'Good Enough', 'Imperfect', or Situated Leadership:
Developing and Sustaining *Poised Resourcefulness* within an Organization of Practitioner-Consultants

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Abstract

Can practising and knowing be exhibited, not as separate entities, but as a single, multi-dimensional, entwined activity? We think they can. In this paper, we want to explore the possibility of there being for us, as living beings, many more immediate and unreflective bodily ways of being related to our surroundings than the ways that have become conspicuous to us in our more cognitive reflections – ways of orienting ourselves to the others and othernesses around us that can become directly known to us within the unfolding dynamics of both our, and their, bodily movements in the course of our engaged intra-actions with them. As an example, we want to explore how, within the context of an existing organization, a certain dialogical style of intra-acting – involving informal forms of talk, responsive listening, and the noticing of subtle aspects of people's expressions – can result in a group of consultants developing (and sustaining) their own autonomous ways of working, while displaying at the same time a certain 'house style'. What is new in approaching organizational learning and leadership in this fashion is that we begin to attend to those forms of judgment needed to assess a best way of "going on" (Wittgenstein, 1953) in uniquely new circumstances – a learning that can be likened to what a 'good enough' (but not an idealized, perfect) mother (Winnicott, 1988) can achieve in providing the occasions or circumstances within which her infant develops his or her understanding of a first (rather than a second) language.

Being employed in Attractor is not about being good enough theoretically but about daring to let go of perfection and to be present. I practice this in relation to all new employees. I give people a kind of a paradoxical message: You can become much better, but at the same time you are good enough – otherwise you would not be here!'" (Brand1, a senior manager in Attractor).

> *"The leadership process is like a river. Contained by its bed (the culture), it can be said to be flowing in one direction, yet, upon close examination, parts of it flow sideways, in circles, or even backwards relative to the overall direction. It is constantly changing in speed and strength, and even reshapes its own container"* (Barker, 1997, p.352).

Past approaches to leadership, as Barker (1997) has pointed out, have focussed on "the knowledges, skills, abilities, and traits of the leaders which are *presumed to be* the most successful in getting followers to do what the leader wants them to do" (p.344, our emphasis) – what, in brief, we will call the *heroic* model of leadership[2.] This model has, for the most part, as

Barker points out, been "defined ostensively" (p.347), by referring to people already occupying leadership positions. But as he makes clear, this approach – in which named outcomes of a productive process are posited as the *ideal forms* which guide the process towards their own productive realization[3] – leaves us in fact ignorant of the actual process of leadership itself, especially in those situations in which "the goals (of leadership) are not specific, or when the imposition of order does not solve the problem" (p.350). In an attempt to move away from the heroic model, from what Barker calls the "dyadic supervisor/subordinate relationship" (p.350), he suggests that leadership be conceptualized as "a *dynamic* process of interaction that creates change," and that if it is, "then the leadership roles may not be, perhaps should not be, clearly defined" (p.351). Indeed, he goes further to suggest that leadership is a *developmental* process in which those being trained to work in a company come to develop an "understanding of themselves and a conventional base from which to explore experiences: in other words, they learn to 'manage' themselves" (p.359). It is just this process, in which those in a company come to 'manage' themselves that we want to explore further in this article.

In concurring with Barker's suggestions above – that if leadership involves a developing, dynamic process of interaction, then leadership roles cannot be (and, perhaps, should not be) clearly defined – we want to carry across Winnicott's (1988) use of the term 'good-enough mothering', from mothering to leadership, for just the same set of reasons as his reasons. "It is convenient," said Winnicott (1988), "to use a phrase like 'good-enough mothering to convey an *unidealized* view of the maternal function; and further, it is valuable to hold in mind the concept of absolute dependence (of baby on environment), rapidly changing to relative dependence, and always travelling towards (but never reaching) independence" (p.90, our emphasis). Thus below, we want to explore in much more detail what is involved in 'good-enough' forms of interaction[4], as they have been played out in the developing dynamics of a particular leadership process – both their *unidealizable* and their *changing* nature as the developmental process unfolds – a leadership process that begins as mothering begins, with a sensitivity and a responsiveness to another's perceived needs, a process that seems to have resulted in the creation of a company of consultant-practitioners able to develop (and sustain) their own autonomous ways of working, while displaying at the same time a certain 'house style'.

Our Bodily Immersion in a Ceaseless Flow of Dynamically Unfolding Activity: On Learning to Make Judgments

Central to our explorations below is the assumption that, as living beings, there are many more immediate and unreflective bodily ways of our being related to our surroundings than the ways that have become conspicuous to us in our more cognitive reflections, *ways* of being *related* or of being *oriented* towards our surroundings that can become known to us from within the unfolding dynamics of our engaged bodily movements within them. Such *ways* of relating can become known to us in terms of the embodied anticipations and expectations with which we approach the things, people, and events occurring around us. Indeed, as we see it, it is the role of these (what we will call) *orientational* understandings arising out of our experimental or

exploratory movements that are basic to the further development of both our everyday *and* our professional practices. Below, however, we want to go further, to suggest with Todes (2001) that without this multi-stranded, embodied 'background' (pre-conceptual, perceptual) understanding of the specific field of possibilities in which, in each changing moment, we are embedded, we would not only lack all *orientation,* but in not knowing 'where we are', we would also, literally, 'not know what to do next'.

But even more than this, lacking these embodied, pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual, gained-in-action (and thus action-guiding understandings) that 'sit' within us, so to speak, as 'standards' against which to judge the appropriateness of our verbal expressions, we would not know what words to use in expressing the nature of our situated understandings to others.

