
Behind the mask of a CEO of a Management
Training Institution:

Exploring breakdowns of identity in the struggle
for recognition.

Philip James

September 2020

Thesis submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Management

Abstract

Key words: Identity, recognition, performativity, indeterminacy, breakdown, emotion, neutrality, discourse, reflexivity.

Key authors: J. Dewey, N. Elias, G.H. Mead, G.W.F. Hegel, E. Goffman, J. Butler, A. Honneth, R. Stacey, I. Burkitt, C. Mowles, B. Townley, D. Griffin, A. D. Brown.

This thesis explores how idealisations of management identity influence everyday practice as a CEO, drawing on narrative accounts from my experience over a number of years. Combining the performative perspective of Erving Goffman with Axel Honneth's ideas on the struggle for recognition, my inquiry delves into what happens when the habits and expectations behind the masks we wear break down. My research is informed by the complex responsive processes perspective developed by Ralph Stacey and colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire that views organisations as ongoing patterns of communicative interaction between human beings. As such, the inquiry gives critical attention to the concrete micro-interactions of everyday conversation, taking such experience seriously (Stacey & Griffin, 2005). I combine this perspective with contemporary identity research in management and organisation studies to make original contributions to the current scholarly conversation (Afshari et al, 2019; Beech & Broad, 2020; Brown, 2020; Clarke & Knights, 2020; Coupland & Spedale, 2020; Kenny, 2020; McInnes & Corlett, 2020; Petriglieri, 2020; Pratt, 2020; Simpson & Carroll, 2020; Winkler, 2020; Ybema, 2020).

I establish a perspective on neutrality as a privilege arising from dynamics of power and make further contributions to four themes in the contemporary debate by addressing the methodological importance of reflexivity; by taking a paradoxical perspective on identity as individual and social both at the same time; by thoroughly considering embodied and emotional qualities of emotion; and by taking up the invitation to adopt and extend Goffman's dramaturgy to include a habitual interpretation of performativity (Brown, 2020; Beech & Broad 2020).

My arguments are that management practice is performative involving idealisations of managerial identity that are profoundly influenced by assumptions of autonomy and choice in the systemic management discourse. This idealised identity can break down in the everyday flow of practice, leading to intense feelings of shame and disappointment. Since they are painful and associated with failure, these emotions can become covered over, influencing practice, amplifying the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1995) and the search for meaning and fulfilment. Finally, I argue that management practice can encompass inquiry into breakdowns (Dewey, 1910) as a way of enhancing our capacity to act amidst the indeterminacy of organisational life.

My contribution to practice includes unique and original empirical material, which, through reflexive inquiry, offers a rich account of my experience as CEO of a modern UK training institution. This thesis presents critical analyses of highly ritualised managerial events, such as Board meetings, as well as much more mundane, conversational episodes that together offer highly resonant openings for reflection by other managers interested in problematising everyday dramas that typify everyday organisational life. This contribution includes critical engagement with evidence of movement in my experience of management practice, including a challenge to neutrality as benevolence, the struggle to stay with the emotional heat of breakdowns of identity and how, together with the groups in which management practice takes place, a CEO might come to experience ways of becoming more reflexive. I offer no prescriptions for better outcomes. Instead my contention is that reflexivity can broaden our capacity to act as a way of taking our responsibility for each other seriously.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank my faculty colleagues and fellow students for the privilege of being part of the Doctor of Management community.

Special thanks to my supervisors, Karina Solsø and Nick Sarra for their support, challenge and encouragement; to my ever-evolving Learning Set, Keven Bartle, Sally Hopper, Senta Jakobsen and Philip Ayuk for their provocative conversations and companionship along the way.

To my family, Kathryn, Charlotte and William – thank you for your love, your patience, your unwavering belief and - well - for everything.

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Introduction

This thesis provides insights into everyday lived experience as a CEO, dogged by disappointment with life at the top. A fascination with how skilled people run organisations has fuelled my own ambitions to join that elite, but I am left puzzled by the mismatch between my experience and what my extensive management education predicts should be happening. My research ignites some of the burning questions that arise from this sense of confusion and disappointment: how the expectations I carry about what it means to be a successful CEO influence the way I think about what I should be doing; how intense feelings of shame and disappointment get covered over when things go wrong; how we can become caught up with indeterminacy, struggling to take a position when surrounded by conflicting views on even the most trivial of matters; and what possibilities there may be for engaging differently as a CEO to make better sense of ideas like success and fulfilment.

I explore identity as a manager, taking a critical stance on how much of the modern discourse on management presents largely tacit assumptions about the nature of organisations as systems comprising autonomous individual people with freedom to make rational choices (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey, 2012; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Townley, 2008). Unchallenged, these assumptions present a way of thinking about management that promotes individualised ideas of success, where other people are human resources to be directed towards achieving goals from which might be derived a sense of achievement and fulfilment (*ibid*).

These expectations simply do not stand up to my experience as a CEO, which is fraught with often intense emotional episodes of anger, shame and disappointment when things fail to go to plan, or when my colleagues and I find ourselves embroiled in seemingly trivial matters that distract us from our ideas of what we should be doing. I am not alone in being puzzled by why contemporary management writing seems to ignore such painful emotional experiences in organisations when they seem to me to be part of everyday experience (Burkitt, 1999; Fineman, 2008; Townley, 2008) and find myself left with a wholly unsatisfactory conclusion that feeling anything other than positive means we simply must be doing it wrong. This conclusion is unsatisfactory in part because of how it ignores the emotional labour that goes into covering over painful emotions, into sorting out conflicts so that people can recover a sense of harmony, and into putting on a mask of calm, confident positivity as a leader hoping to inspire others into action (Fineman, 2008; Goffman, 1959; Hochschild, 1983; Shields, 2005; Simpson & Marshall, 2010; Townley, 2008; Vince & Gabriel, 2011).

It is through our emotions that we come to experience the world and our sense of selves as subjects (Burkitt, 1999; Dewey, 1895; Mead, 1934; Wetherell, 2012). So, if emotions are largely missing from the contemporary discourse on what being a manager is all about, this raises questions about what

the consequences are for a sense of identity. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the concept of identity has come to attract more recent scholarly attention in management and organisation studies (Brown, 2017, 2019, 2020; Knights & Clarke, 2017; Winkler, 2018). The perspective that I draw upon presents a thoroughly social and paradoxical understanding of identity as a dialectic process of recognition and misrecognition emerging through communicative interaction (Hegel, 1991, Honneth, 1995; Mead, 1934).

Inquiring into the emergent nature of this local communicative interaction, I turn to linguistic and dramaturgical interpretations of performativity (Butler, 1993; Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986; Gond et al, 2016; Learmonth, 2005; Simpson et al, 2017) and to insights from process sociology to explore how, through conversation, our identity simultaneously forms and is formed by a largely invisible and unarticulated social order (Butler 1993; Elias, 2000, 2001; Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986). Inquiring into the emotional heat of breakdowns is thus a way of glimpsing what is emerging when the struggle for recognition and meaning become amplified amidst the indeterminacy of organisational life (Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1910; Honneth, 1995). My research starts, therefore, with the challenge of taking experience seriously, which means progressively deepening and intensifying a critical reflexive analysis of particular, concrete events to allow what is going on behind the mask of this CEO to become vividly illuminated and held open for further imaginative interpretation (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012; Stacey & Griffin, 2005; Thomas, 2010).

Throughout my thesis, I give an account of how my thinking has moved in the process of writing it. Movement in my thinking reflects a wider movement in the thinking and practice of other people with whom I am engaged in research - my colleagues at work, members of my Learning Set, and the broader DMan community (Stacey & Griffin, 2005). I take a position informed by the pragmatic philosophical and group analytic traditions that the self is fundamentally social in nature (Elias 2000, 2001; Foulkes, 1948; Mead, 1934), meaning that reflecting on how my thinking has moved is not merely about providing an introspective account of something that is isolated within me, but a way of elucidating the dynamic conversation that I am part of at work and on the DMan. I am therefore hopeful, following an intensive process of engagement with my research community, that my research will be interesting, relevant and provocative to other managers and researchers. Since my thinking and my practice are interwoven, accounting for the movement in my thought illuminates some of the consequences for practice when adopting a more reflexive and inquiring approach as a manager.

The context for my research

I joined the DMan programme a year after joining a UK-based institution delivering leadership and management development activities. As its CEO, leadership and management are not only elements

of my daily practice, but concepts that are the focus of the work of the institution itself. When I began, I saw the DMan as an opportunity to bring new thinking on management practice into my work: how to make best use of my new knowledge, insights and research experiences. I was concerned less about my practice as a manager and more about opportunities to say something new and interesting about management as a concept. Through the process of reflexive inquiry, I began to pay closer attention to my daily experiences in the present – to what I'm already doing now, rather than what I hope to happen in the future. What I noticed and started writing about is the sense of disappointment I felt in my everyday interactions and in the practical tasks and activities I found myself doing in my work. One of the consequences of this was to decide to leave my CEO role at the institution, some six months before the end of the DMan. So, my occupational context changed significantly as I came to reflect upon my research projects in conclusion of my thesis. This leaves me working through the consequences of my resignation for myself and my colleagues, including the uncertainty of what I might find myself doing next. It is important to acknowledge this changing context as a feature of my experience that is inevitably entangled with my research work on the DMan, particularly as the focus of my research is on my experience of identity in organisational life.

Outline of my research method

My research follows an abductive inquiry into breakdowns in my regular everyday experience as a practising manager (Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1910; Thomas, 2010). I write autoethnographic accounts of these situations, providing thick narrative descriptions of what happened and reflecting upon them (Anderson, 2006; Geertz, 1973). My intention is towards phronesis not theory (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Thomas, 2010). Rather than attempting to formulate a new theoretical model that might be wielded out of context, I aim to evoke emotional resonance in the reader who might recognise in their own experience similar dramas to those at the heart of my inquiry (Anderson, 2006). My contribution to knowledge includes providing scholars with original empirical material and critical analysis forged from a unique intersection of performativity, indeterminacy and recognition in the particular context of my experience as a CEO (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012, p15).

The structure of my thesis reveals the way that it was composed as four research projects and a synopsis. Project 1 is an intellectual autobiography, addressing what has influenced me and what assumptions have come to form the way that I think and make sense of the world. In this respect, Project 1 has a style and structure that is different to my other projects and its purpose is to draw critical attention to the assumptions, prejudices and habitual tendencies that pattern my way of making sense of my experience and participating in the world. Projects 2, 3 and 4 begin with narrative accounts of puzzling breakdowns in my contemporary experience at work that further challenge my

habits and ways of making sense of the world (Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1910). Again, these projects were developed iteratively through several stages, deepening the reflexive engagement with the experience described and drawing in theory to develop my inquiry.

My synopsis represents another reflexive turn on my four research projects, which are a source of empirical research material as a series of projects through which the movement in my way of thinking becomes apparent. My overarching theme of identity, combining motifs of recognition, performativity and indeterminacy, became apparent only through this retrospective analysis of my earlier research work. Whereas many other doctoral approaches begin with a review of a field of literature to identify gaps, my research follows an abductive approach. This means that the specific literature I engaged with was informed by the iterative process of the research method, starting with a particular line of inquiry and broadening into a wider appreciation of the field. Researching literature became a recurring exercise throughout my thesis as my research question developed and my inquiry deepened. I further establish the grounds for following this method in my *Methodology* section.

Research on the DMan is richly informed and influenced by the group analytic tradition (Mowles, 2017; Stacey & Griffin, 2005). Participation as a researcher in the DMan community is intrinsic to the method employed in producing my thesis. My projects have been critically reviewed by members of my Learning Set every six weeks through the course of the programme. Each quarter, I have gathered with the whole DMan community for residential weekends that comprise many informal opportunities for discussion as well as seminars on different theoretical perspectives, and Community Meetings held as median experiential groups (Mowles, 2017, p.7).

This thesis contains my research projects in their original form, a synoptic summary where I reflect again upon these to establish the ground for my arguments, and a fuller account of my research method, including consideration of my approach to literature review and ethics. I conclude my thesis with a claim to the contribution that I make to both knowledge and practice.

Summary of the complex responsive processes perspective

The intellectual stance on the DMan is broadly located in the interpretive critical management tradition, questioning underlying ideological assumptions about the world and our way of making sense of experience in organisations. The programme takes a frame of reference known as complex responsive processes of relating, developed by Ralph Stacey and colleagues Doug Griffin and Patricia Shaw at the University of Hertfordshire, and critically examined and evolved by the DMan community over a number of years. This perspective shares insights from theories of organisational becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Langley and Tsoukas, 2012; Hernes, 2014), the social nature of the self (Foulkes, 1948; Mead, 1934) the nature of time (Prigogine, 1997; Griffin, 2002) and paradox (Mowles, 2015), together with parallel interests from the Critical Management Studies school: politics, power relations and processes of identity and recognition.

Fundamentally, this perspective has four theoretical pillars. The first draws on complexity sciences by analogy to provide insights into how change emerges in organisations through local interaction, emerging as patterns that are paradoxically recognisable but unpredictable, stable and changing, and regularly irregular. The second is the philosophical tradition of pragmatism (see the work of William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead) and the conception of humans as thoroughly social beings, where the idea of 'self' arises – and is constantly formed and reformed – in social interaction. Next, is the group analytic tradition that provides a frame of reference for inquiry, positioning research as a both an individual and group driven activity, which of course is congruent with the pragmatist philosophy of the thoroughly social self. The fourth pillar draws on process sociology and the work of German sociologist, Norbert Elias, who shares one of the important elements of the pragmatists to describe the interwoven nature of individuals and society; that both are phases of the same phenomenon and that it is incongruous to discuss one without the other. Elias says that humans are formed intersubjectively and that patterned changes in society emerge from the interaction of interdependent and interacting human beings – that local and societal patterns form and are being formed simultaneously (Elias, 1970, 2000, 2001).

To summarise, these four pillars combine to provide particular ways of thinking about organisations. Firstly, an emphasis on local micro-interactions between people that paradoxically produce and are produced by global patterning of experiences; secondly, the emergence of global patterns over time according to a complex perspective on the nature of temporality; and thirdly, the paradoxically social nature of the self. This combination of perspectives provides the general rationale for a research method that uses narrative inquiry into the patterns that emerge through my experience of ordinary micro-interactions with others in my work as CEO.

My Arguments

I have developed my arguments from a critical reflexive engagement with my research projects informed by the complex responsive processes perspective. My arguments are founded upon the motifs of recognition, performativity and indeterminacy that emerged from this reflexive methodology. Later in my thesis, I expand upon my four arguments, summarised here:

- Management practice involves a performative enactment of idealised identity that is influenced by assumptions of autonomy and choice in the systemic management discourse;
- This idealised identity can break down in the performative flow of practice, leading to feelings of shame and disappointment;
- Such breakdowns of identity can amplify a struggle for recognition and the search for meaning;
- Finally, I argue that inquiring into breakdowns can be a way of enhancing our capacity to act amidst the indeterminacy of organisational life.

My Research Projects

I have not re-written my research projects for this thesis but instead present them in their original form, finalised at each stage of my progression through the DMan programme. Each was developed through iterative writing and re-writing following reflexive analysis with my Learning Set until reaching a stage that I, my Set and my Supervisors felt was good enough to establish a position and to continue deepening my inquiry in subsequent projects. The reason that the projects have not been rewritten is that each then becomes a source of empirical research material in two senses: First, each records a narrative and contemporaneous reflections that represent important aspects of my experience at the time of writing; and second, as a series of projects, the movement in my thought becomes visible from one to the next. This allows for a further reflexive turn within my synopsis that reveals new ways that I am now making sense of my narratives and reflections, highlighting differences in how I was thinking about them at the time that they were written. I will return to a deeper consideration of this method and the concept of reflexivity in my Research Methodology section and now present my four research projects in order.

Project 1 | Exploring how I have come to think the way that I do

This project developed through an iterative process of writing, challenge and refinement with my DMan community colleagues and uncovered two distinct narrative themes not originally apparent in what began as a chronological telling of my career. I therefore arrived at a form that follows those themes systematically, paying attention to the patterns that emerge in a way that a chronological biography would stifle. I conclude by summarising why I've come to think the way I do, pointing to commonalities across these themes, finishing with the resulting questions that warrant further inquiry in the DMan programme.

Theme 1 | The pursuit of success through mastery of theory in practice

I was born in 1970 into a working-class family, the eldest of three sons who enjoyed a happy and stable childhood. Having done well at school, I was the first in my family to go to university: an achievement worthy of celebration, bringing promise of career success built on a solid education. I pored through university brochures to consider what to study and chose construction management, attracted by how the degree was sponsored by a consortium of construction companies looking to attract new graduates to improve the industry's image and performance. The vocational setting, focused application of business and management education and company sponsorship combined to promise great employment prospects in the early 1990s, when UK graduate unemployment was high.

Into construction

On graduating, I secured a full-time job but became frustrated by my experiences in construction. My work on site was of little interest to me. I would do things like direct traffic, place orders for materials, interpret measurements from architects' drawings and set out markings on site for tradespeople to work to. I felt I wasn't being given opportunities to progress into management, despite having built up practical experience during my degree. This felt like a backwards step, a waste of time. What was the point of that year and a half's experience if I had to start from scratch when I graduated? I'd expected my degree, with its high levels of practical experience, to present a powerful springboard for early career success and was eager for progression.

The idea of progression and improvement was a central concern of Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus who proposed a five-stage model of skills acquisition in the 1980s. The brothers considered how people move from 'Novice' to 'Expert' by acquiring knowledge, developing skills and shifting approach from an analytical, rule-abiding way of working to one that becomes more intuitive with advanced expertise (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980).

Reflecting on my early experience through the Dreyfuses' work, others clearly considered me to be at 'Novice'. I didn't necessarily disagree; rather I rejected the idea of needing further technical skills to pursue a career in management. I equated technical competency with bodily functions involving physical dexterity and so on, whereas I interpreted management to be primarily concerned with thought and the mind. I see conceptual limitations in separating mind and body in this way, but recognise that this was how I was thinking at the time, perhaps influenced by broader societal themes that placed higher value upon knowledge work than manual skill, illustrated by major industrial developments of my childhood like the miners' strike and large-scale loss of UK manufacturing jobs.

This reflection raises questions about the Dreyfuses' model, as eloquently expressed by Danish economic geographer, Bent Flyvbjerg, when interviewing Hubert Dreyfus (Flyvbjerg, 1991). Here, Flyvbjerg challenges the absence of concepts like power dynamics and ethics, argues that the model ignores other writers' work that Dreyfus himself relies upon elsewhere, and questions the assumed split between 'mind' and 'body'. I recognise these problems in my thinking at the time. In trying to develop my management knowledge, my problem-solving ability and capacity for organising other people's work, I ignored the embodiment of my thought and action and factors such as the dynamics of power, ethics and politics, as noticed by Flyvbjerg.

Initially, I loved the idea of tackling major logistical and commercial challenges through teamwork. Building an office block, school or hospital was a major operation involving significant levels of

coordination and cooperation, with tangible, visible and long-lasting results. These ideas, gleaned from the glossy university brochures, had motivated me to join the construction industry, yet my everyday lived experience on sites felt anything other than cooperative, constructive and rewarding.

In the early 1990s, I reported to the site manager, Barry, on a project to build an office-block. A small subcontractor, Tony, was working on site, locating electricity cables and service pipes. When he hit an unexpected obstacle, Tony hired a digger that was kept on site. Left in charge for a morning, I made the digger available to Tony, so that he could continue working efficiently, clearing the remaining part of the site. Barry returned after lunch, furious that I'd hired out the machine, saying 'It's not up to us to make his life easy! If he needs the machine, he needs to come and get it authorised – every time!' This angered and confused me: I'd made what I considered to be a logical decision in the best interests of getting the work done. Looking back, I see what was really going on was a game of power between Barry and Tony, each trying to outsmart the other to earn more money. My judgment and actions were of little importance in what was really going on between Barry and Tony and this made me feel somewhat redundant – a pawn in a game that was being played out regardless of my role within it.

This encounter was typical of the attitude that pervaded everyday life on site. Relationships were mostly adversarial, and the name of the game was to win by forcing those around you to lose out. This was far removed from the exciting image of the construction industry I'd been sold. The bullying and coercion I saw reflected what the collective industry had been trying to eradicate by recruiting 'a new breed of managers' through degree programmes like mine. I was disappointed in what I saw from more senior people: if this is all management is, there's no need for a degree, I thought. I was in somewhat of a double bind, unhappy with the industry I was in, but needing to be part of it if I wanted to effect change. This time was formative for me, and I remember thinking 'when I'm in charge, I shall behave much better'.

Out of construction, seeking better management practice

Keen to escape these frustrations, I joined a construction materials company in the mid-1990s on their management development programme, finding myself within a distinctly new 'thought collective'. This term was adopted by Fleck to refer to a culturally conditioned style of thinking about scientific fact (Merton et al, 1981).

I became an assistant to a young but experienced Quarry Manager, Simon, who'd left school early to work in the quarry, doing well to become manager in his mid-twenties. I wanted to impress Simon, to show him my degree was an advantage and didn't mean I was incapable of mastering practical skills like driving mobile plant, operating the processing plant or working on the weighbridge. I wanted to

earn respect by combining practical skill with cognitive ability, to be seen as highly capable in my current role, but capable of much more in the future. Reflecting on that today, I see that I was highly competitive, which on the one hand was empowering and motivating, but on the other hand felt constraining, as my role and relationship with Simon felt temporary - a means to some other end.

I sat with Simon one tea break, mugs in hand, changed out of our muddy overalls and starting to warm up on a dreary autumn morning, chatting about our plans for the week. Simon remarked, "We're a mean team, you and me, Phil. I'm good at quarrying and you're great at systems."

That afternoon, I reflected on our conversation, taking Simon's comments as a complement. I'd been learning about management systems and Simon had used the word in the same way, as shorthand for management processes, organisation skills, and planning. I interpreted 'systems' also as a way of describing an ability to conceptualise activities and problems, combining 'getting things done' with 'working out how to do things better'. I used models I'd learned in my studies help me in my work, such as project plans to help us to get more done during our maintenance shutdowns.

Ralph Stacey delves into the ideology behind such management models in a way that challenges my raw acceptance and application of them at the time. Stacey is Professor of Management on the DMan programme and a pioneer in drawing upon the complexity sciences for insights into management practice. Stacey writes,

The ideology being reflected in these tools and techniques is that of command, control and efficiency (Stacey, 2012, p.47)

Making sense of this now, Simon's description of me as a 'systems person' reflected his insight into the ideology behind the way that I was thinking and practising. So, when I introduced a new set of documents to guide our team meetings, for example, I was in 'systems' mode, seeing myself as someone who could operate *within* the system as a team player, getting things done, as well as *outside* the system, making changes to control the performance of the system itself.

One way of understanding systems thinking is as

a particular kind of conceptual model as in first order, hard systems thinking with its general systems theory, cybernetic and systems dynamics models of human groupings as systems which came to be regarded as actually existing. (Stacey, 2010, p.236)

The study of cybernetics identifies concepts of regulation and feedback, as described in the classic description of a heating system that maintains its environment at a desired temperature by operating

according to feedback from a thermostat (Keeney, 1983). The systems approach is developed further in relation to human science by noticing that the human observer is not entirely detached from the system itself but interacts with it in something known as 'second order cybernetics' (Keeney, 1983).

