initially, this was focused on whether leaders have a set of principles that are used to guide their actions, as purported by the celebrity leadership literature. In exploring how leaders become aware of and develop their principles it soon became clear that I was seeking to understand the processes of becoming a leader throughout a lifetime that influenced a leader's practice in the present and future. Exploring these processes, both across a lifetime and in a present moment has fascinated me, and helped my personal reflection on how my past experiences have come to inform and influence my present practices of leading.

A final note on my PhD process. As a full-time member of staff, I started my part-time PhD in December 2016 and progressed well until leaping or being thrown into the position of Associate Dean (AD) for Postgraduate Education in August 2019. By February 2020 we had begun planning for the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, and in March 2020 we were locked down, and I was charged with responsibility for enabling the faculty to move all PG teaching online and maintaining recruitment levels in the face of national lockdowns. The rigours of the AD role and the impact of the pandemic

on my workload resulted in two periods of intercalation. I include this only to explain why my data collection and analysis period stretched over such a long period of time.

1.3   Research context

The subject of leadership development has historically received little attention when compared to the wider academic discipline of leadership, with research into how leaders develop being particularly sparse (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm and McKee, 2014; Hibbert, Beech and Siedlok, 2017). Studies of leadership development usually focus on the development of skills, knowledge and attributes formally on training programmes, which aim to enhance a leader's ability to be adaptable, to address and solve complex problems (Day, Zaccaro and Halpin, 2004), communicate well, build strong team relationships, and behave in transformational or charismatic ways (Burns, 1978; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

Informal leader development in the workplace has received less attention (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Myers and DeRue, 2014; Day et al, 2014), with studies historically focused on how individuals and/or groups gain and interpret knowledge, information, and skills, creating meaning for themselves, which they might pass on or contribute to a wider group or organisation (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). Of relevance for this thesis is the research on incidental learning and learning gained relationally through experience (Marsick and Watkins, 2014). This suggests that learning is iterative (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983; Davies and Easterby-Smith, 1984), an everyday process of interpreting experience (Hibbert, Beech and Siedlok, 2017) and socially constructing new ways of being and acting in the world (Janson, 2008), which can existentially change the individual leader or manager (Cunliffe, 2002; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004; Jarvis, 2009b; Illeris, 2009; Marsick and Watkins, 2014).

Drawing on ideas from process philosophy (Whitehead, 1929; Heidegger, 1962) and process theory (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016), scholars have more recently begun conceptualising leadership learning and development as a process of becoming, something that emerges through the development of practices and dispositions over time (Chia, 2017; Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021; Siew and Koh, 2023). Research into the process of becoming a leader has tended to focus on becoming when starting a new role as leader (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011) or becoming across a lifetime (Moorosi, 2020). Methods used to research the processes of becoming have been dominated by semi-

structured interviews (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Lanka, Topakas and Patterson, 2020), with a small number of studies using narrative writing (Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019; Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021) or autoethnography (Parker, 2004; Kempster and Stewart, 2010). This has led to increasing calls for research methods that are better able to capture the processes of becoming that influence organisational and leadership practices (Kempster, Parry and Jackson, 2016; Cloutier and Langley, 2020; de Vaujany and Introna, 2023).

1.4 Research process and contributions to knowledge

Heeding the call for research that can better capture the practices of leading and the processes of becoming, this research adopted two main phases. Prior to the first phase of empirical research, a literature review of leadership development and leadership learning was undertaken to inform the general area of the study. This revealed becoming a leader as one possible avenue of investigation amongst others, such as informal learning and incidental learning. It was only after the empirical research had been analysed that becoming emerged as the key process linking both phases of empirical data together.

The first phase used the narrative descriptions within reflexive dissertations written by MBA students to explore the influences and processes of becoming that contributed to the practice of leading. The dissertations asked MBA students to draw on and combine their life-long experiences and their recent MBA learning, consolidating this into a set of principles that would guide their future practice as leaders. The focus on development of guiding principles was a trigger that allowed the students to observe the emergence of the threads that intertwined to create their principles. This trigger enabled the surfacing and articulating of why the students led the way they do. Template analysis of the dissertations and the writing of a journal article enabled the first theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis to emerge. These comprise:

- The concept of micro-disjunctures. The process of becoming a leader has previously been thought to be mainly influenced by major events. This first phase of research proposed the importance of micro-disjunctures - multiple small moments across a lifetime of becoming a leader that are imperceptible, and so are left unrecognised and unresolved. Micro-disjunctures on similar themes seem to re-occur, niggling at the leader until they are able to

consciously surface and resolve the micro-disjuncture. Leaving a thread of micro-disjuncture unresolved implies that the process of becoming a leader is disrupted, with practices important to leading remaining undeveloped or underdeveloped.

- The process for surfacing micro-disjunctures. Micro-disjunctures can be surfaced using the trigger of reflexive narrative writing focused on the articulation of guiding principles, which reveal longitudinal threads of micro-disjuncture within the processes of becoming a leader. Giving future leaders a method of understanding their processes of becoming a leader enables a fuller process of becoming, and the potential for individuals to become more intentional about the development of future practices of leading.

The second phase of research sought to investigate becoming a leader by focusing on everyday practices of leading, asking whether experienced leaders are intentional about their decision making, or whether they act in a mode of non-deliberative practical coping. This study involved participants who held senior positions of hierarchical leadership within organisations, asking them to keep a diary of their acts of leading each week over a five-week period. Follow up interviews and template analysis allowed the following contributions to emerge:

- The concept of informed, responsive practical coping. The research found that leaders new into a role do act in non-deliberative ways, relying on practices they have developed in the process of becoming undertaken for their previous role. An intense period of becoming a leader whilst being a leader (occupying a hierarchical position in an organisation) is coped with using a process of mistake-making, withdrawal and reflection, from which leaders develop an intentional method of coping best described as informed, responsive practical coping.

- The concept of 'woodshedding' in the process of becoming a leader. The research uncovered a process of withdrawal and reflection as acts of becoming, similar to the musical process of woodshedding. This involves withdrawal and intense practice to enable difficulties to be overcome, or to master essential musical skills to allow improvisation to appear fluid and non-deliberative. Leaders in the study described how they withdraw and woodshed by blocking out thinking time, attending courses and engaging with theory, thus reflecting on

their non-deliberative mistakes and formulating intentional practices to guide their future acts of leading.

The third phase was to return to the literature and undertake a narrative review of the literature on the empirical studies and theoretical articles of becoming a leader. This phase allowed for a deeper investigation into process theory, an idea that implicitly or explicitly underpins most academic writing on becoming a leader. The narrative literature review produced a conceptual frame in which becoming a leader is conceptualised as a life-long process of evolution. The conceptual frame depicts threads of becoming intertwining throughout a leader's life, emerging as practices that inform or guide acts of leading. Within the frame there are moments of accelerated becoming (e.g., when moving into a position of hierarchical leadership) when the unhelpful practices need changing in a short time period as the new leader adapts to their new situation. The contributions from this phase comprise:

- The concept of accelerated becoming existing within the life-long process of becoming a leader. This combines two concepts of becoming, across a lifetime and when entering the role of leader, which have previously been explored as separate entities.
- Widening the life-long concept to a whole-life concept. Previous studies have explored becoming a leader through focusing exclusively on workplace influences. I contend that the process of becoming a leader cannot be constrained to a particular situation, and that external influences (for example family responsibilities) can equally create threads that intertwine with threads emerging from the workplace practices which guide acts of leading.

In the spirit of process theory, the contributions from the two empirical articles and the narrative literature review created threads in my processes of becoming as a PhD student and a researcher. Whilst the research has been described, above, in a linear way the threads of becoming do not necessarily operate chronologically (Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje, 2004). My research process therefore allowed for the process of becoming a researcher by enabling learning from one article to feed back into the others, resulting in multiple rewrites. This process ensured that the three articles shared the central focus of the thesis, with my understanding of the processes of becoming a leader being informed by existing academic writing and the conceptual frame that emerged from the narrative

literature review, whilst also being developed and extended through the two phases of research which add new knowledge to the subject of becoming a leader.

1.5   Thesis structure

This thesis is presented in the alternative or multi-part format, which has been chosen for three main reasons:

1. The research design, comprising the narrative literature review, the analysis of MBA reflexive dissertations, and the diary study of everyday practices of leading, naturally suited the production of three journal articles of publishable quality, making the multi-part format an obvious choice.

2. As a Senior Teaching Fellow in the Department of Entrepreneurship and Strategy, Lancaster University Management School, there is an expectation that I will be constantly engaged in scholarly work, and that this can be evidenced in such a way that would further the research ambitions of the University. Thus, the production of peer-reviewed journal articles is as important for the organisation as it is for my career development and for sharing new knowledge with the leadership research community. The multi-part format allows for my PhD to be completed, and my research to be written up and submitted as journal articles at the same time, meeting organisational and personal requirements.

3. The ability to submit articles for publication during the PhD process will increase the impact of this research, with peer reviewed journal articles gaining wide dissemination to the academic leadership community, and conference papers and teaching developed from this research ensuring the findings of this research are made available to the practitioner community.

The thesis consists of five subsequent chapters which are briefly summarised below. The summaries include the research questions addressed and the core findings:

Chapter 2 contains a sole authored literature review article: Saunders, C.J. *Becoming a leader: a literature review and emerging conceptual frame.*

This chapter comprises a narrative literature review written for publication in the International Journal of Management Reviews. The review focuses on the literature pertaining to becoming a leader which has been emerging as a discipline within the leadership learning and leadership development literature. It discusses how the term

becoming, and the subsequent understandings of the processes involved in becoming a leader have developed in a fragmented way, occasionally underpinned by philosophical thought, but mostly concerned with a linear flow of events which influence how an individual leads. The review synthesises the fragmented approaches to becoming a leader found in the literature, weaving together philosophical ideas, theoretical positions and empirical studies to develop an emerging conceptual frame of the process of becoming a leader.

Chapter 3 is a consolidated methodology, providing an overview of the research philosophy, design and methods chosen to explore the topic of becoming a leader. The chapter provides a justification for the decisions taken during my PhD research, and provides additional detail on the research design, data collection and analysis to supplement the information in the two articles described in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical article: Saunders, C.J., Iszatt-White, M., and Reynolds, M. *Becoming a Leader: micro-disjunctures and the articulation of guiding principles.*

This first empirical chapter comprises a journal article written with the intention of publication in the Management Learning journal. The research described in this chapter analyses the reflexive dissertations of MBA students, exploring the social construction of guiding principles which allow the processes of becoming a leader to be surfaced. The chapter introduces the concept of micro-disjuncture to theories of leadership learning as a lifelong process of becoming. A disjuncture occurs when our way of being is challenged by the situation we face, producing a physical sense of unease and creating dilemmas which must be resolved as part of the process of becoming (Jarvis, 2009a; Dall'Alba, 2009). This chapter contends that everyday moments of micro-disjuncture are so imperceptible that they remain unrecognised and so have not been resolved. The first contribution of this chapter is theoretical, the concept of micro-disjunctures and the importance of surfacing and resolving micro-disjunctures for the process of becoming a leader. The second contribution is practical, a process to trigger micro-disjunctures using a reflexive MBA dissertation.

Chapter 5 is the second empirical article: Saunders, C.J., Iszatt-White, M., and Reynolds, M. *Intentionality in Leading: from non-deliberative practical coping to informed responsive coping.*

The second empirical chapter is an article that has been written with the intention of publication in the journal Leadership. This chapter describes research into the everyday acts of leading undertaken by senior organisational leaders and asks what these reveal about the practice of leading. Participants in the study describe how they act in non-deliberative practical coping ways when they first take a senior role, utilising practices unconsciously developed over a lifetime of becoming. However, intensive experience of accelerated becoming within the turbulent, fragmented reality of leading, punctuated by moments of reflection for which we have adopted the term 'woodshedding', generates processes, practices and principles that are intentionally used by leaders in everyday acts of leading. This chapter offers two contributions. The first is to introduce the concept of informed, responsive practical coping, an intentional act of leading involving conscious use of process and practices that are guided by personal principles and values. The second is to borrow the musical concept of woodshedding to describe how experienced leaders withdraw and intensively practice to create solid foundations or conscious practices for their leading. For experienced leaders woodshedding helps distil processes, practices and principles enabling non-deliberative practical coping to become informed responsive coping.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion. This final chapter offers a conclusion for the whole thesis, drawing together the threads of the three articles to demonstrate that they make up one PhD thesis. The thesis findings are synthesised and the key theoretical contributions are highlighted. Implications arising from the contributions for theory and practice are discussed, with a particular emphasis on implications for leader development. Finally, the limitations of the study are reviewed and suggestions for future research made.

The thesis has a consolidated bibliography, within which books and articles which formed the core sample for the narrative literature review (chapter 2) have been highlighted. Appendices 1 and 2 respectively provide more detail for the research undertaken for the journal articles presented in chapters 4 and 5.

2: Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

This chapter provides a narrative literature review written in the form of a journal article. Drawing on theoretical, philosophical and empirical research from the management and leadership field, the review focuses on the process of becoming a leader.

Originally, the research for this thesis was exploring aspects of how leaders learn to lead, specifically looking at the development and use of everyday practices and principles used to guide acts of leading. As the primary research progressed it became clear that research participant narratives on how their practices and principles have developed were describing the processes of becoming a leader that have been emerging as a discipline from the leadership learning and leadership development literature. Within this literature the term becoming, and the subsequent understandings of the processes involved in becoming a leader have developed in a fragmented way, occasionally underpinned by philosophical thought, but mostly concerned with a linear flow of events which influence how an individual leads. This chapter will synthesise the fragmented approaches to becoming a leader found in the literature, weaving together philosophical ideas, theoretical positions and empirical studies into an emerging conceptual frame. This frame describes a process of becoming that can then be seen in the empirical journal articles found in chapters 4 and 5. Chapters 4 and 5 also contain an expansion of the literature that is relevant and specific to the individual empirical studies of this thesis.

2.2   Becoming a leader: a literature review and emerging conceptual frame

Saunders, C.J., *Becoming a leader: a literature review and emerging conceptual frame* (to be submitted to the International Journal of Management Reviews)

2.3   Summary

Literature on becoming a leader has been emerging as a strand of work within the leadership learning and leadership development literature. Within this literature the term becoming, and the subsequent understandings of the processes involved in becoming a leader have developed in a fragmented way, occasionally underpinned by philosophical thought, but mostly depicting becoming as a linear flow of events which occur when a leader is thrust into an organisational position of leadership. This narrative review synthesises the fragmented approaches to becoming a leader, weaving together an emerging conceptual frame. The frame enhances our understanding of becoming a leader by depicting it as a whole-life process not constrained by organisational position. Whole life includes the threads of becoming from outside the immediate work life of the leader. The frame integrates becoming over a lifetime with times of accelerated becoming, within which kairos moments emerge, offering the prospect of being intentional in the process of becoming. Emerging from the conceptual frame are suggestions for future methods of studying the processes of becoming a leader.

2.4   Introduction

"Be-coming emerges in embracing the uncertainty of the unfamiliar" (Segal, 2017: 484).

For many years the management and leadership literature has theorised that managerial and leadership learning derives from experience in informal and incidental ways (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983; Davies and Easterby-Smith, 1984; Marsick and Watkins, 1990). More recently there has been a reconceptualisation of leadership learning from experience as a continuous, holistic process of formation (Hibbert, Beech and Siedlok, 2017) and becoming where, over time, a person engages in and is subject to processes of becoming that create a set of practices which are used in enacting the role of leader (Hill, 2003; Kempster, 2006; Segal, 2017; Chia, 2017).

From the leadership learning perspective, becoming has been seen as a continuous process of situated learning (Kempster, 2006; Schedlitzki, 2019) through which a leader socially constructs and reconstructs their identity (Siew and Koh, 2023). This concept of

becoming as a process of continuous change has been applied more widely in organisational studies (Nayak, 2008), particularly for the practice of strategy (Styhre, 2002; Chia and Holt, 2006); in project management (Paton, Hodgson and Cicmil, 2010; Buchan and Simpson, 2020); in apprenticeships (Chan, 2013; Schedlitzki, 2019); and in entrepreneurship (Kempster and Cope, 2010; Verduyn, 2015). Outside of management and organisational studies becoming has been used as a lens to study the development of professionals (Dall'Alba, 2009), and has been applied to understand the development of leaders in the teaching, nursing and military professions (Young, Pearsall, Stiles, Nelson and Horton-Deutsch, 2011; Marble, 2012; Siew and Koh, 2023; Diez, Martinez-Morán and Aurrekoetxea-Casaus, 2023). The studies on the process of becoming a leader are implicitly or explicitly informed by ideas of process theory, process philosophy, or a process ontology (Nayak, 2008; Chia, 2017; Cloutier and Langley, 2020).

Whilst the everyday process of becoming is largely under-researched in the leadership development literature (Siew and Koh, 2023), there is growing interest in seeing the development of leaders through the lens of process theory which has led to differing conceptualisations of the process of becoming. Some scholars see becoming as a process that occurs once a person begins a hierarchical position of leadership, with quantitative studies focused on measuring changes in personality once taking the position of leader (Asselmann and Specht, 2023), and qualitative studies exploring the challenges and transitions experienced by new leaders (Hill, 2003; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011). Others conceive becoming as a whole-life process, where the past, present and future are all threads in the process of becoming, with qualitative research methods used to explore how life events aid the process of becoming a leader through the emergence of practices used in current acts of leading (Inman, 2014; Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021; Vendette, Helmuth, Intindola and Spiller, 2022).

At this relatively early stage in the theorising of becoming as a means to understand the process of leader development it is valuable to clarify what has emerged so far, and to conceptualise a process of becoming a leader that will be useful for future research. Emerging from the theoretical and empirical literature surrounding the process of becoming a leader are two questions on the theory of becoming. The first is concerned with temporality – should becoming be conceived of as a chronological process of unconstrained temporality across a lifetime or should becoming be framed as the

transitions occurring when starting a leadership role. The second concerns intentional action – is a leader subject to the processes of becoming in an unconscious way, or do they possess agency of intentional choice in their process of becoming.

This review will aim to draw together the threads of research on becoming a leader with the intention of clarifying issues of temporality and intentionality, and producing an emerging conceptual frame that clarifies the process of becoming a leader and offers suggestions to aid future research. The paper will take the form of a narrative literature review (Fan, Breslin, Callahan and Iszatt-White, 2022), structured using temporality and intentionality as emerging concepts in the literature of becoming a leader, and analysed through the lens of process theory. A process theory perspective (Cloutier and Langley, 2020) allows the literature of becoming to be seen as continually evolving, or constantly in flow. Through this lens, a theory of becoming a leader can be traced, recently emerging from diverse threads flowing from the management, leadership, organisational studies and education literatures. A narrative review enables the threads of becoming from this diverse literature to be drawn together, allowing a conceptual frame to emerge from the process. The emerging conceptual frame offers temporal clarity on the process of becoming a leader, representing a moment from which scholars can intentionally develop new ways of studying the process of becoming (de Vaujany and Introna, 2023).

The flow of this paper will start with a brief introduction to process theory, followed by a description of the review method adopted to capture the literature of becoming a leader. The paper continues by following the two threads of temporality and intentionality, discussing the theories and empirical findings in the literature that align to each of these threads. This concludes with the weaving together of an emerging conceptualisation of the process of becoming a leader, with the suggestion of future threads of research in light of the emerging conceptualisation.

2.5   Process theory

The ideas of process theory draw on the work of philosophers such as Whitehead, Bergson, James, Heidegger, Sartre, Nietszche and Deleuze and Guattari (for detail on these philosophies see Styhre, 2002; Nayak, 2008; Dall'Alba, 2009; Verduyn, 2015; Segal, 2017; Cloutier and Langley, 2020; Eustice-Corwin, 2020; Matitz, Chaerki and Chaerki, 2021; Roth 2021). Process theory perceives the world and everything in it as

being in a constant state of flux and flow, where everything is in a continual state of emerging, evolving and becoming (Cloutier and Langley, 2020: 3). Becoming is characterised as change across time, with transformations happening in and through everyday lived experiences and events (Matitz, Chaerki and Chaerki, 2021). As such, process theory understands that everything, even conscious thought, is an eternal flow of "undivided continuity" (Nayak, 2008: 181), with past, present and future all in a state of continuous change, forever becoming, always unfolding and always incomplete. Within this flow entities only appear to be stable due to the boundaries placed on them by our constructed definitions, boundaries which disappear when a diachronic view is adopted (Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019; Cloutier and Langley, 2020; Matitz, Chaerki and Chaerki, 2021; de Vaujany and Introna, 2023).

Process theorists often refer to the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (Nayak, 2008) as the originator of process thinking. This is due to a fragment of Heraclitus' philosophy which reads "You could not step twice into the same rivers; for other waters are ever flowing on to you" Jones (1931: 483). This fragment has been interpreted in two main ways, which have developed into strong and weak conceptualisations of process theory (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016). Strong process theory would suggest that both the river and the person stepping in are constantly in process, constantly creating and recreating the reality of the person and the reality of the river that is experienced (Cloutier and Langley, 2020). Even though the river appears to emerge as a solid entity, one cannot step into the same river twice as it is in flow and thus ever changing; and, as the person is also in a flow of lived experiences they are constantly becoming more experienced (Jarvis, 2009a) and, so, are not the same person as they were when they first stepped in. Thus, "the world trans(forms) as a productive…tension between processual and aprocessual becomings, between enacting and being enacted" (de Vaujany and Introna, 2023: 11).

A strong process theory perspective sees becoming as perpetually occurring through processes of social learning, with action and adaptability allowing a set of unconscious practices or dispositions to be created and emerge (Styhre, 2002; Chia, 2017; Buchan and Simpson, 2020). In this constantly flowing world, those things that we recognise as entities, such as stable, recognisable or predictable leadership styles or behaviours, are merely an immediate representation of something that will imminently change in response to situational momentum (Chia and Holt, 2023). However, the development of

bundles of practices that are routinely utilised in the flow of everyday lived experience allows for the suggestion of a constant and recognisable entity or, in the case of a leader, a character (Chia, 2017).

Weak process theory (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016) would suggest the river and the person both have an essential substance that can be recognised across time. Rather than a set of practices that perpetually change and adapt (Chia, 2017), weak process theory accepts a core essence that has a form of permanence (Vendette et al, 2022). This permanence has been described as substance (Vendette et al, 2022) or a minimal self (Eustice-Corwin, 2020), an essential core which is subject to processes of change deriving from situations and environments which makes transformation possible but not inevitable. Any future becoming or transformation would be incremental or insignificant, perhaps limited to actions and behaviours adapting to prevailing circumstances (Eustice-Corwin, 2020). This view suggests that becoming can be conceptualised as an iterative and evolutionary process where a sense of self develops in a continuously ongoing process (Scanlon, 2011). This sense of self allows for an entity to become or be, with being conceived of as an arrival, an establishment of the self through the process of becoming (Scanlon, 2011).

Process theory, weak or strong, underpins ideas of becoming a leader and, as such, can be used as a lens to analyse the literature on becoming a leader.

2.6   Review method

The field of management studies is a fragmented one, with multiple methods, definitions, disagreements and avenues of exploration. (Denyer and Tranfield, 2011). The concept of becoming a leader has emerged in such an environment in an equally fragmented way, with relatively small numbers of papers in the field of leadership referring directly to the term becoming in their title, keywords or abstracts. This makes a narrative review the most appropriate to bring together theories of becoming from different streams of management and leadership literature, and from literature found in other disciplinary silos of work (Fan, Breslin, Callahan and Iszatt-White, 2022). A narrative review, with its approach of following threads within articles to build up a picture of the field of study best fits calls for the greater use of process theory in management research and conceptual construction (Cloutier and Langley, 2020; de Vaujany and Introna, 2023). Following a narrative approach allows for the emerging

field of becoming a leader to be mapped using theoretical, philosophical and empirical papers drawn from a wide field of studies.

The danger of adopting the narrative approach is the bias of the author allowing some literature to emerge and other to submerge (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart, 2003). To alleviate this possibility the core literature search identified a number of search terms and inclusion criteria, using the Web of Science database for the search (Cronin and George, 2023) as shown in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Flow chart of the search process

Search 1: Topic	Inclusion criteria	Results	Refinement	Total papers
"becoming a leader" "leader becoming" "becoming a manager"	2000-2023 Articles Review articles	117 papers	Abstracts read. Research or theory specifically about becoming included.	32

Meso citation topics identified from Search 1: Management, education and education research

Search 2: Author keywords	Inclusion criteria	Results	Refinement	Total papers
"process philosophy" "becoming" "leadership transitions" "leadership learning" "learning to lead"	2000-2023 Articles Review articles Citation Topics Meso: - Management - Education and educational research	436 papers	Abstracts read. Research or theory specifically about becoming included.	46
			Total Papers	**78**

Search 3	Total papers
Snowballing applied to sample of 78 papers	21
Total Papers in final sample	**99**

The first search used the 'topic' field to search for 'becoming a leader', 'leader becoming' and 'becoming a manager'. Inclusion criteria were 'articles' and 'review articles' covering the years 2000-2023, as this time period reflects the vast majority of

published articles in this area of becoming a leader. This produced 117 results. All abstracts were read and those mentioning becoming merely as a descriptive word in their study but not theorising or researching becoming as a process associated with the temporal construction of the identity of leader or manager were eliminated, leaving a sample of 32 papers. The majority of these papers appeared within the Web of Science Citation Topics Meso categories of management and education and educational management. These categories were added to the inclusion criteria for the second search.

The second search adopted a two-part approach to widen the pool of papers for the review. The first part was to widen the search terms (Denyer and Tranfield, 2011) on the Web of Science; the second was the use of a snowballing approach (Fan et al, 2022), following threads from different articles that led to becoming literature from other disciplines. The widening of search terms was to avoid producing a highly selective review or one that lacked thoroughness (Fan et al, 2023), and the snowballing allowed for the narrative review to continue to follow a process theory approach.

The new search terms emanating from the core pool of literature were 'process philosophy', 'becoming', 'leadership transitions', 'leadership learning' and 'learning to lead'. These were searched using the 'author keywords' category. Inclusion criteria were articles and review articles from 2000-2023, with the results being refined by Citation Topics Meso for management, education and educational research. This resulted in 436 results. All abstracts were studied using the same inclusion criteria in terms of articles and review articles and dates, with those having a focus on theorising or researching the process of becoming being kept. This added 46 papers to the sample, making the sample size 78.

The snowballing approach was applied to the full sample, adding another 21 articles and books, making the final sample size 99.

This sample was synthesised to create the following descriptive narrative, drawing together threads of theories and studies and setting out the evolution of the concept of becoming a leader in the literature. Using process theory as a lens to analyse the literature highlighted two key threads, temporality and intentionality, that are present in the empirical studies and in the theoretical and philosophical articles on becoming. These threads have been used to structure the narrative review, with the emerging

conceptual frame presenting a new and coherent way of understanding the becoming a leader literature.

2.6   Temporality in the process of becoming

All articles in the sample, whether theoretical or empirical, discussed becoming as a process that occurs over time (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Dall'Alba, 2009; Jarvis, 2009a; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011), with the philosophies of Heidegger used explicitly and implicitly in the conceptions of temporality used to frame studies on becoming a leader. Heidegger argues that time is a subjective sequence of mental acts existing in three dimensions simultaneously: the past, always in existence and bringing our history, culture, relationships and heritage, forming our developed practices which we utilise in the present; the present which is all-immersive and in which we are aware of our actions; and, the future which we project into, making choices from opportunities (Dall'Alba, 2009). Studies on becoming have tended to separate these dimensions with some authors exploring a constrained version of temporality with a focus on becoming when starting a new leadership role (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Chan, 2013; Siew and Koh, 2023); meanwhile, other authors choose a relatively unconstrained version of temporality by taking a whole-life approach (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Inman, 2014).

Constrained temporality: becoming a leader in the role

Articles focused on becoming a leader have traditionally focused on becoming that occurs when gaining the position of leader in an organisation (e.g., Hill, 2003; Benjamin and O'Reilly 2011; Moorosi, 2020). There is an assumption within these studies that becoming occurs within a constrained temporality, a particularly intense period of personal development, and the processes of becoming investigated are confined to an individual's work-life experiences.

These articles contend that becoming involves leaping or being thrust into a role (Young, Pearsall, Stiles et al, 2011; Segal, 2017) which requires transitions and transformations of the self (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011). Leaders are conceptualised as becoming by being embedded in their new world and by having to adapt in order to act. This is a continuous, largely unconscious process of integrating knowing, acting and being similar to Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world (Chia and Holt, 2006; Vu and Dall'Alba, 2014). Studies have found that transitions can include changes to personality (Asselmann, Holst and Specht, 2023); or taking risks and facing challenges

that require new ways of working (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Young et al, 2011); meanwhile, transformations involve shifts in one's mindset from the professional that one has previously become, to the leader that one is becoming (Koskiniemi, Perttula and Syväjärvi, 2015; Siew and Koh, 2023).