In other words, what we can find at work within us are *felt* understandings to do, not with facts or information, but with *what kind of context* we are in, with what our current surroundings *require* of us, i.e., the 'calls' they exert upon us to respond within them in *appropriate* ways, as well as with the opportunities for action they can *afford* (Gibson, 1979) us – a kind of *felt* knowing that shows up in our *readinesses to respond* in certain ways, spontaneously, according to the anticipations embodied in the *approach*, *attitude*, or *stance* we adopt towards a particular circumstance.

This approach, as we shall see, leads us into a kind of fluid, process thinking, a shift from thinking of events as occurring *between* things and beings existing as separate entities prior to their inter-action, to events occurring *within a continuously unfolding, holistic but stranded flow of events*, with no clear, already existing boundaries to be found anywhere (Mol & Law, 1994) – a flow of events within which we ourselves are also immersed. In other words, rather than having life and language *within* us, we have our lives and language *within* our living relations to our surroundings, within the languaged flow of activity continuously unfolding around us. Thus rather than inter-actions, we become involved in *intra*-actions, activities in which we find things happening to us as much as we make things happen in our surroundings[5].

And this is another major theme that we want to explore further here: What does our thinking need to be like *if it has to take place in a 'fluid space'*, a space in which there are no fixed and finished 'things' in terms of which to conduct it? Can we think in terms of *dynamic stabilities* – in terms of what Mol and Law (1994) call "invariant transformations" (p.658) or Gibson (1979) calls "formless invariants" (p.178)[6] – that is, in terms not of static, pictureable and frameable forms, but in terms of sequences of continually changing forms, all of which appear as *aspects* of a stable 'something' which emerges[7] within a larger flow of activity? Is it possible for us to install ourselves, *now*, at this moment, within such a 'flow of experience', a flow of activity which has not yet been 'worked over' to distinguish *unique aspects* or *features* within it to which we must give some sort if expression? Like Mol and Law (1994), not only do we think it possible, we think that in practice much work *is in fact done* on the basis of sensing such dynamic stabilities within essentially fluid spaces.

This, however, is an unusual orientation. As intellectually active adults, our focus is more usually on knowledge as conceptualized, on propositional knowledge – as Argyris (2003) has noted, "actionable knowledge requires propositions that make explicit the causal processes required to produce action" (p.444). But as young infants, we lack such well-defined forms of knowledge; if we are later to gain this kind of 'knowledge' of the 'things' around us, we must first be able to recognize them and move around in relation to them in our everyday practices as the 'things' they 'are', that is, as the 'things' they are taken to be by the others around us – and such practical recognitions cannot be taught us at this stage by trying to teach us propositions or by offering us facts linguistically. For the ability to say explicitly, "This is an X (but not a Y)," requires our already having come to know, *implicitly in our bodily activities*, what X-ness and Y-ness is; and this capacity to orient towards the 'what-ness of things' in our surroundings in the same manner as those around us, and to *judge* that this is indeed an X and not a Y, is something we acquire in the course of our spontaneous involvements with these others. It is something a 'good enough' mother teaches us, spontaneously, in the course of her being attentive to what she senses as our 'needs', the unsatisfied tensions she can perceive us as feeling in the incipient intentions she can see us as *trying* to execute, as she feeds, comforts, plays, and otherwise actively interacts with us[8]. It is our 'tryings' (and 'failings') that are important to her at this stage in our development, not our achievements (see the discussion below of Ryle's distinction between "task-verbs" and "achievement-verbs").

Thus, if in the course of an infant's early life, mothers act as "double-agents" (Shotter & Gregory, 1976, p.6) – prepared to satisfy some of both their infant's 'needs' as well as their own – then together, in a somewhat wordless 'conversation' between them, conducted very largely in terms of intonation contours, gestures, facial expressions, joint attention, touch, smell, rhythmic intertwining, mothers and infants can come to know each other intimately. Indeed, the fact is that, while still to an extent vague, others around us (and we ourselves[9]) can respond to the 'temporal shape' of our expressions (see Shotter, 1993, 2008; Stern, 2002, 2010) immediately and directly without it being necessary for us to first learn rules or any other previously agreed criteria as to how to act in response to them; and it is within the 'living shape' of these expressions that we first come to learn the shared 'ways' of *relating ourselves to our surroundings* common to those in our culture. These *orientational* aspects of our learning are crucial. And this, we want to suggest, is the task of a leader, or a consultant, or anyone entering a new and unfamiliar situation in which they hope to create change: their task is not a matter of problem-solving, but that of arriving at an orientation, a *way* of making-sense of what is at first a bewildering situation. They must first come to a sense of the possibilities for change the situation *affords* (Gibson, 1979) in terms common to those already in that situation; they must learn to make judgments.

"How do I know that someone is in doubt?" asks Wittgenstein (1969). "How do I know that he uses the words 'I doubt it' as I do? From a child up I learnt to judge like this. *This is* judging" (nos. 127,128). "Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement" (no.378). That is, it is based on our capacity *to relate ourselves* to a 'something' in our surroundings linguistically in a certain manner, to distinguish it and to describe it *as* an X rather than *as* a Y. But if the

'something' in question is a new, never before encountered something that needs to be distinguished and responded to uniquely *'as itself'*, then we cannot be 'told about it' in linguistic terms *representative* of 'things' already well known to us. We need first to be 'introduced' to it, so to speak, to become acquainted with it, to acquire some expectations as to how it will respond to a range of our actions.