In his work on learning organisations, American systems scientist Peter Senge identified 'systems thinking' as a crucial discipline concerned with seeing wholes, their inherent interrelationships and patterns of change - the thinking of feedback, system improvement and organisational learning (Senge, 1990). This kind of thinking reflects the perspectives of Immanuel Kant whose "both...and" philosophy eliminated any paradox associated with someone being both part of nature and outside it (Griffin, 2002). Senge takes a similar stance, showing leaders as both part of system and outside observers with influence upon it. This whole way of thinking is predicated on that very principle:

Systemic self-organisation only makes sense when coupled with the detached observer (Griffin, 2002, p34).

I saw this in my practice: part of my job was to 'go outside' the system and improve it. For example, after a few weeks of carrying out safety inspections, spotting similar problems each time, I designed a new problem-and-solution postcard for canteen noticeboards, to better communicate the issues, encourage people to find solutions and reward them for doing so. I detached myself from the regular routine of what I was doing to make changes: the 'system' had been faulty, and my intervention would improve it for the future.

Today, I'm starting to discover the work of German sociologist, Norbert Elias: one of the sociologists who provide theoretical foundations for DMan programme. In Elias's work, I find some reconciliation in how he suggests being both involved and detached at the same time (Elias, 1987). I was starting to become aware of an ability to reflect on a situation from a more detached perspective. Looking back on that time, I appreciate that systems thinking enabled me to make improvements in the quarry, but also had its limitations by ignoring my embodied involvement in that environment and within the team.

Management tools and models

By 1995, I was continuing to study management models. I discovered John Adair's model of *Action Centred Leadership* (Adair, 1973) with its three overlapping circles, representing Task, Team and Individual. The model asserts that leaders should focus upon the conjunction of the three circles, upon the needs of the individual and the team, whilst getting tasks done. I found this idea very powerful and applied the model to my daily practice, making more time for one-to-one conversations and deliberately organising maintenance activities with the idea of strengthening relationships within the

team. I even used the model as a template within my monthly reports, to focus upon people issues within the quarry.

Reflecting further, I see that Adair's model is rooted in systems thinking, drawing attention to a separation between individual and team. I did find the model to be a valuable practical reminder to pay attention to all three realms but see problems in how it invites the manager to step outside of all three realms, since she, in fact, is not mentioned within it at all. This mode of thinking reinforces the separation of self and other, of observer and participant, of manager and team and I recognise that is how I was thinking at the time, separating myself from daily activity to reflect on improving production efficiency, nurturing people's practical skills and conceiving activities to help the team work better together.

In my reading on the DMan programme, I am discovering the work of American Pragmatist philosophers such as George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, and of sociologists such as Norbert Elias, which is leading me to challenge my ways of thinking from earlier in my career. Might I have gained a different perspective by paying more attention to the social nature of the interactions within the team? I was perhaps not fully recognising my own role in those interactions and the problematic nature of an unspoken assumption that I was separate from the team.

A couple of years later in my career, I was seated in a meeting with my new boss, Chris. I'd been a Quarry Manager for three years, so knew Chris well and felt relaxed in his presence. I'd prepared for the meeting and was armed with evidence showing what a good job I was doing. I wanted to ask Chris for a promotion, and after taking a deep breath, sat forward and made my case.

Chris's response was so powerful that I still remember it to this day. "Don't be in such a rush for a promotion, Phil. Make the most of being a Quarry Manager so you can really understand how the business works on the ground". Chris's response infuriated me, and I recall the visceral reaction I had to his words. I felt disappointed, overlooked and devoid of the recognition I craved. I was not only capable and eager but had already 'put in the time'. I 'got it', Chris, and didn't need more time, thank you very much!

Chris also said, "your best achievement as a manager will be to promote someone over yourself". This idea caught me off guard. On the one hand, I loved the idea of having such a powerful influence on someone else. On the other, this was a further sign from him that he'd no intention of promoting me. The meeting ended quickly, and I was left grappling with mixed emotions. On reflection, this encounter uncovered further insights into the games of power that go on in organisations. Perhaps my being promoted was challenging to Chris or stirred in him a sense of disappointment with his own career.

By thinking in a linear and rational way about my development, I'd ignored how interpersonal relationships and organisational politics played into being an effective manager with more power and influence. Through discussion and development of these reflections with my DMan colleagues, I can see that this points to the way that I was thinking about ideas of success and achievement at the time.

I'm drawn again towards the work of Elias who takes the idea that the individual and society are inextricably linked, that the individual mind, or self-consciousness, is formed by social interaction, whilst forming social norms at the same time. Elias develops the idea of society into 'habitus' and talks about 'the game' (Elias, 2000). This perspective poses questions about my perception of success and how that impacted - and was impacted by - the success of those around me. One of the questions that arise for me concerns the 'rules of the game' as I'd perceived them. What was compelling me to want a promotion, leaving a job that I was good at? Why did meeting with Chris represent a stage in the game that felt like a win-or-lose moment? In the long run, since I left the company to take a new and exciting job elsewhere, it seems that I had more control than Chris over my own success within the broader 'game'. Yet the power dynamic at the time felt constraining as it assumed certain tacit rules such as our relative places within a hierarchy, and that staying within the company was a given. More broadly, this leads me to think about organisations as social phenomena: what was it I felt I was 'in' at the time of my conversation with Chris that was separate from my conversation with him, right there, in that moment? Why, after a different conversation a couple of years later, when I gave Chris my resignation, did I immediately feel 'outside' the organisation? Perhaps what was being negotiated all the time was not really my location within or outside an 'organisation' as such, but my interpersonal, and therefore social, relationship with Chris.

Delving deeper into management thinking

In 1997, I joined the company's Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies (DMS), which took me into new academic territory, ostensibly preparing me for a higher management role. My exposure to more taxing learning materials felt reassuring, reigniting a sense of satisfaction following my previous conversations with Chris. Maybe I'd been overlooked for promotion, but inclusion on the DMS was powerful recognition of my performance and future potential.

Reflecting on that time from my current perspective, joining the DMS meant acceptance into a new group with a collective identity as people destined for future success. My identity was being formed by inclusion within the group and by joining the group, I was playing my part in forming its identity, which again echoes how Elias talks about the individual and society ('group', in my description above) as two aspects of the same entity (Elias, 2001).

A look in the mirror

One DMS module, *The Integrative Manager*, involved using academic models to form a synthesis of how my management skills could be developed in the future. This was the first time I'd given substantial attention to my personality and way of thinking. These models included Belbin's (1981) work on team roles; Honey and Mumford's (1982) work on learning styles, after David Kolb's (1984) experiential model; Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, founded largely upon the conceptual work on personality by Carl Jung (Briggs & Briggs Myers, 2015); and several contingency theory approaches to management by Fiedler (1967), Hersey and Blanchard (1977), McGregor (1960) and others. The outcomes reflected my preference for strategic thinking, autonomy, leadership and a wide sphere of influence, so further reinforced my ambition to progress within the management hierarchy.

I continued to use models to draw conclusions about myself in a way that was isolated from my environment, my participation in groups and my part in society. This did, however, make sense to me at the time and I thought that understanding more about my psychological make-up could throw light upon how to become a better manager, to be more successful. The tacit – and unchallenged - premise of the project was that by taking 'a look in the mirror' I could align my behaviour and personality traits towards the achievement of idealised career goals.

I favoured a positivist approach and didn't challenge the reification of concepts like 'organisational culture' and 'personality type'. I can see the consequences of this way of thinking in my practice at the time: at work, I led a project to recruit six new team members into three local quarries and the process I designed relied heavily upon group interviews and personality assessments to judge how well the new people would 'fit within the culture' of the existing teams. I focused on the apparent personality traits of candidates over and above their practical skills, believing it would be easy to train people to drive heavy machinery but that changing attitudes would be more difficult, if not impossible.

I enjoyed learning new management models, believing that acquiring such knowledge would have direct results in terms of career success. Rather than challenging my own thinking, I was spurred on by the idea that what I was learning would be of critical importance for higher management roles. Discussing this with my DMan cohort raised questions about how acquiring the language of management models and concepts might enable a person to be recognised and accepted as part of a particular group. At the time, I started to introduce aspects of my learning into my monthly reports to Chris and in my presentations at quarry manager team meetings. I introduced new statistical methods to my reports that gave greater insights into production efficiency and quality of our products. Whilst the maths and statistical theory behind the reports was complicated, I managed to simplify the way that calculations were made, and the new reporting method became quickly accepted by my peers. I

wasn't always able to win people over to new ideas, however: my plans for removing the clock-card machines that recorded people's working hours were rejected, despite my eloquent and enthusiastic description of how flexible work patterns and self-organised teams would lead to higher levels of productivity and greater sense of job satisfaction. There was a strong sense of 'if it's not broken, don't fix it' - my new-found ideas were just a step too far for my colleagues at that time, although I had fully embraced their value for my work. Today, I am more cautious about idealisations of theories and wary of the consequences for my practice. That leads me to reflect that it is a tendency for me to idealise that was a contributory factor in others rejecting my new ideas.

So, my newly acquired vocabulary brought with it some disturbing tensions. I enjoyed what I was learning and found insights into improving my practice. However, encountering resistance made me nervous about talking too openly about new ideas, for fear of being seen as out of touch with 'the real world'. Too many new ideas, introduced too quickly could put strain on my personal reputation and relationships. Being identified by Simon as being 'good at systems' was one thing, but there was a limit to how far his respect would stretch if I continued to use too much management jargon. This highlights the role of language in relation to inclusion and exclusion within groups, raising questions about how a person's identity may be influenced by changes in one's sense of inclusion or exclusion, as power differentials ebb and flow with the acquisition of new knowledge and vocabulary. I was keen to be accepted into two competing groups: those on the management development programme and those outside it. For me, management education - fuelled by a desire for success - seemed at the same time enabling and constraining.

Encountering the idea of professional standards and communities of practice

By 1999, I'd completed my DMS and left the company to join a professional institution in the construction industry. I was essentially an ambassador, promoting and representing the institute to raise its profile and recruit new members, all in the name of raising standards of practice within construction. I led a team who organised training events and met with people within construction companies to talk to them about professional standards, training opportunities and qualifications. I attended meetings about education projects and recruitment initiatives, and this took me back to the time when I, myself, was looking for career inspiration, showcasing the opportunities that the construction industry had to offer.

I spent lots of time in meetings with others, often in formalised committees and I will reflect on that aspect of my practice later. I started to discover and develop ideas about competency standards and what it means to be a 'professional person'. I talked to individuals and groups about the importance

of professional standards and the benefits that membership of a professional institution could bring, so it was important to me to be able to articulate ideas about professional competency and ethics.

The concept of a professional body is underpinned by Lave and Wenger's work on Communities of Practice, which identified three crucial ingredients: Domain (construction management); Community (membership); and Practice (people actually working in construction) (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This concept was interesting to me. Competency, progression and success were things that could be codified in ways comprising both educational attainment and day-to-day work activity. This formulaic approach can again be related to the Dreyfus brothers' skills acquisition model. Career progression is identified as series of stages, defined by the Institute's membership framework, reflecting the stage-by-stage approach modelled by the Dreyfuses. Thinking back to my time in quarrying, my conversation with Chris might have been different had I been able to rely upon some objective benchmark of competency to show him that I'd achieved a certain level of ability and was indeed ready for a promotion. Instead, the experience felt like a difference of opinion with no real common ground to refer to.

Considering this further, the Dreyfuses' model presents skills acquisition as a linear and mono-directional process, which over-simplifies what I have noticed through my experience. Some people, I have observed, pick things up very quickly whilst others might lose abilities that were once well honed. Along with Flyvbjerg, whom I mentioned earlier, two other thinkers, Gobet and Chassy challenge the model, arguing a lack of empirical evidence for the presence of stages, instead dwelling more deeply on the idea of intuition - how it is displayed and how it is formed in practice (Gobet & Chassy, 2009).

I sympathise with the idea that formulaic approaches to career progression are naïve and constraining, without entirely rejecting the notion of competency frameworks, education, and the Dreyfus brothers' model. But my experience has shown me there are equally powerful factors at play in career progression: politics, power relationships, ambition and chance all being of worthy of further inquiry and all notions that I had not paid much attention to in my desire to be recognised and accepted as a competent manager. Reflecting further on this, I see that my tendency to hold onto idealised notions from theories about management and about competency created a tension with my experience and an anxiety about not being recognised in the ways that I had been seeking.

A shift in my ideas of success and fulfilment

By 2007, I'd built my experience within the institute, having worked on various projects that included a re-organisation of its branch structure, installation of new IT systems, leading a consultation roadshow on new governance arrangements and designing a new digital marketing strategy. I wanted

to take on broader responsibilities but was constrained by a lack of opportunity to progress within the institute, so joined the British Association of Social Workers as Assistant Chief Executive. My work involved leading a large team across several business disciplines - marketing, finance, HR, membership, IT, facilities and publishing. In this role, I had a higher degree of autonomy than I had previously experienced. I held responsibility for large sections of the Association's operations, and I felt able to put more of my learning into practice across a broad range of activities, building my skills, knowledge and reputation as a business leader.

Whilst I'd achieved further career success, it was there that I encountered a major shift in the way that I was thinking about ideas of success and achievement. Social work requires a degree-level education, so most of the people I met were just like me and had been successful academically but had made very different choices to me. I sat with a colleague, Hayley, over a cup of coffee one morning. She told me her early life had been very difficult, having been abused as a child and placed with a series of foster families for her protection. Her experiences in the social care system had been very positive, however, and she'd done well at school. She'd chosen social work so that she could make sure that future generations of children could be 'as lucky as I have been', as she put it. This drew my attention to the fact that intelligent, ambitious and professional people could have very different goals and views of success. I started to become less content in accepting a definition of success that involved climbing an organisational hierarchy and more interested in alternative perspectives. This was somewhat unsettling. I struggled with the idea that my search for fulfilment might need a change of career and alternative forms of recognition.

More about recognition

German philosopher Axel Honneth was interested in recognition. In his 1995 book, *The Struggle for Recognition*, he takes as his starting point upon the early work of German philosopher and idealist G W F Hegel, combining his thinking with the American Pragmatist George Herbert Mead to thoroughly locate recognition as a social phenomenon. Honneth identifies recognition within three realms and explores how their denial leads to social conflict (Honneth, 1995).

The first realm, Love, is about affection, which underpins basic self-confidence. I relate this to my stable and loving family life in contrast to that of Hayley.

The second, Rights, concerns being afforded legal status and human dignity, so is connected to self-respect. I relate this to my solid societal experience as a white British male, growing up in the UK, free from the challenges and indignities of inequality experienced by some women and people from minority backgrounds.

The third realm, Solidarity, relates to self-esteem, arising from social appreciation of a person's concrete traits and abilities. It is within this realm that my own personal struggle is situated, intensified perhaps because of the relative strength and solidity with which I regard my sense of recognition in the first two of Honneth's realms.

Rather than the pursuit of social recognition as a goal in itself, Honneth draws attention to its importance in relation to identity; a principle upon which Hegel and Mead are agreed:

In order to be able to acquire an undistorted relation-to-self, human subjects always need - over and above the experience of affectionate care and legal recognition - a form of social esteem that allows them to relate positively to their concrete traits and abilities. (Honneth, 1995, p.122)

I'd expected my role as Assistant Chief Executive to lead to a greater sense of fulfilment, solidifying my identity as an accomplished manager and building my self-esteem. That's not, however, how I felt at the time. Whilst I was enjoying my role, I had begun to challenge my definition of success and pay more attention to my conversation with Hayley for whom fulfilment was far more socially oriented. I have not fully reconciled that experience with how I feel now about the idea of success and fulfilment and that is a theme that I want to pay more attention to as I progress with my inquiries on the DMan.

My role today

In 2016, I joined a management training institution as Chief Executive. Yet another CEO role with a larger organisation might be regarded another step in my relentless march to higher levels of management. However, I sense more depth to my motivation, rooted in an uneasy search for fulfilment and identity. Immersing myself further into a discourse about the nature of leadership and management - whilst being in a position to effect change in this discourse - feels like a very good opportunity for reconciliation of my own discomfort with these ideas.

As CEO, my everyday practice calls for leadership and management skill on my part: chairing meetings, monitoring performance, making spending decisions, writing reports, interpreting financial data and speaking confidently both in public and in private. But the institute relies upon the idealisation and abstraction of management and leadership in order to sell its services and pursue its role in helping people to advance their practice. Yet, I remain personally dissatisfied with how a majority of management theories, books, models and speakers describe both leadership and management in such abstract and idealised ways. This dissatisfaction, I feel, goes to the root of my unrealised sense of career success and fulfilment – again concepts that I have tended to hold in idealised ways. Everyday

experience, it seems, calls starkly into question the idealised prescriptions of management and leadership theory and challenges how corporate organisations, business schools, authors and institutions like my own continue with this discourse in relentless pursuit of perfection, certainty and stability.

Theme 2 | A fascination with the boardroom

Some of my favourite moments growing up in the 1970s were with my Dad and brothers as members of a fishing club. We'd rise early on weekends to go to fishing on a river or lake and we'd take part in different club activities. I remember being fascinated and somewhat bemused by the goings-on at some of the committee meetings at the local pub. The people in the meetings were the same folks we used to sit alongside on riverbanks on sunny Sunday mornings. Completely alien to me, though, were the language and rituals at these meetings. There were "minutes", "apologies", "points of order", expressions like "through the chair", "all those in favour" and "any abstentions". There was an odd formality in people's speech, gestures and actions. There were rituals involving wooden hammers, signing of documents and the wearing of "chains of office". People I knew as John and Alan were now "Treasurer" and "Honorary Secretary". In the committee room, far away from the riverbank, my adult friends often got agitated about things like minor changes to the rules, or where to hold the Christmas Dinner and I had no idea what any of this had to do with catching fish.

My next encounter with such a committee came twenty years later, in the late 1990s, working in the professional institute in construction. The institute's board of directors was called 'Council' - a forty-strong body of volunteers. I went to my first Council meeting with my colleague, Martin, and we sat at the edge of a large, ornate room with its imposing fireplace and gilt-framed oil paintings hanging beneath thick, plaster cornices. Our voices contributed to the nervous chatter as the room filled with all the Council members, who took their seats around the large open square of tables. The institute's President was last to enter, resplendent in his chains of office and fine striped suit. Taking his seat, he gave the table a sharp rap with his carved wooden gavel and the meeting got underway. The discussion followed a rigid agenda and my boss read from the same stack of papers that everyone had in front of them. When it came time for others to speak, they would shift nervously in their seats, giving a little cough before talking in slightly shaky voices. Most of the questions that followed seemed to show that the person asking them didn't really understand the issue being discussed. Martin and I exchanged quizzical glances as the meeting dragged on and none of what was said seemed to matter much at all. "What was all that about?", I asked Martin at the end. "That was one of the better ones," he said, "but it was still a complete waste of time".

This experience catapulted me straight back to my childhood, to the smoke-filled committee room of the fishing club. Surely, this could not be how 'serious' organisations were run 'at the top'? What was the point of all this ritual? Why do meetings follow the same agenda when the things that need discussing are different? Why do people's characters and personalities seem to change within these formalised settings and what's really going on that determines how organisations work?

Thinking further about ritual and formality

In his 2013 article in the Harvard Business Review, Paolo Guenzi, Associate Professor of Marketing at Bocconi University in Milan, draws insights not from fishing but from other sports. He suggests that corporate teams can learn from how sports teams use ritual to reinforce desired behaviour, reduce anxiety and create a sense of identity and belonging. These themes build upon the work of Aaron Smith and Bob Stewart, two academics who also looked at sport for insights into the role of ritual in organisations. Smith and Stewart identify different inter-dependent functions that:

underline the role that rituals play as communication and learning systems, drawing attention to what is important and helping to funnel the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of organizational members. (Smith and Stewart, 2011, p.113)

As well as ritual and formality, I wondered why so much time was spent on mundane matters. Board conversations, I noticed, tended to gravitate towards the simplest issues, away from more complex matters. This, too, may be a phenomenon that emerges from anxiety and a sense of discomfort about one's ability to contribute to more complex discussions in such a public setting. I wonder, therefore, whether formality and ritual serve to reduce anxiety in the way that Guenzi says. I'd like to understand more about the patterns of ritual and anxious behaviour I have noticed over subsequent years of experience with boards, as this conflicts with what the literature says about high-performing boards.

At the time of that Council meeting, I was trying to apply tools, techniques and language from my DMS in my day-to-day practice. I expected to use models to analyse strategic options, to discuss the organisation's culture and capabilities within the context of long-range objectives, and to spend time forecasting how changes in the business environment might affect plans for the Institute's future. I felt confused about why the meeting didn't fit my expectations of what the board of directors should be doing. I'd been introduced to theories about management and organisations, to subjects such as culture (Schein, 1985; Johnson & Scholes, 1997), organisational change (Morgan, 1988), industrial economics (Porter, 1979) and so on, but nothing of these figured in the formal agenda or conversations that emerged. I'd felt empowered by the insights that strategic management models

could bring in enabling an appreciation of issues faced by the Institute. I also encountered constraints with this way of thinking, illustrated by the stark clash between expectation and observed experience.

Starting to appreciate politics and power

My practice involved a preoccupation with the content of meetings. I spent time working out a sensible agenda, writing papers on subjects for discussion, researching data to support proposed courses of action and rehearsing presentations that I would be giving at meetings. As the next chapter of my working life unfolded, I began to see that, as well as thinking about content, paying attention to power and politics may provide greater insight into how meetings actually unfold in practice.

Politics had, of course, been very much present throughout my career to date. In his 2011 book, *Rethinking Management*, DMan Programme Director Chris Mowles talks about politics in this sense, as

the daily negotiations about power between engaged members of staff (Mowles, 2011, p.90)

Later in my career, in 2012, as CEO with another professional institution, I spent much of my time in informal meetings with my colleagues; I'd give presentations about the priorities and activities of the institute; I did routine, mundane tasks like completing expenses forms and checking invoices, as well as more involved and taxing work like writing reports and papers for board meetings. These papers were often persuasive accounts of some kind, such as proposals for new activities like launching new training programmes in another country or changing policy to reduce the risks of a loss of income. These documents would be my primary means of communicating with the board and I'd issue them ahead of meetings, so that people could read them, think about the issues they raised and prepare for the discussion. I thought this was a good way to work, believing that setting out proposals in advance, with supporting evidence, would be helpful in supporting people and ensuring that meetings would be focused and productive.

Most of the volunteers on the board had full-time jobs within large industrial corporations and this gave me an opportunity to see how their practice might reflect how things are done in the boardrooms of the corporate world; an opportunity to benchmark against best practice.