Transitions and transformations occur through the questioning of assumptions and behaviour (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011), resolving gaps or disjunctures as they emerge, and adopting of new ways of working (Jarvis, 2009a). These transitions and transformations mirror Jarvis's (2009a) concept of disjunctures, a moment of discombobulation caused when our previously developed practices and dispositions (Chia, 2017) are disturbed to the extent that *"we feel unease"* (Jarvis, 2009a: 21). Through resolving disjunctures we become more experienced versions or ourselves (Jarvis, 2009a), hence the attraction of seeing becoming as a process that happens whilst in the role. Resolutions of disjuncture captured in empirical research (mostly using semi-structured interviews) include acquiring new skills needed to manage and motivate others; dealing with the changing nature of one's relationships with colleagues; developing an ability to cope with difficulties; and, challenging personal assumptions to enable a leadership mindset to emerge (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011). However, this process of becoming through resolving disjuncture can be difficult to sustain as it involves continuous questioning of our essence, assumptions and beliefs (Dall'Alba, 2009; Jarvis, 2009a). Resolutions of disjuncture often need adapting in practice, making the process of becoming *"open-ended and always incomplete"* (Dall'Alba, 2009: 43).

The processes of resolution are often described in this literature as a struggle, characterised by anxiety around the ability to lead and the acceptance as a leader by others (Parker, 2004; Segal, 2017; Siew and Koh, 2023). Anxiety, like disjuncture, causes us to stop, to be struck, and to be aware of a gap in our learning. Drawing on the existential philosophy of Sartre, Segal (2017) argues that dealing with anxiety is to allow our essence to emerge as we engage with the world. Segal contends that we become through our acts and we can only act in relation to the world, but the world is uncertain, and so acting in the world means dealing with this uncertainty (Segal, 2017). For Sartre (1948), coping with the anxiety that accompanies uncertainty is central to the process of becoming (Segal, 2017).

Some studies contend that the struggle and anxiety inherent in becoming a leader is due to leaders new in the role having to instantly be the leader whilst also being in the process of becoming the leader (Hill, 2004; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Enoksen and Lynch, 2018). Studies have found that new leaders are trying to cope with the everyday fragmented nature of leading whilst, at the same time, trying to develop the interpersonal judgement needed to lead. They are having to cope with stressful and emotionally difficult situations whilst in the process of developing a deeper knowledge of the role and of themselves. They are trying to do the job (i.e., advancing reforms and developing an environment for change) with the practices and dispositions learned as they became experts in their previous role and, thus, have to struggle to learn new ways quickly (Hill, 2004; Parker, 2004; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Stiles, Pardue, Young and Morales, 2011; Enoksen and Lynch, 2018).

Psychological studies into becoming a leader suggest that the struggle and anxiety of becoming a leader in the role can have an impact on personality. Quantitative measurement of personality characteristics over time have found that the character changes once in the role of leader. Psychologically, leaders become happier but more angry (Asselmann and Specht, 2023); more conscientiousness (Li, Li, Feng, Weng, Zhang, Frese and Wu, 2021) but with higher levels of tension (Fletcher and French, 2021); less extraverted and more risk averse; and, less conscientious (Asselmann, Holst and Specht, 2023) but with increased well-being and self-esteem (Fletcher and French, 2021; Asselmann, Holst and Specht, 2023).

At the other end of the ontological spectrum, scholars using a social construction perspective conceptualise becoming as a perpetual process of construction and re-construction of identity (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Siew and Koh, 2023). Siew and Koh (2023), draw on theories of becoming a professional (Dall'Alba, 2009; Scanlon, 2011) to contend that becoming goes beyond the skills training and knowledge associated with the professional role occupied by the leader. Rather, becoming a leader is an integration of being, becoming and belonging (Parker, 2004; Chan, 2013; Siew and Koh, 2023), where a leader begins as the person they have already become prior to taking on the role, adds new skills and knowledge suitable for their role, and observes and copies the behaviours and actions of significant others within their situated practice in order to both become a leader and be accepted, demonstrating that they belong (Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Siew and Koh, 2023).

Kempster and Stewart (2010) use co-constructed autoethnographic narratives to explore becoming a senior leader once in the role. Their research depicts a snapshot of becoming a senior leader, contending that the practices of becoming include observation of senior people in situ in order to act appropriately as a senior manager for that organisation; gaining access to influential people in order to gain knowledge and to become part of events; accepting the power that exists within your role; and, accepting conflicts that will happen in relationships with colleagues (Kempster and Stewart, 2010). These processes enable a leader to become in the role, and to accept their role and have it accepted by the wider organisation.

Acceptance as a process of becoming is described by DeRue and Ashford (2010) as claiming and granting, where becoming emerges as the claim to be leading is made by the leader and endorsed or granted by the actions of followers (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Chan, 2013; Moorosi, 2020), raising the possibility of enabler and disablers existing in the process of becoming a leader. The literature suggests that threads of enablement can include positive role models and mentors, feedback and crystallizing events, whilst disablers or barriers to becoming have been identified as organisational structures, rejection of claim (by self or others), and personal uncertainty that is unresolved (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Chan, 2013; Maurer and London, 2018; Lanka, Topakas and Patterson, 2020). The underlying contention, here, is that the process of becoming within a constrained temporality must lead to one being (or having become) a leader in the eyes of the self and of others (Maurer and London, 2018; Lanka, Topakas and Patterson, 2020), supporting the contention that the process of becoming allows for the emergence of a recognisable, minimal self (Eustice-Corwin, 2020).

What emerges from the articles which research and theorise becoming as a process that starts when leaping into a leadership role is a constrained view of temporality, with the process of becoming being studied in a linear fashion within a limited frame or time period. In a majority of articles, previous experiences are not discussed, and the frame of study only includes experiences from the workplace, excluding outside experiences which may also contribute threads of becoming a leader when starting a new role.

Also emerging is an underlying assumption that the leaders taking part in the research already have a core essence or self that the new situation requires to change. These leaders have followed a process of becoming in their previous roles (Vu and Dall'Alba,

2010) that has led them to achieve a position of leadership, but this has not prepared them to lead in their new context. A new process of becoming is required, with the leader's essence or minimal self (Eustice-Corwin, 2020) that has been previously developed evolving during the process of becoming a leader whilst in the role. This reveals an implicit belief in weak process theory (Cloutier and Langley, 2020) by researchers of becoming in conditions of constrained temporality. We will return to these issues later in the article.

Unconstrained temporality: becoming a leader across a lifetime

In contrast to the constrained temporality approach to becoming a leader, a second body of literature conceptualises the process of becoming a leader from a whole-life perspective of unconstrained temporality. From this conceptualisation becoming a leader is a process that develops throughout life, being socialised to develop attitudes, values, traits and practices that are utilised in the act of leading (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Moorosi, 2020; Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021). As such, becoming is conceived as a whole life process of *"self discovery, learning and identity construction"* (Inman, 2014: 237).

Accessing life histories requires a narrative ontology (Brunet, Fachin and Langley, 2021) such as the writing of life histories (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Inman, 2014) or using narrative stories (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021) as sensemaking processes to understand a leader's emerging practice. This approach sees leadership being the *"result of a lifelong process of learning and development"* (Inman, 2014: 238), an incremental process of becoming that is linear across a lifetime. Often the literature focuses on trigger events (Turner and Mavin, 2008) or small stories (Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019) which can impact leaders' self-awareness, motivation, values, and emotions, driving the process of becoming (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Jarvis, 2009a).

The literature of unconstrained temporality also appears to assume the existence of a core or authentic self (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Turner and Mavin, 2008; Eriksen, 2012). Aligned to substance or weak process theory (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016; Vendette et al, 2022) the life history/story approach suggests the production of self-knowledge and internalisation of leadership happens through constructing narratives and reimagining life stories which intertwine to produce the practices that become an

essential or minimal, authentic self (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Eustice-Corwin, 2020). A resilient self emerges diachronically across time (Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019) through relationships, events and experiences of life which shape a leaders' future practice (Moorosi, 2020).

Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn (2019) draw on Ricoeur's concepts of idem and ipse to explore the unconstrained temporal process of becoming a manager that is associated with a wider lived experience rather than merely sequential events. Idem represents the process of continuity in learning, where a manager learns dispositions and practices that appear useful, and through repetition these become embodied in an individual's enduring character (Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019). Idem allows for a manager to perceive themselves and be perceived as the same person through life (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021).

Ipse represents an immediate experience of self from the perception and interpretation of everyday actions. This process is continual and never-ending, changing from moment to moment. The interplay between idem and ipse creates harmony when they align, and disjuncture when they diverge (Jarvis, 2009a). Disrupted harmony, or divergence, creates the need for resolution (Jarvis, 2009a) or the possibility for change (Bolander et al, 2019).

This process of harmony and disruption makes becoming in unconstrained temporality messy and chaotic, a self-narrative process of constructing stories that depict an understanding of the self, into which new emerging practices constantly become entangled. Practices from a lifetime of becoming influence a leader's everyday practice of being a leader, defining how they engage with others, perform in the role and, ultimately, have their leadership accepted (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021). This process perpetually interprets and reinterprets what has happened, is happening and may yet happen (Bolander et al, 2019). Through this we can understand becoming a leader as a process that oscillates over time, with an *"ongoing dialectic between continuity and change, progress and stand-still, knowing and not-knowing and excitement and despair"* (Bolander et al, 2019).

Within the literature on unconstrained temporality in becoming a leader there is an underlying assumption that the process of becoming is diachronic, happening chronologically across the entirety of an organism's lifespan (Eustice-Corwin, 2020).

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Eustice-Corwin draws on the work of Nietzsche to argue that becoming is a lifelong struggle for the unity of the self, a process of disordered and contradictory thinking, in which we attempt to intertwine knowledge, skills and traits (practices) by privileging some thoughts, actions, events and behaviours whilst pruning others. This process integrates new experiences and reinterprets old ones during the formation of the recognisable, minimal self (Eustice-Corwin, 2020). Eustice-Corwin (2020) uses a becoming metaphor of the self as a book which has some pages already written while others are blank. What is written can be *"edited, embellished, reinterpreted and woven together"* (Eustice-Corwin, 2020: 75). However, it cannot be deleted and so is retained as part of the minimal self to place a restriction on what one might become. Becoming is therefore a process of looking at and endorsing your own development journey, whilst intentionally deciding to make a course-correction involving self-knowledge, awareness and disciplined development choices (Eustice-Corwin, 2020).

What is noticeable from the unconstrained temporality literature is that early-life accounts take a broad view of the many influences, events, and people involved in the process of becoming. However, studying the leadership practices that emerge from a life history remains focused on observing the work-life of a leader and not the whole life. Informal learning literature argues that learning can occur "*at work or in other spheres of life*" (Marsick and Volpe, 1999: 4), highlighting that external threads such as support from family members can be a key thread in the process of becoming a leader (Diez, Martinez-Morán and Aurrekoetxea-Casaus, 2023).

2.7   Intentionality in becoming a leader

The literature on becoming a leader has another underlying theme that is implicit in most articles, that of the ability to make an intentional choice within the flux of becoming. Intentionality has been conceptualised in two ways: intentionality about choice in the moment (London and Sherman, 2021; Chia and Holt, 2023); and, adopting intentional processes that enable or enhance the process of becoming a leader (Austin, Regan, Gothard and Camochan, 2013; Schedlitzki, 2019;).

Intentional choice in the moment is conceived as an intentional 'leap' towards becoming what we want to be (Dall'Alba, 2009; Segal, 2017). For example, a musician would choose lessons, practice, observation, listening and performance, choices which aid the process of becoming a musician. This intentional choice from emerging

opportunities has been argued to be key to the process of becoming a professional (Dall'Alba, 2009; Vu and Dall'Alba, 2014).

This intentional leap may be guided by the relationship between the individual and their organisation. Rostron (2022) contends that individuals will narratively construct their personal version of the organisation which, in turn, informs their construction of what it means to be a good manager or leader. The development of a *"personal social landscape"* narrative (Rostron, 2022: 434) allows leaders to make choices on how to act, thus intentionally becoming *"the hero of their own story"* (Rostron, 2022: 418). This narrative construction is achieved through a continuous intertwining of beliefs about power; personal motivations to lead; and the changing nature of situational understanding resulting in practices emerging as styles of learned behaviour (London and Sherman, 2021). This suggests that individuals have cognitive agency over behaviours and the process of becoming (London and Sherman, 2021; Rostron, 2022).

Cognitive intentionality is also evident in processes used to enhance one's becoming, including developing an understanding of becoming a leader through auto-ethnographic accounts of situated leadership (Kempster and Stewart, 2010); encouraging and facilitating intentional critical self-reflection (Schedlitzki, 2019); using narrative writing (Bolander et al, 2019) including reflexive assignments (Eriksen, 2012); seeking out difficult work assignments; being curious through questioning and observation of leaders; and developing professional and supportive networks (Austin et al, 2013).

Core to both conceptualisations of intentionality in becoming is the understanding that one becomes through activity, by being thrown or leaping into uncertain situations (Segal, 2017). Intentionality develops through gaining experience and developing a desire to lead (Siew and Koh, 2023).

However, there is no certainty that becoming will occur, as one intentional choice open to leaders is to withdraw in the face of anxiety. Intentionally withdrawing from difficult situations has been found to hamper the process of becoming a leader, leaving disjunctures unresolved (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Segal, 2017). Intentional withdrawal can leave essential processes of becoming unfinished, processes that will reoccur as they are critical to the individual journey of becoming (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Segal, 2017).

## 2.8   Discussion: Conceptual frames of becoming a leader

"Everyday life, in its unfolding, always flows along multiple entangled lines" (de Vaujany and Introna, 2023: 10).

Emerging from the literature review is a concept of becoming a leader that is both diachronic (across life) and whole-life, a process that involves intertwining of threads of processes from across the whole of a leaders lived experience (Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019; Siew and Koh, 2023). This conceptualisation of becoming a leader is one of unconstrained temporality which adopts a mode of "temporal plurality" (de Vaujany and Introna, 2023: 13) by intertwining both the unconstrained, whole-life temporality and the constrained, workplace temporality. Importantly, this conceptualisation sees whole-life becoming from a wide perspective, where all experiences, people and events, not just those experienced in the workplace, stay with us and are continuously interweaving with new experiences, people, and practices in the ongoing process of becoming a leader. This is a concept of becoming that is aligned to strong process theory (Langley and Tsoukas, 2010), where everything is evolving, continuously changing and constantly emerging; and to the idea of leader development being a process of formation relating to the whole person (Hibbert, Beech and Siedlok, 2017).

Any attempt to visually depict the complexity involved in becoming a leader is a difficult task, something that is too complex for traditional conceptualisation methods such as tables or antecedent diagrams (Cloutier and Langley, 2020). To enable simplicity in the representation of the complexity of process theory Cloutier and Langley (2020) suggest a framing approach, where theorists must decide what to focus on – what is in frame and what is out; deciding on the depth of the framing – how much depth of philosophical study to include in the frame; and, deciding on the temporality of the frame – short periods of time or whole-life studies. The conceptual model outlined below follows this idea, offering a representation of the process of becoming a leader. This is a general representation rather than a detailed depiction of every moment of disjuncture and resolution, every thread emanating from inside and outside of the workplace, and the emergence and passing of every practice. Presenting all this detail would be impossibly complex, hence the need for a frame that represents the process alongside a broader description of what each frame represents.

Figure 2.2 Frame 1 depicts a whole-life process of becoming a leader, including past, present and future; life histories, becoming in the role, and the possibility of intentional choice. Frames 2 and 3 emerge from Frame 1, enabling closer inspection and discussion of becoming in the role and intentionality in the process of becoming a leader.

Figure 2.2: Frame 1, whole-life becoming
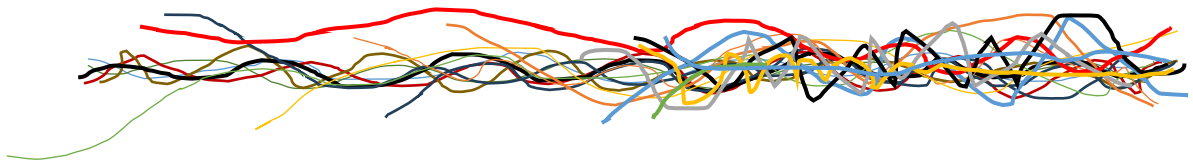
This first frame represents the meta view of becoming a leader, a whole-life approach, in which the threads depicted represent multiple events, people and experiences encountered throughout the whole of life. Some threads have a long history, constantly influencing the leader's practice. Others are more recent. Some have an immediate impact and are drawn into the core quickly. Others take a long time to intwine, representing those moments where a leader withdraws and pauses their becoming, only for the thread to return and be intwined at a later moment (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Segal, 2017).

The longer threads tend to represent the values, principles and practices that have become embodied in a person over the course of their life, being used to unconsciously guide action in moments of leading (Chia and Holt, 2023). These longer threads entangle across time, depicting both the emergence of seemingly intentional practices of leading (Chia and Holt, 2023), and the creation of harmony (Jarvis, 2009a) emerging as a recognisable, minimal self (Eustice-Corwin, 2020). The inclusion of a minimal self supports the premise that practices or dispositions combine in a recognisable form that may be resistant to change (Chia, 2017; Eustice-Corwin, 2020), and accepts the possibility that when one becomes the leader one should be in response to one's environment (Rostron, 2022) or authentic to some enduring sense of self (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Eriksen, 2012).

The conceptual model of becoming flows from left to right, from earliest influences to current behaviours. There is an obvious increase in the complexity of becoming represented by the increasingly crowded and more angular set of threads towards the

right of the model. This shows an accelerated form of becoming that occurs when taking on a leadership role, with multiple new threads being developed and intertwined in a short period of time. While the longer threads in the frame represent values and principles, the accelerated threads represent the specific changes to mindset or practice identified in the becoming in the role literature.

Figure 2.3: Frame 2, accelerated becoming
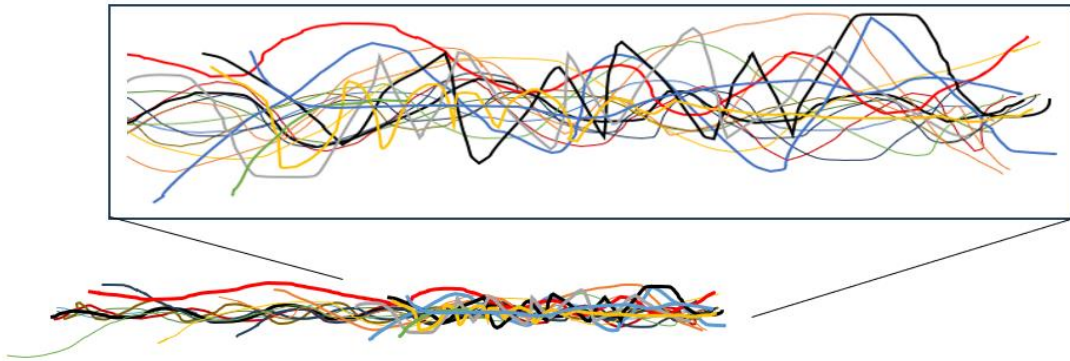
Frame 2 magnifies one element of Frame 1, representing the moment of becoming associated with starting a new leadership role, a moment of accelerated becoming that is situated within the broader frame of whole-life becoming. Accelerated becoming occurs within situations of constrained temporality such as being thrust into a position of hierarchical leadership. Here a sudden increase in threads and complex movements represents the unease and heightening of a leader's anxiety (Segal, 2017). Multiple new threads of disjuncture appear that need resolving (Jarvis, 2009a) as a leader transitions and transforms (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011). This frame demonstrates the increased complexity of the becoming process during a transition, with former threads becoming less influential as new ones are created and intertwined. Included in this frame as a contribution to the process of becoming a leader within a constrained temporality are processes and threads that emanate from outside of the workplace which influence the process of becoming a leader, including family influences, caring responsibilities, experiences of volunteering, the influence of faith and other threads.

All across Frames 1 and 2 exist moments of intentional choice which are taken and perhaps lost in the flux and flow of becoming. Frame 3 provides a focus on a moment of intentionality in the process of becoming a leader (Dall'Alba, 2009). Whilst the first two frames have largely been conceptualised as chronos (χρόνος) time, depicting a

progression over linear time, Frame 3 depicts a moment of kairos (καιρος) time, a complex idea of the right or opportune time, a moment between the *"finished past, and the future"* (Verduyn, 2015: 639) in which a choice can be made to continue on the path of becoming a leader.

Figure 2.4: Frame 3, intentionality of choice
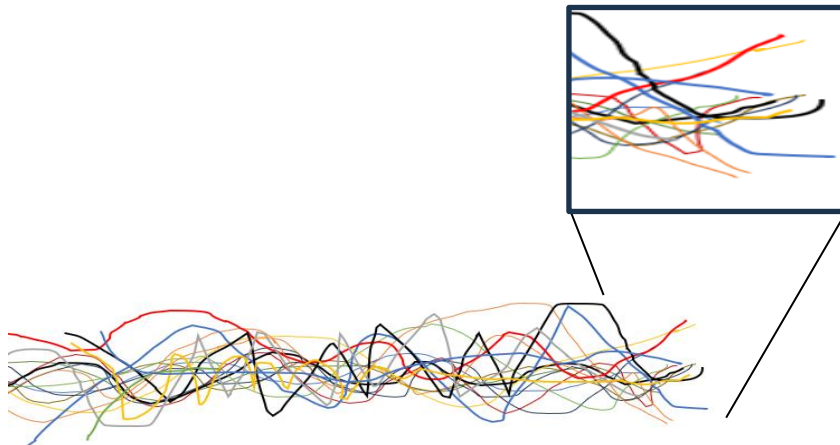
The representation of Frame 3 depicts the kairos moment when a possible future direction of becoming has emerged, presenting the leader with a potential opportunity (DallAlba, 2009). How a choice is made within that moment is contested between a cognitive decision-making approach (London and Sherman, 2021) and a non-deliberate, situational approach (Chia and Holt, 2023). Chia and Holt (2023) take a strong process theory perspective by arguing that intentionality is not located in the conscious mind of the leader but derives from absorbed and embedded practices which unconsciously guide action. These practices, represented in the model as threads emerging from the process of becoming, interact with environments and situations which are able to generate their own innate responses. This culminates in an *"urge to act"* (Chia and Holt, 2023: 2), perhaps a desire to lead (Siew and Koh, 2023), characterised by the resolutions (Jarvis, 2009a), experiments (Chia and Holt, 2023) and transformations (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011) needed to overcome struggles, anxiety or moments of disjuncture described in the becoming literature (Jarvis, 2009a; Segal, 2017; Eustice-Corwin, 2020).

Within Frame 3 intentional choices are made driven by the flow of becoming described above. These moments of intentionality are where improvisation within the process of becoming a leader occurs (Brinck and Tanggaard, 2016), producing new practices that

are not fully intentional but emerge through creative adaptation. Drawing on the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), this form of intentional becoming is rhizomatic, a continuous form of growth that is open and unpredictable, attempting to respond as new to each opportunity and not relying on previous knowledge, beliefs or assumptions but always regenerating and transforming (Barak, 2015). Intentionally becoming is an endless process of encountering new things and relationships; of thinking in open, nomadic spaces (Barak, 2015) where there are no fixed routes to constrain one's becoming, allowing production of endless possibilities unconnected to previous thought, and of being novel and creative in developing thoughtful solutions that enable change (Styhre, 2002; Marble, 2012; Barak, 2015).

2.9   Implications for researching leadership

Conceptualising becoming a leader as a whole-life process proposes an expanded understanding of how a leader develops (Day et al, 2014). A whole-life process of becoming a leader argues for an inclusive understanding of leader development, equally valuing formal learning programmes designed to deliver skills, knowledge and abilities (Myers and DeRue, 2014), and informal or incidental learning based in the workplace (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). Adopting the whole-life perspective brings into the frame the threads of becoming that originate from outside of the workplace, something that can be found in longitudinal studies of becoming (McCall, 2004; Kempster, 2006) but which gets excluded when studies focus on becoming a leader once in the role.

The first contribution of this narrative review is to include whole-life threads in the conceptual frame of becoming a leader. By doing this I contend that frames adopted in leadership development research should be expanded to explore threads of becoming from everyday life activities outside of the workplace. In order to do this, researchers could adopt the use of diary studies (Radcliffe, 2018) focused on capturing whole-life threads, and helping to uncover *"the meaningfulness of participants' ordinary lives"* (Radcliffe, 2018: 188) when it comes to the process of becoming a leader. Combining diaries with short narrative stories (see Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021) by the actors in the process of becoming could also contribute to a deeper understanding of becoming a leader throughout life and once in the role.

The second contribution is the concept of kairos moments of intentionality, where emergent practices converge with the momentum of organisations or situations and the

urge to act (Chia and Holt, 2023). Again, different forms of research are required, here, to understand how the impetus of existing practices, the momentum of situations, the need to resolve disjunctures and the pull towards a desired future intertwine in the process of becoming a leader. Greater use of co-created auto-ethnography (Kempster and Stewart, 2010) using diary studies (Radcliffe, 2018) from multiple actors for additional evidence would allow for a more complete picture of the process of intentionality in kairos moments to emerge.

A further recommendation to academic scholars would be to adopt Cloutier and Langley's (2020) suggestion of providing clarity on the framing for research into becoming a leader. Methodologies should be clearer on what is in frame and what is out of frame, demonstrating a clearer an understanding of the limitations of the research, and identifying which philosophical or process theory position the work is adopting. Brunet, Fachin and Langley (2021) provide four ontologies of process which may be helpful here: substantive, becoming, experiential, and pragmatist. The substantive ontology is similar to weak process theory (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016), focused on understanding the evolution over time of something that is accepted to exist (has substance). The becoming ontology is aligned to strong process theory (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016) seeing all as being in process and phenomena being constituted by and emerging from processes. The call, here, is to design research that seeks to understand the processes that 'make' something in and through activity. Experiential ontology explores how individuals can understand their becoming through the narrative stories people tell when reflecting on events. Finally, pragmatist ontology argues for an understanding that we are in a process with that which we are studying and need study methods which reflect this 'withness'. Rather than retrospective studies of what no longer exists Brunet et al (2021) suggest a prospective method of research that seeks to explore the present and projected future, for example through autoethnography and diary studies.

Finally, a note of caution. Scholars of becoming a leader should ensure they remain critically aware that the moments of kairos time in the process of becoming are not neutral in themselves, but contain embedded cultural, historical, gender and class norms which may influence the resolution of anxieties in particular ways (Stead and Elliott, 2012). These norms are part of the interwoven threads that influence the process of

becoming a leader, reminding us that adopting a reflexive approach to becoming is essential (Cunliffe, 2002; Stead and Elliott, 2012).

2.10   Conclusion

The emerging literature on becoming a leader has seen becoming used in a fragmented way, from a describing term for entering a leadership position, to a philosophically informed term depicting a continuous process of change and evolution. This review has presented a conceptual frame that has emerged from this literature and represents the process of becoming a leader across a whole lifetime, punctuated by times of accelerated becoming involving kairos moments which offer opportunities for intentional becoming to occur. Possible future threads for research have also emerged that would deepen and expand the conceptual understanding of becoming a leader should researchers wish to become more intentional about their study of leaders' becoming.

3: Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research philosophy, explaining the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions adopted by this study. To explore the processes of becoming a leader I have used a social construction ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. My theoretical position is informed by process theory (Cloutier and Langley, 2020) which is explicitly discussed in the two journal articles that can be found in chapters 2 and 5, and implicitly informs the article in chapter 4. Methods of reflexive narrative writing, diary studies, and semi-structured interviews have been used to capture processes of becoming that can result in the development of practices or principles (chapter 4); and, to explore becoming a leader emerging as practical coping in everyday acts of leading (chapter 5).

The chapter will start by exploring the underpinning research philosophy of the study, followed by sections on the research design, data collection and analysis methods. Some key issues of using a qualitative research philosophy approach, such as validity, generalisability and reliability will also be considered, alongside the limitations of the research. The purpose of the methodology chapter is to provide an expanded, integrated and more complete methodological picture for my PhD thesis. The consequence of this is that some of the detail in this chapter will necessarily be repeated within the journal articles that make up chapters 4 and 5, something that is perhaps inevitable in a multi-part format PhD thesis.

3.2   Research philosophy

3.2.1   Ontology

At the core of this research is a desire to understand the processes of becoming a leader and how leadership practices and principles emerge. One consideration when deciding on a research ontology is the appropriateness of the ontological position in regard to the subject being researched (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). What would be the best way to explore and gain new understandings of the process of becoming a leader?

One method would be to focus on the visible, observable signs of becoming, for example the practices used by leaders as outputs of the process of becoming. This would be to make an assumption that leaders do have a set of practices that are derived from or emerge from the process of becoming. However, this would be a hypothesis,

and this research is not seeking to prove this as a hypothesis in a positivistic sense (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). Positivism, or objectivism, believes that "the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred through sensation, reflection or intuition." (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008: 57). This ontology would suggest that reality is external to the leader, able to be observed by another, and analysed in a rational and dispassionate way. A positivist approach could have some merit for a study into the practices of leaders. For example, practices that have emerged as a set of principles are pragmatic and practical. Similar to Aristotle's virtues (Hall, 2018) or Sternberg (2003) or Yang's (2014) theories of wisdom, principles guide or result in observable action. As such, a positivist study of observed behaviour could be used to uncover the principles that an individual acts out on a regular basis.