In other words, rather than treating ourselves as already having a complete mastery of our first language, and as learning to use theoretical-talk as a second-language, we must sometimes still treat ourselves, even as adults, as like *first-language learners*, as still having to learn, to distinguish, and to respond to the unique what-ness of previously unencountered 'things' – that is, as still learning to make judgments as to what in fact they *are* in ways similar to the judgments made by those around us. This is not the case in learning a second language, in which we need to learn to talk of 'things', already distinguished as such in our surroundings, in completely new terms[10].

This leads us on to another, even more central reason for emphasizing the need to attend to the circumstances surrounding our utterances, to do with the *creative* nature of all dialogically-structured activities (Bakhtin, 1986)[11]. For we will argue below that genuine innovative change cannot be *produced* in an organization in accord with a plan or strategy, i.e., it is not a matter of *praxis*, of conducting an ordered activity with an end in view. It is a matter of *poiesis* – an originating creativity that goes beyond currently existing understandings, a creativity that *just happens*, which *emerges* if the appropriate dialogic circumstances are in place. Consequently, innovative change, we would like to say, cannot be planned; but it can be *occasioned* or *circumstanced*.

The Role of Dialogically-Structured Practices Within the Unending Flow of Intra-Action

> *"... an utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations"* (Bakhtin, 1986, p.94).

There is something very special, then, about the dynamically flowing nature of dialogically-structured activities that we feel has not yet been properly understood and assimilated into the management learning and organizational studies literature. It has not been assimilated, we feel, because, as Antonacopoulou (2009) notes, we need "to unlearn the ways in which we generate and ask the questions that drive our inquiry" (p.423). In other words, the kinds of changes that are needed in our thinking are 'deep' changes, changes in our 'ways' of thinking, 'ways' of seeing, of hearing, 'ways' of 'making connections' between events, 'ways' of talking, and so on ― in short, they are changes not in what 'we think' but in 'what we think with'[12]. We need to extend our first language learning. Hence, these kinds of changes cannot be produced by

following intellectually devised plans, procedures, or protocols, because the coordinated execution of planned actions depends upon all concerned already sharing the set of existing concepts relevant to the formulation of the plan. Such plans can only result in the continual rediscovery of a sameness. How can something quite other than what is already well known to us enter us and lead us to act in a previously unthinkable way? This, we think is the power of the dialogical.

As we see it, as living, embodied human beings, the spontaneous responsiveness of our living bodies is very basic; we cannot live in a completely isolated, self-contained fashion, in total separation either from our surroundings or from the others and othernesses within them. We live out our lives from within a ceaselessly ongoing background flow of dynamically unfolding activity, and it is from within our immersion in the midst of this activity that we must conduct our inquiries – we cannot in reality divorce ourselves from participating within it. Indeed, due to the spontaneous responsiveness of our living bodies, instead of one person first acting individually and independently of another, and then the second replying, by acting individually and independently of the first, i.e., inter-individually, in all dialogically-structured activities, we act jointly, as a *collective-we*. In so doing, we move from an activity in which we, as separate individuals, merely *coordinate* our activities, to a joint or dialogically-structured activity within which we become a *participant part* in, and of, a larger, unitary process. And we do this bodily, in a 'living' way, spontaneously, without our having first 'to work out' how to respond in this manner with and to each other. In short, we move from *inter*-acting to an *intra*-acting. This means that when someone acts, their activity cannot be accounted as wholly their own, for their acts are partly 'shaped' both by the acts of the others around them, as well as by their responsiveness to other aspects of the larger situation within which they are acting (Shotter, 1980, 1984, 1993, 2008).

It is this that makes this kind of joint activity so special, for when it occurs, unique, qualitatively distinct, ephemeral 'somethings' emerge within the dynamically unfolding entwinings of the two or more unique 'flows' of activity involved within it. Indeed, as Bakhtin (1986) points out, because (a) something novel, related to the circumstances of the dialogical transaction itself, is always created, and (b) because its overall outcome cannot be traced back to the intentions of any of the individuals involved[13], the novel 'somethings' created are experienced not as objects, but as 'agencies', as "a *superaddressee* (third)" (p.26) with 'its' with their own (ethical) demands and requirements: "Each dialogue takes place," he says, "as if against a background of the responsive understanding of an invisibly present third party who stands above all the participants in the dialogue (partners)... The aforementioned third party is not any mystical or metaphysical being... he is a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance, who, under deeper analysis, can be revealed in it" (Bakhtin, 1986, pp.126-127).

And, just as that invisible third partner, with 'its' with their own (ethical) demands and requirements, is present to an infant *in* the many different ways in which a 'good enough' mother pays attention in her perceptions of her infant's needs, her perceptions of his incipient intentions in relation to his surroundings – by looking towards what he is pointing at, putting into his hand

what he seems to be reaching for, pointing out 'things' for him to notice, giving possible words all the time to what he is doing, while intoning all the time encouraging, soothing, and/or affirming expressions, commentating on his actions in terms that later he must master – so we might say, this is how 'good enough' leaders/ researchers/ consultants might bring about 'actionable' knowledge in those they are working with in their collaborative inquiries into *their* practices.