Two such people seemed to enjoy their roles as troublemakers, deliberately asking probing and ever-more detailed questions, playing off each other to see who could make me feel as uncomfortable as possible. They adopted the nicknames 'Waldorf and Statler', after the heckling, grumpy old characters from The Muppet Show. They disrupted meetings – seeing this very much as part of their job - and blocked progress on important issues due to their preoccupation with irrelevant minutiae. It was a

mystery to me how they'd risen to hold senior roles with large companies when this is how they behaved on the board of their professional institute. I found myself unable to explain or justify this behaviour with reference to my knowledge of business and management literature at the time. Today, I'm curious to explore this experience from a sociological perspective as an alternative means of gaining an understanding of what was going on.

The way I was thinking at the time was very much derived from my learning but my actual experience in the boardroom clashed violently with my expectations. Maybe Waldorf and Statler were simply incapable or unwilling to act as I'd come to expect. I'm sure that they held the opposite view, seeing their intimidating approach as a virtue.

Within the board (known 'Council') were distinct cliques and alliances. Sensitive or difficult business was generally withheld from Council, discussed and decided upon instead by a smaller number of 'more senior' directors known as the 'President's Committee', of which Waldorf and Statler were long-standing members. One time, a redundancy arose within the staff team. 'We can't possibly discuss this with Council,' said Waldorf. 'Most of the clowns on Council wouldn't understand – they've never made anyone redundant in their lives.' Deals and agreements were mostly made outside the formal meetings and this was rationalised, legitimised and justified by the 'old guard' as a necessary way of getting things done. I'm left wondering whether this had something to do with the voluntary nature of the committees, which drew together people from other organisations where they would have been located within a distinct organisational hierarchy. To what extent did people's 'day job' impact upon their relationships within the committee, I wonder, where one might find a Managing Director sitting next to a Laboratory Supervisor.

People on the President's Committee would say different things there than they would say publicly at Council meetings. The idea that different conversations are held within different contexts is taken up by James C Scott, an anthropologist and political scientist who was interested in power relationships between different groups and how lower social classes resist domination by those in authority. In his 1990 work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Scott argues that subordinate groups of people, although appearing to surrender to dominant groups, will display forms of resistance in private, unnoticed by the superordinate group. Scott's view on the difference between what happens in private and in public helps me to shed some light on behaviours on Council and the President's Committee: the latter being more representative of the dominant group with greater authority, where private conversations amongst its members would reinforce their sense of superiority.

I also call to mind Norbert Elias's 1965 work with John Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders*, which looked at power differentials, stigmatism, gossip and fantasy and how these phenomena served to reinforce the respective social positioning of different groups of people within the same small Leicestershire village (Elias & Scotson, 1965). The President's Committee had more power over the organisation, given its identity as a more wise and capable group of people than Council - an identity that was reinforced by the way that they referred to Council in derogatory terms, reciprocated by the way that Council held the President's Committee in high regard.

Playing a more political game

I realised that I needed to play a different game to get what I wanted from Council meetings. It was not enough to write rational, well-presented proposals and expect people to read them and form an opinion on that basis. So, I started to have discussions outside of meetings, taking my own role amid the politics. I spent more time with the President's Committee, seeking out the people that wielded power over others, attempting to reach deals in advance, so that I could go into meetings not only with written proposals, but with a small army of supporters - Waldorf and Statler amongst them.

This raised some ethical questions about my part in the political manoeuvring that I'd originally regarded as petty and distracting. I saw board meetings as the proper means of reaching decisions and expected that other people would want to make the most of those meetings, too. I felt an obligation to be clear, concise and helpful to people who were less familiar with the issues than I was. Engaging in political activity outside of the formal channels felt like a transgression into a manipulative and divisive way of operating. Adjusting my practice had consequences, enabling me to navigate board meetings in a different way but at the same time constraining the value I'd placed upon rational argument and intelligent use of business theory. As board decisions can impact heavily upon the lives of others, the idea that such decisions could be more heavily swayed by political manoeuvring than rational discussion raised in me concerns about ethics and authenticity.

Although I was starting to pay attention to the political game, I still believed that politics were getting in the way of the real work, of the proper way of going about business. I began redesigning the governance system and researching literature on best practice, using this as a basis for my presentations on why we needed to change the way we were working. I drew on aspects of the law, best practice and statutory guidance:

Trustees of larger charities should take responsibility for setting the charity's strategic aims and direction, and agreeing appropriate future plans. (Charity Commission, 2015)

I was looking for stable ground upon which to build a rational case for change. Along with constructing a solid argument, I went about building alliances with the people I thought would be most resistant, recruiting them as champions for my cause.

My Master's degree and research into boards

I was eager to learn more and enrolled onto an MSc in Corporate Direction, which focused on the work of the board, playing into my fascination with differences between theory and lived experience. My thinking at the time took for granted that the board was some discrete aspect of an organisation, some system within the overall organisational system. I also assumed that there was value in separating theory and practice, so that one may inform the other. I have since started to form different views about the enabling and constraining consequences of these ways of thinking and would like to work further upon these issues in subsequent phases of my DMan.

For the research element of my Master's, I chose to explore what motivated people to take voluntary positions on boards, accepting responsibility for the governance of organisations without being paid. I was looking to explain what I'd observed in the boardroom and what the implications were for the performance of organisations and the practice of managers within them.

I used surveys and questionnaires, analysed the responses, drew attention to patterns and attempted to codify these into a model that could be used to generalise about people's intentions. In basic terms, my research showed me that people have a variety of interests, motivations and perspectives on why they are on boards.

I adopted a positivist approach based on a belief in authenticating knowledge through the application of the scientific method, showing that I preferred:

...working with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be law-like generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists (Remenyi et al 1998, p.32, cited in Saunders et al, 2003, p.83)

Whilst interesting to an extent, my research felt unsatisfactory and inadequate, giving only shallow insights into my area of interest. I was left with further curiosity about the gap between theory and practice and had been unable to learn more about how power dynamics impacted upon relationships, the extent to which ethical considerations played out in practice and the apparent clash between rational argument and decision-making amid the ritual and formality of board meetings.

My way of thinking, formed from years of study and reinforcement, relied on the systems perspective espoused by Senge (Senge, 1990). I looked for norms, for the rules of the game, using benchmarking to find the 'right way' of doing things, believing that if I could sort out the system, the people would do what they're supposed to. All those tools, techniques and approaches are widely available and promoted as part of the mainstream discourse within business schools, consultancy services and the management of organisations. I've experienced the limitations of this kind of thinking and the constraints that it places upon my practice. This has left me with an unsatisfactory view of management and confusion between theory and what actually happens in daily organisational life.

Concluding themes | How I came to think and act the way I do

Over time, my practice and thinking changed from a reliance upon tools and techniques (such as the Action-Centred Leadership model of John Adair, 1973), into a mode of thinking about organisations as systems (Senge, 1990). More recently, stimulated by my work on the DMan programme, I have begun to pay closer attention to my lived experience as a manager, encountering politics, power dynamics and alternative perspectives offered by complexity studies. I have also noticed my tendency to idealise notions of leadership, management, success and fulfilment - and to regard time itself as a precious commodity, giving me a sense of urgency in seeking career success. I now want to draw closer attention to the themes that arise from a reflection on my narratives.

The first theme concerns the way that I've been thinking about organisations and management. My disappointment with boardroom experiences and with managerial hierarchy can both be viewed in respect of a gap between my expectations from theory and what happens in practice. My own practice within everyday organisational life and my relationship with boards has been steered by a rational, positivist and linear approach to life and a preference for systems thinking. I have expected to find and follow a well-laid out path to success through the mastery of skill and knowledge. A failure to find and master the right way of doing things goes to the heart of a lack of fulfilment in my organisational life.

So, this raises questions about success and fulfilment. Any casual observer might believe that I've been successful in my career, achieving positions of power and status - exactly what I set out to achieve early in life. I have, however, encountered different interpretations of success and fulfilment through interaction with different people in my career. This makes me question what it is that I'm seeking by way of success. Working at the top of an organisation and experiencing life in the boardroom have not led to any lasting sense of satisfaction and this raises questions that I believe are generalisable for other managers.

Recognition and identity have been recurrent issues through my career. I've sought inclusion in groups of power and influence, whether those are boards of directors or cohorts of high-potential managers. Against the stability of family and broader societal life, I have sought esteem and encountered conflict: between myself and others, between opposing groups and between my own expectations of what is right and what is accepted in practice. Whereas I have sought harmony and consensus through an objective, 'right way' of doing things, the avoidance and eradication of conflict has, I think, done nothing to serve the emergence of my sense of identity. As Doug Griffin puts it:

We fool ourselves in fooling others. We fool others in fooling ourselves.

(Griffin, 2002, p.197)

My narratives also show a fascination with how power is derived, perceived and wielded. My boardroom experiences are full of references to power dynamics and how power differentials between individuals and sub-groups play out in the decisions and actions taken by the board. This in turn raises questions of ethics, about the effect of the decisions of powerful people upon others. Then there is the question of my own relationship with the idea of power. Through discussion with my DMan cohort, I have begun to probe into what has been compelling me to want a position at the 'top' of organisations. Is it enough to describe myself as ambitious? Have I been in search of power, of inclusion in powerful groups?

Finally, my reflections have pointed to a gap between what the theories in the dominant discourse say and what really seems to be going on in organisations. This gap has been noticed by others and is a fascinating area for inquiry that has generalisable implications for leadership and management practice. The conjunction of my new role with in a management training institution and my work in the DMan community gives me an opportunity to explore my experience against different theoretical perspectives on leadership, management and organisations, to find new insights that could have implications for practice and be of help to others.

That may well turn out to be my most fulfilling experience yet.

Research questions | Where do I go from here?

As I turn to Project 2, I want to understand more fully how idealisations of leadership and management practice both enable and constrain managers to negotiate a sense of identity within their practice and fulfilment in their career. I am curious about the role that rational models of management - within business schools, the dominant literature and institutions like my own - play in embedding idealised views of leadership, success and fulfilment, in turn influencing the practical judgment applied by managers navigating the complexities of everyday organisational life.

Project 2 | Exploring power dynamics in interactions with the Board.

In my first project, I explored how I have come to think the way that I do. I reflected upon a narrative account of my career, taking a reflexive approach to my underlying beliefs and assumptions, formed through education, experience and interactions with others in my life. Looking back over that project, I notice a movement in my way of thinking that can be summarised as a shift away from a *prescriptive* approach, represented throughout the dominant discourse on management, towards a *descriptive* approach of my everyday lived experiences. That is, towards what British Psychologist John Shotter called ‘witness-thinking’ or a mode of thought that is concerned with the spontaneous opportunities for learning as they arise in our sense-making, rather than one that focuses on finding answers to problems or arriving at concrete, abstract conclusions (Shotter, 2012). Shotter is remembered, amongst other things in his prolific career, for the way in which he influenced the way that humans are studied and the promotion of non-experimental forms of psychological inquiry. Writing towards the latter part of his career, he summarised:

the outcomes of our inquiries as practitioners are not to be measured in terms of their end points – in terms of their objective outcomes – but in terms of what we learn along the way in the course of the unfolding movements they led us into making (Shotter, 2012, p.1)

Along with a noticeable movement in my thought, writing my first project provoked emotional responses from me as I started to question some of the fundamental assumptions that had been at the foundations of my practice and beliefs as a manager. I continue to feel challenged by these responses and feel generally unsettled by the process of writing, reflection and reflexivity, unable to pin down exactly the ‘rules of the game’ as I now see them and not yet ready to define and articulate how I may go about my life within organisations. Thus, it remains important to me to continue to delve into my own experiences and reflect upon these in the light of the writing of other scholars and researchers, so that I might adapt my perspective and learn to live with the ambiguity, paradox and uncertainty of organisational life.

Writing about the emotional and political dimensions of learning, Vince and Gabriel, two scholars from the University of Bath who are part of a growing movement of academic interest in emotions in organisations:

Learning involves success and failure, trial and error, triumph and disappointment, presenting individuals and groups with formidable uncertainties and self-doubts liable to trigger anxiety. (Vince & Gabriel, 2011, p.339)

These words remind me that anxiety about the movement in my thought is a recognisable human phenomenon and that I can expect continued emotional responses as I learn more through reflexive inquiry into the unfolding of my experience. My narrative in this project concerns what is interesting and troubling to me in my present-day practice. Through reflexive exploration and reference to other scholars, I aim to open further lines of inquiry that I may follow in the remainder of my thesis.

Prologue | Some background information on my practice and work setting

I work as the CEO of a UK-based charity: a professional association of around 30,000 individual members within the field of leadership and management. Supporting the activities of the association are 22 members of staff who report either indirectly or directly to me. The association is governed by a Board of 7 Trustees, who are elected into their voluntary positions by their fellow members for 3-year terms. My role in managing the organisation on a day-to-day basis is separated from the roles of Trustees in governing the association, overseeing overall performance, ensuring its financial viability and seeing that everything is done within the parameters of policy and the law.

My practice therefore brings me into contact with people who – as Trustees elected to power in an organisation concerned with leadership and management practice – have achieved a degree of recognition for their knowledge and abilities as leaders and managers. Hence, these Trustees may well feel the same additional sense of expectation and responsibility to *be good at* management and leadership as I do, as CEO. I undertake a varied range of tasks and activities, but I shall concentrate in this project on my interactions with the Board, on time spent in meetings with the whole group with smaller numbers of Trustees. I spend time preparing for these meetings: writing papers that give either a historical account of performance (management accounts, quantitative business indicators such as membership numbers and narrative accounts of activities such as media appearances or dealings with statutory agencies); or persuasive arguments of some kind that ask the Board to make collective decisions on spending money or taking a particular course of action in the future (business cases and project proposals, for example).

It is within this area of my practice that my narrative takes place.

Narrative | The Board meeting

I arrived in London for the usual evening meal prior to the Board meeting itself. Wine glasses clinked, voices rose in greeting and in laughter, and stories were shared as people caught up with each other after a couple of months apart. It was a convivial start to a series of events that would involve a full day's meeting, another overnight stay and a breakfast meeting between me, the Board's Chair, Jim,

and Deputy Chair, Ashley. This was to be Jim's penultimate meeting as Chair, and I was interested in how the relational dynamics would play out as Ashley prepared to take over Jim's role.

After breakfast the next morning, everyone convened for the meeting, a few minutes later than scheduled. With me at the table was Jim, sitting on the edge of his chair, pen poised, glancing between the ticking hands of the clock and the melee of latecomers still helping themselves to coffee. Ashley and the five other Trustees gradually took their places as Jim drummed his fingers on the desk, barely hiding his irritation. After a few moments of tension, the meeting settled down and the usual formalities – apologies, declarations of interest, signing-off of the previous meeting's minutes and matters arising – were all quickly dispatched.

My report

The agenda moved onto my report on the wider performance of the association. I had spent more than a full day writing the report, drawing up graphs that showed performance metrics that took up 6 or 7 pages, considerably lengthened by the narratives that I had included to bring to life what was otherwise a set of lines and charts that just did not, in my opinion, give due recognition to the wide range of activity that was being done by people in my small team.

Jim asked me to present my report, asking for highlights and updates on the basis that everyone had already read it. I turned my attention to the papers in front of me and the notes I'd made in the margins to remind me of the comments that I wanted to make. I knew from experience that not everyone would have read the papers and that a whole list of questions would follow my presentation but had no idea what they might be. I sat up in my chair, feeling my heart rate pick up pace as I prepared to give my semi-rehearsed account. After a moment's pause, I changed my mind and put down my pen. I said that I was conscious of the fact that people had a twenty-page report in front of them, full of detailed information and that rather than going through it, I would like to hear how they felt about the content and format of the report: Was there too much detail in there, did the commentary help, did the report help them to make sense of progress and give them what they needed to know as Trustees?

Jim tapped his pen on his pack of papers and looked as if he was about to say something but didn't. I looked around at the other Trustees: Anne, Sheila, Joyce and Kelly. None of them caught my eye and I started to feel uncomfortable about the silence stretching out for too long. To my relief, Ashley cleared his throat, looked across at Jim, then spoke, describing some improvements he'd like to see to my report. Until then, my change of tack had felt risky, as I'd broken from convention, from what I thought was expected of me. It was as if I was unable to determine whether what I had said had any

value or validity until I had received a response from someone in the room. Even as Ashley began to answer, though, I still felt exposed to the possibility that Jim or one of the other Trustees might disagree and suggest that I stop wasting time and get on with presenting the paper. However, as the discussion progressed, I felt increasingly confident about the direction I'd taken, and the tone of the meeting remained positive and constructive as the group gave their thoughts and ideas about the report. After about half an hour of discussion, we seemed to arrive at a consensus of what the Board expected from me in the future.

What occurred to me then, amplified by my writing about the experience now, is that I had never really heard from the Board (even when it comprised a different set of individuals) what exactly they were expecting of me in my role.

Time to talk money

Late in the morning, it became time to turn to the final agenda item, to discuss my remuneration as CEO. This was a subject that had been postponed for two Board meetings already. I had felt uncomfortable, embarrassed even, about raising this with the Board as it felt both indulgent (we should be spending our time thinking about the future health and success of the association) and too personal (I haven't known you long, but we're all now talking about my salary). At the same time, I felt frustrated and overlooked since this discussion had been postponed on two previous occasions, ostensibly to give the Board time to review some facts and figures so that they could reach a more informed decision. Despite some discomfort in my part, I knew that it was appropriate for any Board to consider the CEO's remuneration and, in our case, there was a good business need for doing so as we'd recently done a salary benchmarking exercise which showed that I was not only being paid less than market rates, but less than my senior colleagues too.

Jim stumbled over his words as he introduced the agenda item. He looked physically uncomfortable, stretching his neck to relieve some of the tightness of his collar and tie and moving his chair back a little from the table. He poured himself some water from the flask on the table and, looking across at Anne, mumbled that she had been asked to circulate some workings to the rest of the Board and asked her for an update. I felt a mix of emotions at this point: angry and disappointed that what seemed to be unfolding was a sense of disorganisation and apparent disregard for how important this issue was to me; but at the same time, an urge to help the people around me, who were clearly struggling with embarrassment and anxiety. I grappled with this mix of emotions, but remained silent, conscious of trying to remain a calm, neutral and professional appearance. Anne was seated next to me, slumped low in her chair. She held up a wad of papers in front of her, awkwardly peering over the top of them as she spoke. She raised her voice a little more loudly than the ambient volume, saying that she hadn't

been able to complete her work as she'd been waiting for some feedback from an earlier conversation with Joyce. Joyce seemed to be taken aback by this and in turn, exchanged quizzical looks with Sheila, who said that she was a bit confused, as she thought they had all been waiting for Jim to set a date for a teleconference.

I was puzzled by how people around me were behaving at this moment. Earlier in the meeting, the Trustees seemed to be working together, building upon each other's comments and moving the conversation forwards to a constructive conclusion. Now, they seemed to be acting separately, defending their own positions, competing with each other, passing the focus of attention away from themselves and avoiding something. I thought about offering to leave the room, in case they felt unable to discuss my salary with me being there. However, I preferred to remain silent and calm, although a slight look of bemusement might have been discernible on my face.

After a few more minutes of confused conversation about what should and shouldn't have been done, Jim summarised that the Board was clearly not able to make any decisions on the issue today and asked Anne to circulate her workings to the rest of the Board over the next couple of weeks, so that they could all look at them before the next Board meeting. With that, he quickly announced that it was time for lunch, and everyone stood up and headed in different directions as they left the room or consulted their mobile phones. I felt bemused, angry and disappointed at this sudden adjournment and the collapse of what should, I thought, have been a sensible and reasonably straightforward discussion. Of course, I realise that there is an emotive quality to the prospect of a conversation about my salary and that some people might have felt uncomfortable about that. However, the discussion could have been handled in different ways, including asking me to leave the room, so that a decision could have been reached. As I left for lunch, I couldn't help feeling that I might – in some perverse way – have felt more included in the discussion, more recognised, by not being in the room, rather than so obviously have been excluded and overlooked during a discussion that was happening all around me.

After lunch: introducing Raj.

After lunch, the Board meeting resumed with a session on a business proposal for the association to invest in new consultancy activity into the effectiveness of board performance in public sector organisations. This activity would build on our own recent work on corporate governance and offer a unique perspective that focused upon leadership, rather than compliance-related aspects: the *dynamics* over the *mechanics* governance. Jim and I had met and discussed the proposal on several occasions with our consultant, Raj and Jim had encouraged me to bring the proposal to the Board. Raj was very experienced and knowledgeable in the field and a senior member of our association. He had, in fact, previously been interested in joining the Board as a Trustee and, if it weren't for him changing

his mind a few weeks earlier, would have been a member of the Board himself. Before the meeting, Raj had sent his proposal papers to the Board and I'd given them a synopsis of what to expect from the afternoon.

As Raj took his seat at the meeting table, I introduced him, giving some highlights from his personal biography and re-capping the context for his presentation. He smiled and confidently began his presentation, dressed immaculately in a smart suit and making eye contact with everyone seated around the table. Raj didn't use any visual aids, but spoke fluidly and authoritatively about the proposal, filling in elements of the proposal with anecdotes from his own experience to bring life to the words on the page.

About 15 minutes into Raj's presentation, I noticed Ashley sit back in his chair, take a deep breath and start drumming his fingers on the surface of the oak table. He looked over at Sheila, picked up a pen and ripped a piece of paper from the spirals of a notebook with a rasping sound that cut through the melody of Raj's smooth, clear monologue. Ashley scribbled a note, folded the paper and passed it across to Sheila, an action that was noticed by the rest of the people in the room, drawing their attention momentarily away from Raj's presentation. I felt annoyed at this behaviour, so obviously distracting. Whilst I had no idea what Ashley was thinking, I felt that he was being deliberately disruptive and mischievous. Feeling annoyed, I redoubled my focus on Raj, as if to send out a signal to others that that's where our attention should be.

Raj paused before reaching the conclusion of his presentation, asking if anyone had any questions. After a short pause, Jim came in with an on-topic question, hesitantly asking how long one of the consultancy exercises would normally take and how many people would be involved. Jim was jotting down some figures on a piece of paper, appearing to do some quick arithmetic to check what Raj was saying about the commercial viability of this new venture.

As Raj began his answer, he was quickly interrupted by Ashley, who apologised for cutting in, but said that he was confused and that he sensed the energy levels in the room dropping. He called for a break and asked Raj to leave the room, so that the Board could have a confidential discussion.

Jim muttered something that signalled that the meeting would adjourn for a few minutes, although he was clearly bemused by what was happening. I felt acutely embarrassed: for myself, thinking that my proposal was felt to be a complete failure; and for Raj, whom it seemed, we were now treating very poorly indeed. Maintaining his professional demeanour, Raj politely agreed, and I accompanied him out of the room to the coffee area. Outside, Raj looked confused and upset at what had just happened. I suggested that he should make himself comfortable, grab a coffee and that I would be

back out to see him in a few moments, giving him a warm smile of reassurance. I was at pains to treat Raj politely, insisting that if anything had gone wrong, it had not been due to his to his excellent presentation. I would return to him, after the behind-closed-doors discussion, and explain everything.