However, this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding than just observing the surface level manifestations of the processes and practices of becoming. The research is seeking to understand the processes of becoming a leader and the practices that emerge from the perspective of the participant. Rather than a positivist ontology the research focus suggests social constructionism would be a more appropriate approach. Social constructionism is a qualitative research approach which "is typically orientated to the inductive study of socially constructed reality, focusing on meanings, ideas and practices, taking the native's point of view seriously" (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 1). This approach accepts that an individual's process of becoming may be impacted by multiple factors, and that practices emerging through this process may develop or differ as the circumstances faced by the leader change.

A second consideration when selecting a research ontology is the core ontological position of the researcher themselves. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2008) argue that the quality of a research design can be seriously compromised should the researcher fail to give full consideration to their personal ontological position. A researcher's ontological position lays out the assumptions that a researcher has on the nature of reality and, as such, these assumptions will influence explicitly or implicitly the way research is designed, conducted and analysed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). For research to be deemed credible it must be aligned with the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and how this reality can be investigated and

understood. Failure to do this can affect the quality of the research itself (Leitch, Hill and Harrison, 2010).

The choice between these two positions for me as researcher asks the question of how I believe the practices of leading and leadership can be researched and understood. Are the processes of becoming a leader observable as entities in themselves, moments in time or events that could be measured as facts that may be discovered by following a positivist approach seeking "objective, empirically verifiable knowledge" (Crotty, 1998: 27)? Or is the process of becoming a leader "grounded in people's self-understandings" (Leitch et al, 2010: 69), constructed and given meaning by the individual, thus requiring a constructionist approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012)?

To answer this fundamental ontological question, it is perhaps useful to refer to the personal context section in the thesis introduction. Reflecting on my experiences of leading suggests to me that my current beliefs about leading are part of a process of becoming that has gone on throughout my lifetime. This process has been one where I have constructed and reconstructed my understanding of what leadership entails as the roles and situations have changed. This construction has not always been conscious but has required deliberate processes to make it conscious. As such I do not believe that leadership or leading are observable phenomena that can be quantitatively measured following a positivist tradition. Rather, as a researcher I believe that processes of becoming will be difficult to separate from the situation, history, culture and, indeed, the moment in which they emerge. This makes for a complex reality that is best investigated using a constructionist ontology.

Consequently, the studies presented in this thesis are underpinned by a social constructionist research philosophy as the most suitable for the research itself, and aligned with the researcher's personal beliefs about how we can understand the nature of leading (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Social constructionism is also the primary ontology found in articles that discuss becoming a leader, especially those influenced by the ideas of process theory (Cloutier and Langley, 2020). My ontological position is that the processes of becoming a leader are not entities in themselves; rather, they are flows of complexity which are continuously constructed and re-constructed within the minds of leaders as they engage in the everyday situational and social

practice of leading (Kempster and Stewart, 2010; de Vaujany and Introna, 2023; Siew and Koh, 2023). To investigate these socially constructed understandings of the processes of becoming means asking individuals to think, write, discuss and reflect on acts of leading. This, in turn, requires participants in the study to engage in a process of recalling, reflecting on, and recording what they believe to be true; to construct for themselves the reality of their own experience (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Shotter, 1993). Participants will be interpreting their own experiences of leading and being led to allow these constructions of what it is to lead to emerge. The data gained from participants' constructions is then interpreted and analysed by the researcher in order to produce new understandings of the process of becoming a leader. Hence, the concept of becoming cannot be observed as an objective entity, something other to the researcher or to those involved in the research. Becoming is intimately connected to people, relationships and situations, and the processes of becoming and conceptualisations of leading will be constructed by, perceived as real, and interpreted by the participants of this study, and by the researcher himself.

Constructionism seeks to "appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experiences." (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008: 59). As such the position adopted by this study, accepts that there may be multiple understandings of a reality or, indeed, multiple realities that individuals experience, interpret and construct. The subject under study, here, is the process of becoming that emerges as acts of leading, something which is given meaning when individuals consciously engage in attempting to understand their process of leading. These understandings are subjective, created by the participants in this research in their everyday interactions with others, through their engagement with their situation and their environment, and through the interaction of the participants with the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Crotty, 1998).

In investigating the experiences and acts of leading which, when reflected upon, may surface the processes of becoming, I am investigating this interdependent process of constructing meaning from experience by the individuals involved (Crotty, 1998). In doing so, I am accepting that these constructed meanings are a product of the interaction between the research participants, their environments and colleagues, as interpreted through their cultural and historical influences. I also accept that these constructions of meaning are subjective in nature, being one construction of many possibilities.

To select social constructionism as an underlying philosophy requires that the research produced must be of high quality in order to address some of the main criticism of qualitative research methods. These criticisms come from proponents of the positivist tradition, and centre around the subjective nature of social constructionism described above. Positivist approaches assume research that is value-free, objective, rational, universal and generalizable (Crotty, 1998; Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). These beliefs create a form of measurement that has created research into leadership that risks defining leadership and leaders in advance of the research data being collected through the use of hypothesis and questionnaire (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a). These tenets of positivist research have also been used to criticise the results of qualitative research. Rather than measuring the outputs of research against objective measures of universality and generalisability, advocates of social constructionism argue that it is better to try to understand what is actually going on in the mind of the participant, and accept that social constructionism produces data that is value-laden, subjective, interpreted by the researcher and the researched, and that validity and objectivity are, perhaps, myths (Leitch, Hill and Harrison, 2010). Leitch et al (2010) argue that a thoughtful way of ensuring the quality of qualitative research is to judge it on its own merits rather than on measures determined for qualitative research, measures such as whether the research design is appropriate to the subject, is rigorous, ethical, transparent and sound, and that the results are truthful, credible, and coherent (Leitch et al, 2010; Tracy, 2010).

As the studies in this thesis adopt an ontology of social construction, and an interpretivist epistemology, the validity and quality of the study will be derived from the processes used and the research methods employed (Leitch et al, 2010). To demonstrate this, the information in this methodology has been written to offer transparency to the robust methods used to capture and analyse data, offering justifications for the suitability of methods adopted, and giving sufficient detail in the empirical chapters for observers to appreciate the rigour used during the research process (Cassell and Symon, 2004).

A note on terminology. The term constructionism is being used deliberately in this section. There has been some confusion in the literature between the terms constructionism and constructivist (Crotty, 1998). Constructivist appears to be used for a more subjective individual interpretation of the world, mostly driven by cognitive

understandings, and somewhat divorced from wider cultural or historical influences. Constructionism is generally aligned with a view that whilst the individual may construct the meaning, they are influenced by myriad 'unseen' factors, including history and culture, and that the construction of knowledge is interdependent with these factors, with the experience, and with themselves (Crotty, 1998). By deliberately using constructionist or constructionism, as opposed to constructivist, I am aligning my work with this appreciation of how meaning is created within the full complexity of the world.

3.2.2   *Epistemology*

The word epistemology comes from two Ancient Greek words, episteme, which is akin to scientific or programmed knowledge, and logos, which is connected with the knowledge of logic, or theory. Epistemology, therefore, concerns the question of how we know what knowledge constitutes 'good knowledge' in the context of the subject of enquiry (Crotty, 1998; Easterby-Smith et al, 2008).

As discussed above, this study is adopting an ontology of social constructionism which, first, will be seeking to understand the processes of becoming a leader, processes which can lead to the development of a set of practices, dispositions or principles that guide a leader to act in both intentional and non-deliberative ways. In doing so there is an assumption that participants are making sense of, or interpreting, their experiences and their construction of experience into an understanding of the practice of leading. The study then goes into greater depth, exploring whether and how practices are developed and deployed, or "socially produced and maintained" (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009).

An interpretivist epistemology, concerned with "capturing the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour through investigating how they experience, sustain, articulate and share with others these socially constituted everyday realities" (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell and Symon, 2006: 132) is the most appropriate approach to explore this knowledge. This is due to the volume and complexity of information required by a study that is trying to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of becoming a leader (Johnson et al, 2006). Acquiring this knowledge involves collecting and analysing a variety of data concerning the routine and potentially difficult moments in individuals' lives, and gaining access to the meanings that participants place on these

moments (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The interpretivist epistemology assumes that this knowledge of individuals' lives can be gained by studying socially constructed phenomena, such as narrative writing, shared meanings and language to uncover the sense individuals make and the meanings they give to situations they face (Klein and Myers, 1999; Cardoso and Ramos, 2012).

Crotty (1998) highlights three major themes or approaches to interpretivist forms of study; hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Hermeneutics has its roots in the study and philosophy of the interpretation of written language, particularly biblical texts. Modern forms have been used to interpret a wide variety of artifacts, including films and workplaces. Hermeneutics is essentially trying to access the interpretations that arise when artifacts (e.g., objects, books, films, etc.) are created or used by a community who embed the artefact with a socially constructed meaning (Yanow and Ybema, 2009).

Phenomenology aims to uncover and understand the meanings and insights into phenomena that are understood to be socially constructed, for example leadership. It is focused on how individuals make sense of their immediate lived experience when they develop meaning through interpreting experience as seen through the lens of their weltanschaang, or worldview (Cope, 2005; Yanow & Ybema, 2009).

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with a process of identity formation experienced by individuals in their engagement and encounters with others (Saunders et al, 2012).

This study will use, mostly, a phenomenological interpretivist approach, although the process of becoming could arguably be described as a process of identity formation. Becoming a leader is a very personal process that is arguably unique for each individual due to the circumstances of their lived experience. A phenomenological inquiry helps to understand the experience of becoming a leader through the narratives of those experiencing it, and by "exploring the meanings and explanations that individuals attribute to their experiences" (Cope, 2005: 168).

A pure Husserlian phenomenology would ask an individual to try and distance themselves from their previous understanding of a phenomenon, and attempt to experience the phenomenon as if for the first time (Cope, 2005). As stated in the ontology section above, this is not seen as being possible, as the construction of

knowledge from individual experience makes it difficult to separate the many influences on a person from their interpretation of the phenomenon (the act of leading) itself. Therefore, this study will draw more closely from the ideas of existential phenomenology (Crotty, 1998) which argues that individuals and their context, situation, and culture-historical influences are interdependent and, thus, cannot be studied in isolation of each other.

Existential phenomenology defined by philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty developed the idea of the individual 'being-in-the-world', known as Lebenswelt - 'lived-world' or 'lived experience'. The emphasis, here, is to investigate and record the world as it is experienced in the live moment, or in practice (Cope, 2005). As will have been noted from the previous chapter, the ideas of Heidegger also underpin theoretical articles that discuss the process of becoming a leader, making an existential phenomenological approach particularly apt for this research.

The subjectivity of lived experience is such that individuals do not necessarily have a conscious awareness of the experiences they are living through (Cope, 2005; Rolfe, Segal and Cicmil, 2017). Instead, it is suggested that it is only when our everyday lived experience is disrupted, for example when our normal everyday practice does not produce the anticipated results, that we gain an insight into the reality of our lived experience (Rolfe, Segal and Cicmil, 2017). An existential phenomenological epistemological approach, drawing on the ideas of Heidegger (1962), would suggest that disruptive events allow us to access the background experiences that we exist within, but which we are so attuned to that we cease to notice in a conscious way. The disruption creates an anxiety which Heidegger sees as essential for individuals to be able to observe and question their everyday experiences. This anxiety allows us to access not only our everyday lived experiences, but the pre-conceptual notions, or tacit knowledge or understanding that we use to navigate the everyday (Rolfe, Segal and Cicmil, 2017). In other words, the interpretivist form of study, using an existential phenomenological approach, can be used to explore disruptions or disjunctures (Jarvis, 2009a) to the lived experiences of participants that may reveal the processes of becoming a leader that result in the practices of leading.
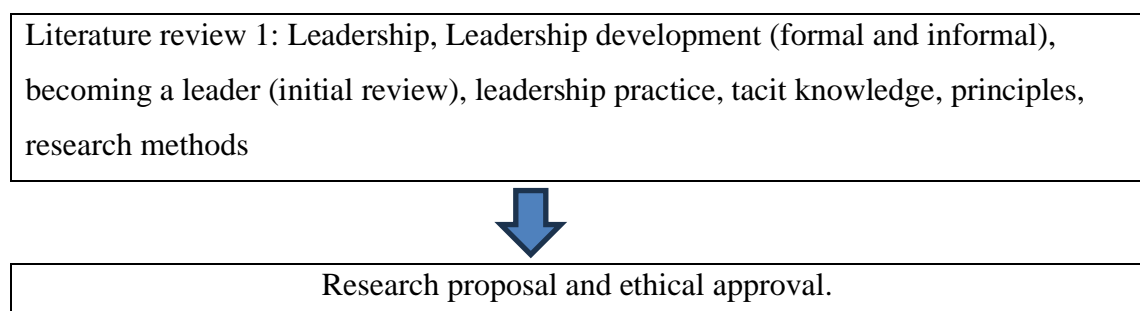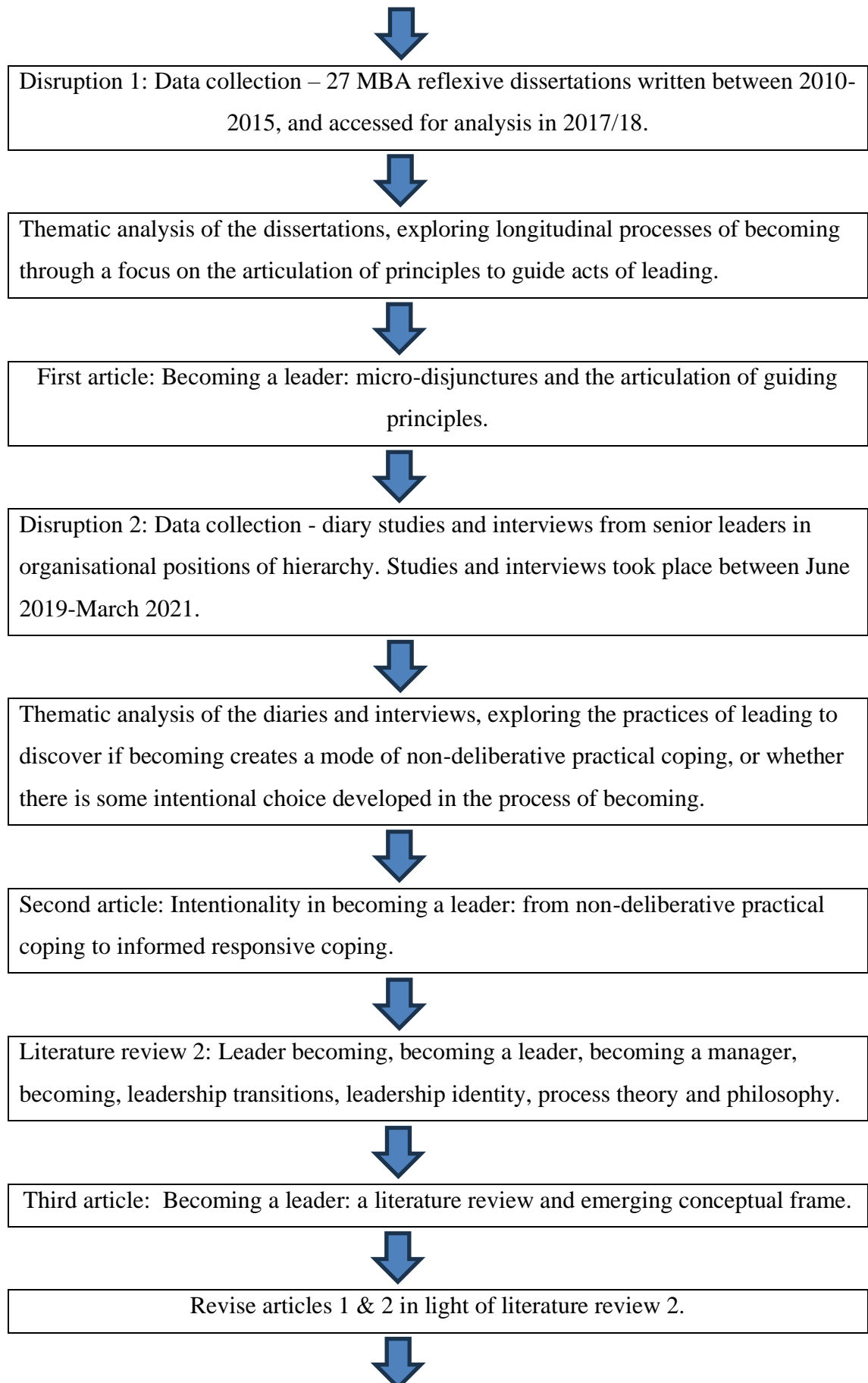
3.3   Research design

In adopting an existential phenomenological approach, this study makes the assumption that leaders will have ceased to notice important processes in their journey of becoming. As a consequence, in order to enable a focus on previous disruptions, this study was designed around creating two new triggers or moments of disruption (Rolfe, Segal and Cicmil, 2017) which would allow participants to surface and articulate their previous processes of becoming or their current practices of leading.

The first moment of disruption was an act of narrative writing in the creation of a reflexive MBA dissertation. MBA students at Lancaster University Management School were asked to write reflexive narratives drawing on their previous work and life experiences, and on the knowledge and experiences gained during the MBA programme. The purpose was to define a set of principles for managing or leading individuals, teams or organisations in the future. Focusing on articulating a principle was intended to create a moment where MBA students would stop and think, reflect and explore, and surface some of their processes of becoming a leader.

The second moment of disruption was a different act of reflexive practice (Cunliffe, 2002), using a five-week diary study that would enable senior leaders in organisations to capture and reflect on their everyday acts of leading as they happen. In other words, the diary was a disruptive moment that asked participants to explore their everyday disruptive events as they occurred, thus allowing the researcher to understand the events from the perspectives of the participant (Radcliffe, 2018: 188). The diaries were further explored using an interview which focused on the participants' understanding of their acts of leading, and asked whether these acts were driven by unconscious practices in acts of non-deliberative practical coping, or whether there was some intentionality in the actions and decisions made by the leaders involved.

Figure 3.1: Research Design

Literature review 1: Leadership, Leadership development (formal and informal), becoming a leader (initial review), leadership practice, tacit knowledge, principles, research methods

⬇

Research proposal and ethical approval.

Disruption 1: Data collection – 27 MBA reflexive dissertations written between 2010-2015, and accessed for analysis in 2017/18.

Thematic analysis of the dissertations, exploring longitudinal processes of becoming through a focus on the articulation of principles to guide acts of leading.

First article: Becoming a leader: micro-disjunctures and the articulation of guiding principles.

Disruption 2: Data collection - diary studies and interviews from senior leaders in organisational positions of hierarchy. Studies and interviews took place between June 2019-March 2021.

Thematic analysis of the diaries and interviews, exploring the practices of leading to discover if becoming creates a mode of non-deliberative practical coping, or whether there is some intentional choice developed in the process of becoming.

Second article: Intentionality in becoming a leader: from non-deliberative practical coping to informed responsive coping.

Literature review 2: Leader becoming, becoming a leader, becoming a manager, becoming, leadership transitions, leadership identity, process theory and philosophy.

Third article: Becoming a leader: a literature review and emerging conceptual frame.

Revise articles 1 & 2 in light of literature review 2.

Complete final thesis and submit in multi-part/alternative format.

Through bringing these moments of disruption together, the intention was to gain a new understanding on the process of becoming a leader, and explore whether these processes lead to practices that remain unconscious and non-deliberative or are conscious and intentional. A more detailed methodology of each stage of the research will now be discussed.

3.4   Methodology

In deciding on appropriate methods of data collection this study followed the advice of leadership researchers on appropriate methods of understanding what leaders do and why. Firstly, research focused on the processes of becoming will need to be committed to understanding what leaders do in their everyday practice in order to uncover the practices that emerge over time (Orlikowski, 2010). Orlikowski offers the idea of practice as a perspective, where situated and recurrent everyday activities of leaders become the object of analysis. Practice as a perspective puts the focus of research onto the relational interaction of people, acts, events, situations and environments, making it a suitable approach to "address organizational phenomena that are posited to be relational, dynamic and emergent" (Orlikowski, 2010: 27).

Adopting this idea of practice as a perspective, leadership researchers have argued for ideographic methods of research to be the most suitable, especially when examining phenomena that have emergent properties such as processes and practices (Kempster, Parry & Jackson, 2016). Ideographic methods suggest the adoption of highly reflexive methods of data collection, such as using narratives and methods of autoethnography (Boyle and Parry, 2007: Kempster & Stewart, 2010). These methods enable the research to engage deeply with the "multiple layers of consciousness, thoughts, feelings and beliefs" (Kempster, Parry & Jackson, 2016: 255) of leaders. This advice informed the methods chosen for the journal article that can be found in chapter 4. The reflexive MBA dissertations that formed the data for this study contained autoethnographic narratives, where the students interviewed themselves to provide detailed micro-cases (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a) based on critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954; Cope, 2003) from their past which revealed their processes of becoming a leader, including

personal thoughts and feelings, relational descriptions, and examinations of situational and cultural contexts.

Narratives in the form of micro-cases which reveal what leaders actually do in their everyday practices (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a) were also used to gather the data for the second journal article which can be found in chapter 5. In this case the narratives were in the form of a diary study (Radcliffe, 2018) which allowed participants to explore their everyday acts of leading and whether these acts were an unconscious enactment of emerging practices (non-deliberative practical coping) or were, in some way, responsive and intentional.

Further detail on the methods of the two phases of research that led to the writing of the articles in chapters 4 and 5 will now be discussed, with particular reference to the decisions that were made about sampling, data collection and analysis (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008).

3.5   Phase 1: Sampling, data collection and analysis

The first phase sought to understand the processes of becoming that led to the choice of a set of principles thought to be important by MBA students for their future practice of leading. The data for this study were drawn from the final reflexive dissertations of MBA students at Lancaster University Management School. From a process perspective, this phase of the research was developmental (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016) in that the participants were asked to stand outside of the flow of processes, to articulate their principles, and to seek to understand the flows and threads that had allowed these principles to emerge into their practices of leading. Langley and Tsoukas (2016) would call this a weak process approach as it indicates that the participants remain recognisable over time, with the emergence of their principles in continuous motion around them.

These students were required to undertake reflexive dialogical practice (Cunliffe, 2002) drawing on critical incidents (Cope, 2003) to produce autoethnographic narratives (Ramsey, 2005). The reflexive dissertation guidelines, which can be found in appendix 1, required the students to construct their narratives against three criteria:

1. Authenticity – demonstrating that a principle is important to them by reflecting on what has influenced their choice. Describing individuals or situations where

they have seen the principle in practice. Considering their own assumptions, beliefs and values and exploring connections between these principles.

2. Formal learning – use of theory connected to the principle to critically evaluate and analyse the principle.

3. Productive application – demonstrating how the principle has been used to bring about change and improve either the individual or the situation. Reflecting on how they might implement their chosen principle in the future.

The criteria of authenticity containing descriptions of people, events, experiences and incidents, provided rich autoethnographic data relevant to the focus of the research study and were the main source of data that contributed to this phase of exploring the processes of becoming a leader.

3.5.1 Sampling

The essays were usually 7,500 words long. Each essay discussed at least three principles, making a typical authenticity section approximately 800 words long. The essays of students from 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14, and 2014/15 were used. The sample followed a non-random sampling method for which there are no fixed rules on sample size, but it is advised that data collection continues until a point of saturation occurs (Saunders et al, 2012). The sample included only those students who gained a distinction grade for the dissertation as these students provided the richest descriptions of the influences on their choice of each principle. Following this inclusion criterion, the potential total number of essays in the sample was 40. A self-selecting sampling approach was adopted, with participants being asked if they would opt into the study (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). This resulted in the final number of 27 reflexive dissertations in the sample. The sample was diverse, with participants coming from 14 different nationalities, 20 male and seven female, having an age range of 25-38 years and an average work experience of nine years. The participants came from very different sectors, ranging from charities and public sector to manufacturing, IT consulting and international banking.

3.5.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Once permission had been gained from the 27 participants involved, the data were downloaded from their MBA reflexive dissertations into the ATLAS.ti 22 software. ATLAS.ti software allows qualitative data to be analysed in a systematic way which

allows questions to be asked of the data that may have been difficult with traditional methods of qualitative analysis (Friese, 2019). This allows answers to emerge from the data that may have been previously hidden (Friese, 2019).

A template analysis approach (King, 2004) was used to provide a thematic analysis of the essays. When using template analysis, the researcher must start with an initial set of themes to provide a starting framework for the analysis, but which would not be so detailed as to stop new themes being discovered during the analysis (King, 2004). Generating these themes was a process of reading and rereading a small sample of the essays, guided by the main aim of the study. The following initial set of themes emerged:

Table 3.1: Thematical analysis of MBA dissertations - initial themes

Theme	Category	Illustrative example
Origin	DNA/ Born with it	"Values like devotion, courage, faith, etc., comes from our heart, from our DNA."
	Made – cultural/ historical/ social	"My parents have a simple and traditional set of values that they instilled upon me."
	Theory-derived	"I have found out in the literature that listening is an important skill for leaders."
	Experience – difficulties	"The journey in creating this coalition had been extremely difficult and fraught with opposition."
	Experience – notable people	"Whilst we were out to lunch together one day she turned my life upside down"
Development	In the moment	"My failure…allowed me to discover my own gaps…of knowledge."
	Reflection – writing	"Through the power of reflection…I have come to realise that I did not arrive with a bucketload of practical wisdom."
	Other reflexive practice	"One of the most powerful tools instilled upon me… is the regular practice of self-reflection."
	Conscious/ unconscious awareness	"I realised that I had been following a set of principles without acknowledging their presence."
	Feedback from others	"And it is these friends from my childhood…that provide the most colourful and sound advice when I'm navigating dilemmas."

Awareness	Experience – situations and tasks	"As I begin my new role…I am already applying many of the skills and knowledge I've recently learned."
	Theory to aid understanding	"The difficulties…made me want to gain explicit knowledge of academic-based theories in order that I could be a better leader."

The themes were revisited and developed as the study progressed allowing some themes to be developed, others to be excluded and new themes to emerge (Burton, Vu and Hawkins, 2022). Examples include the theme of 'DNA/Born with it' which was shown to have little support across the sample and, consequently, excluded; and the theme of an emotional prompt which emerged. The final thematic template was:

Table 3.2: Final MBA dissertation thematic analysis table

Category	Theme
Origin	through experience – everyday experiences of leading and being led, and achieving difficult tasks
	through notable people
Awareness	through deliberate reflection
	through an emotional prompt
	through moments of disjuncture
	through notable people
	through use of theory
Development	through use of theory
	through notable people
	through experience
	through deliberate reflection

The ATLAS.ti enabled further analysis to occur, including the ability to read all the evidence in each theme together, and to cross reference themes of a similar nature easily. A careful process of reading, re-reading and reflecting on the data (Rice and Ezzy, 1999) allowed a number of the quotations in each theme to be interpreted as

moments of disjuncture or micro-disjuncture. These became key elements in the final analysis and writing up of the article in chapter 4.

3.6   Phase 2: Sampling, data collection and analysis

The second phase focused on a new set of participants, senior leaders in hierarchical positions within organisations. This study sought to explore the everyday activities of the participants, building on the previous study by looking at the process of becoming a leader once in the role. The unit of analysis in this study was the participants' everyday acts of leading captured by them in the moment through keeping a diary for five weeks. The diaries capture the everyday practices of leading, with participants asked to reflect within the diary and in a follow-up interview on the how their practice of leading had developed and whether it was unconscious and non-deliberative or informed by previous influences.

From a process perspective, this phase was a configurational study (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016:10), in that the participants were capturing data longitudinally whilst "in-the-flow" of process, but the researcher remained outside of the flow. This enabled the researcher to observe and interpret distinct patterns emerging from the participants' live accounts (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016). As the participants are in-the-flow of processes this type of study aligns with a strong process theory approach (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016), with practices and leaders continuously evolving through the qualitative diary study period.

Whilst qualitative diary studies have been increasingly used for studies in the management field, there has been little use of them specifically for researching leadership (Radcliffe, 2018; Unterhitzenberger and Lawrence, 2022). Proponents of diary studies argue that gaining detailed first-hand accounts of the everyday activities of participants as they happen enhances the researcher's ability to understand phenomena from the perspective of the participant (Radcliffe, 2018; Hyers, 2018). This is due to a diary being able to capture the situated practice of the leader (Kempster and Stewart, 2010), recording relationships, emotions and environments, and giving descriptions of historical and cultural norms and expectations (Radcliffe, 2018). The immediacy of a diary, with activities, events and emotions being recorded so close to these moments occurring helps to overcome issues connected to forms of research that rely on

participants recalling moments from a distance (Spencer, Radcliffe, Spence and King, 2021).

Participants in this diary study were asked to explore their everyday acts of leading as phenomenological moments which occur and are recognised as acts of leading by the leaders themselves (Ladkin, 2010). These moments are likely to be complex, being made up of numerous elements including the leader, follower, individual purposes, and influenced by the situation, environment, relationships, personal and organisational history and culture (Ladkin, 2010; Alvesson and Jonsson, 2018). The participants were encouraged to capture these moments in as much detail as possible in their diaries, requiring them to closely observe themselves, their relationships and their situations in order to produce highly personal and descriptive accounts (Sparkes, 2000; Richardson, 2000).