So what is being implicitly communicated here in the living of the experience unfolding in the relations between the 'good enough' mother/researcher/consultant attentive to the perceived needs of her child/subject/client, if it is not objective, propositional knowledge? In exploring the question as to whether there is such a thing as 'expert judgment' about the genuineness of a person's expression of feeling, and whether one can learn to be such an expert, Wittgenstein (1953) comments: "Yes, some can. Not however, by taking a course in it, but through 'experience'. – Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip*. – This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. – What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments" (p.227) – or better, one learns the skill of *coming to* correct judgments, a skill that involves being able to open up within oneself an 'inner dialogical *space of experimentation*', to use a phrase used by the editors of this issue.

Current Understandings of Management Research and its Failings:
Ryle and Category Mistakes

> *"Actionable knowledge requires propositions that make explicit the causal processes required to produce action. Causality is key in implementation. Shoham (1990) writes, 'If causal reasoning is common in scientific thinking, it is downright dominant in every day sense making' (p. 214)" (Argyris, 2003, p.444).*

"Business schools are on the wrong track," say Bennis and O'Toole (2005, p.96). The trouble is that business schools have embraced "the scientific model of physicists and economists, rather then the professional model of doctors and lawyers" (p.98), and this leads to student managers being taught methods that "are at arm's length from actual practice, [which] often fails to reflect the way business works in real life" (p.99). What is needed, they suggest, is that: "The entire MBA curriculum must be infused with multidisciplinary, practical, and ethical questions and analyses reflecting the complex challenges business leaders face" (p.104). While we agree with their account of the inappropriate nature of the MBA curriculum, we wonder whether 'infusing' it with 'multi disciplinary questions and analyses' will actually work to 'reflect' the way business works in real life to change the actual *practices of management* that students come to embody in any significant way. For as we indicated above, the changes we need are 'deep' changes in 'what we think with', changes in our language-entwined practices to do with how we go out to meet our surroundings with the right kind of anticipatory responses 'at the ready', so to speak. Bennis and O'Toole fail, we feel, to appreciate this.

Drawing on Hedberg's (1981) and Tsang's (2008) work, Antonacopoulou's (2009) suggestion, already mentioned above, that we might need to *unlearn* the ways in which we generate and ask the questions that drive our inquiry is, we think, very relevant. And we realize that in applying this need to one of Antonacopoulou's own formulations we are being to a degree impertinent. However, as the tendency she exhibits in her formulation is a very general one – indeed, it is the very general one that Argyris (2003) quotes Shoham (1990) as claiming to be *dominant* in everyday sense making – we feel justified in focussing on it. For it is precisely this claim as to its dominance that we feel is misplaced. Quite correctly in our view, Antonacopoulou suggests that a "*dynamic conceptualization* of practice is called for that accounts for the emergent nature of practice because of the tensions inherent within and between practices" (pp.422-423, our emphasis). But then in line with Argyris' claim that it is explicit propositional knowledge of causal processes that is needed, she goes on to list a whole set of *named aspects* – such as *Practitioner, Pronesis, Purpose, etc.* (*all beginning with a P*) – all of which, she says, "call for a series of questions to be raised to uncover the *outcomes* that a practice is orientated towards" (p.423, again our emphasis on 'outcomes'). And she goes on to say, "these points are useful foundations for future practice-relevant scholarship that focuses not only in analysing practice as a key variable to explain social, political and economic forces. It is a useful foundation also for considering the *outcomes* to which management scholarship is orientated if it is to deliver impact" (p.423, our emphasis). But again, as we see it, it is the very focus on 'outcomes' that precludes the very possibility of a *dynamic* conceptualization.

In making this claim, we have in mind the work of Ryle (1949), who points out that to think we can arrive at a description of what occurs during the *saying* of an utterance from an examination of what was in fact *said*, is to make, as he terms it, a "category mistake." He introduces the idea of a category mistake by imagining a foreigner asking to be shown "the University of Oxford." She is shown the various colleges, libraries, scientific departments, etc., and so on, until there is no more to show. The foreigner then says: "Thank you very much for showing me all these things, but can you now show me 'the University'?" In other words, the foreigner has failed to recognize that 'the University' – as an *organized* collection of observable but disparate entities – is of a different logical type or category from the separate but intra-related entities within which it consists; in other words, they are emergents. And the most notable sphere in which we continually make such category mistakes is, as Ryle points out, in our attempts to *describe* human activities. For, as he points out, we continually use "achievement-verbs" when we should have provided an organized or orchestrated sequence of "task-verbs," along with their individual criteria of satisfaction – that is, we too often talk of actually 'doing something' when we should speak only of '*trying* to do that something'. For it is *how* a person looks or listens, the *way* they look or listen, that determines in large part what they will hear or see.

Hearing or seeing something, as an achieved outcome, is determined by the anticipations we bring to the situation of our hearing and seeing as a result of our prior experiences or prior preparations. The anticipations and expectations a golf or a tennis coach might bring to a player they assess will be quite different from those a choreographer would bring to a ballet dancer upon which they must pass judgment. *Achievement*-verbs, "verbs like 'spell', 'catch', 'solve',

'find', 'win', 'cure', 'score', 'deceive', 'persuade', 'arrive', and countless others," Ryle (1949) notes, "signify not merely that some performance has been gone through, but also that something has been brought off by the agent going through it. They are verbs of success" (p.125). People have performed something successfully, efficiently, or correctly.

But there is more to our bringing off achievements in our practices than embarking on them with the right kind of anticipations 'at the ready'; we must also execute various *judgments* in the course of their execution. As Ryle (1949) points out, people must also be *responsible* for their performances. "A person's performance is described as careful or skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon successes, to profit from the examples of others and so forth. He applies *criteria* in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right" (p.29, our emphasis) – a person's actions are performed in accord with certain "action guiding anticipations" (Shotter, 2005), felt as distinct tensions requiring satisfaction. Describing a practice only in terms of its *outcomes*, its *achievements*, not only precludes the possibility for error and the need for *judgment* in the execution of the series of tasks leading up to an achievement, but ignores completely the role of our deeply embodied expectations ('assumptions') in determining the question we might ask in our inquiries as to the nature of practices.