I returned to the room to find that Ashley was now on his feet, pacing up and down behind his chair. He lent forward and placed his fists on the table, shoulders hunched, brow furrowed. Ashley had everyone's attention and seemed to enjoy holding a moment's silence before he spoke. He said that he was confused and didn't know why on earth we were looking at this proposal. He said that he knew he wasn't alone, since he'd checked with a couple of his fellow Trustees, looking across at Sheila and Kelly, who nodded slowly in agreement, all the time looking solemn, but not speaking. Our situation is clear, he said, and we had to focus on recruiting new members and doing something about the deficit rather than chasing new ideas. Bringing Raj along, he felt, was a waste of time and money – a distraction to the organisation's real plans.

Jim was silent.

I felt a surge of embarrassment, confusion and anger. The room suddenly seemed small and oppressive and a flush of heat and tension rose through my body. Here was another afternoon session that was quickly disintegrating into failure. I was annoyed with Ashley for breaking the session down in the way that he did and for Kelly and Sheila for joining in. I was furious at Jim for not claiming his part in sponsoring the proposal and for allowing the session to be brought to a premature end. Rather than raising any questions or concerns about the topic before the meeting, earlier that morning, or even during the rather nice meal that we'd all had together the night before, people had chosen to rather dramatically and theatrically halt Raj's presentation and convene a private meeting to discuss it.

I suppressed any outward signs of my anger and exasperation as best I could, deciding instead to calmly reiterate the scene setting that I had done during my introduction to the session. I reminded the Board that the proposal was about growing our presence with public-sector organisations and that, although we didn't currently have the capacity or expertise to do this, that's precisely what the proposal was about – to invest in a new activity that will generate revenue and build our reputation in a market that was also ripe for membership growth. Ultimately, I said, the purpose of today's session was to check out this thinking, not to make any final decisions. Feeling under attack, I reminded the group that this is not the first time that they had heard the idea and that they had been well briefed. However, I decided not to draw attention to Jim, his role in bringing the suggestion to the meeting, or his keenness, privately expressed, for the Board to vote in favour of the proposal.

Jim spoke up after I'd finished. But, rather than volunteer anything about his own role or views, he suggested that the meeting should come to an end, that I go and speak to Raj about the Board's decision and that he and Ashley would pick this all up with me the following morning.

I left the room feeling hurt, angry and embarrassed, but I was acutely aware that Raj must be feeling some strong emotions himself, so again decided to hide my own feelings, to calm and soothe Raj. Not seated and without coffee, Raj looked dejected and embarrassed that he might have made a big mistake in his presentation. I reassured him that he'd done an excellent job, but that the Board had simply decided not to spend any more time on the proposal because it wasn't in line with their new thinking about the strategic direction for the organisation. Raj said that he was cross about the way that the meeting had ended and that he felt quite humiliated about being excluded, as that had not happened to him before. His earlier confusion and embarrassment seemed to have hardened into anger from injustice. I felt guilty that I had set Raj up for failure by bringing the proposal to the Board, although I was still very confused as to what exactly had gone wrong. Worse still, I felt a sense of shame at the way that Raj had been treated in the meeting. Although I did not want to be associated with how the Board had reacted, I was the Board's representative to Raj, so felt highly constrained by my role and unable to separate myself from the Board's actions or decision. I continued to reassure Raj as he left the building, saying that we should get together soon for a fuller debrief, once the dust had settled.

By now, I assumed the Board would be discussing my performance behind closed doors. The mood had shifted significantly from the morning's session and this felt like a crisis point. That evening, after the other Board members had gone home, Jim and Ashley went out to eat at a local restaurant and visit a bar famous for its whisky. I had dinner in the hotel and spent the rest of the evening revising the figures in the budget and paring down the previous strategic plan into a narrower set of activities and targets that were now being demanded by the Board. Gone was the convivial group dinner of the night before. Somehow, a distance had developed between me and members of the Board and I was unable to come to any conclusions about how the relationship between Jim and Ashley had developed.

The meeting after the Board meeting

The next morning, I rose early after a broken night's sleep, but decided that the meeting with Jim and Ashley would be a good opportunity to show them that I had not only listened to what the Board's expectations were from yesterday but had already responded by drawing up a new plan. We gathered after breakfast, back in the meeting room where we'd spent the whole of the day before and began by reviewing the meeting from previous day. The tone of the conversation was positive, as we all

reflected that the morning session had thrown up some very positive outcomes, by clarifying the parameters for a new three-year plan. Nothing was mentioned of the aborted session to decide on my new salary or the abrupt and theatrical ending to the afternoon session with Raj. I felt low on energy, still fatigued and demoralised from the previous day, so didn't feel ready to challenge Jim or Ashley about either. Instead, I felt that by taking control of the plan and the numbers, I could show them that I was capable of doing the job they were expecting of me and resilient enough to bounce back from critique, failure and a change of direction. At the same time, I was acquiescing to Jim and Ashley's dominance on the Board, bowing to their ideas and preferences to how they wanted things to be done.

I presented the new plan to them, complete with draft sets of numbers that both were pleased with. I emphasised that I was enthusiastic about the change of direction, making an effort to reinforce my position as a loyal and dedicated CEO to the Board. The fact that it has now been changed was a very good sign, I said, that the Board is coming together well as a team and is taking ownership of the plan, rather than just accepting what had been put in front of them. I felt myself crafting and articulating words that played entirely into what they wanted to hear from me. At this point in the game, I thought, I'm outnumbered and need to retrench, to buy some time to consider what to do next. Now is not a time for fighting, but for attending to wounds.

Ashley confirmed that he liked the new plan and turned to his notes from the day before, going through them one by one. Most of the items on his list seemed to me to be an eclectic collection of ideas that had come from conversations during the meeting, about things that we should do that didn't really seem to fit with the plan. They were all low-level action points about doing pretty minor things: Joyce had found a web domain name that she suggested that we should buy; Anne thought that we should allocate two pages of our magazine to advertise our other products to our members; Sheila wanted me to follow up with a free website review that she'd negotiated with a person she'd met at a networking event and the list continued. In the end, I looked down at a 'to-do' list of about fifteen items and felt rather disappointed at the apparent outcome of a full day's meeting between seven intelligent and experienced people. I sighed inwardly and thought to myself, "This has been a complete waste of time. Is this really what Board meetings are for?"

Our meeting concluded with some further discussion about how I should do my job, which made me feel very angry, feelings that I hid behind a mask of receptiveness. Jim said that I was being 'too nice' to my team and needed to get tougher with them. Ashley concurred, saying that I just needed to give them a set of targets and leave it to them to tell me how they're going to deliver them. Ashley said that he wanted to be able to pay me a bonus, so we needed to hit the targets in the plan. He said that

I should 'be more strategic' and get my team working hard for me. His dream, he said, would be to walk into my office to see me with my feet up on my desk, working out the colour of my Ferrari.

I felt a flush of anger, once again, from a profound sense of being misunderstood. The image of a Ferrari was completely contradictory – offensive, even – to the idea of the Association's standing as a charity. What's more, I had no interest in fast Italian cars, only in being paid more fairly and appropriately for doing a job in an organisation whose role and potential I cared deeply about.

As we left the hotel into the bright London sunshine, Ashley turned to me and asked in a friendly, personal tone if I was feeling ok after a tough couple of days.

"Yeah, of course," I said. "I just need to reflect on where we've got to but yes, I'm fine. Raring to go."

Reflection | What troubles me

My overwhelming sense of this experience with the Board was of being misrecognised, misunderstood and disciplined by people who were in a position of greater power than me. At the same time, I want to explore my part in creating that experience. These few days felt like a sustained negotiation of issues such as power, capability, responsibility and differences of perspective. Somehow, I also feel a sense of shift in how I am recognised by the Board, how my identity and those of other members of the group have been further sculpted by the experience. I also feel somewhat puzzled and annoyed by the way that I seem to behave within the company of others in these settings. From the beginning of the Board meeting, I notice how I adopt a deferential and restrained manner with Trustees. This is evident in instances of polite support for authority, such as my solidarity with Jim in being ready to start the meeting on time, or by not wanting to embarrass him by calling attention to his strong support of Raj's proposal. My restraint is evident also in more emotionally turbulent times, such as when I stayed silent under pressure from Jim and Ashley to 'be harder' on my team, or by shutting down a conversation with Ashley about how I was feeling after such an intense meeting: "I'm fine. Raring to go."

Bent Flyvbjerg, a contemporary writer on management practice on megaprojects and on the philosophy of social science, presents a profound challenge to a tendency for restraint, self-censorship and suppression of emotions to avoid conflict:

Suppressing conflict is suppressing freedom, because the privilege to engage in conflict and power struggle is part of freedom (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.108).

I find Flyvbjerg's words provocative, highlighting that my tendency for self-restraint is constraining of my freedom as an individual, and the freedom of others participating in these meetings. At the same

time, Flyvbjerg seems to be extending an invitation to engage in the struggle for power as a basic right as a free human being. However, this idea seems to ignore the potential consequences of exercising one's rights to freedom in such a way. I find the idea of engaging differently in conflict, politics and power very challenging, aware of a great uncertainty about what the consequences might be, hampered by the difficulty of assessing the risks involved in acting more assertively into the power dynamics with the Board.

These instances of suppression, both in the moment and upon reflection, are examples of how highly constrained it can feel for me in my practice as a manager in acting and responding with others. Rather than an introspective reflection, I can understand that this restraint is both formed from the social experience I find myself in and gives shape to that social experience by constraining the possibilities for alternative and novel outcomes. Reflecting further, how different could this Board meeting (and previous meetings) have been for everyone had we been more open and honest about our thoughts and feelings in response to the questions and provocations from one another?

In a history of disappointment and frustration at Board meetings, this was another session that led to feelings of disillusionment, of a poor outcome, of something not turning out the way that it *should* have, of a missed opportunity for something *better* to have happened. The disappointment of this experience is consistent with my history of involvement in different Board meetings across multiple organisations, but there is only one common component throughout that history: me. I recognise that my sense of disappointment is not only derived from the behaviour of others, of the outcome of some abstract occurrence known to me as 'Board meeting'. It is derived also from a continued disappointment at my own actions and responses, at this continued pattern of restrained, deferential behaviour. This may, I think, serve to deepen a sense of dissatisfaction from a career point of view, playing the role of CEO who comes away battered and bruised from Board meetings. More disturbingly, this pattern has implications for my sense of identity as I struggle to reconcile my hopes and ambitions with the turmoil of everyday organisational life. Taking a more social perspective, I imagine that such meetings provoke strong emotions in others, too, whether these are shared senses of disappointment, or some other feeling that is influenced by others' motives, perceptions and historical experiences.

By taking up a reflexive inquiry, I hope to discover possibilities for playing differently into the politics of organisational life in the future and in so doing, I hope to illuminate insights that may have generalisable appeal for managers in similar settings. I start by exploring my understanding of and relationship with the idea of power, as I think that is my first obstacle in struggling to make sense of what both enables and constrains my actions and responses in settings where power differentials are

a major backdrop: what exactly is at play here? What are the risks involved in speaking up, in rallying against dominant displays of behaviour and in attacking the tacit expectations bestowed upon us by job roles? In short, why do my experiences of Board meetings tend to unfold in this way and what possibilities might there be for different outcomes?

Reflection | Starting with power relations

I shall start by reflecting on how the idea of power features in the relationship between me and the Board. My way of thinking about power has already started to change towards seeing power as a relational concept; as a differential between people or groups; a dynamic feature of how relationships are configured, rather than as a possession or object. The perception of power as a phenomenon that is woven within the activity of relating between people, rather than located within an individual and then imposed upon another, was taken up by German sociologist, Norbert Elias, one of the scholars who provide theoretical foundations for the DMan programme. He saw power as relational and co-created, rather than something that is held or bestowed upon someone (Elias, 1970). This is a significantly different description than that which is taken up within the systems thinking perspective presented in parts of the dominant managerial discourse, such as the Power Bases model formulated by social psychologists French and Raven (1959) that emphasises distinct sources of power that an individual may possess and exploit.

One may say that someone "has" power and leave it at that, although such usage, which implies that power is a thing, leads down a blind alley. (Elias, 1970, p.93)

Elias is not alone here: the French postmodernist philosopher Michel Foucault wrote extensively on a similar interpretation of the phenomenon of power, influencing scholars and practitioners in how power can become understood as an instrument of control and coercion. By approaching power in this way, however, Foucault warns against the reification of power or its existence as an independent phenomenon:

The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others. Which is to say, of course, that something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures. (Foucault, 1982, p.788)

In that respect, Foucault is aligned with Elias in not only seeing it as a relational phenomenon but one that is in a constant state of flux and active negotiation, indeed something that is brought into existence only through action.

Drawing at times on the work of Elias and Foucault, DMan Programme Director Professor Chris Mowles writes extensively on the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, taking up this perspective on how power relationships in organisational life can enable and constrain our interactions:

This web of relationships is made up of co-operating and competing interdependent people conditioned by the fluctuating power relationships between them which Elias called a 'figuration' (Mowles, 2011, p40-41).

Mowles and Elias are inviting here us to regard power not only as a dynamic process, as Foucault does, but as a phenomenon that is somewhat energised by the way in which relationships between people are structured, given that those people are dependent upon each other to varying degrees. Foucault (1982) provides a reminder, as I begin to consider the structural configuration of the relationship between me and the Board, to regard power relations as emerging in ways that are not designed by any individual or group of people, albeit that the role descriptions and terms of reference that help us to organise our relationship around structural lines is clearly designed and documented. I shall take up this view of power with respect to two perspectives from my experiences with the Board: firstly, how the configuration of the Board in relation to my role of CEO gives rise to a power differential; and secondly, how changes in that configuration appear to significantly alter, or energise, that power differential.

Reflection | How power arises from the way in which our roles are configured

I want to point to three elements of the figuration of the Board/CEO relationship to understand what the consequences might be for the power dynamics in that relationship and what emerges in terms of emotional responses and sense-making.

Firstly, Trustees are elected to their position by members of the association, whilst, as CEO, I have been appointed through an employment recruitment and selection process by the Trustees. Thus, the basis for my authority as CEO comes from my expertise and ability to do the job, tested through the recruitment process and evaluated at regular intervals. The Trustees' authority has its basis in being elected by members with a 'mandate' to act with their trust, in the best interests of the charity. Since Trustees appoint, evaluate and can dismiss me as CEO, that establishes an immediate power

differential that is a fundamental part of the relationship and one that I pay attention to during my interactions with the Board.

Secondly, Trustees are not paid for their work, whereas my CEO role is a paid role under a contract of employment. This again establishes an uneven footing for the relationship: Board meetings, for example, are part and parcel of my 'day job', whereas Trustees are there voluntarily, often taking time out of their 'day jobs' and even forfeiting their ability to earn money so that they can attend. In terms of either being dismissed or resigning our respective roles, I therefore have a greater financial risk to bear than Trustees.

Finally, under various pieces of UK law, the Trustees – and not me as CEO – carry the burden of responsibility for decision-making and the financial viability of the organisation. Whereas I will be immersed in the day-to-day operation of the association, it is the Trustees who are charged with carrying the responsibility for what happens. Like many UK charities, the association I work for adopts a structure where the CEO is not a Trustee or Company Director, but is invited to Board meetings, where she or he can be held to account and advise the Board on operational and strategic matters. Some associations adopt more of a private-sector model, where the CEO is a Trustee and therefore a member amongst equals on the Board. The separation of Trustee and CEO roles is based on ideas of best practice within the charity sector that are built upon the notion of agency and management hegemony: non-executive, unremunerated Trustees can apply objective scrutiny upon the paid executive, who, it is assumed, has an interest in gaining further power and financial reward than is in the charity's interests:

The solution to either of these agency problems is to ensure that executives or managers act in the best interests of the owners by increasing the amount and quality of information available to principals and making senior executives part owners of the firm through their compensation packages. This contract between the principal and agent is the unit of analysis for agency theory from which scholars will attempt to determine the most efficient contract governing the principal-agent relationship given assumptions about people (e.g. self-interest, bounded rationality, risk aversion), organizations (e.g. goal conflict among members), and information (e.g. information is a commodity which can be purchased). (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.58 in Cunliffe and Luhman, 2013, p.2)

These ideas are embedded into the regular discourse associated with running charities, exemplified here in this extract from legal guidance published by the Charity Commission for England and Wales:

Trustees might be told that they should not interfere in day to day operations. You should allow staff and volunteers to carry out any functions that have been delegated to them. But, you and your co-trustees must be able to ensure that delegated authority is being properly exercised, through appropriate monitoring and reporting procedures (and, where appropriate and possible, independent checking). (Charity Commission, 2015, p.30)

The ideas in agency theory tend to be taken up in the positivist tradition in identifying conflicting goals between agent and principal (CEO and Board, in my own experience) and identifying mechanisms of governance (reporting, auditing) that can control or mitigate the self-serving behaviour of the agent (CEO). This perspective is limited in placing binary perspectives on principal and agent, assuming that the former has goals and motives that are aligned with the organisation's overall goals, whilst the latter is self-serving. Thus, such a perspective ignores the idea of change, variation, inter-dependency and follows a rather linear cause-and-effect line of thinking in identifying both the root of the problem and its solution. Thus, the Board/CEO relationship in charities such as mine is built upon a rationalist ideology that could be challenged, but nevertheless prevails, in terms of the legal and structural mechanisms that feature as part of the formal relationship between Board and CEO, as can be seen within the Charity Commission guidance above (2015).

These elements (election, remuneration, legal status) of the figuration of the Board/CEO structure enable us to perform our respective roles, whilst providing constraints upon our relationship that leads to patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The Board is asked to act as a collective, taking decisions and accepting responsibility as a group. So, when I do come together with the Board for regular meetings, it should not be surprising for me to feel excluded and isolated at times, since this is a feature of the design within which we are conducting our respective roles. Similarly, Trustees are excluded from the day-to-day affairs of the organisation, whilst being asked to be accountable for it.

Here, I am following Elias somewhat in providing a structural explanation for the power differential – noticing how our respective roles are configured. However, Elias (2001) goes further in identifying the idea of interdependence – the *relative needs* the Board and I have of each other - as a fundamental enabler and constrainer of the relationship between us. The board and I are not acting independently of each other, but are dependent upon each other in an inextricable way, according to how the governance of the organisation is designed.

However, I find it hard to escape Foucault's (1982) point about the power relations arising not through a blueprint or design but emerging in recognisable ways from the interactions within the webs of relationships. On the one hand, I am operating within designed, defined and documented parameters:

job description, employment contract, terms of reference, Articles of Association and UK law and these do seem to put in place power differentials between me and the Board. On the other hand, taking a broader view of power as relational within the Board as well as between me and the Board as a unified entity, I lean towards Foucault's (1982) ideas that these power relations manifest in ways that are not fully explained or predicted by such artefacts.

I want to delve a little more into the fluctuating sense of inclusion and exclusion that I experienced in my narrative. Writing with fellow researcher John Scotson, Elias conducted a sociological study of the effects of the migration of a new working-class group of people into a new area of a village in Leicestershire, in the UK (Elias & Scotson, 1965). One of the ways in which people felt variously included and excluded within each group was how ideological differences were co-created and co-sustained in order to reinforce the power differentials between the groups. If I take this idea and reflect on my experiences with the Board, I begin to think about how being included and excluded from the Board might not simply be an outcome of a linear understanding of the wielding of the Board's power over me. Instead, the acts of inclusion and exclusion themselves play into the continuous negotiation of that power differential, enabling its reconfiguration whilst constraining the degree to which it is altered at the same time.

To reflect in more concrete fashion about this idea, the themes of inclusion and exclusion are evident within the meeting in my narrative: Ashley's passing of a private note to a sub-group of the Board, Raj being asked to leave, private conversations between Board members that excluded me, and earlier discussions about salary are all examples of exclusion and isolation of one or more people from the overall group. One explanation could be that some of these things arose from the way that Ashley, as incoming Chair, negotiated his position of power through overtly political behaviour in the meeting, building alliances by passing a private note to Sheila, announcing to others that Sheila shared his point of view, rather than asking her to express her own opinion. Although I felt angry when Jim remained silent after Raj had been asked to leave the meeting, his response can be seen to be politically deft in protecting an alliance with Ashley, Sheila and others, rather than speaking up in defence of my proposal, which would have established a 'rival camp' and led to conflict with the alliance led by Ashley.

If I think back to the events at the start of my narrative, I felt very much included, albeit rather awkwardly, in the convivial events of the dinner party before the meeting, as we all attempted to shake off the trappings of our roles and come together as people trying to get along together in a 'social' setting. The next day, I felt brutally excluded from parts of the meeting. The dynamic flexing of this inclusion-exclusion played a part in deriving the shifting power dynamics in the group, whilst being

driven by them at the same time. From the perspective of living through that experience, I felt anger, anxiety, puzzlement and disappointment at what was unfolding. I therefore wonder whether these bodily responses were inherent features of the stretching and shrinking power dynamics, both being formed from them and fuelling further shifts in power at the same time.

Examining my relationship with the Board from the perspective of inclusion-exclusion and structural figuration is interesting, but still feels inadequate in explaining some of these strong emotional responses I and others experienced at the meeting in my narrative. I sense that this inadequacy arises, in part, from regarding the relationship as somewhat static and fully configured, according to the design of the organisation. In part, this is where I return to Foucault's (1982) and Elias's (2001) idea that the power dynamics that arise and are felt as bodily responses to notions of inclusion-exclusion are not merely the playing-out of a grand design but emerge from the interaction and interdependency of the members of the group. I therefore want to look at how changes to that figuration enable and constrain changes to the power dynamic; how power flows through my web of relationships as I experience it.

Reflection | How changes in configuration alter the power differential

Elias's and Foucault's perspectives on power as a shifting and changing phenomenon leads me to consider, from my experience, how and why power differentials change even though the formal features of a relationship appear stable in their design. I shall start by reflecting on how power dynamics change for me, in my practice, as I move between interactions with my team and interactions with the Board.

My narrative highlights moments in my practice where, due to the figuration of the relationship in question, I am acting from a position of greater power: for example, in my relationship with Raj, whom I engaged as a consultant, or in my interaction with members of my senior staff team. As I enter the Boardroom, my position moves from the pinnacle of the organisational hierarchy to below, and outside of, a group of powerful Trustees. That movement in hierarchical position manifests as a marked shift in power that may be unsettling and difficult to reconcile for both me and for members of the Board. Similarly, moving out of the Board room to converse with Raj pivoted me from being in a low-power position in the room, to a high-power position with Raj, which may explain the restrained, 'professional' air I adopted with him at that moment, as I sought to regain status or address an attack on my identity.

I want to highlight another movement in the figuration of relationships with individual Trustees. Before they are elected as Trustees, candidates such as Ashley and Sheila will tend to reach out to me

for advice and support in order to boost their chances of being elected. Such a candidate may assume that I, as CEO, have a high degree of influence on the outcome of an election, through legitimate or other means. At the very least, I do have knowledge of the workings of the election process, of the Board and of the association's current strategic priorities that are all valuable for anyone seeking an advantage in a competitive election. Once a person has been elected and is on the Board as a Trustee, the nature of this interpersonal relationship seems to 'flip' as I become accountable to them for my activities. So, the power within the relationships shifts abruptly from me having a greater degree of power, to one where the Trustee is in a position of greater power, as a member of the Board. I have experienced this shift with every member of the Board in my narrative and can identify this shift as something that I have struggled with to varying degrees. For example, when faced with aggressive questioning from Ashley, or in being overlooked by Jim by the avoidance of a discussion on salary, I can remember a time when I was in a more powerful position than each of them yet recall treating them with attentive care and respect. So, when this care and respect doesn't seem to be reciprocated by those people, this leads me to feel confused, angry and let down.