3.6.1 Sampling

Sampling for the diary study followed a non-random method of convenience sampling (Saunders et al, 2012). This was due to two factors, the difficulty of persuading people in senior hierarchical positions of leadership (e.g., CEO) to commit to keeping a diary over a five week period, and the need to recruit participants who were sufficiently interested in their own leadership to want to engage in a process of self-reflection, writing and interviews and who would trust the researcher with the contents of their reflections (Hyers, 2018). These requirements, especially the need for trust to enable leaders to be fully open and honest in their diaries, led to the researcher recruiting senior leaders from their personal network of contacts, enabling participants to be more open and honest with what was being recorded. To avoid skewing the sample towards people with a similar outlook to the researcher, the contacts used were drawn from previous executive education students and clients, colleagues from a board of directors, some friends and some participants recommended by others.

The total sample recruited was 12 participants (five male and seven female). All participants were senior managers from different organisations and sectors as shown in table 3.3. The participants had been in their senior roles for at least two years and, in several cases, senior experience was in excess of 15 years.

Table 3.3: Qualitative diary study participants

Participant	Sector	Seniority	Diary study	Interview
1	Police	Chief Superintendent	1 week	No
2	Housing	CEO	5 weeks	Yes
3	Charity	CEO	4 weeks	Yes
4	Education/ HE	Associate Dean	5 weeks	No
5	Housing	CEO	5 weeks	Yes
6	Manufacturing	Director	5 weeks	Yes
7	Health	Director	5 weeks	Yes
8	Education/ schools	Headteacher	5 weeks	Yes
9	Health	Senior Manager	5 weeks	Yes
10	Consultancy	Partner	5 weeks	Yes
11	Law	Partner	4 weeks	Yes
12	Media	Director	5 weeks	No

A feature of using diary studies as a research method is the need to constantly encourage the sample to persist in completing the diary over the full period of the study (Radcliffe, 2018). This was particularly true for the senior leaders in this study due to the pressures of work. Of the original 12 participants, only nine completed diaries for the full five-week period. Others missed a week and one completed only one week. As the nature of this research was not longitudinal but was to capture acts of leading as they happened, their data were still valid and, consequently, included in the analysis of diaries. Three participants withdrew from the study due to pressure of work and, so, were not interviewed.

3.6.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The diary study was facilitated using a semi-structured diary entry form which can be found in appendix 2. This form was designed to enable participants to capture their moments of leading in a detailed way. Participants completed a typed diary entry each week over a period of five weeks. During this time the researcher, following the advice of Radcliffe (2018), maintained regular contact with the participants to answer any procedural questions and to encourage completion of the study period.

The diary entry form asked participants to first record all the acts of leading of note from their week, and then to focus on one act in greater detail. The form required

participants to give a detailed description of the situation and the act itself, and to comment on how the participant decided on that act and what reflections and feelings they experienced following the decision.

The completed diaries described a total of 408 acts of leading. Of these, 53 were expanded into detailed descriptions.

Following completion of the diaries the researcher undertook an initial analysis of the diaries in order to identify questions for a follow-up interview (Radcliffe, 2018). Questions were formulated around the acts of leading described, with a particular focus on how decisions were made, attempting to tease out how conscious and intentional or unconscious and non-deliberative these acts of leading actually were. This allowed data to emerge that spoke to the processes of becoming a leader.

Follow-up interviews were semi-structured (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008), lasting between 90-120 minutes. The majority of the interviews were undertaken on the phone, mostly due to the Government restrictions on movement imposed during the Covid pandemic. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcriptions were uploaded to the Atlas.ti software platform for analysis.

As with the MBA dissertations, the diary studies and the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (King, 2004; Spencer, Radcliffe, Spence and King, 2021). The diaries and associated interviews were analysed together in order to allow the data from one to build on and enhance the other. The sample as a whole was also analysed to allow themes from across the sample to emerge. Similar to the MBA dissertation analysis and following the advice of King (2004) the first complete diary and interview was analysed to generate initial themes with reference to the overall research purpose of identifying processes of becoming through exploring whether acts of leading are intentional or non-deliberative. All diary and interview sets were then analysed against these initial themes. This involved multiple readings and re-readings of the entire sample, and of the quotations that made up the individual themes identified (Friese, 2019).

The analysis of diaries initially revealed the activities of leadership and acts of leading described by the participants. Activities of leadership were those activities that would normally be expected from a leader in a position of organisational hierarchy, such as chairing meetings (see Appendix 2 for more detail). Acts of leading were intuitive

moments, similar to the descriptions of practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006). It was these acts, shown in table 3.4, that participants focused on when asked to describe one incident from their week in greater detail.

Table 3.4: Thematic analysis of diaries - acts of leading

Activity	Examples of Acts of leading
Chairing/ attending meetings	Selecting when to chair a meeting to ensure the clarity of the outcome & knowing when to not to attend.
	Listening intently and questioning – picking out important threads; seeking the truth; asking open questions.
	Ensuring enough time for the controversial items to be debated, deciding when to be assertive, moving discussions into actions.
	Attending to support colleagues and helping colleagues to make sense of the world.
	Keeping 'strong personalities' in check during meetings. Cultivating/preparing colleagues in advance of decisions.
Relationships	Listening to, empathising with, supporting and reassuring colleagues – especially those struggling with personal issues.
	Noticing when colleagues may need to talk privately and making time for this.
	Checking in with individual colleagues following difficult meetings.
	Encouraging peers, colleagues, reportees and encouraging 'up'. Congratulating, praising colleagues; thanking people personally.
	Coaching staff (not just direct reports) on their future. Mentoring staff who are underperforming.
	Giving practical advice to colleagues, e.g., helping with individual objective setting.
	Challenging colleagues, e.g., on decisions, knowledge, behaviours. Challenging assumptions.
	Creating future leaders – coaching newly promoted colleagues; encouraging ambitious staff to take on strategic projects.
	Spending time with enthusiastic individuals, providing support, removing barriers.
Stepping in	Facilitating the exit of underperforming staff; agreeing severance offers; being personally involved (not delegating this).
	Acting on inclusion and diversity in a public and personal way, e.g., sending individual messages to colleagues.
	Making time to help teams prepare for important meetings.
	Speaking out to senior staff on issues when this may be career damaging (courage) – managing up!
	Acting on difficult people issues – convening meetings, bringing people together with a sense of urgency.
	Volunteering for difficult tasks/volunteering support to achieve results (even when not your job).
	Leading by example to generate wider behaviour change.
	Using experience/knowledge for the good of others, e.g., colleagues and clients
Stepping out	Cultivating a 'critical and trusting' relationship with the regulator/council, etc.
	Building individual relationships that may lead to new business/partnerships.
	Speaking out to important external stakeholders, e.g., funding organisations, regulators, etc.
Leading self	Pausing – thinking carefully how to respond to colleagues when needing to deliver an important/unpopular message.
	Preparing – e.g.. to be able to ask carefully worded challenges; knowing the detail.

	Treading carefully! Gathering information before making comments/decisions.
	Knowing when to consciously park own agenda to listen to the other.
	Knowing how much information to give at any one time – enough to help but not to overload.
	Reflecting on practice and changing to get a different result.
	Trusting rather than micro-managing.
	Making space in diary to be 'present and available' to colleagues when in the office.
	Keeping positive when the colleagues are getting tired.
	Delegating line management appropriately.
	Spending time doing the key activities of the organisation so you know what colleagues are experiencing, e.g., teaching; vaccinating; back to the floor.
	Making disciplined decisions about own time, workload, availability and energy, and demonstrating that through behaviour.
	Being prepared to have difficult conversations with the boss.
	Thinking very carefully about the bigger decisions; being more cautious; gathering all the available information; talking it through with trusted colleagues.
Leading the organisation	Directing – using listening to develop a very clear way forward, even if this is not universally popular.
	Visiting departments/functions to commend and say thank you after meetings.
	Following up on decisions – supporting and ensuring people are accountable.
	Encouraging staff to publicly appreciate each other.
	Dealing individually with heads of underperforming areas – allowing for open discussions; making space for personal issues to be discussed; offering support and reflection time.
	Values-based lobbying internally – e.g., for a more sustainability focused strategy.
	Consulting colleagues – getting information and balanced/different perspectives. Checking your thinking.
	Initiating discussions with service leads.
	Creating systems to monitor staff overload and moments of intense stress – and then develop interventions to alleviate this.
	Giving clarity on expectations and standards; ensuring discipline.
	Creating inclusive networks, e.g., women's network.

Further analysis of these acts of leading was done using Atlas.ti to read and re-read the data in different configurations, thereby revealing examples of participants describing acts of leading that were non-deliberative, and acts that were consciously informed and responsive. Examples of these are shown in table 3.5:

Table 3.5: Final diary and interview study thematic analysis with examples

Theme	Illustrative example
Non-deliberative practical coping - language of unconscious act used	*"It's a great deal easier to understand our own leadership retrospectively, and then to build up an understanding of our own leadership style by reflecting on what we have done instinctively"* (Participant 12) *"This sort of decision is often down to experience and intuition"* (Participant 5)

Informed responsive coping - language suggesting intentional thought behind an act of leading	*"I do this…not just because I am a senior leader, but because it is the right thing to do…the fact that I am one of the most senior leaders…will hopefully amplify the message"* (Participant 1) *"…when an event like that happens, I literally do sit and think about outcomes"* (Participant 2)

As can be seen from the final journal article in chapter 5, the analysis led to findings focused on the non-deliberative and informed responsive modes of practical coping.

3.7   Ethical considerations

This study submitted and received ethical approval from the FASS-LUMS Research Ethics Committee on 9th October 2017. Participants of the reflexive dissertation study and the diary study and interviews were contacted by email to ask for their permission for their dissertation to be included in the sample. They were sent a participant information sheet which explained the context of the study, why they had been asked to participate and what would be expected of them. The information sheet made it clear that participants could withdraw at any time, and specifically mentioned that their data would remain anonymous and could be shared via academic journal articles and in this thesis. No participants requested that their data be withdrawn.

Some interviews were held in person, and some on the phone due to either the preference of the participant or Covid restrictions during the data collection period. One third of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and the rest professionally by a highly recommended transcriber who is familiar with the ethical research standards of the University. The professionally transcribed interviews were checked by the researcher for accuracy and completeness.

One possible ethical issue to highlight was in respect to the reflexive dissertation participants. I was the Programme Director of the MBA programme while these participants were MBA students. They may have felt obliged to agree to be part of the study. However, I ceased to be MBA Programme Director in 2015, and did not request participation from the former students until 2017, by which time all participants had moved away from Lancaster and had gained management-level employment. It is unlikely that MBA alumni would feel compelled against their wishes to have their work analysed. As I only became a PhD student late in 2016, the participants were writing

their dissertations completely without knowledge of the possibility of them being used in a research sample in the future and, so, cannot be accused of writing in a biased way to try and meet the aspirations of the Programme Director's PhD.

As the diary study participants came from my professional and social network there is a possibility that they may have felt compelled to join the study. Several people who were asked rejected the offer, which suggests that senior executives are not so easily swayed. The majority welcomed the opportunity to spend some time on a self-awareness exercise that could help to improve their understanding of leading.

3.8   Limitations of the study

Taking a qualitative, interpretivist approach, based on autoethnographic reflexive dissertations and diaries kept by busy senior executives has some limitations, particularly around the issues of subjectivity and unreliability (Buckner, 2005).

The first limitation is possible subjectivity brought by the researcher. As described in the introduction, I have experience of senior organisational leadership and, as a consequence, have constructed my own story of my journey of becoming, and have experienced having to learn on the job whilst acting in situations of complexity and great uncertainty. In this scenario it is not possible to be completely distant and entirely objective about what is being observed. Rather, my ontology and the subsequent methods adopted accept that the researcher is also a participant in the research (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008) and, as such, the question of objectivity presents a false divide. Throughout the analysis and writing up of findings from the study I have been aware of the difficulty of separating myself as researcher and author from the accounts that have been observed in the writing up process, something described as a crisis of representation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). I have been aware of both my responsibility for being truthful and reliable with the narratives of the participants, and of my possible subjectivity, with my experience of leading influencing the interpretation of the data. This awareness, along with multiple discussions with the PhD supervisory team on the themes emerging from both sets of data, has allowed these risks to be partially mitigated, but there remains an inevitability that some of my interpretations have become part of the work presented in this thesis. The generous use of illustrative data extracts in the two articles will hopefully allow the reader the freedom to accept my interpretation, seeing that the voices of participants shine through and demonstrating

that the interpretation of the researcher is one of integrity, producing findings that are rigorous, transparent, truthful and credible (Leitch et al, 2010; Tracy, 2010).

The second limitation concerns the integrity of data gained by asking participants to write reflexive narratives in the form of dissertations and diaries. This can lead to a focus on 'epiphanies', where some form of hardship or situation that is noticeably different from an everyday life shocked the participant into a deeper reflexive state. There is a danger that this narrative is highly influenced by the enhanced emotional state attached to the moment being described, which may serve to move the description from a representation of reality to a more creative account. As Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje (2004) point out, there is a danger that narratives move away from being accurate descriptions and become creative or fictional, especially when adopting a social constructionist perspective, where "language is not literal (a means of representing reality) but creative in giving form to reality" (Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje, 2004: 264). As a researcher I have been mindful of this possibility when analysing the narrative accounts in the study and have tried to follow the advice of Alvesson and Sköldberg, (2000) to be self-critical about my own interpretations by examining them from different perspectives.

There is a third limitation surrounding the construction of narratives for the reflexive MBA dissertations. The participants are describing moments and events from their journey of becoming, some of which may have occurred many years ago. This raises a question of how accurate the memory and subsequent description actually is, how much is robust memory and how much is, perhaps, overly constructed (Cassell, and Symon, 2004). With this type of research there is no opportunity to triangulate to data and, so, I had to rely on the integrity and truthfulness of the participants' descriptions. There is an additional issue with the dissertations having been written as the final assessment for the MBA programme at Lancaster. This was a deliberate intervention, resulting in participants receiving a grade that contributed to their final MBA mark. The brief for the essay, the participants desire to gain a good grade, and the constraints of the marking criteria may all have an impact on the depth and content of what was actually written. The mitigation for this was to focus one third of the criteria on providing evidence of the authenticity of a guiding principle to the author, leading to descriptions that appear reliable.

A fourth limitation concerns the diary studies. The depth of detail and reflection captured in a diary varies greatly from one participant to another. This raises the possibility of some diaries being completed close to the moments occurring, whilst others, possibly the less detailed ones, being completed retrospectively at a distance, thus creating a potential issue with the accuracy of data (Radcliffe, 2018). Whilst the researcher attempted to prompt what was required through written and verbal instructions, and by being available to answer any questions during the study period, the diaries certainly varied in their detail and depth. This limitation was mitigated by gaining greater description and depth through interviewing the diary participants.

The limitations described above could all have had an impact of the data collection and analysis had they not been anticipated at the beginning of the study. This allowed for the researcher to include the following mitigations into the research method: increased researcher reflexivity (Cassell and Symon, 2004); adopting a self-critical approach to analysis (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000); a focus on data that could be seen to be truthfully authentic to the dissertation writers; and the inclusion of in-depth interviews alongside diary studies. These mitigations have ensured that the study has not been invalidated by these limitations, and that the robust findings from this study can present new and deeper understanding of the processes involved in becoming a leader, an understanding that has implications for future leadership research and how we think about leader development.

4: Empirical article I: Becoming a leader: micro-disjunctures and the articulation of guiding principles.

Saunders, C.J., Iszatt-White, M., and Reynolds, M. *Becoming a leader: micro-disjunctures and the articulation of guiding principles* (to be submitted to Management Learning)

4.1   Abstract

This article introduces the concept of micro-disjuncture to theories of leadership learning as a life-long process of becoming. Whilst becoming has established itself in the leadership learning literature (see Kempster and Stewart, 2010) a key concept that drives becoming, disjuncture (Jarvis, 2009a), has received little attention from leadership scholars. Disjunctures occur when our way of being is challenged by the situation we face, producing a physical sense of unease and creating dilemmas which must be resolved as part of the process of becoming (Jarvis, 2009a; Dall'Alba, 2009). Research findings from a study of reflexive MBA dissertations suggest that managers carry with them everyday moments of micro-disjuncture which are so imperceptible that they remain unrecognised and, so, have not been resolved. The process of writing reflexive narratives focused on articulating guiding principles acts as a trigger for surfacing micro-disjunctures. Once surfaced, students can begin to resolve the micro-disjunctures by articulating principles which guide their future acts of leading, thus introducing conscious intentionality to the process of becoming a leader. We contribute the concept of micro-disjuncture to theories of becoming a leader and offer a process to trigger micro-disjunctures using a reflexive MBA dissertation. In doing so, we challenge the traditional academic dissertation as the final learning activity for an MBA programme, arguing that a reflexive dissertation would better serve MBAs transitioning into positions of leadership.

Keywords

4.2   Introduction

Critical approaches to leadership learning have adopted the theory of becoming, suggesting that learning to lead is a largely unconscious process of apprenticeship (Kempster and Stewart, 2010), where we learn to become a leader in a community,

through processes such as social interaction, observation, copying, trying, making mistakes, being told, and exploring (Kempster, 2009; Jarvis, 2012). The process of becoming allows for a conscious and unconscious construction of our conceptual understanding of leadership (Kempster, 2009), our ways of leading, and our very identities (Collinson, 2003; Jarvis, 2009a). Jarvis (2009a) argues that the process of becoming is punctuated by situations of disjuncture, emotionally laden moments where our unthinking flow of activity is interrupted, our harmony is disrupted and a feeling of unease occurs that requires resolution. Jarvis's disjunctures are akin to Grint's (2005) "wicked problems" - complex, uncertain and vu jàdé (never seen before). These problems create situations where learning is essential and it is clear that previously held assumptions and methods will no longer work (Jarvis, 2009a). Disjuncture is argued to be fundamental for learning to occur, crucial to the process of becoming - the transformation of a person through learning (Jarvis, 2012). Yet due to its imperceptible nature, incidents of micro-disjuncture pass largely unrecognised by learners. Obvious forms of disjuncture have received some attention from leadership scholars, for example difficult work experiences, personal hardships (McCall, 2004), increased responsibilities and substantial changes in work (Davies and Easterby-Smith, 1984). These tend to be large individual life events, easily memorable critical incidents. These disjunctures demand a resolution, a solution practiced in a social situation and held to be acceptable (Jarvis, 2012).

Discussions about learning to lead from everyday incidental moments of disjuncture, which we call micro-disjunctures, are absent from the theories of leadership learning and leader becoming. This article addresses this omission by exploring the importance of disjuncture and micro-disjuncture for the process of becoming a leader (Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Edwards, Elliott, Iszatt-White and Schedlitzki, 2013). We define micro-disjunctures as everyday incidental situations that niggle at us, but which do not present a dilemma that needs resolution immediately. In the fragmented flux of leading, we swiftly move on, unaware of the micro-disjuncture, which is left unresolved until it occurs again.

Consequently, the focus of our article is the concept of micro-disjunctures which emerged from analysis of 27 reflexive MBA dissertations in which students were asked to reflexively explore critical incidents (disjunctures) from their experience in order to articulate guiding principles that could guide their future actions. The study revealed

that whilst moments of disjuncture were important, attending to unresolved micro-disjunctures is crucial to a leader's journey of becoming, as leaving the micro-disjunctures unresolved can increase the risk of becoming the leader you did not intend to be. Focusing reflexive dissertations on articulating guiding principles allowed micro-disjunctures to be surfaced as students made sense of a lifetime of social and relational moments. This enabled a critical appraisal of personally held assumptions and beliefs. The surfaced micro-disjunctures created dilemmas for the students and these were resolved by articulating guiding principles, thus allowing intentionality into the process of becoming a leader.

Our contribution is to introduce the concept of micro-disjuncture into theories of leadership learning as a process of 'becoming' (Kempster and Stewart, 2010). We argue that an awareness and resolution of micro-disjunctures can enable students to be more intentional about their process of 'becoming' a leader (Kempster and Stewart, 2010). Additionally, we add to literature on the intentional development of guiding principles, something that is under-researched in management literature (Oliver and Roos, 2005; Oliver and Jacobs, 2007). Our reflexive narrative approach (Ramsey, 2005) responds to calls for greater use of reflexivity in leadership development (Reynolds, 1998; Cunliffe, 2002; Schedlitzki, 2019). This gives rise to a secondary contribution, a reflexive MBA dissertation process which triggers the surfacing of unresolved micro-disjunctures and requires these dilemmas to be resolved by articulating principles that guide future acts of leading. In the process, we extend the knowledge of the value of learning gained from an MBA programme previously published in this journal (Hay and Hodgkinson, 2008) and challenge the dominance of the traditional MBA dissertation format.

The essay is structured in the following way. The next section reviews the literature on disjuncture, leadership learning and guiding principles. The reflexive dissertation process undertaken by MBA students is described, alongside the research and analysis methods used. The data emerging from the dissertations is analysed and presented, using extracts from the student's work to illustrate emerging themes. A theoretical discussion on micro-disjunctures and the surfacing and articulation of guiding principles follows leading to suggestions for further study, conclusions and limitations of the study.

4.3   Literature

4.3.1   Learning from experience

Management learning theory and associated empirical research has argued that managers and leaders learn from experience in informal and incidental ways (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983; Davies and Easterby-Smith, 1984; Stead and Elliott, 2012; Marsick and Watkins, 2014). Learning can be both intentional, being in some way planned and self-directed; and incidental, gained from experience and through relational interactions (Cunliffe, 2002; Marsick and Watkins, 2014). A key element is that incidental learning happens in an iterative manner (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983; Easterby-Smith and Davis, 1984) with new ways of being and acting being generated from the everyday lived experiences of learners (Cunliffe, 2002; Flynn, 2018). In this sense learning is both experiential and existential, gained from situations, relationships, actions and conversations which can existentially change the individual who engages proactively with the learning process (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004; Jarvis, 2009b; Illeris, 2009; Marsick and Watkins, 2014).

Learning through experience is generally understood as a socially constructed phenomenon in which knowledge is created by individuals to help them deal with the unknown (Janson, 2008; Jarvis, 2009b; Marsick and Watkins, 2014). Socially constructed meanings are created spontaneously during incidental learning through relational and dialogic activity (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003). Illeris (2009) argues that this process of social construction may occur through the development of mental schemas or patterns which are then drawn on later when the learner faces similar situations. Mental schemes originate in primary experiences or, as Janson (2008) calls them, leadership formative experiences (LFEs), defined as experiences that "make a high impact on leaders, resulting in learning relevant to their leadership" (Janson, 2008: 73). These experiences may be unconsciously known and can be brought into a conscious state through reflexive learning activities such as narrative writing (Ramsey, 2005), life stories (Shamir and Eilam, 2005) or reflexive dialogic practice (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003). As Janson points out, when exploring learning experiences what really matters "is the meaning leaders make of experiences rather than the experiences in and of themselves" (Janson, 2008: 73).

4.3.2   Disjuncture

This socially constructed learning from experience is a continuous and messy process, where incidents are experienced and reflected on. Jarvis would describe the incidents as moments of disjuncture creating dilemmas which require resolution for the person to learn and, thus, become more experienced (Jarvis, 2009a). Jarvis captures the complexity of this process in his definition of learning:

> "…the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experience social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person" (Jarvis, 2009b: 19).

Deriving its origins in theories of adult and life-long learning, the concept of disjuncture proposed by Jarvis (2009a) explains how learning occurs in everyday practice. A disjuncture can be a situation in which we "are not sure how to act" or that "stops us in our tracks….and gives rise to astonishment, wonder or some other emotion" (Jarvis, 2009a: 20). Disjuncture draws the individual into an awareness of the world, and learning comes from the individual resolving or making sense of this disjuncture (Jarvis, 2009a; 2009b). However, disjuncture is not necessarily a moment of experience as it is a complex phenomenon which can apply to a number of different aspects (e.g., knowledge, skills, sense, emotions, beliefs, etc). Jarvis explains that disjuncture exists on a continuum "from a short instant of disjuncture to a lifetime of recognising that there are some things in our lives that we can never take for granted" (Jarvis, 2012: 11).

Previously resolved situations of disjuncture create ways of practicing in the everyday that creates harmony with our context and situation (Dall'Alba, 2009; Jarvis, 2012). When we encounter the unexpected it acts as a trigger to highlight a gap between our expectations and a current reality, leading to the state of unease that is disjuncture (Bjursell, 2020). Jarvis contends that "this state of disequilibrium is a fundamental cause of learning that is inextricably intertwined with being-in-the-world" (Jarvis, 2016 [2001]: 30). The learning process of becoming (Jarvis 2009a; Kempster and Stewart,

2010) involves a lifetime of moments of disjuncture, giving the learner sensations of not-knowing which require resolution.

Resolving disjuncture requires a new search for meaning in which the learner confronts how their assumptions and beliefs have developed and realises that their biases can be questioned or changed. New meaning is constructed that satisfies the learner allowing for the disjuncture to be resolved, even if that new meaning is not objectively correct (Jarvis, 2009a). A resolution is an act that may need to be practiced several times before a sense of equilibrium is renewed (Jarvis, 2012).

4.3.3   Micro-disjunctures

The concept of disjuncture suggests that a disjuncture would be a memorable, emotionally laden event due to it making us stop and think. The disjuncture has interrupted our harmony, something we are keen to restore (Jarvis, 2009a). However, everyday learning contains moments of disjuncture which are hardly noticed (Jarvis, 2012). We call these moments micro-disjunctures. They are powerful enough to cause an irritation or a niggle, but not sufficiently disruptive to require a resolution. This could be due to the individual believing they already know what to do and, so, presume they do not need to change; or because the individual does not fully comprehend the situation and are not conscious of the micro-disjuncture; or because the individual simply rejects the possibility that learning is required and lives with the state of unease (Jarvis, 2016 [2001]). Consequently, micro-disjunctures are buried and left unresolved, lurking in the background and periodically niggling. These unresolved micro-disjunctures leave a person in a state of ignorance, unaware of the gap in their practice which has not been consciously acknowledged and so cannot be resolved. Only by resolving these ignored micro-disjunctures can a person transform to a more experienced person, thus advancing their process of becoming a leader (Jarvis, 2009a).

4.3.4   Becoming a leader

Drawing on theories of situated learning and process philosophy (Chia, 2017), the development of leaders has been conceptualised as a perpetual learning process that unfolds diachronically across time (Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019), in which the individual's practice of leading develops as a result of our participative engagement (Kempster and Stewart, 2010) in the leadership roles into which we have leapt or been thrown (Segal, 2017). Becoming can often only be understood when looking back over

life histories and important events (Turner and Mavin, 2008), exploring who we are as leaders in the uncertainty of our everyday lived experience (Cunliffe, 2009; Segal, 2017). In facing the anxiety associated with our lived experience we develop practices or predispositions which combine and allow us to become, if only on a temporary basis (Chia, 2017). These practices are a stable platform in the flux of becoming which inform our ways of being and acting as a leader (Segal, 2017). Our becoming is perpetually emergent, informed by the construction of narratives from the personal social landscape we experience in organisations which inform our concept of what it means to lead well (Rostron, 2022).

Dall'Alba (2009) argues that the process of becoming includes an exploration of our knowledge and experience of leading, where practical experience is most influential in knowing what to do, how to act and, indeed, what can be done in a given situation. There is intentionality in becoming so long as we know what we wish to become. Dall'Alba (2009) suggests that within our life experience there will be possibilities that we can choose to engage with, and opportunities that we may seek out, that will move us on our unfolding journey of becoming. Dall'Alba illustrates this by saying:

"For example, if we make a commitment to become a teacher, musician or economist, what we seek to know, how we act, and who we are is directed by and to this commitment, which organises and constitutes our becoming." (Dall'Alba, 2009: 36)

The act of becoming a leader means we are perpetually unfinished, in the process of becoming whilst, at the same time, leading now in the present moment (Cunliffe, 2009; Jarvis, 2009a; Segal, 2017). Exploring this messy paradox can highlight some moments which have an increased salience for learning over others (Kempster, 2009; Kempster and Stewart, 2010). Salient moments identified with the theory of leader becoming have been the influence of notable people, difficult work experiences, and personal hardships (McCall, 2004; Kempster and Stewart, 2010); a substantial change in the environment, starting a new job, moving to a different organisation or gaining increased responsibilities (Easterby-Smith and Davis, 1984); and non-routine conditions where formerly successful practices are no longer effective (Marsick and Watkins, 2014). It is possible that these moments have increased salience due to the intense nature of emotions attached to them, and the meanings we construct from them (Edwards et al, 2013; Rostron, 2022).

Salient moments described, here, would clearly fit within Jarvis's definition of disjuncture (Jarvis, 2012), being moments that present a clear gap in what is known and what needs to be learned to continue the process of becoming. Salient moments focus on emotionally laden, easily remembered events – new jobs, personal trauma, stressful work situations, inspirational or terrible role models, things that go wrong and no longer work. The micro-disjunctures introduced earlier, moments in the normal "average everydayness" (Dall'Alba, 2009: 35) that niggle us but pass by as hardly recognised, are absent from the leader becoming literature. Jarvis argues that "a great deal of our everyday learning is incident[al], pre-conscious and unplanned" (2012: 1) making it difficult for adults to recall. We contend that these everyday learning moments are an essential part of the journey of leader becoming and are worthy of exploration. Micro-disjunctures may stay unresolved for long periods until a trigger moment brings them suddenly to consciousness. We contend that both disjuncture and micro-disjuncture contribute to becoming, to how a leader leads, and to the everyday acts of leading they consciously and unconsciously do. We argue that this contribution comes from resolving micro-disjunctures by articulating a principle that will guide future action.