In summary, then, category mistakes or mistakes in logical type occur when, in the service of *achieving general explanations*, we try to describe people's activities in terms of their general outcomes, instead of in terms of their sequential details as they unfold in response to particular circumstances, in the course of producing these outcomes. As a consequence, rather than attending to something out in the world that can be *seen*, that can be *pointed out* to others and identified – the actual detailed things people do and say in the course of their activities – we talk of abstract entities (like the University of Oxford) which we ourselves construct in terms of salient features, aspects, of our own choosing, different at different times according to different ends in view that we might have. In other words, such entities have an emergent or dialogically-structured nature; and we should not relate ourselves to them *as if* they are tangible, nameable objects with distinctive properties of their own. In other words, when we talk about such seeming entities as 'organizations', 'companies', 'businesses', 'the workforce', 'persons', 'language', 'communication' – as well as 'knowledge', 'action', or 'theory' – we should not assume that we all know perfectly well what the 'it' is that is represented by the concept of the entity we are talking about. 'It' does not 'already exist' in a wholly determinate form prior to our talk 'about' it. As Mol and Law (1994) point out, "in fluid spaces there are often, perhaps usually, no clear boundaries. Typically, the objects generated inside them – the objects that generate them – aren't well defined" (p.659), although they can usually be 'pointed out' in practice.

'Good Enough' Leadership

We have already seen above, then, that with a 'good enough' form of mothering – a form of mothering that is sensitive to our 'needs', to the unsatisfied tensions at work in us, to our

expressions of incipient intentions that care-takers can help us complete – we can, along the way, come to learn all kinds of things to do with *being* a certain kind of person, someone who comes to make *judgments* in many ordinary everyday circumstances in a manner similar to those made by the others around us. In so doing, we come to share our culture's *ways of going on* and *making sense of things* without our (mostly) having explicitly to be taught them. We come to see *as facts* what others also see as facts, to see as 'things' what others see as 'things'.

What we would like to explore here is whether a similar form of what we might call 'good enough' leadership can help practitioners within an organization to learn and to sustain – without any explicit teaching in terms of propositional forms of knowledge – what we have called the 'deeper' forms of knowing and judging required *to be* relationally sensitive and knowledgeable practitioners. Crucial to it, as we have already noted above, is the fact we, and the others around us, can spontaneously respond to the *speaking* of our words, to 'temporal shape' of our expressions, without it being necessary for us to learn any previously agreed criteria as to how to act in response to them. Indeed, as parents, we rely on our children responding in this spontaneous way to our expressions in teaching them the contingently intertwined (and thus seemingly orderly) linguistically structured practices which we later come to think of, philosophically, as rule-governed practices. Relying on the directionality inherent in the temporally unfolding of living activities, we utter at certain crucial moments in the course of this teaching (along with a whole set of exaggerated facial expressions and other bodily gestures), such verbal expressions as 'Stop!', 'Look', 'Listen', 'Look at that', 'Listen to this', 'Do like this', 'Do it like that', and so on. In being intertwined in with a particular activity in a particular context, parents are acting here like a coach.

The crucial nature of events occurring in the *moment of utterance* cannot be over emphasized here: in coming at a particular moment in the already ongoing flow of contingently intertwined activity occurring between them and us, in pointing in their gestural expressiveness from *'this past'* towards *'that kind* of future', our children's activities allow us to intervene at *that* moment, and in doing so, to point them towards '*another kind* of future', towards seeing a connection between events of a previously unnoticed kind. And it is within such a process as this that our children can "grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.88).

What in detail might a kind of leadership which continues activities within an organization conducive to the building of such mental strengths entail?

Central to them, we want to suggest, are a number of what we might call local-cultural influences on the original development and sustaining of overall style of what we will call the *relational-talk*[14] occurring in the organization in question in this article, Ramboll Attractor, Denmark (RCM Attractor - Dk): they are *curiosity*, *irreverence*, *irony*, and *redescription* – features introduced by the second author into the organization as one of its founding members in 2000, and continually sustained by his introduction into the company of monthly 'academy days', master classes, organisational days, and annual 'summer institutes'.

The first two features mentioned above were introduced under the influence of the work of the Milan Group in Systemic Family Therapy (Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1980; Cecchin, 1987) – who, in breaking away from the idea of themselves as scientific researchers seeking a definitive 'truth' as to the nature of the clinical situation, came to regard it not as a neutral object to be studied, but as a complex situation requiring a complex exploration. In not seeking final answers, they sought to conceptualise an initial 'vague knowing', in which continual learning and development in satisfying the felt tensions in a situation could occur, whilst still remaining curious as to what else might be at work unnoticed within it, thus seeking always to question it further. Later, the group came to introduce the notion of *irreverence* (Cecchin, Lane & Ray, 1992), of always being prepared to say, "yes, but there is another way to see this," no matter how nicely one's current account of the clinical situation might seem to capture the nature of the difficulty seemingly presented.

Rorty (1989) calls people of this sort – those who are "never quite able to take themselves seriously because they are always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves" (p.74) – 'ironists'. "The ironist," as he describes her, "spends her time worrying about the possibility that she has been initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game. She worries that the process of socialisation which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being. But she cannot give a criterion of wrongness" (p.75).