In a similar vein, having been the architect of the structure and systems that allow the Board to function in the way that it does, I feel let down when that system does not work in my favour or, as indicated within my narrative, allows the Board and individual Trustees to behave in ways that I see as aggressive, counterproductive or inappropriate. I immediately note my description of the Board's work as a system, which, of course, reflects my pre-existing preference for a systems-view of organisations that I described in Project 1. I note, also, in this line of thought, a reliance on a perspective that attempts to 'get outside' of my relationship with the Board, rather than taking a perspective as a participant within that inter-dependent relationship.

Rather than take too much of a diversion into an explanation of systems thinking here, I want to draw attention to how my deeper exploration here has raised a heightened realisation of the role that power dynamics, politics and shifting relationship figurations play in how life in organisations is experienced – elements that tend to be overlooked, marginalised and constrained by the systems perspective.

At the beginning of my narrative, I drew attention to how one of key elements in the way the Board is configured was due to change at this meeting and my interest in the relationship between Jim, currently the Chair of the Board and Ashley, soon to take over that role. The passing of the note (a particularly symbolic, non-verbal form of communication, after Elias, 1989) and dominant behaviour displayed by Ashley could relate to a playing out of the shifting dynamic around the role of Chair - Ashley starting to assert his position within the Board as its leader and dominant figure. That

interpretation does not negate or contradict French and Raven's (1959) ideas of a base power lying 'within' the roles that people are assigned, of course, but does bring our attention to the dynamics at play: what is changing and emerging between people, within their relationships; that power isn't so much held as a static resource, but is being constantly negotiated and in a dynamic state.

However, this explanation has its limitations. Ashley is only one of a few Board members and by role title, he was not the 'most senior' person in the room. Going further, had it not been for Raj deciding otherwise a few months earlier, he could easily have been a Board member himself, rather than a visitor and presenter to the Board on that day. Can such a slim separation of roles play such a significant part in producing the inclusion and exclusion that played out? Perhaps so, when one considers how quickly the figuration of various roles in a relationship can change, in ways I have described above.

Finally, I want to point to the succession plan that is part of the Board's constitution. Trustee roles come up for re-election every three years and these vacancies arise annually, to ensure a balance between continuity of service and inflow of new people on the Board. This means that the nature of the Board is rather transient and dynamic and so the power dynamics within the Board will ebb and flow over time as the people within the group change. Picking up on the idea of power as relational and dynamic enables me to reflect about how changes within the membership of the Board holds possibilities for power and politics to emerge in new ways over time. As a changing and evolving group, the Board is comprised of people who, only a matter of weeks previously, were once candidates aspiring to those positions, seeking my favour and support as CEO. The identity of 'the Board' is constantly changing as the people who comprise it come and go and as the individuals themselves form the identity of that group, whilst being formed by it at the same time. As I write this narrative and reflection, Jim and Joyce have already left the Board, Ashley is now Chair, and three new Trustees have been elected. This change of people will, I imagine, intensify the negotiation of roles, identity and purpose that were already fluid and emergent with the previous set of Trustees in place. As such, I expect the power dynamics and negotiation of roles, identity and purpose will all become more pronounced, as may the emotional responses of those involved. My final reflection here on power, then, is that what is in constant formation, re-formation and negotiation is what Elias would call the *habitus* of the Board (Elias, 2000), or the pattern of behaviours which the members of the Board are disposed to exhibit according to a set of assumptions that form a kind of background guiding our understanding of what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable.

This idea lies in stark contrast to how the systemic managerial discourse tends to identify the culture within an organisation as something that is relatively stable, identifiable and controllable by managers

and leaders within the organisation, through applying a systems approach to the way in which the organisation itself is regarded. By way of illustration, I point here towards the work of Edgar Schein, an influential organisational scholar who wrote extensively about the idea culture in the 1980's. Schein wrote, in his seminal work on culture and leadership (1985) about both *primary* and *secondary* mechanisms by which leaders change culture in organisations, including references to activities such as the design of organisational structure and reward mechanisms to influence behaviour and relationships. Schein's work has been influential in furthering the discourse on the role of leadership in taking a systems-view of organisations, where managers can take an external and detached perspective before applying designed changes onto the system. The ideology behind Schein's perspective is fundamentally at odds with the work of Elias (1987, 2000) and others in emphasising the paradoxical nature of managers being both involved and detached at the same time: a perspective that I shall continue to work with in my inquiry here.

I notice a movement in my way of thinking here, away from a set of assumption about how Board *should* be working according to management literature, and away from the idea of my organisation having a tangible culture, towards the idea of a *habitus* for the Board that is in a constant state of flux and renegotiation, shaped by and shaping the beliefs, identifies and emotions of its members.

My exploration of power dynamics has begun to illuminate some important features of my relationship with organisational politics and a pattern of disappointment and frustration with Board meetings. However, I don't yet have enough depth of insight into what these shifting power differentials may have to do with the strong emotions experienced by myself and others in such meetings, why it is that I have adopted a tendency to suppress any such emotional displays, why I didn't speak up at times during the meeting in my narrative and how all of those elements combine to sustain this sense of disappointment in my practice.

So, I now want to take a deeper look at power dynamics to consider the risks involved in political participation. By inquiring into what is at stake, I want to consider, in the thick of the emotionally laden interactions with the Board, what is it that's holding me back, indeed what's holding *us* back as a group?

Reflection | What is at stake here?

By taking a risk-based view on power I mean to inquire into what is at stake when one considers behaving differently to the patterns and norms of behaviour according to this idea of *habitus* that both shapes and is constantly re-shaped by our actions.

Financial risk

I felt anxious about raising the issue of my salary with the Board. Their ability to decide on whether I should get a pay rise, a bonus, or even keep my job, represents a financial risk to me. The Board's ability to adjust my financial reward as CEO was indicative of the power differential between us. This is a curious idea, not least because the Board themselves are unremunerated and yet have the responsibility and authority for determining the pay of their most senior member of staff. I had played into the legitimacy of that role by placing the discussion on the agenda and by the work that I had done on salary benchmarking to show how my pay was not well synchronised to either the internal pay scales of the organisation, or to market rates. By adopting this rational approach to the issue, I had attempted to equip the Board with the ability to make an objective, rational decision on an issue that could be emotive and subjective, thus making their role one that was more comfortable to deal with. At the same time, by doing that, I was playing into the power differential by attempting to steer and coerce them into a course of action based upon my knowledge and advantageous access to information, as if to say "here's the evidence, now make the right decision".

Taking this further, by constructing a solid, rational argument for a pay rise, I might well have presented the Board with an intensely limited sense of freedom and discretion in how they could respond. Similarly, Raj's presentation was thoroughly researched, well-articulated and argued on logical grounds, pointing strongly towards a 'yes' decision. Considering these episodes from the perspective of the power dynamics at play within the meeting, the fluctuating interdependencies within the group and the degrees to which people may have felt included and excluded, I begin to glimpse an alternative explanation for the outcomes that unfolded and the emotional responses that both resulted from and played into those outcomes. My presentation of tightly constructed rational, yet rhetorical arguments for my desired course of action could have felt highly constraining for the Board, thus stretching the power dynamics and sense of inclusion-exclusion too far, resulting in breakdowns of the meeting. In other words, the 'no' decisions may have resulted from the shifting power dynamics in the group and not as a result in the rational argument put forward. Attempting to seize too much power through rational argument resulted in my being disciplined by the Board, presenting the emotionally charged breakdowns we experienced.

The way that the salary discussion broke down quickly, following a period of confused 'passing of the buck' between Board members, could be viewed as a testing-out of power differentials between Board members. No-one had assumed responsibility for completing what they had committed to do - there was no accountability amongst the Board members themselves. Thus, the power dynamics

amongst Board members was unclear and being negotiated, with one key ingredient of that negotiation being the change in the role of Chair from Jim to Ashley.

The issue of pay is emotive and intimate, a subject that is ordinarily private and hidden from colleagues with whom I work more closely and regularly. Whilst the position of people on the Board legitimised their knowledge and discussion of my pay, these are, nevertheless, people with whom I have infrequent contact and whom even then I have known for less than a year. The intimate nature of the discussion, coupled with the power differential between Board members and me resulted, I think, in a sense of being isolated and excluded from the conversation. Taking up Elias and Scotson once more, I notice relative differences in the degree of cohesiveness within the group, and within various groupings within the whole, and see that this feature of the relationships may well be both reinforcing and changing the power dynamics in the group at the same time (Elias & Scotson, 1965). I did not leave the room at that point in the meeting, although I would have been happy to do so in order for the Board to talk unimpeded by my presence. However, the guarded and coded exchanges about what various Board members had or hadn't done felt excluding to me, as was the conclusion of the meeting, when the Board decided to have the conversation at another time.

In terms of playing differently into the power dynamics, I could have taken myself out of the room, or have had a pre-meeting conversation with Jim about how he wished to handle this item on the agenda. As a gesture, this might have been perceived by the Board as a positive and enabling act, allowing them to have a discussion in a more comfortable setting. Then again, that move could have been regarded as a display of aggression, arrogance or even surrender on my part. I notice a tendency here for me to play out various scenarios as fantasy, but it is clear to me that, since the aborted discussion on salary was a repeat of similar episodes at previous Board meetings, behaving similarly according to a rational line of thinking has merely resulted in us becoming 'stuck'. I acknowledge therefore, that I have co-created this pattern with the Board, accepting the postponement of an issue that is very important to me and not speaking up in recognition of myself, which does seem to lead to the conclusion that only a change in behaviour – at whatever point in the temporal sequence of events – will enable us to become unstuck. If this were a game of chess, someone would need to make a different move in order for the game to progress.

My consideration of financial risk seems to have taken me into different territory: into consideration of how behaving differently places more than just money at stake.

Power confers on a group much more than economic advantage, because the struggle is about the satisfaction of needs to do with esteem and identity. (Stacey & Mowles 2016, p. 426)

The question for me here is more about how I may be seen or understood by Board members, were I have taken a different course of action on the debate about my salary. Expanding this idea, I am curious about how I might be perceived differently if I were to explore ways of changing the pattern of being overlooked and marginalised on issues of importance to me.

Risk to identity

I am interested in the idea of how my identity – indeed, our identity - may be formed from being embroiled in the experiences of inclusion and exclusion arising from the power dynamics that are an inherent part of our daily interactions. I recognise in Elias's (2000) view my own experience of being excluded to a lesser and greater degree within the discussions of the Board as a manifestation of power, which provoked feelings of anger, anxiety and disappointment within me. Similarly, I recognise that Board members may have felt excluded from being able to take part in a discussion about my salary and Raj's presentation. If identity has something to do with a sense of inclusion and exclusion, then our experiences of being excluded within the meeting could be seen as a threat to our senses of identity, resulting in responses that were related to seeking re-inclusion into one group or another.

However, I see how I am currently thinking about this idea as a linear process: fluctuating power dynamics *caused* senses of inclusion and exclusion, which *then* impacted upon identity, which *in turn* provoked emotional responses that *resulted in* re-figuration of relationships and a shift in the power dynamic and so on. I find this interpretation limiting, not least as it does not seem to align with my experience within the moment, which felt more turbulent and confused, as if all these processes were happening at the same time. When I think more deeply about other instances in the meeting from Elias's (2000) perspective of power, inclusion and exclusion, I can see alternative interpretations that relate to idea of negotiating identity: Jim and Ashley going out for a meal together after the Board meeting, for example, without anyone else. Perhaps this was to repair a sense of breakdown in their relationship and prepare for a united front in facing me the next day... Instances where Jim and other Trustees seemed reluctant to express their position, perhaps because they waited for Ashley to do so, in some way inviting or responding to the idea that Ashley will be starting to take on the new role of Chair. This may have been enabling for Ashley, providing him with the space to expand into his forthcoming role, as well as constraining, as he perhaps felt that he might be acting too soon, as he hadn't yet had the formal mandate to do so...My introduction of Raj, signalling that I was in alliance with him in advocating for investment in the new activity...My exclusion of Jim at that point, which may explain why he went on to exclude himself mine and Raj's alliance when Ashley spoke up to criticise the proposal.

Viewing these instances as patterns of inclusion and exclusion draws attention to the power dynamics patterning our interactions and the constant sense of negotiation of identity, of struggle for recognition, with other members of the group. However, if, as Elias and others are saying, that these processes are fundamental components of our everyday interactions as human beings, why then should I perceive a sense of risk arising to my identity from the way in which I relate to others in Board meetings? I can accept that settings such as Board meetings may be particularly intense instances of human interaction, thus heightening experiences of inclusion-exclusion and the sense of risk to identity. Yet, it seems that, as social, interactive beings, we are *constantly* engaged in shifting power relations and phenomena such as inclusion-exclusion, identity formation and the emotional responses that these experiences entail. From my experience, I wonder whether the idea of what is at risk here lies with my sense of identity per se, or whether it is to do with how I am recognised by people with whom I have particularly intense relationships, such as the Boards of Trustees. How is my identity taken up by other people and can an exploration of identity as a social phenomenon illuminate what is going on for me in terms of the emotional quality of my interactive experiences?

My inquiry has led to a deeper exploration of power dynamics and into ideas about identity formation. As far as my narrative is concerned, I have yet to touch on the emotional responses in my experience to understand how these connect with identity, risk perception and power. Only then can I get closer to understanding my tendency to suppress my emotions and restrain the way that I communicate in Board meetings. Only then can I begin to glimpse opportunities for acting differently in the future. Therefore, as I draw the reflective section of this project to a conclusion, I want to signal my intention to deepen this line of inquiry in Project 3, by moving into an exploration of the emotional consequences that arise from processes of recognition and identity formation:

The experience of inclusion and belonging generates feelings of affection and loyalty towards other members of the 'in' group and any criticism or threat to one's group quickly arouses aggression. The mere threat of exclusion, and so loss of identity, arouses feelings of shame and humiliation, anxiety and even panic.

(Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.412)

Conclusion | Themes and lingering questions

My overall recollection of the experience within my narrative is of feeling unjustly and unfairly treated, leaving me with a mix of emotions from satisfaction and amusement to anger, embarrassment and disappointment. Writing my narrative feels in some respect like a replaying of my experience, through a medium in which I am inevitably caught in interpreting events as I now see them and an opportunity to win support for my side of the story. The process of writing – a bodily activity – also feels like an

exercise in sense-making, of making connections between micro-events within my narrative, my experiences from the past and the thoughts of other scholars and writers.

I notice my lingering preference for a rationalist and logical perspective (“*they were wrong according to the rules*”) and systems thinking (“*noticing what was wrong will allow me to fix things in the future*”). I have a clear orientation for finding solutions to such problems, rather than delving into the experience itself and taking more of a ‘witness-thinking’ stance:

For we are not seeking the solution to a problem but, so to speak, to find our ‘way around’ inside something that is a mystery to us – an unsolvable mystery that might remain so. (Shotter, 2005, p.154)

My orientation within the systemic discourse on leadership tends to position me as a rational individual. Constrained within that ideology, my daily reflections tend to be limited to the parameters of the game I find myself caught up in, unable or unwilling to pay attention to the patterns emerging for me and others in the unfolding of ordinary everyday life.

My narrative and its re-telling were tumultuous emotional experiences that felt far from rational: experiences that jarred with my expectations for others’ behaviour to follow logical and rational pathways. I find myself in intense negotiations of power, identity and recognition with the Board and these lead to feelings and expressions of emotion that I recognise as emerging as a pattern over a much longer period. What is new to me is the idea that these patterns may be self-perpetuating, from a tendency for me to act and respond in certain ways in my practice. Troubled by my experience, which extends beyond this particular narrative into interactions with this and other Boards, I started a line of inquiry into how structural figurations lead to differential dynamics of power, how changes to those figurations affect and are affected by those power dynamics, how these are experienced as senses inclusion and exclusion and what is at stake in terms of our sense of identity.

If I expand these ideas with reference what I discovered in Project 1, I notice further insights into my movement of thought, which lead me to some preliminary conclusions about my own experience in relation to my research question into success and disappointment in a management career:

- I have been seeking, within my career, recognition and inclusion within powerful and successful groups.
- Now that I hold the position at the top of an organisation, I still feel, at times, unfulfilled and excluded.
- This is despite taking a rational approach to career advancement through management education and progression according to my understanding of success.

- I'm now beginning to adopt a different perspective on how and why I'm feeling unfulfilled and disappointed. If I am experiencing these emotions, others will be too, including members of the Boards with whom I interact.
- I have a tendency, in my practice, to exclude members of the Board in several ways and in doing so, I may expect people on the Board to feel anxious, disappointed, angry and shameful.
- This fuels the patterned experience I have with Boards. So, one possibility might be for me to be more inclusive of the people on Boards in my daily practice, in other words, to engage differently in the inevitable politics that constitute organisational life.

I have also encountered a movement in my thought as a practice-based researcher in how I am now becoming more aware of the process of reflection and reflexivity, as well as a heightened sense of attention to my everyday experience in interactions with other people. Since I am becoming more aware of these phenomena, these possibilities, from my reflexive inquiry, I must consider my ethical responsibilities to act differently, to 'show leadership'.

I am left with lingering questions about the different stances offered by the dominant managerial discourse, based upon rationalist ideology and systems thinking, and perspectives from the theory of complex responsive processes of relating. Specifically, I am intrigued by what is not expressed: silence, the unsaid, the suppressed emotion and the way that we might attempt to disguise or misdirect attention to our feelings when engaging in the everyday dynamic politics of relating. By staying silent, exercising self-control and suppressing emotion, I am reinforcing the patterned experience that I find so very disappointing and if I can behave differently, I may well find a way to a greater sense of satisfaction, recognition and contentment in my identity as a manager. Questioning this may provide insights into the implications and consequences for my practice and for the practice of managers who find a generalisable quality to my inquiry and reflections.

In Project 3, therefore, I shall continue with narrative inquiry to delve deeper into the troubling nature of encounters such as that I related in this project. I want to explore:

- How a perceived threat to identity through misrecognition leads to feelings of anxiety, shame and disappointment;
- Why I allow myself to be dominated by others when I am, ostensibly, in a position of power;
- How my tendency to suppress emotion constrains and enables my practice;

What these insights might tell me about playing differently into the politics in organisations in ways that appear to be overlooked by the systemic discourse on leadership.

Project 3 | Struggling with expressing and suppressing emotions.

In Project 2, I reflected upon a troubling experience in a Board meeting, inquiring into power dynamics, senses of inclusion and exclusion and what is at stake in terms of identity. I did little to engage with the highly emotionally charged quality of that experience. I am puzzled by why that is and how my practice is enabled and constrained by a tendency to overlook, disguise and suppress emotions in my everyday interactions with others. Taking perspectives from the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, I aim to delve deeper into this puzzle. My thesis has developed into an exploration of my sense of disappointment and lack of fulfilment as a manager. Understanding why I tend to suppress my emotions in daily interactions with other people will help me to draw connections with that broader temporal pattern of disappointment. In doing so, I seek insights into the consequences for practice by engaging differently with the emotional dimensions of life as a manager. I begin with a narrative about an experience with colleagues on my management team.

Narrative | A tricky management team meeting

On a bright and sunny Monday morning, six of us gathered for our regular weekly meeting as a management team. We were seated around a white boardroom table in a largely white room, sunlight pouring in through the full-height window that ushered in the green and blue shades of nature. We had become accustomed to using these one-hour sessions to catch up with each other on current events and to check in on our diary commitments for the week ahead. At this point in the meeting, I was giving the team an account of the discussion and decisions made at a Board meeting that had taken place the week before where, of those gathered now, only I had been present.

Despite the bright and welcoming surroundings, I sat stiffly in my chair, my heart beating too quickly against a tightness in my chest that made my breathing uncomfortable and my voice tremble in betrayal of the calm and confident image I wanted to portray. I always find these moments difficult; a perplexing mix of embarrassment and anger at representing decisions I don't always agree with to people I know aren't going to like them. Having struggled through a couple of early items, I explained that one outcome was a plan for some of the Trustees to visit our office in a fortnight's time. Feeling a little more relaxed about this, I told the team that I thought a visit was a really good idea and would help to build the relationship between us and the Board.

I'd not quite finished when Janine interjected, speaking quickly and high up in her register. She wore a troubled frown and glanced around at her colleagues as she spoke. I hadn't expected her interjection but wasn't entirely surprised by it either. Janine and I get on well together, but don't always agree. When she speaks up in such moments, I immediately feel a flash of embarrassment and defensive

irritation at being found lacking in some way. She asked me if I'd seen the email that one of our Trustees, Sheila, had sent that very morning. Gayle chimed in, explaining that she and the rest of the team had received a list of questions from Sheila, that she wanted to discuss when she visited with fellow Trustee, Mike.

I was caught off guard. This was the first I'd heard about the email. John said that he'd not yet had time to read Sheila's note in full but was confused by her questions as they didn't align with the idea of a getting-to-know-you visit. Sheila's questions, he said, made it seem like she was setting out to interview us to see if we'd come up with the same answers as each other. He smiled ironically, making a serious point whilst softening his appeal with a gentle humour that I found myself responding to by relaxing a little and smiling back.

Our collective attention became drawn to Kaye, whose hand flicked sharply up and down as she scrolled through Sheila's questions on her laptop. Her physical agitation interrupted John's flow more effectively than if she had spoken up. She read out some of Sheila's questions to us, speaking loudly and indignantly: "*Imagine it's October 2023: What will have been your three biggest successes?*" and "*if we were an animal, what animal would we be?*" Sounding exasperated, Kaye asked whether Sheila understood how patronising her questions were and how out-of-tune she was with the work that we're doing.

I was irritated by Kaye's blunt and aggressive interruption of John. Before I had decided exactly what to say, Gayle leant forward and quietly challenged Kaye by suggesting that in emailing us with these questions, Sheila had at least reached out, suggesting some things that we might talk about on her visit and that was something we should appreciate. I felt grateful to Gayle for attempting to calm down the agitation that Kaye seemed to be stirring up. As Gayle spoke, I decided to sit back, rather than interrupt the conversation that was now flowing between my colleagues.

Janine joined in, agreeing that having an agenda was a very good idea, although the questions themselves were not what she had been expecting. She picked up a page of Sheila's questions and waved them in the air, asking me whether we were expected to complete them in advance or save them for the day of the visit. I felt under attack once more: this visit wasn't my idea, let alone this list of inane questions, so how should I know what Sheila wanted us to do with them, since I hadn't even been copied into her email! Rather than articulate any of these thoughts, I paused in the hope that someone else might care to offer a point of view. At the same time, I found myself reflecting on just how anxious everyone was feeling about this visit and the way that Sheila was acting. I thought that it might be helpful to try to stay with what was bothering us, rather than close the conversation down. I had no plan in mind other than to see what happened if we kept talking: perhaps some other issue

would come to the surface, perhaps some new alliances would be formed amongst the members of the team, or perhaps everyone would simply become increasingly frustrated until we found a solution. This pause helped me to form my views on what I thought was going on, but as time passed, I started to feel more and more frustrated with the discussion. My annoyance grew at being excluded from Sheila's email and yet being expected to explain and interpret her intentions. I reproached myself for these feelings: Sheila was a perfectly reasonable person and had done nothing more than start a conversation with people she was due to meet with – I should not read too much into that.