4.3.5   Guiding principles

Generally, in academic literature, and especially in management literature, there are very few definitions of what is meant by the term guiding principle. Guiding principles have been observed in the decision making of teams working in high-velocity environments (Oliver and Roos, 2005) and in the process of ethical decision making (Griseri 2008; van der Linden, 2013). They have been described as shared narratives (Ramsey, 2005) which can provide rich "guidance on effective courses of action" (Oliver and Roos, 2005: 908). Guiding principles are experiences articulated as stories, made memorable due to their emotional content, which provide justification for fast decision making. As such, they could be conceived of as a heuristic or norm (Harrison, 1999); a simple rule (Eisenhardt and Sull, 2001); as a purely cognitive process designed to facilitate decision making (Cavarretta, 2021); or as common leadership myths, passed down from generation to generation via a narrative storytelling process (Campbell, 2013).

Oliver and Roos (2005) argue that principles offer contextualised narrative logics that can be used to guide, rather than dictate, action, thus helping leaders determine what to do in volatile and potentially difficult situations (Eisenhardt and Sull, 2001; Oliver and

Jacobs, 2007; van der Linden, 2013). A guiding principle may be ethically based, prescribing, supporting or denying actions (van der Linden, 2013) or operate as a maxim or duty (Kant, 2004) which prompts moral or ethical action (Griseri, 2008). However, a guiding principle is merely one feature within a situation and how it interacts with the environment will determine its use; thus, depending on circumstance, a guiding principle could be used as a reason to potentially act, as a compulsion to definitely act or as a guide for when not to act (Dancy, 2004).

Following Oliver and Jacobs (2007), we accept the existence and use of guiding principles as part of the process of leading and managing and contend that they are useful to guide action in certain circumstances. Guiding principles have been shown to develop through the experience of leaders in situations of uncertainty (Oliver and Jacobs, 2007). This uncertainty can be characterised as moments of disjuncture, which appear to be resolved through the development of a guiding principle. However, imperceptible, cumulative incidents of micro-disjuncture appear to be left unresolved until a reflexive process enables the micro-disjuncture to be surfaced. Once surfaced, a micro-disjuncture can be resolved through the articulation of a guiding principle. As seen in the next section, we adopt the Oliver and Jacobs (2007) suggestion, that creating reflexive dialogical narratives brings guiding principles to life.

4.3.6   Reflexive practice

Reflexive dialogical practice is an on-going and continuous process which occurs as learners engage in the world (with their disjuncture) and with their learning from the world (Cunliffe, 2002). Cunliffe argues that this continuous process creates a need "to focus on singular events and conversations within which we construct practical accounts of our actions, identities and relationships with others, and which may guide our future action" (Cunliffe, 2002:37). Reflexivity is a way of "interrogating our taken-for-granted experience by questioning our relationship with our social world and the ways in which we account for our experience" (Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015:180). As such a process of relational and interactional reflexive dialogical practice would enable everyday micro-disjunctures occurring in the social world (everyday conversations, interactions and micro-experiences) to be explored (Cunliffe, 2002; Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015).

Cunliffe argues that learners make sense of the world they inhabit in three ways: as they dialogue in the act (reflex interaction); through reflective thinking (self-dialogue) after

the act; and through using reflexive dialogue with the self and others to ask questions of their ways of being and acting in the world. Internal and external dialogues based on and happening in social situations allows knowledge to be processed and integrated into the learner's very way of being and acting (Cunliffe, 2002; Jarvis, 2009b).

The development of reflexivity allows individuals to develop "practical understandings" which enable action to be taken (Maclean, Harvey and Chia, 2012: 388). Maclean et al suggest that reflexive practice on the consequences of these actions and on new events will allow for a refinement of understanding, or a resolution of disjuncture (Jarvis, 2012). They theorise that there are two modes of reflexivity. The first is an accumulative mode "concerned with amassing capital, positions, perspectives and opportunities"; and the second a re-constructive mode, "relating to the re-constitution of the self in response to insights gathered" (Maclean et al, 2012: 402). They suggest there may be a link between the development of reflexive practice and success in elite business careers.

Following Cunliffe (2002) we would contend that whilst leadership learning as a process of becoming can derive from salient moments of disjuncture, learners are also engaged permanently in micro-disjunctures occurring during their everyday lived experience. As such, leadership learning is a long-term, messy, incidental process of becoming through resolving disjunctures and micro-disjunctures (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003; Jarvis, 2012; Marsick and Watkins, 2014; Kempster and Stewart, 2010), something that can be understood on a personal level by using reflexive narrative practices. Our paper uses the idea of writing of reflexive narratives to trigger the examination of previously ignored micro-disjunctures which, in turn, are resolved by the articulation of guiding principles that will guide future acts of leading.

4.4   Method

The importance of micro-disjunctures to the process of becoming emerged from a study of reflexive MBA dissertations in which the students had been asked to combine their life-experiences with their new MBA knowledge to define a set of principles that would guide their future acts of leading. A reflexive narrative was written for each principle describing why the principle was important to the student and recalling situations where the they had experienced the principle in practice. The intention of the study was to explore these narratives to better understand the process of articulating guiding

principles and to examine how this might contribute to the students' processes of becoming.

4.4.1   Reflexive Narrative Writing

This study took heed of the calls for leadership research which was autoethnographic in nature (Boyle and Parry, 2007; Case and Śliwa, 2020), asking the participants to reflexively engage deeply with "multiple layers of consciousness, thoughts, feelings and beliefs" (Kempster, Parry and Jackson, 2016: 255). Following Cunliffe (2002) and Maclean et al (2012), participants were asked to engage in reflexive dialogical practice, reflecting on critical incidents (Cope, 2003), moments, interactions, relationships and conversations that have illustrated a guiding principle they see as important for their future practice of leading. These incidents were individually written up as autoethnographic narratives (Ramsey, 2005; Kempster, Parry and Jackson, 2016) in a reflexive dissertation, a method that has been shown to enable thoughtful reflection and reflexive practices amongst students and leaders (Carson and Fisher, 2006; Yarborough and Lowe, 2007). Cunliffe (2004) suggests that a process of narrative writing can be used to help develop students' reflexive skills, with writing focused on questioning one's personal learning being particularly effective for surfacing and articulating tacit knowing. Writing "requires us to be attentive to our assumptions, our ways of being and acting, and our ways of relating." (Cunliffe, 2004: 418). Whilst narratives may usually be conceived of as a discursive process, Ramsey (2005) argues that "even when ostensibly done on one's own, narrative reflection enables the reflector to attend to alternative perspectives, values and projects" (Ramsey, 2005: 233). Further, individual narrative writing engages the author with the communal, relational nature of learning and action and it allows for 'creative and performative' potential to be built into the reflective process (Ramsey, 2005).

The reflexive dissertation brief for the students asked them to reflect on their previous experience alongside the knowledge and experiences gained during their MBA year in order to define a set of principles that will guide how they manage and lead in the future. Students were asked to define their personal guiding principles for leading or managing, and to offer an articulation of each principle. They had to describe why the principle was authentic to them, writing reflexive narratives of the situation and experiences where they have seen, experienced or used a principle in practice. Alongside the reflexive narratives, academic theory related to the guiding principle

identified was used to deepen the retrospective reflection (Vickers, 2007) on experience. Finally, students were asked to consider how they would implement their principles in the future – how the new knowledge would become part of their future acts of leading.

Twenty-seven reflexive dissertations written by MBA students (20 male and seven female) who attended Lancaster University Management School between 2011-2015 were analysed. The age range of students was 25-38 years, and they were from 14 different nationalities. Participants had graduated from the University before they were asked if their work could be part of the study to avoid any possible conflicts of interest, especially as the lead author of the study was the MBA Programme Director for these students.

The essays were 7,500 words long. They contained reflexive narratives on a minimum of three guiding principles with participants describing the situations, people and experiences that led to their choice of principle. From these reflexive narratives the students were asked to thoughtfully reflect on their guiding principles for leading and managing people, teams and/or organisations.

4.4.2   Analysis

Following King (2004), template analysis was used to provide a thematic analysis of the essays. Using ATLAS.ti 22, a set of initial themes focused on elements which influence the choice of guiding principles were created by reading and re-reading a small sample of essays and making notes on the themes that were emerging. At the same time, the research aims were kept in mind to guide the thematic focus (King, 2004). This produced an initial set of themes that reflected key areas coming from the data, whilst ensuring these themes were not so detailed as to stop new themes being discovered during the analysis of further essays (King, 2004). Several iterations of analysis of the whole essay set developed the original themes into hierarchical coding, with a number of elements appearing to be subsets of a smaller number of larger themes (Friese, 2019). This allowed for data to be revisited as new themes emerged (Burton, Vu and Hawkins, 2022) and for original themes to be deleted if they did not have strong support across the full range of data. For example, an early theme under the category of 'Origin' was participants believing they were born with a guiding principle, or that it had originated in their DNA. This was later shown to have little support and was eliminated.

Table 4.1: Revised thematic template on the emergence of guiding principles

Category	Theme
Origin	through experience – everyday experiences of leading and being led, and achieving difficult tasks
	through notable people
Awareness	through deliberate reflection
	through an emotional prompt
	through moments of disjuncture
	through notable people
	through use of theory
Development	through use of theory
	through notable people
	through experience
	through deliberate reflection

Working from the evidence, the data extracts coded to each theme were explored to assess key elements in the process of articulating guiding principles, and how articulating guiding principles contributes to the process of becoming a leader. Undertaking a careful reading, re-reading and reflecting on the data (Rice and Ezzy, 1999) led to an emerging realisation that most elements identified in Table 1 were either moments of disjuncture or micro-disjuncture and, so, these became the key elements in the articulation of a principle.

4.5   Findings

Analysis of the dissertations revealed that the development of a guiding principle was a messy and unconscious process (Cunliffe, 2002), with guiding principles emerging over time due to multiple moments of disjuncture in different situations. Students frequently linked engaging in deliberate reflexive practices with a deeper sense of knowing themselves, informing their process of becoming a leader. For example, narrative writing helped one student "to gain a deeper understanding of myself, my values, my beliefs and my purpose" leading to a deeper understanding of their "leadership style". The new level of self-awareness was demonstrated by students describing moments of

disjuncture and micro-disjuncture which aided the articulation of guiding principles. As one student commented, resolving the disjunctures and micro-disjunctures by articulating a set of guiding principles:

"…will be helpful to me in living by principles I have defined here" (Participant 26).

This initial section uses data extracts to illustrate how salient moments of disjuncture differ from micro-disjunctures. Further illustrations of disjuncture and micro-disjuncture will then be presented and discussed.

In this example, a student is discussing a guiding principle of motivating and inspiring others by describing two very different managers. The first manager is described using salient moments of disjuncture. This manager "did not engage very well", "lacked patience", "yelled" at the student and colleagues, and had a negative impact on the "liveliness" of the department. The individual incidents of disjuncture described are emotionally laden and clearly memorable to the student, who:

"…started feeling less motivated as well and quite unhappy... I would just feel stressed and depressed with the environment" (Participant 6).

They are clearly experiencing unease, and so we label this an emotionally laden salient moment of disjuncture which needed an immediate resolution. Indeed, some colleagues attempted to resolve this disjuncture by leaving the organisation, others by copying the style of their manager.

The other manager is described using multiple, cumulative moments of micro-disjuncture. This manager motivated and inspired the team by being "helpful", showing "good courage", training staff rather than getting angry with them, and generating a "culture of cooperation and teamwork". The student describes being:

"…truly inspired by his conduct and the way that he leads his staff" (Participant 6).

These incidents happened over a long period of time with none of them being so emotionally laden that they required detailed description in their own right. They were only triggered as important to the student and the leader they wanted to become through the process of reflexive writing, hence this being an example of micro-disjuncture.

4.5.1   Salient moments of disjuncture

This example of salient moments of disjuncture leading to guiding principles comes from a student who worked as a health volunteer in West Africa. She describes several emotionally laden situations which informed her principle of courage, including negotiating her way out of an interrogation at a checkpoint during the Malian coup d'état of 2012, and driving through changes in an organisation in the face of "heavy-handed criticism" and "shark bites" from colleagues. As she explains:

"…courage-by-default has defined the most critical moments of my life" (Participant 2).

From their description, this student has clearly experienced memorable moments of disjuncture and has resolved these by drawing on a deeply held, previously internalised guiding principle that she says was instilled in her by her parents:

"My parents have a simple and traditional set of values that they instilled upon me: make an honest living, do the best you can do, never give up, and if faced between two paths: always pick the more difficult one" (Participant 2).

Thus, the moments of disjuncture are seemingly resolved by an already internalised guiding principle which the student has some awareness of.

This second example of a salient moment of disjuncture captures Jarvis's (2009a) description of the unease caused by a disjuncture:

"I always thought my team-focused approach would get me through adversity. When this seemed not [to] work I was stuck" (Participant 3).

The emotion attached with being stuck led to a search for a new practice of leading, in other words the resolution of the disjuncture, with the student describing the intentionally mindful approach to leading they had adopted.

Specific incidents with role models were a common salient moment of disjuncture. One example comes from a student describing a conversation with his scout group leader. The leader had noticed something in the behaviour of the student and intervened with a difficult conversation. What comes across, here, is the emotion of the difficult discussion, and the positive impact that a leader willingly initiating a difficult

conversation can have. Note the brief description of a disjuncture resolved at the end of this quote:

> "My leader took me to one side and point-blank told me I was becoming a bully. He said I would never fully appreciate winning if I could not be part of something more than me. He said there was a joy in being able to make others look and feel good, and above all was so much easier not to put it all on yourself. So I tried it, and he was right" (Participant 3).

The student describes resolving this disjuncture by putting others first and adopting the principles of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), which brought an immediate and memorable moment:

> "We ended up being given a special prize for having scored so highly…Seeing the delight on the boys faces…has stuck with me for nearly 30 years" (Participant 3).

Occasionally, there was evidence that some disjunctures had been unconsciously resolved into a guiding principle, with one student commenting that they had:

> "…been making use of them, but it never occurred to me as they were my principles" (Participant 7);

and another student suggesting that the use of an unconscious principle enabled them to achieve "one of the biggest successes in my career" (Participant 21).

This presents one key difference between disjunctures and micro-disjunctures. The micro-disjunctures appeared to be left unresolved, as we shall explore in the next section.

4.5.2 Micro-disjunctures

> "I used to wonder – why should I start something almost always? Dinner plans, business meeting proposals, meeting agendas in the MBA. I later realised my efforts started a movement and people simply joined. I realised people are generally willing to help, but sometimes they just need a push, signal or perhaps some support" (Participant 12).

Micro-disjunctures such as this are diachronic, cumulative, messy moments which appeared to be inaccessible prior to writing the reflexive narrative. They are moments of action which, when stitched together by the student, reveal an important practice they have developed.

The cumulative nature of a micro-disjuncture is described by the following student who is heavily influenced by their formative experiences "my upbringing, family life, leadership positions at school or work"; by relationships and "interactions with colleagues and friends"; and, by "formal and informal learning" experiences at work (Participant 4). The majority of reflexive dissertations saw students summarising cumulative moments of micro-disjunctures in this way, commenting on observation of role modelling and behaviour, memory of conversations and reactions to their own behaviour.

For example, this student illustrates the cumulative nature of a micro-disjuncture by combining two everyday conversations from different times in their life which pointed to a principle of ethical leadership. This first was a conversation with a senior manager:

> "His frustrated retort of 'wait till you face a situation where it's your conscience what makes clear business sense', really got me thinking" (Participant 4);

and the second with a fellow MBA student:

> "What do ethics mean to me? I was confronted with this question early on in the year after a heated argument with a fellow student" (Participant 4).

Whilst there is some emotion conveyed in these examples, it was not sufficiently strong to require a resolution until the multiple moments of micro-disjuncture were combined. It is, perhaps, this insufficiently strong emotion that led to micro-disjunctures being described as akin to an uneasy feeling, where a principle was:

> "…developing within me for years. I just didn't know it then" (Participant 2).

This uneasiness often indicated a series of cumulative unresolved micro-disjunctures. One student describes how the unresolved micro-disjuncture meant there was an unarticulated, intangible principle just out of reach which, unlike the resolved disjunctures, could not be used to guide action:

"I could feel its importance but couldn't implement it properly" (Participant 12).

As an example, this student appears to describe an unresolved micro-disjuncture when writing about their principle of integrity. They describe a vague feeling that acting with integrity was something of importance to them, reinforced by moments when colleagues had commented on their behaviour demonstrating integrity at work. However, the reflexive writing highlighted moments where they acted against the importance they placed on integrity:

> "Reflecting upon this experience has allowed me to understand how I was able to stray so far from this definition in a weak moment of bad decision-making" (Participant 21).

It would appear that integrity had emerged from moments of micro-disjuncture which this student had been unaware of and had, thus, remained unresolved with a principle unarticulated. Consequently, their behaviour as a leader could be more easily swayed by other influences.

This highlights an important aspect of leaving micro-disjunctures unexplored and unresolved. Students reported behaving in ways that were contrary to their principles. When discussing the importance of emotional intelligence, one student described how her manager's "mood…would influence the air in the office of that day". This impacted the student's mood, and led to them unconsciously copying the manager's behaviour:

> "I found [it easy]to lose my control and would regret for how I behaved afterwards... I have become a supervisor who is not the one I thought I should be" (Participant 17).

This suggests that unresolved micro-disjunctures may impact on the process of becoming, allowing a person to adopt behaviour in an unreflective manner and, so, become something they did not intend.

4.5.3   Resolving and becoming

The reflexive writing process surfaced and consolidated these cumulative moments of micro-disjuncture during the articulation of guiding principles. Thus, the combination of numerous unresolved micro-disjunctures appear to be accessible via the process of reflexive writing, allowing the possibility of resolution to occur.

The theory of becoming suggests that disjunctures are resolved through the development of new ways of acting that restore harmony to our everyday world (Jarvis, 2012). As we have seen, the reflexive dissertation writing enabled students to explore their resolved disjunctures, some of which, like Participant 2's principle of courage, were already consciously known and practiced, and others were guiding action and yet had remained unarticulated, as illustrated by this quotation:

> "I realised that I had been following a set of principles without acknowledging their presence" (Participant 1).

The cumulative micro-disjunctures, however, were unresolved, unarticulated and students suggested they were not guiding action. The process of reflexive narrative writing enabled these micro-disjunctures to be surfaced which they then articulated as a guiding principle. Once articulated, students planned to implement their principles and, in doing so, discovered acts and behaviours which would allow a resolution to occur. The following quotations from Participant 11 demonstrates how a series of micro-disjunctures emerged around the articulation of a guiding principle of 'planning for success'. The implementation of this principle resolves the micro-disjunctures. The first micro-disjuncture is a failed project at the start of the MBA programme:

> "My team was the poorest in the first activity…and our team review showed our lack of planning as the basis of our failure."

Followed by a successful project at the end of the programme:

> "My consultancy challenge team, on the other hand, scored a distinction due to good planning."

These micro-disjunctures start the process of reflection into planning, which led to the student describing two notable people who advocated good planning as a route to business success, before recalling in some detail two micro-disjuncture moments from their career. The first person was from a bank where strategic planning worked "because it was a clear approach to thinking about where we want to be, why, and how"; and the second was from a local authority where the student had to recover a poor project using good planning. The recollection of these cumulative micro-disjunctures were triggered by the focus on articulating a guiding principle, in this case

'planning'. Finally, the student describes the resolution of this micro-disjuncture - a method they will use in their future project management role:

> "I intend to be different from many other PMs who will just get on with implementation. Instead, I will position myself to ask questions – what, why and how – to ensure we have at least thought through decisions and considered available alternatives.

Micro-disjunctures could also occur over a shorter duration. This student depicts a series of micro-disjunctures during project work on the MBA programme which led to a principle of cultural intelligence (CQ):

> "CQ…originates from my reflection on the cumulative team experiences I had during the MBA. It relates to my initial feelings of stress, anger, not being understood and listened to, which then eased out over time into more pleasant and fun feelings" (Participant 25).

To resolve the micro-disjunctures that were surfaced through the articulation of cultural intelligence as a principle this student also presents a set of actions, including:

> "Discuss culturally relevant topics with friends from different countries"; "Suspend judgement and be mindful that differences are normal"; and "Seek and give feedback".

These resolutions of micro-disjunctures often came from academic theory associated with the guiding principle. One student, exploring a personal need to develop resilience that would have allowed them to offer leadership to their team, drew their resolution from resilience theory:

> "I encountered a four-step model…that I could use to develop resilience personally and in a team: (i) Assessment; (ii) Acceptance; (iii) Adaptation; and, (iv) Advancement" (Participant 10).

Another example comes from a student reflecting on moments of micro-disjuncture linked to feeling very engaged at three different workplaces. This student reported having:

> "…an AHA moment, when [the Professor] first introduced us to the concept of employee engagement, "Aha! That is why I was so engaged at my previous workplace" (Participant 4).

Theories of employee engagement were then used to plan acts that could ensure engagement at work, including clear expectations and generous praise and recognition.

For other students it was advice from a notable person that indicated how a micro-disjuncture could be resolved. Discussing a principle of being emotionally controlled, this student described being advised to adopt 'the 24-hour rule':

> "If you are emotionally enraged about something, you should leave it for 24 hours before making a decision. When I have practiced this rule in the past, I have often found a better way of resolving the issue than I had initially planned" (Participant 9).

A final extract emphasises Jarvis's (2012) contention that resolutions need to be tried out in practice to assess their efficacy:

> "As I begin my new role as a management consultant… I am already applying many of the skills and knowledge I've recently learned. I am also actively exploring the application of courage, effective listening, and passion in practice, principles that will act as guiding stars when navigating down this new path towards being an effective leader" (Participant 2).

4.6   Discussion

The leadership literature on the process of becoming has focused on the situated, relational aspects (Kempster and Stewart, 2010) and the philosophical, processual understandings of being and becoming (Parker, 2004; Cunliffe, 2009). We suggest that theory from adult and life-long learning literature can add another dimension to our understanding of the process of becoming centred around the concepts of disjuncture and micro-disjuncture and the importance of reflexive resolution for individuals' understanding of their practice of leading.

The idea of disjuncture, whilst not being specifically named, has been alluded to in the leadership learning literature. Previous articles associated with becoming in this journal have presented quotational illustrations (Cunliffe, 2009, Kempster and Stewart, 2010) or

reflexive dialogues (Parker, 2004) that could be examples of disjuncture. Disjuncture in the leadership learning literature tends to be memorable salient moments, formative incidents (Kempster, 2009) or "moments that matter" that trigger change (Avolio and Luthens, 2006). Disjuncture examples include significant job assignments, the influence of notable people, crucibles or hardships (McCall et al, 1988; Bennis and Thomas, 2002). These incidents are often emotional in nature, making them memorable, and are argued to have an impact on the identity of the individual, but very little is said concerning how they influence the practices of leading adopted by individuals. In other words, how these disjunctures are resolved, and the consequence of that resolution for the practice of leading is underexplored.

Jarvis's (2009a) concept of disjuncture is a cover-all term, describing both the memorable salient moments and the average, every day, mundane, forgettable moments. These everyday moments are acknowledged in leadership learning theory (see Kempster, 2009) but the difficulty in surfacing and resolving these moments leaves them under-addressed, under-theorised and under-researched. We propose that containing all moments of disjuncture under one title and description encourages the focus on those more easily accessible, and that the everyday moments deserve more attention. To recognise this importance, we propose the concept of micro-disjunctures to capture those every day, mundane moments that niggle at people who are attempting to lead in organisations. Micro-disjunctures are often imperceptible in that they do not register as moments in themselves, but gain significance when observed longitudinally over time, when pieced together through the process of reflexive practice. Micro-disjunctures exist in our dynamic, background consciousness (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983), imperceptibly influencing how an individual decides to act as a leader in a given circumstance.

Scholars would argue the use of reflexive processes in the development of leaders is something that is already established (Maclean et al, 2012; Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015); for example, providing philosophical frameworks to enable the critical reflexive practice of students (Cunliffe, 2009). Most of these focus on memorable, salient moments of disjuncture rather than every day, imperceptible moments of micro-disjuncture that need combining and piecing together. In keeping with previous studies, the use of reflexive narrative writing was revealed as important in the process of surfacing micro-disjunctures. However, asking students to focus reflexive writing on

articulating a guiding principle appeared to be the critical trigger which provided a thread through multiple, imperceptible micro-disjunctures.

We contend that providing a focus for thinking, in this case the articulation of a guiding principle, allows a thread of micro-disjunctures to emerge from the messy experience of everyday life. Guiding principles are a tangible concept that is familiar to post-experience students due to their engagement with popular leadership books and TED talks (Newstead, 2022). Providing a clear and recognisable process and outcome to students with limited previous reflexive experience enables them to surface their moments of micro-disjuncture, allowing a process of resolution to become possible (Jarvis, 2012).

Our illustrations reveal that exploring imperceptible micro-disjunctures generates new understanding about one's actions as a leader. A conscious knowledge of micro-disjunctures, revealed through a focus on the articulation of a guiding principle, enables critical comparison of one's influences and subsequent actions. From the perspective of becoming, this longitudinal view, offered through exploration of micro-disjuncture, brings to consciousness the opportunities available and the choices made that contribute to the process of becoming (Dall'Alba, 2009). The focus on what is deemed to be important (one's guiding principles) surfaces the micro-disjuncture and enables a critical appraisal of behaviour, observing whether it has aligned with or diverted from the principle.

Jarvis's (2009a) learning theory argues that disjuncture is the gap that one needs to contend with and that resolving that gap is the process of learning. The focus on articulating a guiding principle reveals two elements: (i) resolutions of previous disjunctures - these are the salient, emotionally laden moments of disjuncture that have been resolved via the unconscious creation of a guiding principle, and (ii) the threads of a micro-disjuncture which can be resolved through the intentional articulation of a guiding principle. Our data reveal that resolved disjunctures and unresolved micro-disjunctures both contribute to becoming and, furthermore, that without conscious critical exploration we risk becoming the leader we did not intend. As McCall (2010: 65) points out, "Learning the right things from challenging experiences is anything but automatic". An articulation of guiding principles allows for previous resolutions to be consciously re-assessed, and new resolutions for micro-disjunctures to be developed,

increasing awareness of one's conceptions of the world and how these were formed (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983) and, thus, introducing conscious intentionality into the process of becoming. Those intent on becoming a leader gain conscious knowledge of the link between micro-disjunctures and how these can impact their everyday acts of leading. By articulating guiding principles from micro-disjunctures they give themselves the ability to consciously chose a path of becoming the type of leader they recognise and of not becoming the leader they detest (Dall'Alba, 2009).

The reflexive process of articulating a guiding principle allows micro-disjunctures to be explicitly understood and resolved, giving rise for the principle to be consciously practiced (Newstead, 2022: 335). However, this is only part of the story. As Jarvis (2012) points out, a resolution needs to be tried out in everyday life multiple times and potentially adapted before its efficacy is proved. As becoming means we have to lead now whilst continuously in the process of becoming it is likely that resolved disjunctures will be revisited over time, with the articulation of principles being adapted; but this is, perhaps, something for future research to explore.

A reflexive narrative process which allows threads of micro-disjunctures to be surfaced, explored and resolved through the articulation of guiding principles which inform action creates a compelling argument for rethinking the final dissertation element of an MBA programme. Traditionally, UK MBA programmes have finished with an academic dissertation focused in on a single subject, where the student can practice and demonstrate their skills of research. The dissertation topic may be purely of academic interest or may have been derived from a company-based project, thus giving the student deeper academic knowledge of a specific subject area. It is questionable whether this form of dissertation can truly be said to be an integrating module that provides assurance of a student's learning from across the programme (AACSB, 2023).

As a general management degree for aspiring leaders, the MBA programme would ideally end with an activity focused on bringing intentionality to their process of becoming a leader. The reflexive dissertation allows for a surfacing of imperceptible knowledge and an assessment of learning from experience. The articulation of principles aids graduating students to navigate the difficulties of their future leadership positions. The ability to be reflexive and the development of principles that guide action, as revealed in our study, lend qualitative evidence to arguments previously made

in this journal about the practical value of learning gained on an MBA programme (Hay and Hodgkinson, 2008), and developing a reflexive skill set potentially enables them to be successful in their future careers (Maclean et al 2012).

4.7   Concluding Comments

This article has contributed to leader-becoming theories of leadership learning (Kempster and Stewart, 2010). We have introduced the concept of micro-disjuncture, multiple small moments across a lifetime of learning to lead that are imperceptible, left unrecognised and unresolved. Using evidence from a qualitative study of reflexive MBA dissertations we have illustrated that micro-disjunctures can be surfaced via a trigger, in this case a process of reflexive narrative writing focused on articulating guiding principles. The process reveals longitudinal threads of micro-disjunctures which can begin to be resolved through the articulation of a principle that will guide future acts of leading. In doing so, individuals can gain intentionality over their process of becoming a leader.