Thus ironists have a *poetic* task in life, for the claims of reason can only follow paths that have first been expressed as possible by an imaginative use of words: "irony, as I have defined it" he says, "results from awareness of the power of redescription" (p.89) – and, in contrast to a craftsman, who "typically knows what job he needs to do before picking up or inventing tools with which to do it... Galileo, Yeats, or Hegel (a 'poet' in my wide sense of the term – the sense of 'one who makes things new') is typically unable to make clear exactly what it is he wants to do before developing the language in which he succeeds in doing it. His new vocabulary makes possible, for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose. It is a tool for doing something which could not have been envisaged prior to the development of a particular set of descriptions, those which itself helps to provide" (pp.12-13). "A talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument for cultural change" (p. 7).

What relational-talk of this kind tends to make possible, then, is the establishing of dialogically-structured relationships in meetings both within the organization, and in meetings between organization members and clients – meetings that can occasion or circumstance both the emergence of novel possibilities for a next step forward, as well as the gaining by participants of what we have called the 'deeper' forms of knowing and judging required *to be* relationally sensitive and knowledgeable practitioners. Working in a community like this, in which speaking differently is entirely natural, not only provides a 'cultural background' oriented towards the continuous creation of novelty, but also leads to employees eager to take on the personal responsibility for the life and practice of the organisation. As Anne Marie reports (in an

interview with Jacob Storch); *"... the really interesting and cool part of working in Attractor, is that you are offered the chance to influence and to be a co-creater of the culture. Right from the beginning, Morton's and your organisational culture was open, new and fresh – one couldn't avoid shaping it. Thus I really want to make an effort bringing on the new... Come on, take your chance! Shape what you want, go for what you aspire for the most! Because it gives me personally a lot of energy, I can pursue my ambitions."*

Indeed, it is not going too far to say that the living responsive relationships existing in the organisation form the very reason for Attractor's practitioners wanting to come to work, every day, with the aim of making a difference, not only for and in Attractor's clients, but also for and in themselves. Indeed, each new instrumentality invented – the kinds of dialogue, the interviews, the exercises, the 'noticings' recorded, the trainings offered by Attractor – are not formulaic. They have no reality apart from that given them by the way (or ways) in which they are attended to *in practice* by clients and practitioners alike. They are social constructions which are *offered life*, i.e., expressed in ways which give rise to *actionable knowledge*, by those involved in them relating to them in different ways at different times in different places, in ways that are responsive to what are perceived as the 'needs' of the current situation.

Anne Marie gives an example of this occurring from some time back, an episode in which she learnt a new and important aspect of consultancy practice. She refers to a meeting in which Jacob Storch ended up with the design of a change project that created a whole new practice in an organisation (a client that Attractor has now worked with for more than five years continuing the project into new regions with consistent positive results). Anne Marie describes it thus: *"When I saw you long time ago in the meeting with XX and YY, there I saw you dancing with them in a very special way… What I experienced right there was exactly co-creation, where one might have an idea about what kind of dance is needed here and what kind of poses one can take. So you don't enter like some kind of soft amorphous alike thing, but one comes in as someone with ideas, but one also follows the 'metaphorical dances' of those who are in the room. I saw you put an opportunity (of a project design) on the table after some relationship building in the shape of attuning, listening and questioning… And then you gave them space to both be satisfied and unhappy about it – they actually left the room and came back and said it wasn't fitting for them. And this you just contained and said, that's okay, how would you like it to be? And then you facilitated a process with them that made them draw up what they would like instead, what they really imagined would work for them in their situation in their departments and regions. I think this was very exemplary and the crazy thing was, something I was really impressed by, they had completed an idea that as a whole resembled what you in the first place had presented to them, just slightly modified so that they now saw it as their project. They didn't have the slightest idea about how much the two things looked alike*."

To the question: "Couldn't one say that this was successful manipulation?," Anne Marie replied: *"No, I don't at all think so. They had the total freedom to say what they wanted. They were held in the open and facilitated in such a way that it became possible for them to put into language something that they didn't have words for… The consultant needed to manage the balance*

between keeping the process open and at the same time assure that the solutions created actually produce desired outcomes... have them take ownership – it is here that one lives the idea that those who hold the problems also hold the key to their solutions."

In other words, it is a remarkable fact how the living of a practice can exert an influence on people's ways of relating to it, so that it can extend into other relationships beyond the original relations between client and consultant within which it emerged. Just as we might say that babies teach women to be 'good enough' mothers, so we could also say that clients can teach Attractor employees to be 'good enough' consultants.

It was in the course of this interview that Anne Marie brought forth the notion of "imperfect leadership" as a way of describing the leadership practice in Attractor. She described it as follows: "*it is not by the book...it has no manual...so one has to find one's own direction and way into it, and it then becomes the way that one really believes in. It may sound a bit silly to talk about 'imperfect' leadership, but there is also something really down to earth about it, something very human. It doesn't become a distant leader out of reach – it offers you an opportunity to feel yourself instead of just following the pretty roads laid out for you.*" It was this comment of Anne Marie's that provided the original motivation for this article. The whole notion of imperfection here resonates with Rorty's (1989) account of being an 'ironist', as it brings to the fore the fact that we must continually make our own judgments in the face of our own neediness and incompleteness before parts of the world that we do not fully control. Anne Marie's account here describes the precise circumstances in which she experiences the tension of having to make up a road for herself, to take ownership over her own presence – and what it offers her in return, is the experience of having her own voice, of feeling herself. For she continued: "*From my point of view it has first and foremost forced me to feel myself and figure out – loud and clearly – where I stand... and I actually think that one could strive more for this condition because there so much more human, something real and authentic about it which I like better than the polished, it makes possible for me to take a different ownership and through it experience a different kind of engagement.*"