After a few minutes, I spoke up, impatient to reach a conclusion on what to do next. I found myself hitting a diplomatic tone, not wanting to disagree with anyone's point of view. I echoed Kaye's views about the shortcomings in Sheila's questions and empathised with Janine's rising anxiety and confusion over the questions. I also said that I had some sympathy with Sheila, who was simply trying to take the initiative and let people know what she had in mind for conversation, which was better than not knowing what might happen. Janine and Gayle both nodded faintly, reflecting my support of their views. Kaye, on the other hand, was clearly still unhappy, huffing and puffing as she struggled to find the exact words to say. I continued, suggesting that we take Sheila's questions as an invitation to talk about our ideas for the future, but that we shouldn't answer her questions directly in advance.

Whilst the others seemed to relax, Kaye was still clearly irritated. That was all very well, she said, but Sheila meeting us individually wouldn't serve any purpose, was a poor way of generating a shared view of the future and would be divisive to us. Kaye's words stirred in me the idea that Sheila might be deliberately threatening to undermine the team and my authority as CEO. Perhaps she was seeing this as a chance to divide opinion and put us to the test. Perhaps she was acting on behalf of the whole Board in that respect. I had the distinct impression that this is where our conversation was heading but I decided against asking my colleagues if this was what they were thinking, feeling that I might be over-stating my own sense of insecurity and burdening them with an unhelpful fantasy.

Instead, I reminded Kaye that she and Sheila had known each other for years, so she ought to know better than I did that Sheila would only be trying to help, albeit that she'd acted clumsily in sending out her email and caused concern among us. At that, Kaye seemed to relax a little and suggested that she would call Sheila to explain that we wanted to meet her collectively, so that the discussion would be more productive and generative. With that, the mood in the room settled as we arrived at a good solution to what had seemed like a thorny problem twenty minutes earlier.

In the days that followed, we quickly became absorbed in other things. By the end of the week, I had forgotten about the drama of the meeting and hadn't thought any further about Sheila's visit. Until, that is, late on that Friday afternoon when I picked up a telephone message from Sheila to say that

she'd had a disturbing conversation with Kaye and wanted to discuss it with me. I was unable to reach Sheila when I called her back, but instead received an email from her apologising that she'd been unavailable to talk, that she'd spoken to her fellow Trustee, Mike, and that they had decided to call off the visit to the office. She'd copied in Ashley, as Chair of the Board, this time but not Kaye or any of my team, in contrast to her original email from a week earlier. Kaye, said Sheila, had made it clear that the management team were very worried about the meeting and that her questions had clearly "set the cat amongst the pigeons".

I struggled to decide what to do first: call Kaye? Call Sheila? Call Ashley to give him my perspective on what had happened? I sat back in my chair, looked at the ceiling and let out a long sigh of frustration. I couldn't understand why Kaye hadn't simply done what she'd promised to do on behalf of the team and how the phone call had gone so wrong. I felt angry that I'd been dragged into the centre of this mess and wondered about what games Sheila and Kaye were playing.

I called Kaye and told her that Sheila had just cancelled the visit, asking her if she'd seen that coming. Kaye seemed surprised and gave a different version of events, saying that they'd had a good discussion and agreed on new plans for the visit. Finishing my call with Kaye, I decided to reply to Sheila's email, expressing my regret that the visit had been cancelled and that, whilst I respected her view, I did not recognise Kaye's words in how she'd described their conversation. I worded my email carefully, avoiding taking sides or defending either Kaye or Sheila, leaving myself room to defend my view in the future, should this disagreement escalate or rumble on further. With a heavy sense of irritation and fatigue, I decided to go home and try to forget about it all for the weekend.

Reflection | Taking a line of inquiry from the emotional quality of this experience

This experience is typical of events in my managerial life that feel like breakdowns, disturbances and failures, full of turbulent emotions for me and others involved. Since writing the narrative, I've had further conversations with my colleagues as part of dealing with what happened, working out how we could have done things differently and trying to make sense of what that episode meant for our relationship with the Board. For all the pain and confusion here, this is a very ordinary episode, typical of the daily dramas that pepper my experiences of practising as a manager. As I work as CEO of an institution that is concerned with researching, describing and promoting ideas about what constitutes good management practice, I feel under constant pressure to live up to competing expectations of what good looks like, and so such episodes stand out as particularly painful to me. So, to understand better how my practice is textured by such experiences, I need also to ask how emotions feature in competing expectations about being a CEO and how broad temporal patterns of disappointment

within my career as a manager arise from and contribute to the emotional quality of daily experiences at work.

A growing body of scholars takes a similar interest in the emotional perspective in organisations. In his 2008 book, *The Emotional Organization*, Stephen Fineman presents a series of narratives of how emotional performances are part of the everyday interactions between people in organisations as diverse as a prison and a management consultancy practice, and that these emotional qualities come to construct the perceived cultures within those diverse settings that are both particular to the context from which they are drawn and highly generalisable at the same time.

Two of Fineman's colleagues from the University of Bath, Russ Vince and Yiannis Gabriel, are part of this growing movement of interest in the emotional dynamics in organisations. Vince provides an opening for learning as I begin my inquiry, describing how rationalising emotional experiences creates further emotions that suggest an opportunity to reflect on both wider processes of organising and the "politics of managerial actions" (Vince, 2006 in Vince & Gabriel 2011, p.5).

Taking up this invitation, I want to explore what my experiences of anxiety, anger and shame in my narrative have to do with my desire to be recognised at being good at what I do. I have an expectation to be in control, to feel positive, to be decisive, and a patterned tendency to seek and promote harmony with my colleagues. I tend to suppress my own feelings and to see the rise of negative emotions in conversations with others as something to be avoided and resolved. I am intrigued by why I do this, how behaving in this way affects my relationships with others and what the consequences of acting differently would be.

Emotions within the struggle to make sense of what was happening

I approached the meeting with a rational perspective on my task: to give an objective and impartial account of the decisions and action points that arose from the recent Board meeting. However, I felt a familiar anxiety and irritation texturing my experience as it emerged. In the end, the whole episode felt far from impartial and objective and much more like a heated negotiation. In Mead's terms, the meaning and consequences of our conversation was not pre-determined, but uncertain, emerging only through our social act of gesture and response (Mead, 1934). Whilst this is always the case, this particular conversation carried for me, and evidently for my colleagues, a much more vivid sense of unpredictability: something much more was at stake than the immediate issue at hand. At the same time as our conversation being about Sheila's visit, it was also about other tacit issues, which were not obvious to me at the time but which I explore in this project, and this aroused a collective and shifting sense of anxiety, anger and shame.

What started for me as a mild sense of insecurity at being left out of Sheila's original email grew into a strong sense of irritation at how people responded and an unstated yet palpable expectation for me to intervene. That irritation became compounded into an acute feeling of anger and frustration when I felt myself becoming embroiled in events once they had gone wrong. It is perhaps tempting to idealise a sense of inclusion as positive and enabling, but here, somewhat paradoxically, the process of becoming included felt irritating, like being *dragged into* a drama that I had no initial place in. I could not understand why Kaye and Sheila had been unable to resolve this in conversation or why Sheila hadn't felt able to tell Kaye that she was cancelling the visit. My immediate reaction was that they had behaved like impetuous children, unable to have a simple conversation without it escalating into a melodramatic cancellation. At the same time, they presented divergent accounts of their conversation. I thus felt a parental responsibility to intervene and this felt bizarre to me, since both Kaye and Sheila are experienced adults in senior roles within an organisation that promotes good management practice. I felt torn in my loyalties as a parent would be between two offspring. Consequently, my relationship with each of them was put under strain and scrutiny and I became angry and suspicious towards both of them. I felt their conflicting accounts meant that one of them had to be mistaken, lying or deliberately sabotaging our relationship. Having initially been ignored by Sheila, she had now left me feeling very exposed by emailing me with her decision to cancel and copying in Ashley. This re-ignited the irritation I had felt when I'd initially discovered that I had been left out and a mild sense of panic about why Sheila had excluded me and what might happen next.

My mind whirred in a replay of events: I could have played a stronger hand in the previous Board meeting to have had more influence over the agenda. I could have spent more time working with Sheila about her expectations for the visit. Then again, I was constrained in doing either of these things, since there were many other items from the Board meeting that needed my attention. Sheila was, after all, only one of six Trustees due to make a visit to the office and the only one that had acted in this way. So, I struggled to make sense of the politics at play and desperately searched for a rational explanation, trying to trace back the problem to a root cause for clues to how I could have behaved differently and what I should do next.

I felt betrayed by Sheila and let down by Kaye in not effecting an acceptable outcome from their conversation. However, I didn't express these feelings to either of them, but chose my language very carefully in order to strike a diplomatic and neutral tone. I am puzzled by why I sought to suppress and control those feelings but recognise this as a familiar way of acting. I didn't allow others to see the effect that their actions had had on me and on our relationship. I pushed away the familiar bodily affectations of anger and instead spoke calmly, at regular volume and with words chosen very carefully so as not to betray my inner turmoil. Reflecting initially on this, I wanted to restore and maintain

positive relationships with both Sheila and Kaye and thought that the best way to do that would be to remain diplomatic and calm. I imagine that had I showed them the full strength and heat of my anger and disappointment, I would have jeopardised my relationship with them in some way and would have been left feeling shameful and regretful afterwards.

Feeling angry and shameful

But since that is typical of the way I tend to act, I want to explore the possibilities for acting differently, starting with the moment that those emotions started to emerge for me. The question of how anger and shame arise has preoccupied a number of scholars interested in the nature of human emotions and how affective states arise in individuals and in groups. A 1992 study into the linkage between shame and anger by Tangney et al attempted to find empirical evidence to enhance theoretical speculation by writers from psychological perspectives. The study found a positive correlation between shame and anger, although remained speculative on causality. Shame, the authors suggest, may arise in response to feelings of anger that manifest in socially unacceptable ways (hostile behaviour, for example). This reflects how I experienced first anger then shame: My anger arose from an unwanted feeling of shame at being exposed as incompetent, and my feelings turned “outwards” towards blaming others in an attempt to spare myself from that painful experience (Tangney et al, 1992). A simple visit had gone wrong and this showed there was a problem with my management team and, by only a short extension, with my capability as CEO. I was embarrassed by how this episode made me look and feel incompetent, my anger acting to push back my sense of shame, to locate the blame with others for putting me in that embarrassing situation.

Reflecting further on the work by Tangney et al, by avoiding showing my anger publicly – by not showing or telling either Sheila or Kaye how annoyed I was about the outcome of their call – I was avoiding a sense of shame that I would have felt had I shown myself as angry. But, without that expression of anger, with or without an accompanying sense of shame, my feelings turned inwardly towards myself, resulting in a sense of exasperation, hopelessness at the prospects of being able to do a good job, and more disappointment at my experience of being a manager. So, here, suppressing my feelings of shame by feeling angry towards others and, at the same time, suppressing those angry feelings and not showing them to others, had consequences for the way that I acted and for my ongoing relationship with Sheila, Kaye and the rest of the management team. Therefore, I can say that acting differently would also have consequences for my relationships and my overall sense of disappointment. Given that I am not content with either my relationships or my overall sense of disappointment, the risks associated with acting differently would seem to be much less than

pronounced than I have been imagining without critical reflexivity. So, what is at stake, here? What is the sense of risk that both enables and constrains the way I act in the heat of the moment?

What is at stake in the heat of emotional experience?

When things went wrong in the meeting and subsequent call with Sheila, I felt an embodied sense of shame, guilt, anger, which immediately felt like I had failed as a manager. Expressing those emotions would have felt like admitting failure and displaying my feelings with any degree of intensity would seem like a failure to live up to expectations about what being a successful manager means. So, I need to understand more about how these expectations arise.

I have encountered my preoccupation with ideas of success, arising from the thought collectives (Fleck, 1935) and ideological stances that have come to influence my way of thinking about management in my career. In my first project, I reflected on how I have been shaped by a rationalist perspective on management and in her critical inquiry into rationality, Barbara Townley sets into context a better understanding of how the ideology of rationality informs work on organisations through three broad frames of reference. Taking up the first of these, Townley describes how a 'disembedded and disembodied' rationality forms the basic ideology that underpins much of the modern and contemporary perspectives on organisations and management. By this, I take Townley to be referring to how much of the rational discourse on management describes phenomena, practices and experiences in organisations in terms of 'objective truths' that exist independently of us as particular human beings interacting with each other in particular contexts. This perspective has consequences for how I respond to expectations about what it means to be competent and I account for what I do in those same rationalised and idealised terms (Townley, 2008. p.25). Turning to how emotions are represented in this perspective, Stephen Fineman takes a critical view of some of the more contemporary trends in management writing warning that in such texts, "organizations are emotionally arid" (Fineman, 2008, p.278). He points to a particularly skewed view of emotions in a way that leads to an idealisation of positive emotions, establishing norms within the context that I operate as CEO, and as CEO of a leadership and management institution in particular. I recognise how this stance influenced the way that I summed up my thoughts towards the end of the management meeting, proposing that Sheila's email could be seen as a very productive effort, and feeling a sense of relief when Gayle and Janine nodded in support of my view.

So, acknowledging and displaying negative feelings seemed to place at stake my own understanding of what it meant to be good at being a CEO. I can confidently reflect that this understanding is shared by my Board and management team, citing here a recent post on Twitter by one of Sheila's Board colleagues: *"Irrespective of the events that happen, we can choose our response and our emotions!"*,

referencing a TED talk by Lisa Feldman Barrett, entitled *“You aren’t at the mercy of your emotions – your brain creates them”*. So, considering the power relations between Board members and me and my management team, this idealised view of emotions was very much part of the set of assumptions in the background to our management team conversation, playing into how I and others dealt with our feelings as that conversation unfolded. So, we have come to expect positive emotions as embodied signals that our performance is in tune with our intended sense of identity as a competent and effective team of managers. When feelings of anger, shame, guilt and frustration arise, as they did in our meeting, they represented a dissonance with those expectations, signalling a problem and threatening our sense of identity. One of the responses to that threat was to suppress any display of these negative emotions in an attempt to retain a sense of positivity and an appearance that is congruent with my desired identity. This is what I think I was doing in the management team meeting – with greater and lesser degrees of awareness in the moment – and I think that goes for my colleagues within the management team, too.

So, aspects of my identity as a competent and successful CEO were at stake for me in the meeting when I found myself suppressing my anger and shame and trying to promote a sense of positivity. I felt that I was making choices about how to behave – what language to use, what tone of voice to adopt, what facial expressions to use and so on. My emotional responses – and therefore my efforts to disguise and control them – changed as the conversation flowed. I found it difficult to stay with feelings of fear and anxiety, at the time believing that my colleagues were expecting me to find a solution or to arbitrate between conflicting viewpoints. I felt impatient at Janine’s troubled introduction of Sheila’s email, frustrated by Kaye’s sustained irritation and then relieved in response to our agreement that she would make the call to Sheila. All the time, I was aware of my desire to retain an outward expression of calm, struggling to maintain a face of professional composure, of reassurance, of authority. I wonder whether I was really making choices or perhaps noticing myself respond in ways that were familiar, enabled and constrained by my interactions with my colleagues and by my history of similar experiences.

Risks to my identity in relational terms

This brings a new ingredient into my central question about the struggle with disappointment as a struggle with risk to identity. But at the same time, this insight feels far too simplistic in terms of being a reasonable or complete explanation of my patterned tendency to attempt emotional control and suppression. One of the disappointing aspects of thinking about my question in those terms is that it closes down any potential for further exploration about consequences for practice. By thinking in this way, I am also further reinforcing a pattern of placing my own identity, success and fulfilment as a

more important goal than what might be important for other people. I do so at the expense of others' sense of fulfilment and the quality of our relationships as colleagues.

Framing my inquiry as a search for reconciliation with a single, true or desired sense of self – Phil the good CEO – sets my exploration within a Kantian frame of reference. That is to assume that there is a fixed notion of 'good CEO' to be attained and that my struggle will be over when I reach that goal. Again, that reflects my deep orientation within a rationalist thought style. In the heat of my narrative, my emotions were mingled with conflicting thoughts on how to respond, ideas about what to say and fantasies about the implications of making a wrong move. When I first heard about Sheila's email, I could have expressed surprise and consternation, cutting the conversation short by saying that I would call Sheila to discuss it further. But, I didn't. Instead, I found myself donning a calm demeanour, as if to say, "this is not a problem, look how relaxed I am".

I could have displayed the same sort of physical gestures as Kaye, or even simply explained how I felt puzzled and annoyed when Janine first raised the issue of Sheila's email. Instead, I sat in polite restraint as Janine spoke and a familiar sense of irritation and defensiveness arose. Thinking about that further, my relationship with Janine often revolves around differences of opinion on the extent to which we should have written plans of action in place, with quantifiable expectations about results. I often feel that I'm not living up to Janine's expectations about what I should be doing as a CEO, as I don't tend to set out clear plans and goals for people in this way. In the heat of the team meeting, I saw Sheila's email as a chance for me to concur with Janine, rather than to fall out over those expectations – Sheila had provided a plan for the visit and that was a good thing for us. In the meantime, Kaye's response irritated me as it called out the troubles that she and I experience in our relationship together. I feel that I don't live up to Kaye's expectations for being able to intellectualise and articulate the limitations in fixed plans and agendas and in this case the naiveté in Sheila's list of questions. What felt like a controlled performance on my part, then - remaining calm and allowing the conversation to flow - was nothing more than a desperate struggle in the no-man's land between the polarised views of my colleagues, as out of control as a ball in a pinball machine, propelled by the kicks of the objects it bumps into. In those moments, my struggle was with finding a sense of mooring with conflicting possibilities for recognition.

I cannot, then, settle on a simple view that my identity or image was at stake if I had been more transparent about my feelings. I need to explore in greater depth the senses of shame and anger in order to enrich my understanding of how my practice, my relationships and my sense of fulfilment can develop by engaging differently with emotions.

Shame from private anticipation of public exposure and a shifting sense of self

As more time passed since this incident, I have tried to engage more reflexively with my experience of anger and shame. Elias writes about shame as part of the processual nature of civilisation within society at large. He says that what is regarded as acceptable public behaviour is constantly advancing by the interplay of individuals' fear of exposure and societal patterns of behaviour that paradoxically form each other at the same time (Elias, 2000). So, Elias sees shame arising as an individually experienced emotion that is both socially and individually formed:

The conflict expressed in shame-fear is not merely a conflict of the individual with the prevalent society of opinion; the individual's behaviour has brought him into conflict with part of himself that represents this social opinion (Elias, 2000, p.415)

This helps me to think about how I felt ashamed at Sheila's cancellation email as it exposed me as not being in control of the situation and of my team, and so, by extension, as being incompetent. This sense of failure did not arise directly from an encounter with others' opinions on what I should have done or how I had failed, since I did not have any such conversations with anyone. Instead, I was brought into conflict with that part of myself that represented the collective opinion of the other people in that drama (Elias, 2000). I was thus presented with a sense of the 'generalised other' (Mead, 1934) that was in dissonance with how I wished to be recognised by myself and by others. My sense of exposure escalated not in heated debate with others but through private, silent conversations playing out in my mind. Taking up Mead's (1934) ideas, my mind is a process of gesture-response where the attitude of the other – in this case, my colleagues – is called forth and given voice in the conversations that I have with myself. Mead proposes that emotions, whilst felt as a bodily experience, show up as differences between the intended meanings of gestures and how they are perceived and interpreted in response. I experienced a dissonance between what I expected to happen and what actually happened in the course of both verbalised conversations with others and as privately conducted conversations with myself as a representation of the 'generalised other' (Mead, 1934).

So, taking this experience seriously, I need to pay closer attention to those silent conversations, rather than dismiss them as insignificant flights of fancy. My sense of shame at being found to be incompetent was constructed in part through imagination and private role-play and not through vocalised interaction with the people involved. I should not simply dismiss that experience as imagined and fanciful:

In other words, in the private role play of silent conversation the attitude of one's group towards one's actions finds a voice. This is a social form of control, arising simultaneously in the group and the individual. (Stacey, 2001, p.7)

In my reading of Stacey, the point of regarding such silent conversations as social processes, where the group's attitude towards me becomes articulated, is that such conversations enable and constrain my actions. In that way, those conversations are significant, meaning that they present consequences for my practice and for my relationships with others. On that Friday evening, my mind raced with imagined conversations with Sheila, Kaye and Ashley. I rehearsed my call with Kaye in silent role play. I imagined, re-imagined, drafted and re-drafted my email to Sheila. I fantasised about ranting at them in angry exasperation at their childish behaviour and total failure to agree a scheme for the visit to the office. My imagination extended to thinking about how each person could respond to the different ways that I might act towards them and how that would affect our future relationship together. It certainly extended to what my management team and Board would think of me – not only in terms of what had already happened, but what might happen given the choices I had about what to do next. The shame and anger I felt emerged, grew, swirled and dissipated in those silent role-plays, rather than in heated vocalised conversation with others, and it is there I encountered an all too familiar feeling of disappointment with life as a manager.

Broadening out my reflections to include the other players in this episode, I am not surprised that I could not reach Sheila on the telephone after she'd sent her cancellation email. I imagine that she had sent that email to me and Ashley in an angry act of aggression, having felt shamed, affronted, confused or misrecognised in her call with Kaye. So, having sent the email in the heat of the moment, she then retreated from the prospect of a conversation, perhaps from mixed feelings of shame and fear of reprisal. My conversation with Kaye about what had happened was more puzzling, as she came across as surprised, rather than angry or embarrassed, meaning she'd either totally misread her call with Sheila or was doing a very good job of disguising how she was feeling. Perhaps her silent conversations had overridden her sense of the verbalised conversation with Sheila. Or, perhaps she was simply mirroring my own calm and emotionally suppressed approach. If that were the case, I can see that there is a possibility for new conversations to arise – for my relationship with Kaye to move on - were I to be more transparent about my own feelings with her.

It was as things broke down that I experienced a conflict with myself – my *self* being the silent articulation of my colleague's attitudes towards me. Dr Eliat Aram, writing from a complex responsive processes perspective since progressing from the DMan programme, talks about a shifting sense of self that arises from such transformational learning processes, bringing together Elias's and Mead's

ideas to consider shame as a painful and inevitable component in that shift. She asserts, in furtherance of Mead's (1934) notion of the social nature of the self, that the experience of shame is intrinsically linked to a shift in that sense of self that arises from learning and the negotiation of meaning (Aram, 2001). Feelings of shame, she says, are part of the experience of inclusion-exclusion in group dynamics and of silent conversation and are thus paradoxical processes concerned with identity (ibid). Shame, says Aram, can arise from the fear of exposure as being incompetent or inferior but is intrinsic to one's continually shifting sense of self (ibid).