We have responded to calls for greater use of reflexive practices in the development of leaders (Schedlitski, 2019), particularly with MBA students (Cunliffe, 2004), using reflexive narrative writing in MBA dissertations. Additionally, we have contributed to the literature that demonstrates the practical value of learning derived from an MBA programme (Hay and Hodgkinson, 2008). The process of writing a reflexive dissertation develops the MBA students' skills of reflexive practice that will be useful for their future careers (Maclean et al, 2012). Finally, we have challenged the traditional MBA dissertation as the final learning activity for an MBA programme, suggesting that a reflexive dissertation would better serve the students in the transition into successful careers as leaders.

4.7.1   Limitations of the study

Asking MBA students to write autoethnographic narratives could, in itself, be problematic. Autoethnographers tend to focus on 'epiphanies', where some form of noticeably different critical moment of salient disjuncture acts to shock the participant into a deeper reflexive state (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). The danger, here, is the written narrative may be influenced by the enhanced emotional state attached to the moment being described. Awareness was, therefore, needed to ensure the emotional attachment of participants did not over- or under-emphasise the disjuncture being

described and the guiding principle that emerged. We tried to mitigate for this through the deliberate reflexive practices used in the MBA programme, designed to develop reflexive practitioners (Cunliffe, 2004) who are cognisant of the need to retain criticality when reflecting on experience (Vince and Reynolds, 2009).

The authors acknowledge that the reflexive dissertations were a deliberate learning activity resulting in participants receiving a grade that contributed to their final MBA mark. This raises the possibility of the content of the essays being unduly influenced by the students' perception of what was required for them to gain a good mark. The design of the reflexive dissertation brief attempted to ensure the reflexive narratives were deeply authentic to the individual by requiring students to write the narratives that described experiences directly experienced by them, and relevant to the guiding principle. Whilst not being a perfect solution to the issue, we believe this has ensured a high level of authenticity in the dissertations that were analysed.

5: Empirical article II: Intentionality in becoming a leader: from non-deliberative practical coping to informed, responsive coping

Saunders, C.J., Iszatt-White, M., and Reynolds, M. *Intentionality in leading: from non-deliberative practical coping to informed responsive coping* (to be submitted to Leadership)

5.1   Abstract

"Leadership is hard. No one talks you through items like this, you'll never learn this stuff on a leadership course, leadership is so in the grey zone! Just got to do what you think is right in that moment" (Participant 7).

"The most common management practice, sink or swim, ends up with much sinking and not much swimming – and more splashing frantically" (Mintzberg, 2004: 200).

This article challenges strong process philosophy perspectives which argue that practices associated with leading have been absorbed through social learning and emerge as unconscious, non-deliberative practical coping. This theory would suggest that leaders act in a non-cognitive, non-rational way, utilising unconscious practices that have developed over a lifetime of becoming a leader. Data from qualitative diaries and interviews of people in senior hierarchical leadership positions suggest that leaders believe they act in non-deliberative practical coping ways when they first take a senior role. However, intensive experience within the turbulent, fragmented reality of leading, punctuated by moments of reflection for which we have adopted the term 'woodshedding', generates processes, practices and principles that are intentionally used by leaders in everyday acts of leading. Woodshedding is a musical concept of withdrawal and intensive practice which enables players to perform music of increasing difficulty and complexity such as jazz, where woodshedding creates the solid foundations, or conscious practices, from which improvisation occurs. For experienced leaders woodshedding helps distil processes, practices and principles enabling non-deliberative practical coping to become informed responsive coping. Informed responsive coping involves an intentional act involving processes and practices guided by personal principles and valued ends.

5.2   Introduction

> "I think certainly becoming chief exec, it was a big shock, because it was the
> first time I've walked into a job and the desk has had nothing on it" (Interview
> Participant 5).

When you make it to a hierarchical position of leadership how do you know what to do? Studies on the activities of managers, including the relatively few studies on the everyday acts of leaders (see Turner and Mavin, 2008; Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010; Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011) suggest that the experience of leading in organisations is best described as fragmented, where leaders are called upon to quickly decide how to respond to the new and the unexpected. It has been argued that a leader's response to uncertain situations is automatic (Hirsch, von Bülow and Simpson, 2023); unreflective and un-rational (Dreyfus, 2007); improvised (Harrison, 2017); and, could be characterised as non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006). When deciding how to act, leaders draw on a set of unconscious deliberations and practices developed over a lifetime (Chia, 2017; Vendette, Helmuth, Intindola and Spiller, 2022) for, if they were to stop and think, this would distract them and make them less effective (Polanyi, 1962; Dreyfus, 2007). From this perspective, decisions and actions in this mode of practical coping are taken unconsciously, responding to the moment without intentionality (Chia and Holt, 2006).

The argument that leaders do not consciously think about their everyday actions and are unintentional in practice has limited empirical support, perhaps due to the lack of studies of leadership practice (Alvesson and Jonsson, 2018). This article seeks to address this by exploring the everyday acts of experienced organisational leaders to understand whether the actions of people in hierarchical positions of leadership in organisations are examples of unconscious practical coping, or whether their action could be described as conscious and intentional (Alvesson and Jonsson, 2018). The focus, here, is on what individuals in positions of organisational leadership report that they actually do in their everyday acts of leading, and whether there is intentionality in these acts. In exploring this we provide empirical data on leaders and practical coping,

which challenges the concept of non-deliberative (Chia and Holt, 2006) or skilful (Dreyfus, 2007) practical coping.

Studies on the everyday work of leaders often focus on new leaders (see Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011). However, our research focused on qualitative diaries and interviews (Radcliffe, 2018) of experienced leaders occupying senior hierarchical positions, answering the call of Kempster and Guthey (2022) for research that seeks to ask those in organisational leadership positions what they believe their responsibilities as leaders are (see Allen, Rosch, Ciulla et al, 2022). The themes emerging from this data illustrate that organisational leaders recall how they practically coped in a non-deliberative way when first appointed to a senior position. Over time, their practical coping develops intentionality in processes and practices, through a process of woodshedding characterised by reflection and withdrawal. We have theorised this developmental process as generating informed responsive coping, where practical coping and intentionality co-exist in the practice of leading.

Our article proceeds in the following way: we first explore the theoretical work on the fragmented nature of a leader's day which leads to conceptualising leadership acts as un-rational or non-deliberative practical coping. Drawing on Chia and Holt (2006) and Dreyfus (2007) we discuss practical and skilful coping, linking this to process-philosophy theories of becoming and ideas of intentionality. We summarise our method and the illuminating findings from the diaries and interviews of our nine senior leaders. Finally in the discussion we clarify the theory of informed responsive coping, elaborating on our contribution.

5.3   Theoretical perspective

The practice of everyday leadership is an under-examined area in the leadership research literature (Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010). For example, academic studies on leader identity development have focused on leader scripts, seeking to connect what leaders think they are with what they believe this means they do, rather than studying what leaders actually do on an everyday basis (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2020; Lanka, Topakas and Patterson, 2020). What has been written draws on empirical and theoretical work examining the everyday work of managers (e.g. Carlson, 1951; Mintzberg, 1973; Hales, 1986; Hill, 2003; Styhre, 2012). The common observation arising from this work is that whilst everyday leadership activities undoubtedly contain

some intentional actions akin to Adair's skills of leadership (planning, briefing, controlling, motivating, etc.; see Adair, 2019), the majority of a leader's everyday activity appears to be reactive or event driven (Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010). In this environment Chia (2017) contends that conscious cognition of abstract mental images, such as the articulated rules stemming from popular leadership theories, do not enable the adaptation and improvisation needed by leaders faced with a fragmentation of their time and space (Tengblad, 2002; Chia, 2017). Rather, a set of socially learned practices or dispositions can better inform intelligent action (Vendette et al, 2022), which can "happen without prior need for cognition and mental representation" (Chia, 2017: 108).

The origin of this practice perspective is often attributed by organisational scholars to Heraclitus (Chia, 2017; Shaw, 2019) who is claimed as an ancient authority for modern ideas of process philosophy, including theories which conceptualise becoming as a continuously emergent process (Chia, 2017; Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019; Vendette et al, 2022). However, as Shaw (2019) argues, the belief that everything is in process and constantly changing may be a misinterpretation of the following fragment of Heraclitus work: "Upon those that step into the same rivers different and different waters flow" (Shaw, 2019: 159) perhaps more clearly translated as "You could not step twice into the same rivers; for other waters are ever flowing on to you" Jones (1931: 483). This quote if often taken as meaning that whilst the river appears to be a stable entity it is, in fact, continuously in a process of change as new water flows in. In the same way, the person stepping into the river is also on a constant process of change, hence the same person can never step into the same river twice as both person and river will have changed. Shaw (2019) contends that Heraclitus was not arguing that everything was constantly in process, but that some entities were stable and consistent, while others were in a process of change. This opens the possibility that some practices may indeed be in a constant process of becoming and therefore subject to intuitive, non-rational responses, whilst other practices appear stable and enduring, reminiscent of the concept of being (Vendette et al, 2022). Indeed, Vendette et al (2022) argue for researchers to view the processes of being and becoming as mutually co-existing (being-in-becoming) which allows theories of leadership and leading to be studied as developmental processes.

This developmental process view argues that the leader is in a constant state of flux, generating "socially constructed meanings that unfold through experiences, events and

interactions over time" (Vendette et al, 2022: 782). Interestingly, whilst the leader's developmental process is in flux, their environment has also been described as fragmented, characterised by numerous disruptive events, brief meetings and frequent change of workplace (Tengblad, 2002). This understanding of the continuously changing development of the leader and the environment of leadership has led researchers to contend that the acts of leaders are creative improvisation (Harrison, 2017); akin to "muddling through" (Lindblom, 1959; Styhre, 2012); tinkering (Clarke and Fujimura, 1992); wayfinding (Chia, 2017); and, non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006).

5.3.1   Practical coping in non-deliberative and unconscious ways

Theories of practical coping in the management literature have come largely from articles which explore ideas surrounding practice within organisations. For example, in the strategy-as-practice field, Chia and Holt (2006) contend that an understanding of the practice of strategic development as a purposeful and intentional activity, involving the use of decision models and goal-orientated plans, is "fundamentally flawed" (Harrison, 2017). Rather, strategy develops from social practices in an emergent manner, and "our agency and identity arise through the actions we (mostly unconsciously) deploy, and our strategies, in turn, emanate from an internalized modus operandi that reflects our culturally mediated disposition" (Chia and Holt, 2006: 637). This disposition allows for strategic development to be non-deliberate, unconscious and non-rational, emerging through multiple actions of non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006), suggesting that everyday practical coping actions emerge from the fragmented flux of everyday activity, influenced by the situation itself, the culture and history of the organisation, but with minimal intentionality emanating from the individuals involved (Chia, 2017).

Coping as a non-deliberate and unconscious practice was proposed by social theorists such as Dreyfus (2007), who argued that everyday acts are unconscious and un-rational. Dreyfus (2014) describes these acts as skilful coping, suggesting that stopping and thinking in an attempt to rationalise or direct skilful coping would only serve to distract the leader. Even though skilful coping would continue in the background, acts are disrupted and thus become less effective, if still competent (Dreyfus, 2014). Dreyfus contends that when someone operates unconsciously they can exercise their skill better than when they have time to think. Further, Dreyfus argues that the ability to articulate

rational reasons for action is more likely to come from a novice than a master (Hasselberger, 2017). As a consequence, "the enemy of expertise is thought" (Dreyfus, 2007: 354).

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Dreyfus argues that when a person is in the process of skilful coping they are in a moment of flow, where there is limited awareness of actions being taken; "…in the experience itself no "I" was present nor was there an experience of my body as separate from the network of solicitations drawing actions out of it" (2007: 356). The act of skilful coping is one that is not perceived by the mind, but rather by the body itself, which is acting on "indeterminate solicitations" (2007: 359). Skilful coping, therefore, is akin to non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006) where action is immanent, emerging through the everyday interactions, relationships and dialogues that occur within organisations (Willocks, 2022). From this perspective leadership is also immanent, emerging from processes of non-deliberative practical coping, conceptualising the intentionality of the leader to be somewhat uninfluential as they are just one of many bodies acting on a flux of multiple indeterminate solicitations (e.g., history, culture, relationships, activity) (Kempster and Gregory, 2017).

Critics of Dreyfus have suggested this view is too extreme, that skilful coping can be both unreflective, unrationalised and instinctive, but also conscious, mindful, logical and rational. Hasselberger (2017) argues that non-deliberate action can be an exemplar of practical skill and virtue and yet, at the same time, this skill and virtue can be intentionally learned, driven by reason and practical intelligence. Whilst some elements of practical coping remain at an inarticulate level, the unthinking practice of coping embodies elements of reason and understanding derived from experience. In other words, there may be some intentionality within skilful coping, something that allows for the possibility that within the flow of unfolding practice (Willocks, 2022) there may exist some individual intentionality that provides direction. However, these critiques focus on the possibility of deliberate learning forming part of skilful coping (White, 2020), without investigating whether deliberate or intentional action can also be within the theory of skilful coping.

5.3.2   Practical coping and the process of becoming

The Chia and Holt (2006) and Dreyfus (2014) conceptualisations of practical and skilful coping are similar to the more recent arguments of how leadership is learned through a

process of becoming (Jarvis, 2009a; Dall'Alba, 2009; Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Eustice-Corwin, 2020; Vendette et al, 2022). It has been argued that individuals become leaders over time, through the transitions that occur when learning to cope in a new role (Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011); or through transitions that occur through construction, interpretation and internalisation of a lifetime of histories, origin and enactment stories and trigger events (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021). Becoming happens unconsciously through engagement in the flux of one's lived experience; by embracing being thrown, thrust or leaping into uncertainty; by taking risks and facing challenges; and by making choices or acting in the unfamiliar (Young, Pearsall, Stiles et al, 2011; Segal, 2017).

More recently, academics have argued that, whilst the process philosophy of becoming is a continual process of transformation in the flux of the average day (Dall'Alba, 2009; Vendette et al, 2022), leaders also have stable elements to their character which enables them to lead. Vendette et al (2022) contend that a substance philosophy exists alongside the process philosophy, with substance being the essence of a person, which can be developed (process happens to substance) but remains largely stable or unchanged over time. They suggest a being-in-becoming philosophical approach to studying leadership, which is open to both the process and substance philosophical perspectives. In a similar way, Eustice-Corwin (2020), drawing on the existential philosophy of Nietzsche, proposes a metaphor of a book of becoming in which there are pages already written, representing the minimal self (the essence), and blank pages yet to be written. Becoming happens diachronically (across time) and is a development process of editing and (re)interpreting the minimal self, and of writing the new self, although new pages will be limited by the opportunities presented in one's lived experience, and, importantly, the choices made about those opportunities (Eustice-Corwin, 2020). It is this choice from opportunities that, perhaps, lends intentionality to a processes of becoming and coping.

5.3.3   Intention within becoming and practical coping

Academics writing theories of practical coping and becoming have often been influenced by the philosophy of Heidegger (Chia and Holt, 2006; Dall'Alba, 2009; Segal, 2017; Chia, 2017). Heidegger argues for a concept of 'being-in-the-world' where we are inextricably part of our everyday world, and cannot stand apart from this in an objective, rational manner. We are absorbed in and shaped by this world and, because of

this, we generally carry out our activities in the world in a state of "average everydayness" where we operate in a routine, instinctive and perhaps unintentional way (Dall'Alba, 2009). We are at harmony with our situation and, so, can proceed in an unconscious manner (Jarvis, 2009a).

However, even though we are ensconced within our world and subject to the social and cultural movements of that world, Heidegger argues that we retain some intentionality in our actions (Dall'Alba, 2009). We are presented with opportunities within the world which we choose to take up, or not, things that are open to us and through which we move forward our process of becoming. Dall'Alba (2009) illustrates this using the example of becoming a professional (e.g., teacher, accountant, musician, etc.). We know what we would like to become and so make choices from the opportunities open to us that move us to becoming that professional.

Thus, whilst practical and skilful coping have been argued to emerge unconsciously from the flux of lived-experience and the processes of collaborative engagement (Chia and Holt, 2006), Heidegger's philosophy maintains the possibility of individual intentional action within the realm of practical coping as part of a social process of becoming (Dall'Alba, 2009; Jarvis, 2009a). In other words, practical coping may be at different times both unconscious and intentional.

Empirical studies exploring what leaders do suggests that leaders believe they are intentional in their actions within the fragmentation that characterises leadership work (e.g., Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Kempster and Gregory, 2017). This suggests that practical coping in an unconscious way may be guided by elements from an actor's past and present which tacitly prompts unconscious action (Polanyi, 1962; Dall'Alba, 2009; Oguz and Sengün, 2011; Hasselberger, 2017). Oguz and Sengün (2011) link tacit knowing with Chia and Holt's description of practical coping, contesting that when you are a leader you are mastering the tacit knowledge necessary for leadership. You are dwelling in a leadership space where your leadership is constantly being co-constructed and re-created through numerous interactions, discussions, conversations, and decisions. This allows for practical coping to be a developmental act of becoming a leader, with everyday acts of leading being shaped by the challenges and transitions previously experienced which have shaped an individual's practice of leading (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011).

In summary, non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006), or skilful coping (Dreyfus, 2007) suggests that acts of leading are unconscious and intuitive enactment of practices with little intentional, conscious action on behalf of the leader. This is countered by aspects of Heidegger's philosophy arguing that individuals have some choice in their process of becoming (Dall'Alba, 2009), and by empirical studies of what leaders do, which suggests there is an element of intentionality in an act of leading. The next section describes our research method which was designed to explore whether everyday acts of leading were, indeed, unconscious practical coping or were informed and intentional in nature.

5.4   Method

The challenge for this study was how to capture the everyday practical coping of organisational leaders in the fragmented reality they face, and how to discover whether their coping was unconscious and intuitive or intentional and informed. Following the advice of Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a), the research focused on a process of surfacing what leaders actually do in their everyday practices. Capturing this involved persuading a sample of senior leaders to observe and record their everyday acts of leading in qualitative diaries (Radcliffe, 2018). The diaries were followed up with an interview which sought to understand the specific acts of leading described and whether these acts of leading were purely practical coping or contained some intentionality.

5.4.1   Qualitative Diaries

The use of qualitative diaries has increased in popularity in recent years across psychological and sociological studies, although its use in leadership research has remained scarce (Radcliffe, 2018; Unterhitzenberger and Lawrence, 2022). This is despite the ability of diaries to "uncover and explore the meaningfulness of participants' ordinary lives in everyday situations, enabling our understanding of events from their perspectives" (Radcliffe, 2018: 188). Hyers describes the diary as a "treasure trove, containing the riches of first-hand testimony" (2018: 2). Diaries have the advantage of capturing experience as it happens, potentially enabling a more detailed description to be created, and avoiding some of the problems associated in asking participants to describe and reflect from a distance (Spencer, Radcliffe, Spence and King, 2021). Diaries can also give the researcher access to the relationships, situation, environment and context surrounding the diarist and the activities they are describing. Radcliffe contends that the in-depth description of experience found in a diary captures the

meaningfulness of that everyday activity, arguing that: "such in-depth qualitative analysis enables new and important findings to emerge, including the discovery of new factors affecting daily decision making" (Radcliffe, 2013: 167). Thus, a diary method has the potential to enable the rich complexity surrounding an act of leading to be captured.

The most common form of diary study is a solicited one, where a deliberate sample of participants are asked to keep diaries on a specific topic for a defined period of time, in the full knowledge that their writings will be analysed by the researcher (Hyers, 2018). This form of diary method was used in our study, giving access to detailed representations of the everyday acts of leading as experienced and enacted by participants. Whilst the aim was to gain an understanding of the everyday practice of leaders in their own words, we acknowledge that there will be some co-creation involved in this type of diary method, as the selection of participants, the briefing, the diary instrument itself, and the coding and analysis has been done by the lead author.

In addition to meeting the requirement of being a senior leader, the participants in a diary study need to be interested in their own leadership, able to self-reflect, to engage thoughtfully in writing about their lived-experience, and to trust the researcher with their reflections (Hyers, 2018). This requirement for trust means that a convenience sampling strategy was used to select participants for the study. A total of 12 participants (five male and seven female) from the author's network took part in the diary aspect of the study. Participants occupied positions of senior leadership in private sector, public sector, and third sector organisations. Radcliffe (2018) points out that one difficulty with diary studies is having participants complete the diary period, and this held true for our study with nine of the original participants completing the full five-week diary, although data from the non-complete studies was also used in the analysis of diaries. The diaries described a total of 408 acts of leading, of which 53 were expanded on in detail. Three participants withdrew from the study due to pressure of work and, so, were not interviewed. The remaining nine were interviewed about their diaries and interviews lasted between 60-120 minutes each. Diaries and interviews produced a large amount of complex data making the overall number of participants less relevant than the depth and quality of information captured.

To aid the participants in the capture of data relevant for this study, a semi-structured diary entry form was developed which asked participants to explore, reflect on and describe their everyday acts of leading. In doing so the research focuses attention on phenomenological 'moments' of leading that occur and are recognised by the leaders involved in the study (Ladkin, 2010). These moments are complex, being made up of numerous elements including the leader, follower, individual purposes, and influenced by the context, environment, relationships, personal and organisational history and culture (Alvesson and Jonsson, 2018). Following Radcliffe (2013) the diary template contained four open-ended questions intended to aid the participants in capturing this complexity:

- Please describe any acts of leading that you have undertaken in the past week. Include brief details on the situations and the people involved, as well as describing your own actions.
- Choose one act from those listed above to describe in as much detail as possible. What happened? What did you do?
- How did you decide this was the appropriate action to take? Please describe in as much detail as you can the decision process that you went through and ALL the factors that had an impact on the decision you made.
- Please discuss any reflections you have about this act of leading. How do you feel about the act and about anything that has occurred as a result of your act.

Participants completed a typed diary entry each week over the five-week period. Diary entries were emailed to the researcher when completed. The participants were contacted regularly to provide an opportunity for questions to be asked, and to encourage them to complete the research period.

Following the completion of the diary period, each diarist was interviewed using a semi-structured interview method, with interviews lasting between 60-120 minutes. The interviews were designed to explore the context of the acts of leading and whether the participants believe their actions were informed by an unconscious set of guiding principles. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

5.4.2   Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse both the interview transcripts and the diaries (King, 2004). Interview transcripts and diaries were first read to gain a broad

understanding of the process of decision-making relating to acts of leading described mainly by the diaries. This led to an initial template being developed from an individual sample, with themes developed in light of the research questions. All the diaries and interview transcripts were then analysed against the themes, being re-read multiple times and theme changes or developments were made using ATLAS.ti 22 (Friese, 2019). The following table helps to illustrate how the themes emerged from the data:

Table 5.1: Final diary and interview study thematic analysis with examples

Theme	Data extract
Non-deliberative practical coping - language of unconscious act used	*"It's a great deal easier to understand our own leadership retrospectively, and then to build up an understanding of our own leadership style by reflecting on what we have done instinctively"* (Participant 12) *"This sort of decision is often down to experience and intuition"* (Participant 5)
Informed responsive coping - language suggesting intentional thought behind an act of leading	*"I do this…not just because I am a senior leader, but because it is the right thing to do…the fact that I am one of the most senior leaders…will hopefully amplify the message"* (Participant 1) *"…when an event like that happens, I literally do sit and think about outcomes"* (Participant 2)

Constant revisiting of the diaries and interviews allowed for themes to emerge and become more solid, with the emerging diary themes largely focused on the acts of leading done on an everyday basis, and the interview themes focused on illustrations of unconscious, non-deliberative practical coping, and intentional coping that guided an act of leading.

5.5   Findings

Participants in the diary study were asked to record their acts of leading over a five-week period. Analysis of the diaries found that participants described two distinct sets of everyday activity, activities of leadership and acts of leading. The activities of leadership were those activities which would generally be expected to be performed by

a leader purely due to their senior organisational position. Activities described by all participants in the study were a mix of the generic activities of leadership (e.g., meetings, one-to-ones, appraisals, strategy development, etc.) and activities specific to their organisation, industry or sector (e.g., advising on a police investigation; meeting the new leader of the council; dealing with complaints from parents; negotiating prices with customers). Examples of activities of leadership included decision-making ("I made a decision around resources", Participant 1); communications ("Presentation (without slides) to our Leadership Group", Participant 2); meetings ("Chairing stuff of all types", Participant 2; and "Leading an interview panel", Participant 8); networking ("Discussing early thoughts about a joint venture with another CEO", Participant 5); and planning ("Board discussion on senior restructure", Participant 8).

By contrast, acts of leading were more akin to acts of practical coping. We define an act of leading as an intuitive moment often happening within an activity of leadership, where the leader acts on an intuitive prompt in a way that ultimately benefits colleagues and the organisation. Whereas activities of leadership were generic, acts of leading were specific and context related. Types of acts of leading included intuitive acts ("I could tell she had something in her mind, so instead of going back to the office, or indeed onward toward my car, I suggested we 'drop ourselves over the banister' and reflect on the day", Participant 2); courageous acts ("difficult conversations with the CEO who wanted to present something that is the opposite to the reality which I proved through numbers", Participant 7); values-driven acts ("My overarching principle as a head is that the children come first and I acted in accordance with that", Participant 8) morally the right thing to do (I feel very strongly that this has to be more than tokenism but a lived and acted part of leadership", Participant 1); relational acts ("kept my diary mostly clear to be present and available to colleagues as this was my only day in the office this week", Participant 12); and, "our relationship helped us to have this conversation which was open and challenging but also remained friendly" Participant 9).

The combination of description of the acts in diaries and elaborating on them during interviews revealed whether these acts were non-deliberative practical coping, or intentional responsive coping.

5.5.1   Non-deliberative practical coping

During the interviews, the managerial leaders were asked to elaborate on their diary examples of acts of leading. It became clear that acts of leading tended to be informed by early experiences of leadership such as this one described by a CEO:

> "[The] chief exec of the council just said, "go to this meeting, government's come up with this crazy idea, just go and make sure they're not going to do it." I came back and said, "yes, the first ones are arriving next Tuesday, so we better get cracking." …[being responsible for this] was a big learning. That was a thing that changed me from a senior manager level person to a chief officer level person, was learning [from] that [experience], and being given free rein to sort it out" (Participant 5).

Faced with these difficult situations, it was common for interviewees to believe they have learned to lead:

> "…by mistake... I think I learn everything by doing it wrong" (Participant 7).

For example, one participant described their first experience of dealing with a colleague who was having difficulties in the following way:

> "So, I was like, "wow; what do I do here?" and for me, I suppose, the way I dealt with that there was just, no formal training on it, knowing just almost to default to being yourself, you know, not so much, "I'm your manager," that sort of stuff; it's just, "I'm X," you know, on a personal level, and that's something I've always used since then" (Participant 8).

These illustrations suggest that unconscious practical or skilful coping may be the dominant response when people are first in positions of leadership. They report feeling that they do not have adequate training, "All this stuff, you never get any training for" (Participant 6), and so they respond intuitively with "quite a bit of shooting from the hip" (Participant 5), learning from mistakes and successes.

> "[When I made] intuitive decisions in the first couple of years in the job, there was a greater percentage that were probably wrong" (Participant 5).

Similar to Kierkegaard's statement "Life is lived forward and understood backward" (Segal, 2017: 476), and attuned with Dreyfus's (2007) definition of skilful coping, leaders suggested that:

> "It's easier to understand our own leadership retrospectively, and then to build up an understanding of our own leadership style by reflecting on what we have done instinctively" (Participant 12).

This understanding that early experiences of unconscious practical coping could be understood by looking backward suggested we should explore the data for evidence for ways in which leaders say this has happened.

5.5.2   Methods of becoming intentional in practical coping

This individual understanding of how they lead retrospectively emerges in many of the interviews. This appears to be a process which includes withdrawal, reflection and return to act. This process was described in several different ways, each of which could be described as snatched or borrowed time. For some leaders this came in the form of a retreat to undertake a course that allows reflection time on themselves as a leader:

> "The King's Fund course that I did, one of the things that I really took away from that was learning to be comfortable with the uncomfortable and having faith in myself that, actually, if something happened and I hadn't thought it through, I can still pull on who I am" (Participant 3).

Courses also provided ideas and theories that were consciously adopted in acts of leading:

> "One of the things that I learnt in a seminar or a workshop was situational leadership, and I still think that's right. You've got slightly different styles needed for slightly different situations and different people. It's getting to know the people and what they respond to" (Participant 5).

One element that came across strongly in the diaries was confirmation of the fragmented business of the everyday life of a leader. This fast-paced flux meant that leaders often had little time to understand themselves retrospectively, so they carved out moments dedicated to conscious understanding that led to or influenced action. One method of fast withdrawal was through reading:

> "I get the Harvard Business Review, little thing every single day, and I just look for little headings that might talk to wherever I am, and look at a little article, I'll just think 'that's interesting', in terms of doing this" (Participant 2).

Another was through the creation of space in diaries that would allow for reflection and thinking:

> "I'll be in a queue coming out of Manchester for half an hour, and that's actually where you do your thinking. I phone people from the house, or even in the car on the way back, and say, "I've just been in this meeting and they've mentioned this. You might want to have a look at that." You sort of do things on the move." (Participant 5).