Another example arose when a change in EU (European Union) regulations required Attractor to switch from gaining contracts through direct contact with clients to open bidding. A date for a 'strategy day' within Attractor to do with handling this change was set and the detailed planning of it handed over to two employee/colleague consultants, Catherine and Per. The reason for choosing two employees was to invite the different voices of the management of Attractor *and the consultants* into a 'strategy dialogue', so that all involved could experience 1) each other's feelings as to what was important for them in relation to the strategic themes being discussed, and also, 2) to create an arena for talking that wasn't defined by management, but by colleagues. One of the consultants, Catherine, reflected on her thoughts about being given this task: "*I had my thoughts about this being such a good idea... But on the other side I thought that maybe the word 'strategy' would be more welcomed if my colleagues knew that this was being arranged by employees/colleagues* (and not the management)" And she continued:

> *"So I tried to 'walk around the pig!' – you know, looking at it from multiple perspectives. Imagine if we could create a strategy day that would become relevant and meaningful to our work here and now! ...Imagine if we could be completely transparent about our relationship to the word strategy and what it means, both as managers and employees. Imagine if we as employees could see the trust and influence that is offered to us by the management to put our own future on the agenda. Imagine if all could sense the uniqueness in that we all can have direct influence on our organisation's strategy... Imagine if all go home afterwards with their hands in the air and with dreams of making such a strategy day for our customers. Imagine if...'*

It is worth paying attention to the movement that takes place during her description: She moves from an indeterminate to a determinate stance, from a closed to an open approach to the challenge – a movement from reiterating prejudices about management and strategy into an imaginative realm. She describes this movement thus: *'I had the feeling that our attitude went from thinking that perhaps management eased their burden on us, into thinking that management was so up front and brave in letting us as employees run the day, with all the different prejudices we have in relation to what appeared as a boring strategy.'*

What we have been outlining here, then, is that 'good enough or imperfect leadership' does not simply emanate from the person of the leader, him- or herself alone. It is not a matter of their intellectual cleverness in creating 'good ideas' for the solution of intellectually formulated problems. It comes to pass, i.e., it emerges, spontaneously within the dialogically-structured circumstances occurring between people in the course of their jointly shared explorations of a situation in which they are at first disoriented. What Anne Marie expresses is the freedom she felt in being afforded the opportunity to find *her own* direction, in *her own* circumstances, in *her own* terms, and not having to follow 'a pretty road laid out for her' in *someone else's* terms. The freedom she feels here, clearly, is neither final nor perfect, it is temporal, situated and what started off for her as a feeling of freedom one day can become a constraint for her the next. Only the continuous application of a redescriptive attitude towards one's current understandings – an ironic attitude that values imagination over certainty, experimentation over inference, growth over stability, innovation over repetition – will work to produce the continuous flow of novelty required for one flexibly to adapt one's practices each unique day to each uniquely new encountered circumstance. And Catherine, although she felt she had been given an unpleasant task, found that in interviewing Attractor's leaders about their struggles with strategies, she came to feel that the strategies arrived at belonged to all in the company, and were not just the management's alone.

Conclusions: On Occasioning or Circumstancing the Possibility of Leadership

> *"... it is not the leader who creates leadership, it is leadership that creates the leader"* (Barker, 1997, p.354).

Above, then, in exploring the details of what 'good enough or imperfect leadership' might look like, we invoked the image of what is involved in first-language learning: the fact that in the course of our spontaneous involvements with a 'good enough or imperfect mother', we can come to orient towards the 'what-ness' of 'things' in our surroundings, i.e., to make *judgments* in the same way as she does. In so doing, we can come to share in our culture's *ways of going on* and *making sense of things* without our (mostly) having explicitly to be taught them. Thus in this kind of learning, rather than the propositional content of what is *said*, what seems to be central at this stage in our learning is the power of people's words *in their speaking*, not to help us in solving of problems, but to help us *relate* or *approach* or to *orient* ourselves towards the unbroken flow of events in our circumstances, and to pick out within them nameable 'things', nameable dynamic stabilities. Indeed, it is the expressive aspects of 'good enough' leaders' utterances, when intertwined in with a particular activity in a particular context, that can make them so special and give them such a crucial role the communication occurring between them and their employees.

Thus people's success in becoming more well oriented in their surroundings is not to be found in them simply making a *decision* to execute a precisely nameable sequence of tasks, i.e., in doing something intellectual, but in them doing something prior to the possibility of such decision making of a much less cognitive and much more practical kind. They must move around in the situation of their concern in a tentative experimental fashion, both physically and imaginatively, using the qualitatively unique tension aroused in them, that initially motivated them to become engaged in the situation, as a guide in arriving at a *resolution* of it in a line of action felt to the best possible way of acting available to them, within it, at this moment in time (Shotter, 2010).