I want to take a more social view of emotions in thinking further about Aram's insight; to think more deeply about our collective experience in the meeting as we engaged in meaning-making about Sheila's email. Kaye and Janine were irritated by Sheila, gesturing and vocalising their anger and puzzlement at the beginning of our meeting. I felt a sense of embarrassment going into the meeting in the first place and felt increasingly angry as I felt pulled into the messy confusion caused by Sheila's questions. These feelings can be related to Aram's ideas that we were experiencing a renegotiation of our collective sense of identity at that time.

Movement in how I make sense of the meeting and my relationships with others

That insight itself points to a movement in my thinking about what was happening in that emotionally charged meeting. Before, I would have reached a simple conclusion about why I felt irritated: Sheila had sent through a list of silly questions; the whole thing was taking up our time when we had other things to discuss; that annoyed me. Reflecting more deeply, I can see that we were grappling with what Sheila's email meant for us and why an encounter with our identity felt problematic. The reason I think that is important, reflecting on Elias, Mead and Aram, is that the discussion in the meeting was one particular example of a wider pattern of emotionally charged breakdowns that can so easily be dismissed as trivial and unique. Paying deeper attention to that particular experience calls out memories of similar experiences and a heightened awareness of new experiences that raise deeper questions about our senses of identity and, in my case at least, a general pattern of disappointment and lack of fulfilment. My exclusion by Sheila suggested something important about my place in this team alongside Kaye and Janine. It raised disturbing questions about my relationship with Sheila and the rest of the Board. My reluctance to get involved stirred further anxiety in members of the team who were already feeling exposed. This whole embarrassing episode, then, further illuminated some of the difficulties we are having in working together as a team.

Chief amongst these difficulties is my ambiguous relationship with Kaye, which affects and is influenced by our relationships with other members of the team. Kaye is a highly intelligent, creative and outspoken person, but her actions tend to cause irritation with other members of the team who

feel that she undermines what it is they are meant to be doing. She often irritates me by leaving me feeling undermined, threatened or unduly criticised. Janine, Gayle and John tell me that this is how she makes them feel, too. Her intelligence and grasp on topical leadership and management issues can be intimidating as she is very able to construct robust arguments for a particular point of view that I and others find difficult to respond to and to challenge. For me, that's where I can feel most vulnerable, as her skill calls out in me a perceived weakness on my part, leaving me feeling insecure, fearful and exposed. Nevertheless, I see Kaye's behaviour not as something originated from within her, but as something constructed through our relationship with each other and in response to how I come across to her. We have learned, I think, to accommodate each other reasonably well. Kaye's expertise and confidence means that she tackles many of the public speaking engagements on our behalf, for example, and that clashes with expectations that the Board have for me to be the most prominent spokesperson in the organisation. But Kaye and I have found a way to share the limelight, which allows me to fulfil public speaking opportunities and maintain a level of public profile that satisfies what I think is expected of me by the Board and Management Team.

However, in more private circumstances like the management meeting I describe, Kaye's tendency to assertively take a position means that I often feel shut down from posing an alternative perspective and I know from conversations with other members of my team that they feel that way too. This dynamic is a striking feature of my narrative: Kaye's physical and vocal gesturing felt threatening to us all. Sitting back to let the conversation run was a sign of how constrained I felt to hear what Kaye had to say about Sheila's email; to avoid taking a position myself and risk being contradicted by Kaye, who would probably have a more informed and reflective take on what she thought was happening. This is why I felt a flush of admiration for Gayle when she spoke up against Kaye, offering an alternative perspective, taking a risk in doing so, but enabling the conversation to progress when I, for one, had remained silent.

So, I am coming to see that as we were discussing Sheila's email, we were – as on many occasions before and since – negotiating subtle changes in our relationships together, questioning the power differences between us, and our identity as individuals and as a collective. Reflecting on insights from Aram and Elias, agreeing that Kaye would have a conversation with Sheila heightened our collective dependency on Kaye, thus tilting the power dynamic further and increasing her sense of exposure when things eventually went wrong. This stimulated an increased dissonance with our shifting sense of identity. Reflecting further on how events continued to play out beyond my narrative, I am left with a distinct sense of guilt at how the failure of the aborted visit by Sheila came to be located with Kaye. I clearly missed or deliberately avoided an opportunity for more publicly sharing some of the responsibility for what happened. In the meeting, I had the opportunity to express more firmly my

view on what was happening, to step in, take a position and assume a role in re-negotiating the terms of the visit. At the time, I felt unwilling to get involved and rationalised this as a way of helping Sheila to further her relationship directly with members of the team. In doing so, however, I missed an opportunity to show Kaye and others how much I cared about how exposed they were feeling and thus the opportunity to experience a shift in the enabling-constraining feelings of loyalty, irritation, fear and responsibility I have towards Kaye.

Emotions as dissonance with senses of self experienced through relationships

Reflecting beyond my own feelings, I want to understand more about shame as a social and relational process and how this relates to our experience in the meeting. Barbara Simpson and Nick Marshall draw on Mead's pragmatist philosophy, combining his ideas with those of William James (1890/1950) and John Dewey (1894, 1895) to adopt a radically social view of emotions. Here, I take their reference to guilt and link this to Aram's notion of how shame is bound up with a shifting sense of self:

...guilt has nothing to do with value judgments about good or evil; rather it is the experience of acting in a way that is inconsistent with whom the construer believes herself to be. Guilt signals that she has slipped her mooring from her sense of self. (Simpson & Marshall, 2010, p.356)

So, my feelings of guilt arise from acting in a way that is inconsistent with my sense of self and the role that I am fulfilling as a competent CEO. Taking up Mead (1934), my sense of self is a social process, influencing and being influenced by my relationships with others. It is in that sense that this conflict arises, and this is where my thinking about my role and identity as CEO has moved. What I mean, is that the dissonance I feel is between different senses of self that are represented by different interpretations of the social. I realise the limitations in the simplistic way that I am about to describe this but recognise that I am exploring ways of making greater sense of my reflections as I encounter this movement in my thought: One interpretation of my social-self is to think about my identity as a process formed through my relationship with Kaye. Another is to think about my identity in respect of my relationship with my Management Team. Yet another is to reflect on how my identity is negotiated through my role with a wider group of people within the association that I lead as CEO. And so on, through to an interpretation that takes in a very broad social arena that includes influences from my upbringing, education and current discourse on what it means to be a CEO: the thought collectives (Fleck, 1935) that I have been a part of through my career. I think that all of these interpretations are in play at the same time, coinciding and competing in moments when I experience guilt as I slip my mooring from my multiple and shifting sense of self (Simpson & Marshall, 2010, p.356).

In earlier iterations of my reflective analysis on this narrative, my thinking about the conflict between my actions and my sense of self were dominated by the idea that I am not quite living up to a set of generalised expectations about being a CEO that are oriented within a broader historic and contemporary discourse on management and leadership. That is a different interpretation from my thinking as I began the DMan, which assumed that my self could be categorised by a set of intrinsic and individually held values that acted as a sort of innate definition of self, from which I might deviate from time to time. What I am now moving towards is a much more complex interpretation of my self as a continuous process of negotiation with multiple social selves that is called to attention through breakdowns and accented with emotional experiences of shame, guilt and anger. So, the richer my relationships with other people, the richer my sense of self and the greater insight I can have into patterns within my own experience that involve disappointment and a search for fulfilment. As my thinking and practice moves in that way, one of the consequences for me and my relationships will be to experience further episodes of guilt, shame and anger and taking those experiences seriously means finding ways of expressing those feelings in relation to others.

The consequences of disguise and pretence within a social interpretation of emotion

These reflections still leave me curious about why I tend to see engaging in emotional displays in my interactions with others as risky. I can relate this to Elias's ideas that engaging in heightened displays of emotion would clash with the "prevalent society of opinion" (Elias, 2000, p.415). What I mean by this, though, is not that emotional display is frowned upon by society as a whole, but by my generalised representation of colleagues with whom I work and have worked with in the past. Put another way, what I perceive is expected of me - the self I want to be - is calm and controlled, rather than angry, upset or volatile. So, finding ways of expressing my emotions and taking more seriously the emotional quality of my relationships with others is challenging for me. One of the principal challenges is not so much to address 'how should I do this?' but to question how much control I have over my emotional displays. How much freedom and control do we have and what are the consequences for practice if emotions, as communicative gestures, can be disguised, suppressed or manipulated? Assuming for a moment that I had a degree of choice about how much emotion to divulge in my follow-up conversation with Kaye, I could have raised my voice to her, or used words to show her just how angry and upset I was feeling, and this would have led our conversation to take a different course. Maybe we would have quickly found ourselves talking about our relationship, rather than what had happened in her call with Sheila. Maybe one of us would have become so upset that we decided that we couldn't continue working together. I won't know exactly, of course, but can confidently assume that events would have taken a different course and our relationship evolved differently in the process. Again, the risks associated with acting differently don't seem to provide an adequate explanation of why I felt

quite so compelled to act in a familiar, patterned way when it came to expressing my emotions with Kaye. So, in what other ways am I constrained and enabled in the way that I express emotions and are there opportunities for me to act differently?

Can we suppress emotions and how does this affect social interaction?

The very idea that I have a degree of choice about my own emotional display and a degree of skill in manipulating others' emotions is a bold assumption. To understand more about the efficacy of that idea I need to explore how emotions emerge as shared and co-constructed phenomena. In her work on emotion, Margaret Wetherell grapples with this very question:

For over a hundred years now, the aspect of affect which has most intrigued social commentators is the spread of emotion from body to body, so fast indeed that a very mysterious force seems to be involved. (Wetherell, 2012, p.21)

Wetherell's practice-based view of emotion shares perspectives with the theory of complex responsive processes of relating. She draws on a wide body of literature on emotion to construct arguments for a social and dynamic view of emotions as part of the processes of everyday human interaction. In particular, Wetherell rejects the idea that something 'mysterious' is involved in shared emotional experiences or how displays and feelings of emotion – affects – come to be shared between people. My interpretation of what Wetherell is saying here is that she is challenging any explanations that rely on the existence of some phenomenon outside of our experiences of relating with one another. So, whilst I reflect that in our shared sense of anxiety as a management team, something else was going on other than confusion over Sheila's email, that 'something else' was not some mystical force that was influencing our feelings, but a 'something else' within our concrete experience of relating with one another. There was no mood, atmosphere or essence that was outside of our bodies that was exerting some influence on the way we were feeling, other than the feelings we generated ourselves in the course of our conversation together. Fineman brings this same idea fully into focus within the context of management and organisations:

A fully contextualized and critical account of emotion requires sociology and psychology to rub shoulders with biology, anthropology, history, organizational behaviour and management studies. (Fineman, 2008, p.278)

So, Fineman calls for a richer, more critical and complex perspective on how we understand emotions in organisations. For me, Fineman is in congruence with Wetherell, combining biological and sociological perspectives to describe our engagement with emotions as both highly complex and very

ordinary at the same time; that emotions are not so much something that we 'catch', but processes that we find ourselves caught up in (Fineman, 2008, p.141).

I want to combine Fineman and Wetherell's views to address my question about how much freedom and choice any of us have in engaging differently with emotional communication. My conclusion is that emotional expression has a paradoxical quality that is interwoven with our social processes of relating; that we cannot wholly control our emotional experiences but that such experiences are, at the same time, radically open to influence and novelty. Making further sense of this, I can begin to sense that there is potential for new experiences and relationships to emerge by engaging differently with emotional expression. Put another way, if there is any opportunity at all for me to experiment with different ways of displaying and experiencing emotion, so that my relationships with others can flourish in new ways, that opportunity lies only within the very ordinary moments of conversation with my colleagues. For that experimentation to be enacted, I need to adopt a more reflective approach to my feelings and actions in the heat of moments such as those described in my narrative about the management team meeting.

Barbara Simpson, in her work with Linda Buchan and John Sillince, offers an insight into what adopting a more reflective approach could mean in practical terms, taking up Mead (1934)...

...and in particular his notion of turning points in the flow of conversation. We see turning points as dynamic concepts that may be observed empirically in leadership talk. (Simpson et al, 2017, p.646)

Simpson et al draw on recent critical inquiry from multiple disciplines to arrive at the concept of "leadership-as-practice", in other words concentrating on the "the dynamics of 'how' leadership work is accomplished" in everyday conversation (Simpson et al, 2017, p.645). For me, this brings to mind memorable moments in the flow of the management team meeting when I sensed that I was at a crossroads of options in apparently deciding what to do or say next. A good example of this would be near the beginning of the meeting when I first became aware that Sheila had emailed the rest of the team with a list of questions. In that moment, I could have expressed my consternation at being excluded and called a halt to the discussion so that I could first speak to Sheila. The outcome of the meeting would have been similar to the one that emerged, but with me making the call, rather than Kaye and this would have represented a gesture towards Kaye and the rest of the team that I felt that what had happened was important and that I cared about how that had made them feel.

One of the reasons that this work by Simpson et al is particularly resonant to my inquiry is that they observed the regular weekly meetings of a senior management team in a direct parallel to my own narrative. However, although Simpson et al set out to...

...demonstrate these movements empirically in the conversational flow of collaborative leadership practice. (Simpson et al, 2017, p.646)

...I wonder how they could take account of the emotional dynamics in the interaction and not just the linguistic and temporal flow of the conversation. They make assumptions in order to categorise their research context as 'collaborative', rather than 'combative', 'transformational', 'hostile' or some other adjective that would have fitted better with the context I found myself in during my team meeting.

Returning to my earlier point about taking my experience seriously, insights from Simpson et al lead me to reflect on new opportunities for adopting more reflexive practice. That is, to accept the particularly stretching and reflexive challenge of taking up Simpson et al to think about turning points in the trajectory of 'the private role play' of my *silent* conversations (Stacey, 2001, p.7). There is something intuitively exciting in that idea, since my practice as a manager is enabled and constrained not only by my actions within the performative flow of interactive conversations but within the process of silent conversations where I encounter my self as a dynamic representation of the opinion of others.

So why is all this important? If I return to why I'm asking questions about emotional control, it is to understand more about the risks associated with experimenting differently with emotion in my practice, accepting that I will not be able to control my experiences that emerge. My opportunities for experimentation are within my concrete daily interactions with my colleagues but also within my silent conversations. Why that is interesting is because of the potential that such experimentation holds for nurturing richer relationships with others in my practice as a manager and thus the consequences that presents for my sense of self and my search for fulfilment in my career. Again, taking a social perspective, this means thinking differently about the part that I play in nurturing relationships that have similarly important consequences for the fulfilment of my colleagues.

Consequences for social interaction

However, having reached a conclusion about the potential for acting differently, I need to address the second part of the question I asked earlier, to understand how social interaction may be affected by emotional suppression and, by extension, by experimenting with how I express my emotions.

Taking up Wetherell (2012), Shields (2005), Vince and Gabriel (2011) and others, my management team meetings can be viewed as occasions of *affective performance*, where emotional gesturing and

responding may be manipulated through political action. I return to Wetherell's ideas of how *affective performance* can be taken up not as a specialised, grand or mystical act, but as a very ordinary characteristic of our concrete social interactions that are part of the fabric of our everyday, taken-for-granted life. In other words, revealing more of my emotions in what I say and how I say things forms part of the same palette of performative options as my patterned tendency to suppress emotions. So, whilst it is a little too simplistic to take up Mead's idea in quite this way, different gestures will call out different responses in my colleagues. In fact, to adjust this view and answer my question at the same time, all I can say is that my social interactions will be influenced by my emotional expression in complex and unpredictable ways. My confidence in saying that is rooted in the idea that my interactions with Kaye, Sheila and the rest of my colleagues *are already* being affected – enabled and constrained at the same time – by the way I tend to engage with emotional expression. I cannot predict or control exactly how experimenting with different ways of acting will play out in terms of my conversations or relationships with my colleagues, except to say that *something* will happen and that *something* may well be different to what is happening currently.

Simpson and Marshall (2010, p.355) describe emotional expressions as gestures of experimentation and inquiry (similarly referred to by Vince and Gabriel, 2011), which I can combine with Wetherell's (2012) idea of affective performance to reflect differently on the emotional quality of my experience in the management meeting. We found ourselves caught up in complex processes of gesturing and responding, textured with collective affective performances and political action, out of which certain consequences emerged. So, becoming stuck in familiar patterns of acting – in our thinking, speaking and unspoken gesturing with each other – closed down opportunities for different outcomes to emerge, for different ways of making sense of our struggle, and for our relationships to develop differently in the process. Taking up examples from the beginning of my meeting, had I intervened more emphatically in response to Janine's disclosure of Sheila's email, Janine herself may have felt more appropriately recognised for her contribution and our relationship would have become enriched through that process. Similarly, finding some way of acknowledging Gayle's challenge to Kaye's strongly stated position about Sheila – by saying 'thank you', by building on her argument, or simply nodding in agreement with what she said – would have let Gayle know that I recognised what she'd done was important and risky and would have opened up the possibility for others to offer their views. Any change of approach would have both enabled and constrained others to respond in different ways, with potential for us to have become less stuck in familiar patterns of interaction and therefore for our sense of identity and our relationships with each other to develop in novel ways.

Consequences for practice

This reflection leads me back to the question of how I can adopt a more reflexive perspective in my practice, to take up opportunities for experimentation and improvisation. In what ways will I act differently in my thinking and conversation with myself and others and what will that mean for our relationships together? That is important to my overall research question about making better sense of my patterned experience of disappointment: a greater reflexive awareness of the potential turning points in conversation will mean coming to act differently to my patterned ways of behaving and therefore play differently into the dynamic emergence of my relationships with colleagues. By experiencing richer, more vivid relationships with colleagues, I will experience a less impoverished sense of self and a greater degree of fulfilment in my experience as a manager. More to the point, my own sense of fulfilment will develop through my interactions with others, as movements in our relationships nourishes our collective sense of fulfilment.

In thinking about these ideas, I want to remain grounded in the concrete reality of what we are already doing together on an everyday basis. That is to avoid thinking about bringing changes to my practice as a manager in terms of developing new skills or donning a new persona as an actor might step into a new role. What I sense instead is an opportunity, in Elias's (1956) terms, to adopt a perspective of greater detachment from the heat of my daily interactions so that I may take greater notice of what is happening in the interaction. By extension, I am also referring to my silent conversations as daily interactions with the generalised other (Mead, 1934) within which I can take greater notice of what is happening linguistically and emotionally.

So, in concrete terms, this will mean experimentation and improvisation in my conversations with Kaye, Janine, Sheila and the rest of my colleagues. One of the ways of thinking about taking a perspective of greater detachment is to think of my silent conversations as private spaces for experimentation, as arenas for role-playing where I can imagine the concrete consequences of different ways of acting in response to a particular interaction. What I mean by that is not only taking more seriously my experiences of quiet contemplation when the time allows, but noticing my own assumptions, interpretations, rehearsals and emotional responses that silently and continually interrupt the lively in-the-moment flow of a conversation with another person.

Had I taken more notice of my silent conversations in the heat of the meeting, I would have considered Kaye's fears that Sheila was deliberately trying to undermine my relationship with her and the team. Doing so would have had different consequences for how the meeting played out and how my relationship with my colleagues developed. I am confident in that assertion, since Kaye and I in fact had exactly that conversation several weeks after that meeting, where she explained to me that the

reason that she had been so agitated on the day was she was worried that Sheila was trying to expose me as CEO. What I experienced after that subsequent conversation was a change in my relationship with Kaye, as I developed a new sense of the care that she was showing towards me. Had I taken the opportunity to do so in the meeting, a direct recognition of Kaye's concerns would have illustrated to both of us, and to the rest of our colleagues, the mutual care and concern that we have for each other, moving our relationships on in different ways through the process of that meeting. As my thinking and practice continues to move, I accept that one of the consequences for us will be to experience further episodes of guilt, shame and anger. Taking those experiences seriously means experimenting with ways of expressing those feelings in relation to each other.

Conclusion | Movements of thought and emerging questions

I set out to explore how the emotional quality of my experience enables and constrains my practice as CEO, to further inform my research question about my struggle with disappointment and fulfilment. Earlier iterations of my project reflected a pattern of behaviour for me where my engagement with emotions was detached and analytical. By engaging more reflexively with my inquiry – and for me, this meant more fully engaging with my colleagues in my DMan Learning Set and at work - what emerged were a series of insights experienced as a movement in my thinking and the surprising evolution of new questions that guided my inquiry.

I see that I am preoccupied with my own success and a sense of accomplishment and fulfilment that is individually oriented, rather than thinking about what is going on for others and the quality of my relationships with my colleagues like Kaye and Janine. I now see how those concepts are intertwined and mutually generative. Suppressing my feelings of shame, and anger in particular, is part of my patterned tendency to act in that way. One of the habitual assumptions that sustain this pattern is thinking that aspects of my identity are at stake if I reveal too fully the depth of such feelings. Developing my practice, my relationships and my sense of fulfilment means finding ways to engage differently with such emotions.

Taking a social perspective, my emotional experiences are processes in which I am brought into conflict with that part of myself that represents the collective opinion of the other people with whom I engage (Elias, 2000). In that respect, taking my experience seriously means paying closer attention not only my relationships with others but to the silent conversations that are part of how I experience those relationships, where I encounter my emotional responses including the familiar feeling of disappointment. The richer my relationships with my colleagues, the richer my sense of self, but also the greater the potential for further episodes of shame, anger and disappointment

It will be challenging for me to find ways of expressing those emotions and taking more seriously the emotional quality of my relationships with others. I tend to assume for myself too much control and freedom about what I am doing when I am in conversation with my colleagues. So, emotional expression is not simply a matter of choice; rather, I am paradoxically constrained and enabled by the complex responsive patterning of my interactions. Any opportunity for me to find different ways of displaying and experiencing emotion lies within the very ordinary moments of conversation with Kaye, Janine and my other colleagues. Importantly, I include my silent conversations as such ordinary moments. But in reaching this conclusion, I am not trying to imply that some sort of new opportunity has revealed itself to me. My interactions with my Kaye, Sheila and the rest of my colleagues *are already* being affected – enabled and constrained at the same time – by the way I tend to engage with emotional expression. Nevertheless, I have a better view of the sorts of openings that are already there for experimenting differently with emotion in my practice.

The idea of experimentation with different ways of participating in my relationships with others is exciting but confusing in that I am not sure how I can adopt a more reflexive perspective to take up such opportunities. In concrete terms, I realise that experimentation and improvisation will mean acting differently with emotional expression in conversation with Kaye, Janine and Sheila and paying more attention to my own assumptions, interpretations, rehearsals and emotional responses as I encounter these in the silent conversations that accompany those that are vocalised.

So, where I have come to is a series of further questions about what taking a more reflexive approach to my practice means in everyday terms. How can I better understand the concept of turning points in conversation? How can my colleagues help me with the idea of experimentation and improvisation? How do silent conversations enable and constrain expression of emotion and what are the consequences of experimentation for my relationships with other people?