Taking time out for reflection was often learned by observing and copying role models:

> "…when he was chief exec of the council, probably the best boss I've ever had. I learnt a lot from [my boss]. He used to put in his diary, prayers, for his thinking time" (Participant 5).

The need to block out time for reflection spoke to the constant interruption that leaders face in their fragmented everyday:

> "I used to get in very early and I used to work at the start. I'd be in at quarter to seven, and then gradually people got to know I was in at quarter to seven, and other people would come in at quarter to, "I just thought I'd catch you." So, the thinking time is really hard. You have to think on your feet and you have to think fast, especially when the pandemic came along. My goodness me, that was quick thinking you had to do" (Participant 6).

Finally, the process of engaging in writing the qualitative diaries also acted as a moment of withdrawal and reflection for leaders:

> "Yes, so it's been a gift to actually just do it, but also I… in the four weeks, or however many weeks it was of doing the diary, I would often start it by going, "bloody hell!" Then, at some point, and it often wasn't on a Monday, because all kind of… it was linear, it wasn't over the week; but, there would be a point where I'd go, "ah, that's not what it looks like, that's actually about such and

such." It made things that were subconscious, conscious. It was helpful and useful" (Participant 2).

This last quote perhaps best captures the process of thinking and reflection allowed by a moment of withdrawal and reflection that potentially brings about an informed response within the process of practical coping.

5.5.3   Intentional, informed responsive coping

As leaders in the study gained experience in their role and retrospectively understood their leadership, their intuitive responses took on the character of being more informed and intentional:

"It's about just the collective experience that forms your intuition. You tend to be right more of the time the longer you've been in the job" (Participant 5).

This intentionality was described in two distinct ways: intentional processes and intentional principles.

5.5.3.1 Intentional processes

Leaders describing intentional processes were literally taking the time to "sit and think about [the] outcome" and, in doing so, planning a more intentional, learned method of response:

"That means that I do particularly think about: - how am I going to respond to this, - when am I going to respond to it, - am I going to do message to message, email to email, text to text, or am I going to break the method, I'll pick up my phone. That stuff, that's there all the time. It's conscious and unconscious, intuitive and value-based, and transactional and eventing… I don't know if that makes me a good chief executive or not…but it's how I endeavour to navigate through the fact that, for me, work is about relationships and outcomes" (Participant 2).

This appears to be a process of informed response, with the leader giving themselves a method that allows intentionality into the coping process. Another participant reported that:

"I have my three sort of markers. So, you know, absolutely, there's a reason for doing it, it's right to do it, in terms of the person's got a need, but is it right for

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us to do it, that's a question that we'll ask; and then, are the circumstances right for us at that time to do it" (Participant 7).

5.5.3.2 Intentional principles

Leaders also described the intentional use of principles or values they used to guide decisions and actions. This quote illustrates the evidence that principles guiding an informed response had developed over time:

> "Every situation is unique, and I don't know… it seems to boil down to your gut, and all the experience you have had, and your upbringing, and your moral compass, and your sense of right and wrong has somehow become embedded in you after 50 years, or whatever" (Participant 6).

What is interesting, here, is the comment about the unique nature of each situation faced by a leader. To act in these situations, leaders described the personal values or principles that guided their response to events. For example, "you should always appoint somebody better than you" (Participant 5); "it's about getting the right people in the right places to do the right things" (Participant 8); "I make it clear to the team members that I've got their back" (Participant 3); and "Working together with people, collaboration, leading with care and compassion and growing others" (Participant 9).

Some principles identified were context-specific, guiding action within a specific organisational setting; this allowed for conscious acts to be judged against specific principles, making the acts informed and responsive forms of coping:

> "Doing the best for the children. Schools do not exist for the staff, they exist for the children and I always put the children first…That's what enabled me to have the difficult conversations, because my motivation was to do what's best for the children" (Participant 6).

Other principles were memorable due to the connection to a strong emotion attached to the memory of the principle. For example, one participant discussing the principle of equity comments:

> "…that would be probably one of the top ones for me and it's the thing that'll trigger a massive emotion when I'm treated inequitably, as well" (Participant 3).

A second participant whose principle is fairness observed that:

> "If there's a sniff or smell of unfairness I can feel the hackles rising. I won't allow money and budgets to be used as an excuse for not doing the right thing" (Participant 2).

Finally, some participants suggested that the driver of their principles was their faith:

> "I think my faith is my… is the thing and I… consider, you know, Jesus spent time with the people he most valued and I think that's important" (Participant 7).

In sum, the diaries and interviews illustrated that practical coping is intuitive and, perhaps, non-deliberative when first gaining a senior role in an organisation. Coping appears to become an intentional and informed response over time, as experience is gained and understood by leaders carving out moments of withdrawal and reflection which surface principles that serve to guide future processes and acts of informed, responsive coping.

5.6   Discussion

Participants in our study identified numerous activities of leadership, duties which would normally be expected of people occupying senior positions in organisations. However, when asked to focus on one specific act of leading from each week they chose acts that were not mundane everyday activities (Alvesson and Svenningsson, 2003b). The acts of leading chosen by participants often involved using intuition and courage in dealing with difficult people issues, or decision making and behaviours intended to benefit the organisation. The immanent nature of these moments appears to dictate responses which require unconscious interpretation, constant adjustment and, perhaps, temporary solutions (Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010). This intuitive nature of an act of leading, at first glance, would appear to confirm the theoretical arguments of non-deliberative practical coping or skilful coping of Chia and Holt (2006) and Dreyfus (2014). Comments about "intuitive decisions" (Participant 5) and "what we have done instinctively" (Participant 12) certainly sound as though they privilege non-cognitive action over conscious, thoughtful, and intentional action (Chia and Holt, 2023), otherwise known as "shooting from the hip" (Participant 5).

However, there should be no celebrations, here, for theorists in support of skilful, non-deliberative practical coping, as the evidence from participants suggests that the non-cognitive approach to leading results in multiple mistakes. Rather than being more

effective by employing non-deliberative practical coping, the leaders in our study claim to have fallen foul of unthoughtful action, having to "learn everything by doing it wrong" (Participant 7). Our participants clearly felt that there were moments in their experience when they were making mistakes though improvising or coping.

We contend that this seemingly unconscious response is more intentional and informed than the leaders in this study, or previous conceptualisations of practical coping would have us believe. It may be true that in the early days of starting a new position of leadership, when "the desk has had nothing on it" leaders do respond instinctively and, in the process, believe they make mistakes more often than not. Indeed, Hirst, Mann, Bain, Pirola-Merlo and Richver (2004) argue that there is a lag between leaders learning through experience and their ability to apply these new skills and knowledge. But even here there exists conscious knowledge gained from experience, from hardships, successes and notable people that has consolidated into who the leader has become (Kempster and Stewart, 2010), creating a substance or essence (Vendette et al, 2022) or the leader's minimal self (Eustice-Corwin, 2020) which intentionally influences how they respond. We have termed this intentional, deliberate response Informed Response Coping.

5.6.1 Informed Response Coping

We theorise that Informed Responsive Coping is practiced by holders of senior hierarchical positions of leadership who have become more experienced in their role over time. Through time, by making a lot of mistakes and using periods of withdrawal and reflection, our leaders have surfaced and articulated processes and practices that consciously and intentionally guide the action taken to deal with events. Chia and Holt (2023) theorise that whilst action does involve intentionality, this intentionality is not the thoughtful agency of an individual or a 'doer'. Rather, they claim it is derived from pre-reflective and unconscious practices or dispositions, and subject to the independent movement or affordances of the situation. We contend that theories of non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006; 2023) and skilful coping (Dreyfus, 2014) overly discount individual deliberate intention.

Dreyfus's (2014) view of conscious, deliberative action being a sign of a lack of expertise appears contrary to the everyday intentional actions described by leaders in our study. Indeed, the quotations in the previous section demonstrate that leaders, when

they are new to the position of hierarchical leadership, may act in a non-deliberative manner, using their previously acquired practices and dispositions to "shoot from the hip". The trouble with shooting from the hip is that they frequently miss the target, hit the wrong target, or even shoot themselves in the foot, as highlighted by the comments about making multiple mistakes early in their leadership career. In contrast to Dreyfus's view, as our leaders gained experience they developed an informed intentionality of action, responding to events in an informed, thoughtful and intentional manner.

This finding supports the theories of leader becoming (Jarvis, 2009a; Dall'Alba, 2009; Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Eustice-Corwin, 2020; Vendette et al, 2022). Our leaders' diaries and interviews show individuals who have become professionals (e.g., a teacher, a lawyer, a housing manager) gaining dispositions and practices that work intuitively in that profession (Dall'Alba, 2009). However, on attaining a senior leadership position they become aware that these dispositions, used in non-deliberative practical coping, lead to many mistakes, the solution of which, through reflection, creates learning in an ongoing process of becoming (Jarvis, 2009a). For the leaders in our study this learning can be seen in the deliberate principles our leaders evoke when describing their decision-making (e.g., "what's best for the children", Participant 6) and the conscious and intentional thought processes that the leaders describe (e.g., "I do particularly think about: how am I going to respond to this; when am I going to respond to it; [how am I going to respond]… am I going to break the method", Participant 2).

Becoming intentional about action requires our leaders to use multiple methods of withdrawal and reflection. Borrowing an idea from the music world we call this a continuous process of woodshedding. Woodshedding happens when a musician has a moment of difficulty, when a piece is proving difficult to master, or when they recognise the need for mastery of the basic skills to allow for more fluid moments of improvisation. Woodshedding is more than just practicing. It represents an intensive period of uncovering the fundamentals of the music and the mechanics of practice in order to improve performance (Haider and Picchioni, 2016). For the leaders in our study there can be no isolated place (the woodshed) for this period of practice as they are always performing in public, responding to events and leading in the ongoing fragmented flux of everyday work (Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010). Hence, the process of woodshedding must inevitably happen in the everyday. Thus, when leaders describe blocking out thinking time, withdrawing to reflect and/or attend a course, or engaging

with theories through reading, this represents woodshedding in the fragmented reality of leading. From this perspective, learning from mistakes emerges as a result of woodshedding, with a period of withdrawal, reflection and conscious practice leading to an ability to be intentional in response to events. In this way our senior leaders have learned, and in learning have become more experienced (Jarvis, 2009a), resulting in them developing conscious, intentional methods of Informed Responsive Coping.

We have theorised Informed Responsive Coping from the diaries and interviews of leaders, from their stories of becoming across time and their descriptions of doing in the moment (Zheng et al, 2021). The construction of coping seen here was not non-rational and unreflective, but was responsive to events, consciously informed by self-knowledge constructed from the leaders' experiences, with leaders using moments of woodshedding to generate processes and practices that guide action and enable coping with everyday events. From this we contend that there is more intentionality in individual acts of leading undertaken by leaders than may have previously been argued, raising implications for leadership studies which argue for the removal of individual intentionality from theories of how leadership is practiced in organisations.

5.7   Concluding thoughts

5.7.1 Contribution

The contribution our article makes is twofold. First, we have extended the theory of non-deliberative practical coping by showing that through gaining learning and experience leaders move from non-deliberative responses to deliberate, intentional, informed responsive coping. Informed responsive coping is demonstrated by the conscious application of processes and practices that have been surfaced and articulated by the leaders involved.

Second, we introduce the concept of woodshedding as the method of surfacing and articulating the processes and practices that make coping intentional. Woodshedding is characterised by withdrawal and reflection leading to new understandings which are then consciously tested and refined in action. In these moments leaders dig deep to better understand their practice. What emerges from moments of woodshedding are the processes and practices consciously used by leaders in their acts of leading.

In the process, we have contributed to the literature on leader becoming by providing evidence that, on attaining a position of hierarchical leadership, the leader is acting on

previously developed practices which no longer fit to the situation faced. They have become what their previous profession or job required, and this is not enough for the senior leadership position they have now acquired. Through a process of intuitive coping, mistake making and woodshedding, the leader develops a conscious and intentional method of response and, through this, they become a senior hierarchical leader. This raises practical questions for further study on how an understanding of becoming can inform the selection process for senior organisational leaders; what a theory of becoming says about the support and development needed by those new to the role of senior organisational leader; and, how much time (and how many mistakes) it takes for a new organisational leader to become the leader that is needed in their new situation.

5.7.2   Limitations

There are two main limitations of our study. The first is the small sample size of 12 diaries and nine interviews. This sample provided a great depth and richness of data about the lived experience of leading at a senior level across a number of different industries in the UK. However, a wider variety of industries and organisations could be studied, and future studies could explore whether cultural or gender differences exist in the process of developing an informed responsive practice of coping.

The second limitation is the method used. We rely on the recording of acts of leading by leaders, and on their memory of events and reasons discussed during interview. This raises questions about the embellishing of stories related in the diary and the accuracy of remembered events and reasons. Future studies which observe acts of leading happening live and in context would help to determine how much of the informed response to an event comes from the distillation of experience into processes and practices, and how much is influenced by the immediacy of the situation itself.

Future longitudinal studies would ideally observe and record the acts of leading from when the leader first assumes a hierarchical role to when they have developed their practices of informed responsive coping. A particular focus on the practices and impact of moments of woodshedding would enhance our knowledge of the processes and practices involved in becoming a leader.

6: Conclusion and Implications for theory and practice

This concluding chapter synthesises my thesis, summarising the aims, methods and findings, highlighting the theoretical contributions which have emerged from the data. Consideration is given to the implications for theories of leading, for research into leadership and for the practice of leader development.

6.1   Synthesis of the thesis

The aim of this thesis was to investigate, explore and gain a deeper understanding of the processes of becoming a leader. This aim provided an opportunity to address some of the areas of leadership research that have been previously identified as under-researched, namely the everyday practices of leading (Alvesson and Jonsson, 2018), the processes of becoming a leader across a lifetime (Siew and Koh, 2023) and the development of practices or principles that influence or guide acts of leading (Oliver and Jacobs, 2007). To achieve the thesis aim required the consolidation of academic literature on the process of becoming a leader or manager, a subject which has developed in a fragmented way across the leadership, management and organisational literature.

To gain a deeper understanding of becoming a leader required the adoption of a multi-phase research process, with the narrative literature review feeding into and being informed by the two phases of empirical research described in this thesis. The use of a process theory lens (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016) to analyse the becoming a leader literature in chapter two revealed a split in the literature along temporal grounds. The majority of articles in the sample researched and theorised the process of becoming as a constrained temporal phenomenon, a process that only begins when someone has leapt or been thrown (Segal, 2017) into an organisational position of hierarchy, and one which is focused solely on experiences in the workplace (Hill, 2003; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Segal, 2017). These papers implicitly adopted a weak process theory approach (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016), assuming that the individual involved had a form of essential self to which changes or transitions were occurring. Some articles which viewed becoming as an unconstrained temporal phenomenon took a similar perspective, theorising about becoming as a process that occurs chronologically to the individual through a lifetime (Turner and Mavin, 2008; Bolander, Holmberg and Fellborn, 2019).

Consolidating these two temporal approaches was the basis of developing the first contribution of my research, the conceptual frame depicted in chapter two. The understanding of temporality revealed in the literature review influenced the two phases of empirical research discussed in chapters four and five respectively. Phase one (chapter four) focused on longitudinal autoethnographic narrative accounts of becoming through a lifetime, allowing for processes of becoming to be explored from the position of the present, looking backwards across a whole life of experience in order to reveal practices that emerge as principles which guide future acts of leading. As such, phase one explored the question posed in the introduction: How are practices or principles developed through a lifetime, and what does this reveal about the processes of becoming a leader?

The analysis of data from phase one revealed processes of becoming a leader that are not constrained by a particular time period, nor by a particular situation such as the workplace. My research uncovered subtle influences on the process of becoming that I call micro-disjunctures, a theoretical contribution to the leadership learning literature that extends previous theories of the memorable influences that have contributed to an individual becoming a leader (McCall et al, 1988; Bennis and Thomas, 2002). The process for surfacing micro-disjunctures through the use of a reflexive dissertation produced a practical contribution to the leadership learning literature. These contributions will be discussed in more detail in section 6.2.

Phase one of this study resulted in a deeper understanding of the process of becoming a leader, one which involved the resolution of both disjunctures and micro-disjunctures to become a more experienced leader. My findings revealed that the process of becoming requires a deliberate, conscious and reflective approach in order for micro-disjunctures to be resolved. By leaving these elements unresolved leaders disrupted their process of becoming (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011), and opened up the possibility of adopting unwanted processes and practices of leading from line managers. Thus, phase one demonstrated that through reflexive dissertation writing it is possible for individuals to be intentional in their processes of becoming a leader, challenging the arguments made in philosophical becoming papers (e.g. Chia and Holt, 2006; Dreyfus, 2007; Nayak, 2008; Roth, 2021). These papers adopted a strong process theory position (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016), contending that everything is perpetually and unconsciously evolving, with practices emerging in a non-deliberative, non-rational and largely unconscious

mode of practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006; Dreyfus, 2007; Chia 2017), perhaps guided as much by situation and circumstance as by personal experience (Chia and Holt, 2023).

This argument between the philosophical literature claiming that becoming was an unintentional process and my findings demonstrating that intentionality was possible in the process of becoming a leader led to the development of phase two (chapter five) of the research. As such, phase two explored the second question raised in the introduction: What does the everyday practice of senior organisational leaders reveal about the processes of becoming a leader? Specifically, do practices emerge as non-deliberative practical coping or do leaders act in a more intentional way?

Phase two data collected from the senior leader diary study (Radcliffe, 2018) and interviews revealed that senior organisational leaders describe their initial acts of leading when starting a leadership role as "shooting from the hip" or "making it up as I go". Dall'Alba (2009) would argue that these leaders have been through a process of becoming a professional (e.g., a teacher, researcher, accountant, etc.), and their success as a professional has led to them leaping or being thrown (Segal, 2017) into a position of organisational leadership. My research extends Dall-Alba's (2009) argument by contending that the practices developed through the process of becoming a professional does not enable a leader to make intentional and informed choices in a new leadership role. As a consequence, leaders describe acting unconsciously in a non-deliberative mode of practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006) when they start a leadership role and, in the process, they make a lot of mistakes. However, the theory of non-deliberative practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006; Dreyfus, 2007) is challenged by the evidence from this study which describe an accelerated process becoming where woodshedding, in the form of withdrawal and reflection, lead to the development of intentional practices. Leaders move in a deliberate way from inexperienced, unconscious, non-deliberative mode of practical coping, to a more experienced, intentional, informed and responsive mode of practical coping.

Returning to the conceptual frame in the literature review, this depicts the elements of my thesis that have been synthesised in this section. Namely, that the process of becoming a leader is a lifelong and whole-life process involving the resolution of disjunctures *and* micro-disjunctures in order to become a more experienced leader.

Leaving this as an unconscious and non-deliberative process risks becoming a leader being interrupted or subverted. Conscious, intentional processes of becoming are possible, and require reflexive practices to be adopted in order to surface and resolve micro-disjunctures, and to allow intentional practices of leading to develop when in an accelerated moment of becoming.

6.2   Theoretical and practical contributions to knowledge

As discussed in this thesis, my research has produced five contributions to knowledge:

- The **conceptual frame** depicting the process of becoming a leader that includes lifelong, whole-life and accelerated moments of becoming
- The concept of **micro-disjunctures** as an extension to our understanding of the process of becoming
- The **trigger process of reflexive dissertation writing** that enables the surfacing and resolution of micro-disjunctures
- The concept of **informed, responsive practical coping** which challenges previous theory on the practice of leading
- The **process of woodshedding** used by leaders in accelerated moments of becoming to move from non-deliberative practical coping to a more intentional informed, responsive mode of practical coping

6.2.1 The conceptual frame of the process of becoming

The conceptual frame contributes to leader becoming theory by arguing that the process of becoming a leader is a process that is unconstrained by time, being both a life-long process, a whole-life process and a process that happens in an accelerated way when the individual takes on a position of leadership. The contribution of adding a whole-life perspective to the conceptual frame challenges the constrained nature of the majority of previous research on becoming a leader (Denis, Langley and Pineault, 2000; Hill, 2003; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Young et al, 2011; Peus, Braun and Knipfer, 2015; Segal, 2017; Moorosi, 2020), where scholars have limited their research to the transitions and anxieties experienced solely in the workplace. My research extends this with the adoption of an unconstrained perspective which argues for events and experiences occurring outside of the workplace to be examined as part of the process of becoming.

6.2.2 The theoretical contribution of micro-disjunctures

The concept of micro-disjuncture is a theoretical contribution emerging from phase one of this thesis. The discovery of micro-disjunctures extends previous theories of becoming that have assumed the process of becoming is dominated by large, memorable moments of disjuncture which are resolved as leaders become more experienced (McCall et al, 1988; Bennis and Thomas, 2002; Jarvis, 2009a). The process of becoming a leader can now be seen as a combination of resolved disjunctures and unresolved imperceptible moments of micro-disjuncture which will cumulatively emerge over time, transforming into unconscious practices or principles. The imperceptible nature of a micro-disjuncture mean they are often ignored, but because a micro-disjuncture typically re-occurs it will niggle at the leader until a conscious, reflexive effort is made to surface and so resolve it.

The discovery of micro-disjunctures in this thesis also contributes through introducing the concepts of disjuncture (Jarvis, 2009a) and micro-disjuncture into the leadership learning literature. Whilst becoming as a term has been established in the literature (e.g. Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011) the concept of disjuncture and explicit theories on the resolution of disjunctures for leaders have been absent from the becoming a leader literature. My work has introduced the concept of disjuncture to the leadership literature, and has extended this theory by revealing the existence of micro-disjunctures, alongside processes for surfacing and resolving micro-disjunctures. This is an important addition to the leader learning literature as leaving threads of micro-disjuncture unresolved implies that the process of becoming a leader is disrupted (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011), with practices important to leading remaining undeveloped or underdeveloped.

6.2.3 The trigger process of reflexive dissertation writing

The trigger process is a practical contribution to the leadership learning literature. My researched revealed that a trigger process was required for an aspiring leader to become conscious of their micro-disjunctures. The trigger process enabled micro-disjunctures to be surfaced, allowing the opportunity for intentional resolution of the micro-disjuncture. The trigger process was the writing of a reflexive MBA dissertation, demonstrating the value of asking aspiring leaders to undertake reflexive dissertation narrative writing (Cunliffe, 2002; Ramsey, 2005) in order to understand one's process of becoming a leader. The importance of this contribution is the understanding that without the trigger

process micro-disjunctures can remain unresolved, influencing the practice of leading in unintentional and at times undesirable ways.

The contribution of a trigger process in the form of reflexive dissertation writing challenges the traditional dissertation that has become a standard final element of a UK MBA programme. Traditionally, the dissertation has been seen as an individual research project based on the intrinsic interest of the student which involves a literature review coupled with the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. The core aim of the traditional dissertation is to train the student in research skills, and to increase specific disciplinary knowledge (de Kleijn, Mainhard, Meijer, Pilot and Brekelmans, 2012; Ashwin, Abbas and McLean, 2017). Some studies have made a link between the traditional dissertation and the professional development of the student. although this tends to be in professions that are characterised as highly academic, for which the ability to master the skills of research are important (Kowalczuk-Walędziak, Lopes, Underwood, Daniela and Clipa, 2020). The practical contribution of my research is to reposition the MBA dissertation as a leader development activity, making a strong link between the previous processes of becoming a leader, the academic theory on leading and leadership and the student's emerging practices of leading. Asking aspiring leaders to write reflexive narratives focused on a set of personal guiding principles allows for the threads of micro-disjuncture to be surfaced, articulated and resolved. The reflexive dissertation triggers a process of understanding how the individual has become a leader, enabling a fuller process of becoming where individuals can be more intentional about the development of future practices of leading.

6.2.4 The concept of informed, responsive practical coping

The theoretical contribution from phase two of my research is the finding that leaders develop a mode of informed, responsive practical coping as they become more experienced in the practice of leading. This research finding challenges the theoretical arguments of strong process theorists (Chia and Holt, 2006; Dreyfus, 2007; Chia, 2017) who argue for leaders existing in a permanent mode of non-deliberative practical coping. My research revealed that whilst leaders might start a new leadership position acting in a non-deliberative mode, they become intentional in their leading through a process of mistake-making, withdrawal and reflection, developing the mode of informed, responsive practical coping. These are processes and practices which intentionally guide actions taken to deal with events as they occur. Examples of

informed, responsive practical coping include the principles participants developed in phase one of the thesis and which the leaders in phase two described as intentionally guiding their responses; and, the deliberate thought processes described by the leaders in phase two that occur before and during the taking of action.

6.2.5 The process of woodshedding

The practical contribution from phase two of my research is the process participants in this study described that enabled them to move from the non-deliberative mode to the informed, responsive mode. This contribution extends the literature on becoming a leader when in a role of organisational leadership, which has previously explored the types of transitions and identity changes that happen over a short period of time, but have not focused on the process of moving from a previous mode of becoming (e.g. becoming a professional) to a new mode of becoming a leader (Dall'Alba, 2009; Kempster and Stewart, 2010; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; London and Sherman, 2021). Borrowing a term used in music, particularly from the development of jazz musicians, I have called this a process of woodshedding (Haidet and Picchioni, 2016). My research revealed woodshedding to be a process of withdrawal and reflection, where leaders continuously undertake short, intense periods of thought and practice which enables difficulties to be overcome, essential new skills to be mastered, and intentional practices of leading to emerge. Leaders in phase two of this study described how they withdraw and woodshed by blocking out thinking time, attending courses and engaging with theory. In these ways they reflect on their non-deliberative mistakes, allowing the formulation of the intentional processes and practices that guide their future acts of leading.

In summary, the theoretical contributions from phase one and two of my empirical research have been shown to extend our understanding of the influences on becoming a leader through revealing concept of micro-disjunctures (McCall et al, 1988; Bennis and Thomas, 2002; Jarvis, 2009a) and to challenge existing literature on the non-deliberative nature of leading and becoming through the finding that as leaders become they develop a mode of informed, responsive practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006; Dreyfus, 2007). The practical contribution of phase one challenges the traditional purpose of a dissertation (Ashwin, Abbas and McLean, 2017), proposing a reflexive approach that enables intentional resolution of micro-disjunctures; whilst the woodshedding process from phase two extends our understanding of the process of

becoming from a non-deliberative form of practical coping (Dreyfus, 2007; Chia and Holt, 2023) to a more conscious and intentional process of leading. Each of these contributions have fed into and extended the conceptual frame of becoming a leader in chapter 2, providing a deeper understanding of the process of becoming a leader to the leadership learning literature.

Having captured and unpacked the combined contributions to knowledge and practice of the thesis I will now discuss the implications of these contributions for theory leadership research and development.

6.3   Implications of the study and future research possibilities

The key conceptual and theoretical contributions that have implications for leadership research from this thesis are the development of an enhanced conceptual frame depicting the process of becoming a leader; the discovery of micro-disjunctures within the process of becoming; and the process of becoming that moves a leader from acting in a non-deliberative way to becoming intentional, informed and responsive in their practice of leading.

The conceptual frame and the findings from my empirical research argue that threads of becoming across a whole life begin, intertwine, grow and decline over time. These threads can emanate from many varied places, including early-life and through-life influences such as family, faith, films and friends as well as volunteering, vocation, vacations and education. Threads of becoming emerge in the practices or principles applied by leaders in their acts of leading. As de Vaujany and Introna (2023) point out, these threads of becoming may represent very different timelines of becoming in terms of speed, rhythm and duration. In other words, the process of becoming a leader cannot be constrained by the temporality and focus on the workplace that leadership learning researchers have previously assumed (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Young et al, 2011; Peus, Braun and Knipfer, 2015; Moorosi, 2020).

The conceptual frame encourages researchers of leadership learning to become more mindful of the frames their assumptions impose around their research, both in terms of what it includes and what it excludes from the understanding of becoming a leader (Cloutier and Langley, 2020). For example, widening the temporal frame used for researching the process of becoming when entering a role of hierarchical leadership to include a whole-life perspective would allow researchers to gain a richer understanding

of the complexity of accelerated moments of becoming, and the contribution made to this from threads originating outside of the workplace. Researchers might consider utilising the diary study approach used in this thesis to widen the frame, asking leaders to record incidents from across their whole-life and to reflexively consider how these have an impact on their acts of leading. A wider diary approach can involve the creation of diaries by not only the leader but colleagues, friends and family from different areas of life to capture a rich data set on the whole-life process of becoming. This is particularly pertinent for researchers whose frame is the process of becoming once in a role of organisational leadership, as this research has previously focused on workplace influences alone (for examples see Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Moorosi, 2020).

A second implication for research emerging from the conceptual frame comes from the concept of a kairos moment. Kairos moments are where it is possible to make an intentional decision in the process of becoming (Dall'Alba, 2009). Dall'Alba (2009) contends that these moments offer the individual who is focused on becoming a professional (such as a teacher or, in this case, a leader) opportunities from which to choose that will progress the process of becoming. As such, they are choices or decisions that will enable the leader to learn more about leading and, by doing so, to become more experienced and able to respond in a more informed manner (Jarvis, 2009a).