Hence, to go further, rather than laying out explicit but de-contextualized plans or 'recipes' ahead of time for others to follow – no matter how well-intentioned or well-fashioned – the task of 'imperfect or good enough leaders (or consultants)' is to help to create the *occasions* or *circumstance*s in a company within which (and through which) employees can develop *their own ways* of orienting or relating themselves to the situations within which they must work. Only then will the knowledge that emerges for them in those situations be properly actionable knowledge, knowledge with detailed relevance to the context in which it must be used. However, we see contemporary leadership and consultancy practices outlined in the mainstream literature doing the exact opposite. They still seek to impose their own abstract *idealizations* in an intellectual, problem-solving effort to outline how, instrumentally, certain abstractly defined outcomes (achievements) can be 'brought off', as if the nature of *what* it is that needs to be achieved is already well-known. Whereas, if the *way* or *ways* to achieve this outcome were in fact already well-known, there would be no necessity for the consultation process; clients could themselves simply tailor the process to what the contingencies of the circumstances would allow or afford.

Thus, to summarize: this kind of mixed practical and imaginative work prior to our acting, to do with our becoming more well-oriented in our surroundings, is of a quite different kind to that

involved in problem-solving. So, although such explorations cannot give rise to anything objective, anything that can easily be pointed at and described; nor can they offer us any 'sure-fire' techniques for immediate practical application; they can in fact offer us something of much more value to those of us as professional practitioners who must act in the moment, from within the midst of complexity. Just as we know, bodily, that we are walking forwards rather than sideways, uphill rather than downhill; that the car we are in is turning rather then going in a straight line; that the room we have just walked into is full of a silent tension amongst all those within it; that the question just asked has not yet received an answer, and so on and so on, so we can also extend such 'sensings' as these – which are continually present to us as an aspect of our *composure*, poise, or *assuredness* in the world *orienting* us in our more deliberate actions – to the achievement of a kind of *poised resourcefulness* in our professional lives: a capacity to enter each new and unique situation we encounter in our professional practice with a range of relevant responses 'at the ready', so to speak, to whatever contingencies, bewilderments, disorientations, puzzlements, feelings, emotions, etc., we might meet there.

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End Notes

[1] All the names of the individual respondents have been changed for the purpose of anonymity.

[2] If we look on the Encyclopedia of Business Management Methods and Models page of *12Manage*: http://www.12manage.com/index_expert.html – an executive business interest group network of management methods, models and concepts – we will find, literally, thousands of them already in existence, and there is, clearly, no shortage of yet more new models and methods. Novice leaders are in danger of drowning.

[3] Indeed, a logical circularity is involved which, if we were doing logic rather than conducting a practical inquiry, would be called *petitio principii* – the fallacy of assuming as a premise a statement which has the same meaning as the conclusion. "The fallacy that arises," said Dewey (1896), "is virtually the psychological or historical fallacy... A state of things characterizing an outcome is regarded as a true description of the events which led up to this outcome; when, as a matter of fact, if this outcome had already been in existence, there would have been no necessity for the process" (p.368) – we could have gone straight to the outcome rather than having to perform a complicated sequence of movements in reaching it.

[4] Later, we shall have reason to talk of *intra*-action, i.e., action within an indivisible, flowing whole, rather than *inter*-action between already separately existing entities.

[5] As a participant part within a larger whole, we take on, for the moment, a new identity as such within it; it is this that makes an *intra*-action quite different from an *inter*-action in participants retain their original identities unchanged. We owe this point to Barad (2007).

[6] "We are looking at *variation without boundaries and transformation without discontinuity*. We are looking at flows," say Law and Mol (1994, p.658, their emphasis). Similarly, Gibson (1979) points out that, due to the continual motion of our eyes, in 'seeing something', we pick up an aspect of 'it' here at this moment, another there at that moment, and so on. As he puts it: "... the perceiver *separates* change from nonchange, *notices* what stays the same and what does not, or *sees* the continuing identity of things along with the events in which they participate" (p.247).

[7] The term "emergent" in its modern sense was coined as long ago as 1875 by G. H. Lewes (1875): "...although each effect is the resultant of its components, we cannot always trace the steps of the process, so as to see in the product the mode of operation of each factor. In the latter case, I propose to call the effect an emergent. It arises out of the combined agencies, but in a form which does not display the agents in action" (pp. 368-369). Due to their chiasmic, intertwined nature, the impossibility of being able to 'trace the steps of the process' is also a quality of dialogically-structured activities.

[8] As Wittgenstein (1953) notes, "if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" (no.242); and implicit in a good enough mother's facial expressions, tones of voice, and other more informal aspects of her expressions, are her valuations of, her judgments as to, *what* is in fact taking place.

[9] "That process... of responding to one's self as another responds to it, taking part in one's own conversation with others, being aware of what one is saying and using that awareness of what one is saying to determine what one is going to say thereafter – that is a process with which we are all familiar... We are finding out what we are going to say, what we are going to do, by saying and doing, and in the process we are continually controlling the process itself. In the conversation of gestures what we say calls out a certain response in another that in turn changes our own action, so that we shift from what we started to do because of the reply the other makes. The conversation of gestures is the beginning of communication" (Mead, 1934, pp.140-141).

[10] As we see it, learning to see intra-actional events in terms of a proposed theory or model is like having to learn a second language.

[11] "An utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing and outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable... What is given is completely transformed in what is created" (Bakhtin, 1986, pp.119-120).

[12] As Rorty (1979) notes: "It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions" (p.12).

[13] That is, they are emergent in proper sense of the term.

14141414141414 We call it 'relational-talk', not only to contrast it with propositional talk, but as will become clear, in

being talk between limited, imperfect beings, in *not being* talk aimed at certainty, at perfection, it is exploratory talk, 'wondering' talk, talk that lives with the anxiety of uncertainty while exploring what might be possible in a particular, local situation.

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