From the perspective of becoming a leader, the kairos moment is where a leader's emergent practices converge with the momentum of a situation and the urge to act (Chia and Holt, 2023). The research findings presented in chapter 4 would suggest that this is a complex, intangible and imperceptible moment, one that is difficult to capture as it is trying to identify a moment amongst a flow of continuous motion, in other words trying to capture "reality in flight" (Pettigrew, 1990: 270). Often these moments are uncovered or brought to consciousness after the moment has passed in time, perhaps indicating, as Kierkegaard surmised, that life is lived forward and understood backwards (Segal, 2017). To capture data on kairos moments will need future research on methodological approaches into exploring the process of becoming a leader, methods for uncovering the opportunities that arise for furthering one's journey of becoming a leader, and which capture the momentum of situations and the pull towards a desired future (Chia and Holt, 2023). Suggestions from the leadership-as-practice movement (Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2010; Kempster, Parry and Jackson, 2016) may be helpful in this

regard. They argue for greater use of longitudinal ethnographic and phenomenological methods (Lehtonen and Seeck, 2022). For example, the wider use of co-created auto-ethnography by the leadership research community (Kempster and Stewart, 2010) might enable a more complete picture to be formed of the process of intentional choice that a kairos moment offers to the leader becoming.

A third implication for further research that has been explicitly adopted in this thesis is a desire to research the act or activity of leading, rather than the leader or leadership. Framing studies on 'leading' enables new avenues of inquiry to open up, putting the focus on how practices or acts of leading emerge in a situational moment from the whole-life process of becoming a leader. The explicit setting of the frame allows for a process perspective to be taken in research (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016), giving rise to potential new explanations of how the practices of leading emerge from the flow of memorable and imperceptible experiences.

A fourth implication comes from the finding of an informed, responsive practical coping mode in this thesis. Previous studies on senior organisational leaders have shown that new leaders struggle when starting an organisational leadership role (Parker, 2004; Segal, 2017; Siew and Koh, 2023) and respond to this struggle with this non-deliberative mode of practical coping. A deeper understanding of the process of becoming arising from my research demonstrates that the organisational leader moves from this non-deliberative mode to the more intentional informed, responsive mode through a process of withdrawal and reflection. This movement would benefit from further research, exploring the juncture where the strong process theory of non-deliberative practical coping (Cloutier and Langley, 2020; Chia and Holt 2023) meets the social construction of reality by senior organisational leaders. If we are to take the research participant's point of view seriously (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) then there are implications arising from this thesis for strong process theorists who have struggled to find ways of providing empirical data to support the strong process theory position (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016). The leaders in this thesis clearly perceived that they had moved to a more intentional process and practice of leading as they resolve disjunctures and become more experienced (Jarvis, 2009a). Future empirical research for those of the strong process theory persuasion could seek evidence that leaders continue to operate in a mode of non-deliberative practical coping even as they become more experienced in their roles. Again, the use of diary studies may be useful in this regard,

as the rich data set that a qualitative diary captures (Radcliffe, 2018) may shed new light on non-deliberative modes of practical coping in practice. Diary studies have rarely been used in leadership research in spite of their ability to capture the 'close up' detail and complexity of leading in the moment and the 'long shot' of leading across time (van Hulst, Ybema and Yanow, 2016). As demonstrated in this thesis, a qualitative diary study can capture the complexity of everyday practices of leading in organisations. Adopting the diary study as a method for collection of data has the potential to further our knowledge of non-deliberative as well as intentional, informed modes of practical coping.

6.4   Practical implications for leader development

The conceptual frame in chapter 2 has important implications for interventions focused on leader development (Day et al, 2014) as a whole-life process. The argument made in this thesis for the concept of becoming a leader being a whole-life process is an argument for leader development practitioners to adopt an expanded understanding of how a leader develops (Day et al, 2014; Flynn, 2018). A whole-life process of becoming a leader argues for an inclusive understanding of leader development, equally valuing formal learning programmes designed to deliver skills, knowledge and abilities (Myers and DeRue, 2014), informal or incidental learning emanating from the workplace (Marsick and Watkins, 1990), and learning generated across a lifetime and from the whole life of an organisational leader. Adopting the whole-life perspective means incorporating methods of understanding the processes of becoming into leader development programmes, enabling delegates to surface and articulate many of the threads of becoming that have influenced the way they practice leading in their roles.

This thesis has shown that research methods, such as reflexive narrative writing and diary studies focused on surfacing the disjunctures and micro-disjunctures that form threads in the process of becoming a leader can be a helpful process for participants who are on the journey to become a leader (Dall'Alba, 2009). Previous research has suggested that unresolved micro-disjunctures potentially stifle the process of becoming (Hill, 2003; Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011). Thus, designing leader development interventions so that they enable micro-disjunctures to emerge into consciousness gives the leader an opportunity of resolution and through resolution to become a more experienced leader (Jarvis, 2009a).

Leader development theory has previously focused on memorable moments of disjuncture such as role models and hardships (see McCall et al, 1988), with leader development interventions conceiving becoming as a process of apprenticeship designed to highlight these moments (Kempster, 2006). These memorable moments of disjuncture have been offered as an explanation for why people may achieve the status of leader and exploring them can help surface an individual's implicit theories of leadership (Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, and Topakas, 2013). Bringing a process theory perspective (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016) to moments of disjuncture and micro-disjuncture re-conceptualises the memorable and the imperceptible or micro-moments of disjuncture as a continuous process of becoming a leader from which the processes and practices utilised in acts of leading emerge. I argue that it would be beneficial to participants on leader development programmes for processes of reflection to be extended beyond gaining an understanding of their implicit theories of leading. Surfacing micro-disjunctures that occur across the whole-life process of becoming enable the participants to become more conscious and intentional about their personal practice of leading and remind them of the need to watch for and take opportunities that will further their process of becoming a leader.

The process of reflexive narrative writing used in this study, and particularly the focus on articulating a set of principles, offers leader developers one method of enabling participants to surface their moments of micro-disjuncture and explore how these have an impact on their practice. This is perhaps due to a principle being an accessible concept for senior leaders familiar with popular TED talks and biographies of leaders. As such, the focus on principles allows for an easy route into the exploration of what is a complex understanding of how their leading has developed across their whole-life.

6.5   Limitations of the thesis

The macro-limitations of this study were explored in depth in the methodology chapter. This highlighted the following:

- The possibility of subjectivity by the researcher, which acknowledged that an interpretive approach meant the researcher was intimately involved in the data collection and analysis. My interpretations have potentially been influenced by my experience of leading. Hopefully, the reader agrees that the openness

provided by the illustrative examples in this thesis has allowed the truthfulness and reliability of data to be clearly observed.

- The integrity of data produced by reflexive narrative writing. This limitation highlighted the possibility of enhanced creativity in the memory of participants when constructing their versions of the reality they experienced. Again, I hope this has been mitigated in some way by the adoption of a self-critical approach to my interpretations of the data. I am also in debt to my PhD supervisors, Marian and Mike, who have aided the process of being critical about the data and my interpretations of those data.

- The construction of narratives for the reflexive MBA dissertations. This limitation spoke to the problems of relying on memory in qualitative research (Cassell and Symon, 2004), and the possibility that the content was written to gain a grade rather than to provide reliable data for a study of becoming. I believe the requirement for authenticity as a specific section in the dissertation, and the explanation in the dissertation brief of what this means (see Appendix 1) has helped me to mitigate this limitation.

- The variability of data collected in the diary studies. This recognised how detail and reflection can vary greatly from one diary to another, with some diaries possibly being completed close to the moments occurring, whilst others may have been completed retrospectively. As diaries were submitted weekly and chased up on the due day if they had not arrived in my inbox, the retrospective views would not have been at too much of a distance from the event. It is possible the difference in detail is purely due to the business of the senior leaders taking part in the study. The inclusion of interviews to follow-up and expand on the diaries has enabled me to partially mitigate this limitation.

A further limitation of the diary study is the small sample size of 12 diaries and nine interviews. This sample provided a great depth and richness of data about the lived experience of leading at a senior level across a number of different industries in the UK. However, a wider variety of industries and organisations could have been studied, and future studies could explore whether cultural or gender differences exist in the process of developing an informed responsive practice of coping.

In spite of these limitations, my research has produced five valuable contributions that extend and deepen our understanding of the process of becoming a leader: the

conceptual frame that depicts a fuller understanding of the process of becoming a leader; the concept of micro-disjunctures; the trigger process of reflexive dissertation writing; the concept of informed, responsive practical coping; and the process of woodshedding that moves a leader from oping on a non-deliberative manner to coping in an informed and responsive way.

6.6   Concluding thoughts

This thesis has emerged from a process of reading, researching, reflecting, writing and revising, a process designed to produce what was called an alternative format thesis when I started my PhD, and is now called a multi-part format thesis. This change reflects a core idea that has influenced my work, that of process theory, in that everything, including the name and components of this thesis, is perpetually in motion, constantly evolving and becoming. The multi-part format requires the construction of three journal articles worthy of publication and a wraparound piece of work comprising introduction, methodology and conclusion chapters. The process of writing the introduction and conclusion have enabled me to reflect on the process of researching and writing a thesis, and of becoming a researcher.

A central process of my thesis has been one of constant review. The literature began with exploring leadership, leader development and leadership learning, which then engaged with and intertwined with papers and ideas emerging from the two empirical research projects. This allowed me to discover adult learning theories of becoming (Jarvis, 2009a) that have not explicitly influenced previous leadership learning papers. and enabled me to develop the narrative literature review using a process theory lens which in turn influenced the two empirical studies focused on different temporalities of becoming a leader. Through this emergent process I slowly realised the centrality of the core ideas of process theory to the concept of becoming a leader, something that spoke deeply to the threads of my own experience of leading.

Previously I have co-authored a textbook on leadership (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2020) and taught leadership to MBA and executive education students. This has resulted in me observing leadership and leading in all aspects of my life, from running youth clubs and negotiating with my family, to watching television programmes and films. Perhaps inevitably, an introduction to process theory has resulted in me seeing everything as a process, or as in-process, evolving, changing, growing, declining,

starting and terminating. In accepting process theory as core to processes of leader becoming, I still hold to the theory that leaders, like rivers, whilst being in constant evolution remain recognisable, and I am drawn to the idea that a leader has a minimal self that can be changed but also remain constant (Eustice-Corwin, 2020). As such, my position on becoming a leader is probably best described as a weak process theorist (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016) who accepts the value of researching the world through the lens of both weak process theories (substance philosophies) and strong process theories (Vendette et al, 2022).

In becoming a researcher, my perspective of the process of becoming a leader has emerged as a process in itself. My understanding has flowed from a relatively basic understanding and appreciation of incidental and experiential learning to a complex, process perspective in which becoming is a whole-life endeavour, with threads of becoming emanating from all aspects of life. The complexity of the whole-life approach highlights how important micro-disjunctures can be to the process of becoming, as crucial as both memorable moments of disjuncture and accelerated moments of becoming when in a role of leadership. I can now see that becoming a researcher is also a process of resolving disjunctures and is one that is accelerated by leaping into a PhD, especially one done as a part-time student. A substance theory perspective (Vendette et al, 2022) allows me to believe that I have had some intentional influence over the process of becoming a researcher, choosing from the opportunities presented (Dall'Alba, 2010), and intentionally using processes such as woodshedding to develop the practices and methods that underpin this thesis. By reflecting in this way on my journey of becoming a researcher I have been struck by the complexity of the process of becoming both a leader and a researcher, giving me a greater respect for colleagues who both research and lead.

To conclude, I believe that this thesis enriches our understanding of the process of becoming a leader. Through publication of the papers in chapters 2, 4 and 5 I hope that my research will enable a more complex approach to becoming to be adopted by leadership learning and development researchers and practitioners, ultimately helping organisational leaders to become more intentional about their own process of becoming.

Appendix 1: Reflexive MBA Dissertations

Reflexive Dissertation Guidelines for Corporate Challenge and Internship Students

Purpose

The reflexive dissertation is the culmination of your MBA year at Lancaster. It gives you the opportunity to draw together your previous work experience with the knowledge and experience you have gained on the MBA. By doing this you will gain clarity on how your studies will improve your management and leadership in the future.

To achieve this you will define a set of principles which will support your future career. A principle is a statement or maxim that frames an attitude, a behaviour and/or a belief. For example a principle might be written as:

'The only prudent way to manage a business is never to lose sight of the overall goal'.

This has implications for the management of constraints on achievement of the goal, for the definition of performance measures, for the identification of critical and non-critical activities in achieving the goal and so on. There are theoretical and practical arguments to support and critique such a principle.

Your dissertation should present a convincing argument to tell us why each principle is especially appropriate for you. You can reference your experiences prior to and during the MBA to provide this argument.

Structure

Students should focus on:

- What are your principles of management/leadership? There is no limit but you may find that a number between 5 and 9 feels appropriate. You should offer a description of each principle, detailing what exactly that principle is.
- Why is this an important principle? This is where you can discuss why this principle is important to you. It may include descriptions of the situation/ experience(s) that led to the discovery of the principle e.g. if your principle is 'It is essential to describe a clear and compelling vision', where have you seen this done well? Who inspired this?

- Academic work should be drawn on here to highlight the importance of the principle e.g. for the principle 'to have a clear vision' you might discuss the literature surrounding transformational or charismatic leadership.

- How will you use this principle? This is where students should consider the applicability and impact of a principle. Students should give some reflective thought to the implementation of a principle – can you use it easily and well in your next job and how transferable will it be to future positions?

The dissertation must have a cover page as per normal assignments, and a bibliography. References should be entered in an appropriate format (e.g. Harvard style). You must check to make sure that no references are missing from the bibliography. As with spelling/typing mistakes and poor use of English grammar, omission of references can cause the award of the degree to be deferred.

Assessment

The reflexive dissertation will be assessed against three variables:

- Authenticity: Can you show that your principles are convincingly rooted in your own understanding of theory and your own personal experience of management practice?

- Use of formal learning: Can you show how ideas and formal learning have strengthened your managerial understanding and practice?

- Productive application and Impact: Can you show (with solid supporting evidence) that your principles have been convincingly used in ways that demonstrate their value, either to change situations or to change your own performance, in positive ways?

Questions to ask about these criteria:

Authenticity:

- Am I able to describe this principle in terms of my job / work, my context, events in which I was a prominent actor, my life?

- What did I do / think / feel about events that I am focusing on? Have I described and analysed some of these events and related them convincingly to the principle I am describing?

- How is each principle uniquely important for me?

- Have I reflected on my personal assumptions, beliefs and values? Have I demonstrated a connection between these and my principles?

Use of Formal Learning:

- Have I engaged in relevant reading around the topic area of each principle?

- Have I revisited the readings covered during MBA modules and used tutors and online resources to deepen my knowledge of relevant ideas and frameworks?

- Have I used specific, detailed examples of the principle in action, factual observations or evidence of situations to support reflections, (and avoided sweeping generalisations and uncritical personal opinions)?

- Have I questioned the principles, perhaps even developed aspects of them, rather than simply applying them mechanistically and unquestioningly?

Productive Application and Impact:

- Can I show that my actions, based on these principles, have had a significant positive outcome for myself or for the organisations and situations I have encountered during the MBA programme?

- How can I use the principles to improve myself and develop as a manager/leader with concrete, realistic steps?

- How will I know that I am making progress in deepening my knowledge about the use of the principles?

- What changes do I want to make to the way I manage/lead?

- What kind of feedback should I get, and from whom?

A good reflective essay is:

- a thoughtful analysis and synthesis of ideas

- an integration of relevant theoretical concepts and personal work experience

- a clearly expressed account of real change and learning, not an artificial construction designed to impress

A good reflective essay is not:

- An uncritical or unquestioning description of your personal and work life i.e. not just feelings without thoughts or vice versa
- A theoretical piece detached from personal and work experience
- A traditional management or consulting report, with lots of bullet points but little narrative and discussion, little doubt or uncertainty

Example of thematic analysis sheet

Appendix 2: Diary study

'Acts of leading' research diary

At the end of each week please spend time describing at least one 'act of leading' you have done during that week. An act of leading can be anything you personally have done that you would describe as leading. This might be, but is not restricted to, a decision in which you and others are involved, a behaviour – role-modelling perhaps, or some form of communication – written or verbal, official or unofficial, direct or informal, or perhaps even a coaching or mentoring moment. What I am interested in is what leaders actually do on an everyday basis, so an act does not necessarily have to be the 'big' moments or dealing with crisis or making crucial strategic choices. It can be the everyday incidents of discipline, encouragement, wisdom and action that you would describe as your way of leading.

To help you describe your acts of leading, the following pages contain four questions for you to consider. Please formulate your description around these questions, and write in as much detail as possible, including facts, acts, situational details, people involved, and any emotional reactions. The boxes are not there to constrain you – please write as much as you feel necessary.

This form enables you to keep the diary electronically. If you would prefer to hand write your diary please do so, then scan your pages so that you can send through an electronic copy.

Each completed record will be considered confidential, and held on a secure, encrypted drive at Lancaster University. Any data used from the diaries in my PhD thesis will be anonymous.

Please email your completed diary to me at the end of each week: c.j.saunders@lancaster.ac.uk.

Many thanks

Chris

[For the purpose of the PhD Thesis, only week 1 is shown as an example, as the questions were repeated for each week. The diary had space for participants to write answers – these have also been removed.]

Week 1:

Please describe any acts of leading that you have undertaken in the past week. Include brief details on the situations and the people involved, as well as describing your own actions.

Choose one act from those listed above to describe in as much detail as possible. What happened? What did you do?

How did you decide this was the appropriate action to take? Please describe in as much detail as you can the decision process that you went through and ALL the factors that had an impact on the decision you made.

Please discuss any reflections you have about this act of leading. How do you feel about the act and about anything that has occurred as a result of your act?

Analysis tables

Table 1: Activities of Leadership

|	
Dealing with people	coaching & advising; reviewing/evaluating/ appraising performance; 1-2-1 meetings with direct reports; Union liaison; official meetings e.g. dismissals, misconducts & complaints; managing upwards; interviewing for senior staff/Board members; setting objectives (with individuals); attending key events (e.g. training & development celebrations; difficult issues e.g. poor behaviour/ harassment/ arguments/ under performance; supporting and challenging colleagues; evaluating staffing needs – normal churn and issues of growth/ decline; ensuring a good physical work environment for colleagues; intervening in disputes between senior staff; taking difficult people decisions; developing/ encouraging future leaders - succession planning; initiating groups/ bringing people together; senior staff training due to changing demands e.g. legal training; cyber security; counselling etc
Managing the present	chairing internal meetings; delegating work; continuously clarifying the vision/strategy; regular senior team meetings; hosting/chairing sector-wide meetings; decision making, especially on resources; presenting internally & externally; drafting reports; meeting the Board, individually and collectively; setting and maintaining standards; negotiating internally on office space/ buildings/ resources; leading on strategic projects (e.g. sustainability); press & PR issues; risk identification and mitigation management; leading contractual negotiations
Exploring the future	setting the vision for corporate planning; joint venture/partnership /takeover proposals; building relationships for new business opportunities; restructuring the business; leading strategy workshops & away days; setting business objectives; environment scanning, sense making & sense giving; information – working out what information you need and how to get it;
Representing	networking/ relationship building; speaking at external events; liaison/ relationship building/ engagement with stakeholders e.g. local authority/ regulator/ lawyers; representing sector at events; non-executive Director work; peer review of competitors; leading on external regulation/ accreditation/ standards;

| Leading yourself	dealing with personal abuse due to decisions made; planning & preparation e,g. for away days/ conference speeches/ new business pitches/ vision casting/ implementing strategic priorities; managing self – time and emotional management;

Table 2: Acts of leading

Activity	Examples of Acts of leading
Chairing/ attending meetings	Selecting when to chair a meeting to ensure the clarity of the outcome & knowing when to not to attend
	Listening intently and questioning – picking out important threads; seeking the truth; asking open questions
	Ensuring enough time for the controversial items to be debated, deciding when to be assertive, moving discussions into actions.
	Attending to support colleagues and helping colleagues to make sense of the world
	Keeping 'strong personalities' in check during meetings. Cultivating/ preparing colleagues in advance for decisions
Relationships	Listening to, empathising with, supporting and reassuring colleagues – especially those struggling with personal issues..
	Noticing when colleagues may need to talk privately and making time for this.
	Checking in with individual colleagues following difficult meetings.
	Encouraging peers, colleagues, reportees and encouraging 'up'. Congratulating, praising colleagues; personally thanking people
	Coaching staff (not just direct reports) on their future. Mentoring staff who are underperforming.
	Giving practical advice to colleagues e.g. helping with individual objective setting
	Challenging colleagues e.g. on decisions, knowledge, behaviours. Challenging assumptions
	Creating future leaders – coaching newly promoted colleagues; encouraging ambitious staff to take on strategic projects
	Spending time with enthusiastic individuals, providing support, removing barriers
Stepping in	Facilitating the exit of underperforming staff; agreeing severance offers; being personally involved (not delegating this)
	Acting on inclusion and diversity in a public and personal way e.g. sending individual messages to colleagues
	Making time to help teams prepare for important meetings
	Speaking out to senior staff on issues when this may be career damaging (courage) – managing up!
	Acting on difficult people issues – convening meetings, bringing people together with a sense of urgency
	Volunteering for difficult tasks/ volunteering support to achieve results (even when not your job)
	Leading by example to generate wider behaviour change
	Using experience/ knowledge for the good of others e.g. colleagues and clients
Stepping out	Cultivating a 'critical and trusting' relationship with the regulator/ council etc
	Building individual relationships that may lead to new business/ partnerships
	Speaking out to important external stakeholders e.g. funding organisations, regulators etc
Leading self	Pausing – thinking carefully how to respond to colleagues when needing to deliver an important/ unpopular message
	Preparing – e.g. to be able to ask carefully worded challenges; knowing the detail
	Treading carefully! Gathering information before making comments/ decisions

	Knowing when to consciously park own agenda to listen to the other
	Knowing how much information to give at any one time – enough to help but not to overload
	Reflecting on practice and changing to get a different result
	Trusting rather than micro managing
	Making space in diary to be 'present and available' to colleagues when in the office
	Keeping positive when the colleagues are getting tired
	Delegating line management appropriately
	Spending time doing the key activities of the organisation so you know what colleagues are experiencing e.g. teaching; vaccinating; back to the floor
	Making disciplined decisions about own time, workload, availability and energy, and demonstrating that through behaviour
	Being prepared to have difficult conversations with the boss
	Thinking very carefully about the bigger decisions; being more cautious; gathering all the available information; talking it through with trusted colleagues
Leading the organisation	Directing – using listening to develop a very clear way forward, even if this is not universally popular
	Visiting departments/functions to commend and say thank you after meetings
	Following up on decisions – supporting and ensuring people are accountable
	Encouraging staff to publicly appreciate each other
	Dealing individually with heads of underperforming areas – allowing for open discussions; making space for personal issues to be discussed; offering support and reflection time
	Values-based lobbying internally – e.g. for a more sustainability focused strategy
	Consulting colleagues – getting information and balanced/ different perspectives. Checking your thinking.
	Initiating discussions with service leads
	Creating systems to monitor staff overload and moments of intense stress – and then develop interventions to alleviate this
	Giving clarity on expectations and standards; ensuring discipline
	Creating inclusive networks e.g. women's network

Example of thematic analysis of diaries
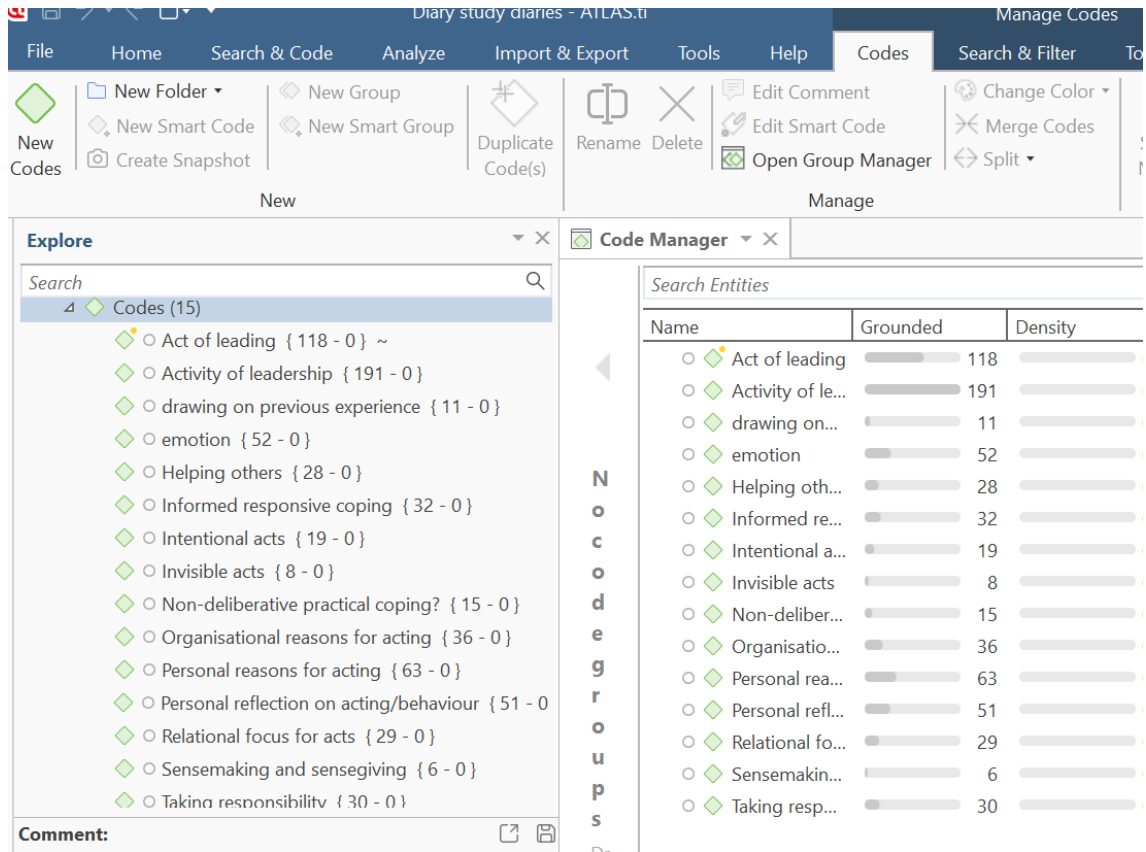
Example of thematic analysis of interviews
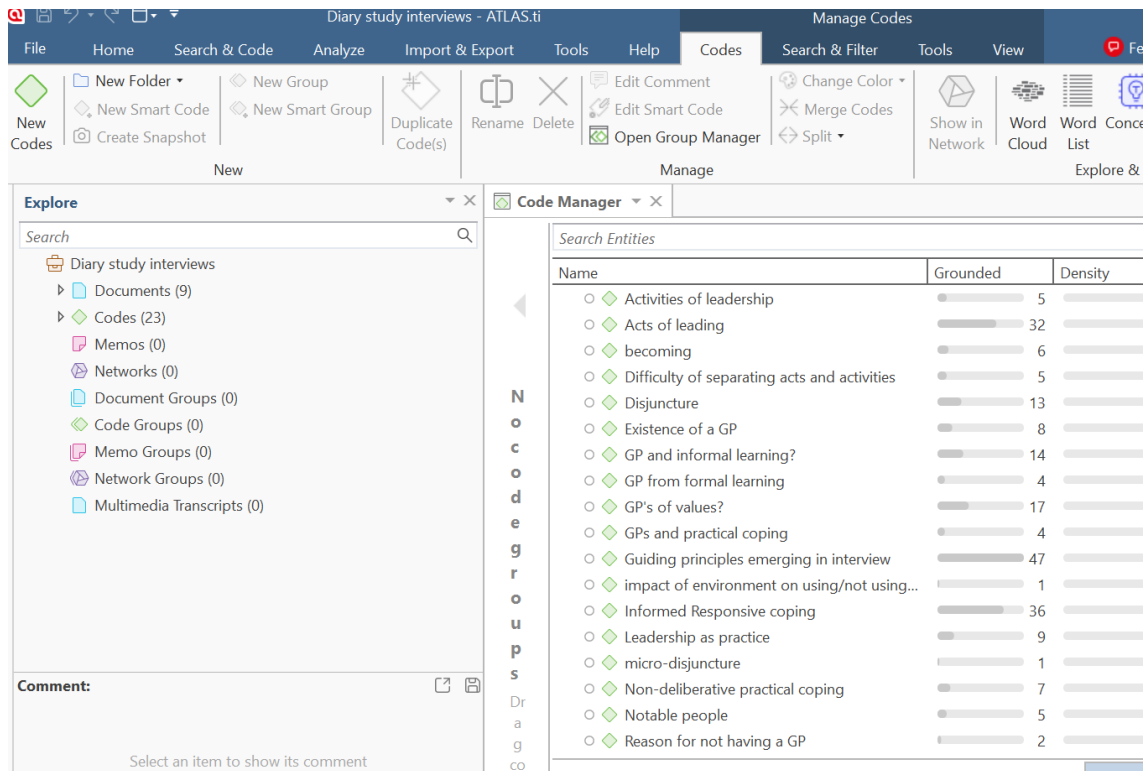
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(∗ indicates articles that are part of the narrative review sample in chapter 2. For completeness, all articles in the sample have been included, even those that have not been cited in the final edit of the journal article)

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