As I turn to Project 4, then, I have a sense of how my inquiry will contribute to knowledge and to practice. I anticipate researching further into the literature and practice of dramatic improvisation to help me with my inquiry. I further anticipate a more thorough engagement with the pragmatists and John Dewey in particular, to deepen my understanding of the connections between conversational turning points, improvisational practice and Dewey's ideas on impulses as signals of breakdowns in habitual action (Dewey, 1922).

Project 4 | Exploring the consequences of idealising harmony and autonomy for CEO identity

Through my earlier projects, a theme of disappointment with 'life at the top' has emerged from critical engagement with breakdowns in experiences within formal settings of Board and Senior Management Team meetings. I am keen to explore more deeply how this disappointment emerges not only in these special formal occasions, but in the everyday micro-interactions with colleagues that constitute the bulk of my experience, yet which I take little notice of. For this, my fourth project, I find myself struggling with a seemingly trivial experience that stands in contrast to those more structured meetings. I will present this narrative without further introduction before reflecting on how this relates to my theme of disappointment and why the narrative feels so important to me.

Narrative | The Luck of the Draw

It had been a good day. One of those where the mood in the office had been lively and cheerful, with great weather promised for the weekend ahead. Meg was in good spirits as she bounded around the corner towards me, already looking like she'd started her holiday, although she'd not yet finished for the day. Our financial year was over, and Meg was heading into an especially busy few weeks finalising our accounts ready for audit, so she was especially pleased to have set everything in motion for her team to be getting on with whilst she was going to be away.

"One more thing to do before I leave," she grinned as she headed towards me, theatrically shaking a white coffee mug up and down in her hands.

Our management team had agreed on a prize-draw to select the names of four of our colleagues to join us at a special awards lunch in the capital, where we were hoping to scoop at least one trophy. I quipped about this being a big moment and asked Bea to be our 'Independent Observer'. Bea takes notes at our team meetings, so knew about the prize draw. Her elevation to 'Independent Observer', after twenty-six years of service, was based entirely on the fact that she was seated exactly where Meg and I had met for the impromptu lottery. I adopted my own role as Drawer-of-Names with faux grandiosity, stirring around the identically sized pieces of paper in the ceremonial mug before drawing four of them out with exaggerated transparency, as a magician might do to prove he had nothing up his sleeves. Out came four names, three of whom were in Meg's own small finance team.

Bea's eyes widened with surprise as the names emerged, joking that it was a good job she'd been there to observe, or people might think the whole thing had been fixed. Bea was disappointed not to have been picked herself, but as we opened up the rest of the pieces of paper from the mug, we could all see that everyone's names had been included and the draw had been fair.

“Well,” shrugged Meg, with an amusement tinged with embarrassment, “that’s the luck of the draw!”

Later that evening, after Meg, Bea and everyone else had headed off home, I bumped into Janine in the almost-deserted car park. Janine was one of my management team who’d come up with the idea of the prize draw, so I told her about the result.

“That will go down like a lead balloon,” she said.

I raised my hands in surrender, pointing out that Bea had observed that the draw had been done properly. “You can check with her if you like.” I immediately felt regretful at placing the absent Bea on the spot. The more I explained to Janine that we’d done exactly what we’d all agreed, the more the solid ground of my argument seemed to crumble away. I’d expected Janine to share the slightly embarrassed resignation I felt about the result in a damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don’t kind of way. But the way she’d denounced the draw so strongly and so quickly felt like an attack on my judgment for having allowed what came to pass.

Janine’s reaction sat with me on my journey home. I reflected that I had left the office without sending a congratulatory invitation email to the lucky few, which had been the plan. Instead, I’d put the clutch of names away in my drawer, ready to pick things up after the weekend. I was glad I’d hesitated, clearly feeling uneasy about something. I remembered that I’d also taken a photo of the winning names before putting them away, which now seemed like an odd thing to do, as if I was assembling evidence that I might later want to rely upon. As I drove, I hatched out an idea that I hoped would be clever enough to avoid renegeing on the draw and sending out the wrong message to the team. We’d buy another couple of places at the lunch and allocate these to members of John and Gayle’s teams, who were otherwise due to miss out as a result of the prize draw.

The following week came, and it was proving difficult to get enough of us together to test out my idea. Gayle, Kaye and Meg were on holiday, and our ticket ordering deadline was upon us. It wasn’t until Thursday that John, Janine and I managed to cram into a booth in the communal part of our office. I brought John up to speed with the results of the draw and my subsequent conversation with Janine.

“And so, what I think we should do is buy another couple of tickets,” I began. Janine stifled an interruption, so finishing my explanation, I brought her back in with a gesture of my hand.

“The trouble is,” she said accusingly, “that’s doing exactly what we said we wouldn’t do: we keep avoiding having those difficult conversations.”

Janine was referring to a long and searching discussion we’d had together a couple of weeks earlier. We had found ourselves straying from our original agenda, reflecting on the quality of relationships

within the management team. Janine had told me that she and her colleagues found it difficult to step up to confront and challenge each other. I'd asked her about how she felt that I dealt with such confrontation. She had said that one of the problems seemed to be that she and her colleagues relied far too much on me to take up problems with other members of the team and that they all needed to do more to challenge each other. We had both reflected on how Gayle seemed particularly skilful at challenging her peers and yet seemed to enjoy great relationships with them. We had gone on to talk more about how facing up to difficult conversations would ultimately help us all work better together as a team and discussed that it might help to try that away from the time-pressured setting of management meetings.

Back in the booth, I disagreed with Janine. I said that my plan for the lunch wasn't ignoring difficult conversations at all. This was different, I suggested, and ignoring the prize draw was simply picking a fight for the sake of it. I could see from Janine's expression that she wasn't convinced. Only recently, we'd had that intimate conversation where I had promised her my support in helping to face up to confrontational moments and she clearly felt that I was backing away from one now. She exchanged a knowing glance with John, who had been largely quiet throughout our discussion. John raised his eyebrows in response and, whilst I didn't draw attention to their silent exchange, I took it as a sign that they'd already been discussing their concerns with each other.

I began to feel that I'd be letting them down if I pushed ahead with my solution, even though something about what was happening felt like being manoeuvred into confrontation with Meg. Janine explained that had she been the one to draw out three of her own team's names, she would have quietly drawn again, so as to share the places out more fairly. She said that Meg should have seen straight away that the result of the draw posed a big problem. The real issue here, argued Janine, is that Meg doesn't see the bigger picture, which is not just about this prize draw but something that shows itself in other ways, too, which is why we should not back away from having a difficult conversation.

I saw what she was getting at. Weighing up whether this was a simple matter of sorting out tickets for a lunch, or a sign of something more troubling, I swayed towards the latter. I felt that I needed to show Janine and John that I was aware of our wider challenges and – more to the point – prepared to play my part in addressing them.

John spoke up, saying that even though we'd drawn out names, as agreed, we are allowed to change our minds, rather than just dig ourselves deeper into a hole.

Our consensus was sealed as we exchanged a few Brexit-related witticisms about not leaving our booth without a deal. One of us quipped that a draw in a coffee mug had become a 'storm in a teacup' and our mood lightened as we finished our conversation. We resolved to allocate the lunch places differently. I would handle the difficult conversation with Meg when she came back from holiday, but we agreed, somewhat vaguely, that we all had an important part to play.

It took another week and a half for that moment to come. I hadn't chosen my moment very well, having procrastinated for a couple of days by telling myself that Meg needed to settle back in after her break. In the end she'd come to see me with some questions about the layout of a Board report and I chose the moment to let her know about the change of plan for the lunch, explaining that fielding almost her entire team as guests would send out the wrong message to everyone else.

"That's fine," she sighed, rolling her eyes, "but, what concerns me is, would anyone else have seen it as a problem if their team's names had been pulled out?"

"Well, I did ask them and yes, they've told me that they would," I responded. I suggested that none of this was aimed at Meg and her team but was about trying to make things fair for everyone. Meg responded with frustration, saying that we seem to spend so much time with trivial things, trying to keep everyone happy. Meg told me about another couple of examples that had escalated into issues that she'd been drawn into, one about changing a lock on an office door and another about a misunderstanding over buying a diary.

"Why can't people just get on with what they're supposed to be doing instead of interfering in things that don't concern them?" she asked. I said that I felt the same, but that 'the little things' might be symptoms of other problems. Meg said that "it all starts at the top," and I felt a flash of shame as I was certain that she meant that it was down to me. Meg went on to explain that in management meetings, we'd all agree to do something, but then individual colleagues would go on to say and do something else instead. This caused confusion, she said, between people in different teams who were left to negotiate conflicting loyalties and bridge the gaps on a day-to-day basis.

I found myself in familiar territory as our conversation turned to how we had to become better at challenging each other openly in meetings, echoing my conversation with Janine a couple of weeks earlier. We finished with the conclusion that we had to find a way of raising and resolving our differences if we were to find a way of working through 'the little things'. It felt like Meg and I had tried to be candid with each other, although neither of us had been able to say precisely what we thought was bothering us most, or exactly what to do about it. I felt relieved that we wouldn't have to spend any more time dealing with the outcome of the prize draw, but at the same time, I knew that

sorting out seats at the lunch table was not really what we had been grappling with at all. We had some work to do, but I felt as unsettled as ever about exactly what that was.

Reflection | Questions arising from my narrative

I struggled with a prolonged hesitation before writing this narrative. What bothered me most was its apparent mundaneness. I could not see how reflecting on a simple lottery draw would tell me anything about management practice and the nature of change in organisations. Pulling names out of a mug isn't something that I do. It's not part of my job, or why I do it. It's not something that my team does, or that managers anywhere else find themselves doing in their daily work.

Except it is.

Clearly, it is. Not only did we find ourselves with bits of paper in a coffee mug, but we became embroiled in all sorts of concerns, conflicts and insights in the process.

So, my first question is about how we navigate the uncertainty of what we *should be* doing as a management team. How do we determine what is important and what is trivial and where does the idea come from that some things are more important than others? I am interested in how frustration with these ordinary everyday dramas is connected to a broader pattern of disappointment throughout my management career. The same sense of frustration was there as Meg compared the change of plan for the lunch to other examples of 'the little things' that were getting in the way of our 'real work'. I didn't want to be the one picking out names from the mug, but I don't imagine Meg really wanted to do that either. Janine and I seemed to share a sense of anger and embarrassment in our lead balloon conversation in the car park. Yet, our subsequent in-booth conversation with John suggested that what was really going on was more conflict avoidance, which seemed to provide justification for why we were spending time on something that otherwise felt so trivial. This uncertainty about what is important for managers to be doing is further reflected in my own hesitation with writing the narrative, caught by a sense of embarrassment at publicly working through an experience that is somehow not quite fitting with how I want to be seen - by myself or other readers.

My second question is about how we find ourselves caught in patterns that see me, as CEO, negotiating a restoration of harmony amongst my colleagues. Where is my voice, my opinion - my authority, even - in the midst of conflictual interactions? The pattern noticeable throughout my narrative is one where I rush to find solutions, discomfited by dissonance between Meg and Janine. It is there within our recurrent team conversations about avoiding conflict, that seem, rather ironically, to cover over what is going on for us, as we fall into abstract talk whilst avoiding particular difficulties as they arise. In moments of conflictual tension, I find myself offering clever interventions: a solution

to a thorny seating plan problem or a witty joke to restore some collegiality after a tense encounter in the booth. When my colleagues disagree, my role becomes constituted not as arbiter, but as diplomatic envoy: representing the team's rejection of the prize draw result to Meg, for example. Alternatives might be for me to simply dictate what I want to happen and leave it there, or to insist that colleagues work out their differences together, without me as a go-between. Nevertheless, my narrative shows something of our patterned experience with conflict that sees me adopt the role of envoy and problem-solver.

In the context of an event that seemed trivial and separate to more important work, my position was one of neutrality. Janine's 'lead balloon' weighed me down, representing the burden I felt to resolve her objection by some clever thinking over the weekend. My habitual behaviour is that of enabler, problem-solver and facilitator of others' work. I impulsively seek to restore harmony, rather than to promote and assert my own position. This disposition reflects the major ideas from a particular perspective on leadership that influenced me very early in my management career, one that continues to enjoy contemporary prominence in my work today:

Analysis | The influence of Servant Leadership

Although the concept of leaders being in service to others dates back much further in history, Robert K Greenleaf, writing in the 1970s, is credited with being the originator of the idea of Servant Leadership. At its heart, Servant Leadership turns the idea of the dominance of an individual, powerful and driven leader on its head. The goals and priorities of the leader are solely to serve others and leadership derives from and works through the influence one has on others by prioritising their needs, health and achievements.

The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.

(Greenleaf, 1970, p.6)

Greenleaf acknowledges the source of his inspiration as the 1932 novel *Journey to the East* by the German-born Nobel Prize-winning author Hermann Karl Hesse. In the novel, Leo attends to the menial chores of a travelling party of men. When Leo disappears, his "extraordinary presence" is noticed by the group who fall into disarray. Later, Leo emerges as "a great and noble leader" and those who knew him realise that "Leo was actually the leader all of the time, but he was servant first because that was what he was, deep down inside." (ibid. p.2)

Greenleaf's Quaker values of peace, equality and truth – and particularly the idea of speaking truth to power – are visible in his work, although it is important to appreciate that he was writing in what he describes as a time of crisis of leadership (ibid. p.2, p.4). He wanted to understand the rebellion of young people against American institutions and saw this as a failing on the part of such institutions to lead because they were failing to serve. He drew attention to contemporary sociological inequalities based on race and gender and saw the philosophy of Servant Leadership as a way of emancipating oppressed groups through leadership “*by exceptional people from their own kind.*” (ibid. p.19).

As well as these particular socio-economic conditions of America at this time, Greenleaf was working on ideas at a point in history where the term *leadership* was becoming increasingly popular in organisation management thinking, which began to separate out more mechanical notions of ‘management’ from the transformational, strategic and inspirational qualities of ‘leadership’ (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.13).

Greenleaf's ideas have been widely taken up by theorists and practitioners, to the extent that the philosophy of Servant Leadership is identified as being practised by some of today's largest and most successful organisations (Spears, 2010, p.29; Iarocci, 2017).

One of Servant Leadership's most seductive ideas is the challenge to what Greenleaf saw as dominant, autocratic and abusive forms of management at the time that he was writing. This has been part of its appeal for me – wanting to approach leadership in a more humble, collegiate way. I recall at the beginning of my career, as related in Project 1, being attracted to the construction industry under a generalised call for a new kind of management. Encountering early disappointment with the behaviour I saw from senior people, I recall thinking ‘when I'm at the top, I'm going to do things differently’. My formative experiences as a young, junior manager included my boss, Chris, telling me that my best achievement would be to promote someone above myself. In this narrative, my role became to serve and support Meg's and Janine's positions and their relationship as members of the management team. All of these ideas are congruent with the idea of one's position as a manager being about serving, supporting and advancing others above oneself. Humble, not heroic; neutral not dogmatic.

Analysis | Servant leadership as an example of the systemic perspective on management

One of the “Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership” identified by James Sipe and Don Frick (2009), is that servant leaders are skilled systems thinkers. This calls to light that Servant Leadership is fundamentally underpinned by the broader ideology of systems thinking upon which much of the discourse on leadership and management is founded (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.9-13). When Greenleaf was

formulating his ideas, earlier schools of management thought (Taylor, 1911; Fayol, 1930; Mayo, 1945, Likert, 1961) were being challenged by a new movement of thinking based upon engineering (cybernetic systems and systems dynamics theories) and biology (general systems theory) (Forrester, 1958; Simon, 1960; Miller & Rice, 1967), which introduced new themes, whilst reinforcing prevailing ideas that organisations are essentially system-like entities.

Some of the central themes that arise from this perspective are that organisations exist as bounded, whole entities that, although comprising individuals as their component parts, are separate to them, at what Stacey and Mowles critically identify as “another level of existence” (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.43). In this discourse, organisations operate like systems encountering patterns of equilibrium and change, and the role of the leader is to design and apply control to how the organisational system behaves, making rational choices from a detached position. So, this mode of thinking assumes that individuals are autonomous and able to make rational choices about what they do.

Although more recent work on complex adaptive systems (Gell-Mann, 1994; Holland, 1998; Kauffman, 1995; Langton, 1996) considers non-linear causality, systems thinking is largely founded on the basis of linear, or circular causality, leading to the idea that skilful managers can control what happens through manipulation of leverage points: “that is, those points in the web of negative and positive feedback loops where change can have the largest beneficial effects” (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.102). The characteristics of a successful system in this regard are harmony and equilibrium, so that the leader’s predetermined strategic goals are pursued with consistent effort and intent.

The consequences of this way of thinking show up in my narrative in terms of my rush to find a solution to the seating plan problem, to deal with the conflict between Janine and Meg and restore the state of our team experience to a harmonious equilibrium. I was attempting to detach from and then control the outbreak of conflict in the system, whilst also sensing the irritation of being caught in something that I wanted to distance myself from. So, my inquiry will explore these ideals of harmony, neutrality, autonomy and choice as consequences of a way of thinking about organisations as systems.

Reflecting further, it is not just the works of Greenleaf, Spears or any other proponents of Servant Leadership that have shaped my thinking but many systemic theories on leadership that both enable and constrain my experiences as a manager, as I have explored at some depth through previous projects. The systemic discourse on organisations and management has profoundly influenced my practice, with Servant Leadership being just one example of how systemic ideas and assumptions shape my practice and our experience of working together as a management team. I am drawing attention to how my identity is formed through an ongoing social process involving continued engagement with different theories and thought collectives (Fleck, 1979). I therefore do not position

Servant Leadership as something I have chosen to adopt as a model for my practice, but as a particular example of the broader school of systems thinking that enables and constrains my practice and that of my colleagues.

So, I am arguing here for an inquiry into my particular narrative, by referring to a particular example of systems thinking (Servant Leadership), to draw out generalisable insights into consequences for practice. I will continue by addressing my question about the pattern of negotiating a restoration of harmony to the idea of neutrality. That will bring me to the question about how we navigate the uncertainty of what we think we *should* be doing, relating this to assumptions of individual autonomy and choice.

Reflection | Exploring the ideals of harmony and neutrality in relation to conflict

In my narrative, when everyone around me seemed happy with what was happening, I felt settled and able to turn my attention elsewhere. We agreed on a prize draw to sort out the guests for lunch; my conversation with John and Janine lost its tension when we agreed to a change of plan and lightened the mood with a few jokes; my conversation with Meg found familiar terrain when we moved on from the reversal of the prize draw result to a conversation about the importance of ‘the little things’. Conversely, when I encountered disagreement and conflict, this signalled that there was a problem to be resolved, so that we could restore harmony and settle back to some sort of equilibrium. Janine’s challenge weighed heavily upon me and I procrastinated my conversation with Meg, anticipating conflict with her when she returned from holiday. I did not want to live with this state of disequilibrium, which felt unbearable as a knotty and painful mix of embodied emotion.

Conflict and harmony as binary alternatives

So, what is revealed is a binary view of my experience in this group where we are either in the preferred state of harmonious equilibrium or the problematic state of discordant tension. This is an idealised view consistent with how the systems discourse on management promotes success as a cohesive, well-performing management team as opposed to a dysfunctional group of people who are less able to do the work that is in front of us. When there is upset and disagreement, my impulse is to try to reconcile these to restore harmony and consensus so that we can move on. For Janine, it is a sense of unresolved conflict that means that ‘avoiding difficult conversations’ becomes a pressing issue for her, so that we can deal with things and get back to equilibrium.

At other times, neutrality seems to be about trying to maintain a state of harmony, to avoid the disagreement that taking a position might introduce. Faced with allocating a limited number of lunch places we struggled with deciding who should go. Elias talks about how we experience bodily

responses to the shifting power dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, which applies to how we imagined our colleagues' responses to being excluded from the lunch (Elias, 2001). The risk of making an unfair, unpopular or otherwise problematic decision was too great and it felt safer to rely upon the luck of the draw. Anyone subsequently excluded from the lunch would be excluded by a turn of fate and not by the decision of a manager. Similarly, taking a position myself risks my own exclusion or that of particular others – either Janine or Meg in this case - and so it feels safer to be neutral, to try to keep everyone happy, to avoid siding with one colleague over another.

So, let me dig into this binary way of thinking about harmony and the consequences of trying to avoid conflict when taking a position. One theme prevalent in Greenleaf's original work on Servant Leadership that survives many of the re-formulations by others is that of *healing* (Greenleaf, 1970; Spears, 2010). In their qualitative study of the personal accounts of Servant Leadership in different organisations, Jit et al home in on the idea of healing to promote a healthy workforce and "sense of cohesiveness, collaboration, and sustainable relationships among the followers by understanding and addressing their feelings and emotions." (Jit et al, 2017, p.80). This is consistent with Spear's identification of healing as one of his ten characteristics, alongside which he points to research that suggest that Servant Leadership enhances wellbeing "by creating a positive work climate" (ibid. p80). So here, the role of servant leader is oriented towards the reparation of health, cohesion and harmony, which again is reflective of the wider systemic discourse:

Those who give a central role to conflict are rare (Pascale, 1990) and the call is usually for strongly shared cultures and harmonious teamwork. (Stacey et al 2000, p.105)

Here, Stacey et al point to how conflict is neglected as a concept in contemporary management, except where tacitly acknowledged by the promotion of harmony, consensus and consistency. Again, this mode of thinking positions harmony and conflict as binary alternatives, with conflict seen as a threat to the harmonious equilibrium to which the system should be restored.

There are, however, examples of a more nuanced treatment of conflict in contemporary systemic management literature than the stance offered by Servant Leadership. Peter Senge, who was a principal exponent of the idea of 'learning organisations' promotes the idea of organisational success deriving from the ability of its members to learn from conflict (Senge, 1990). However, Senge here proposes that 'common meaning' can emerge through a particular kind of conversational dialogue arising from conflicts of ideas, rather than conflict between people (Senge, 1990; Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.113). So, I am interested in what grounds there are for taking a more sophisticated view of conflict and harmony, to gain further insights for practice from the events in my narrative.

A more complex view of conflict

From Elias's sociological perspective, conflict is inevitable as we interact with each other as inter-dependent beings with both competing and complementary goals and heterogeneous histories (Elias, 1970). For Mead, as a pragmatist philosopher, conflict is not only inevitable, but at the very core of our human experience as our sense of who we are in the world is encountered, challenged and reconstructed (Mead, 1908, 1934). Mead takes up Hegel's view of how thought develops and emerges through the dialectic movement between contradictory ideas and takes this further in describing the inherent conflict involved in particularising population-wide patterns that reveal themselves only within our local interactions (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 376). An example of this in the context of my narrative is the conflict that arose when the generalised principle of neutrality assumed in a well-executed prize draw came to take on different meanings for us as the particular result of the draw became evident.

These perspectives challenge the way that conflict is dealt with in the literature on Servant Leadership and much of the systemic discourse on management, excepting perhaps Senge's more nuanced view. Seeing conflict as dynamic and inherent to the very ordinary processes of interaction, rather than something to be controlled, avoided or resolved, opens up the possibility of exploring the consequences for practice when conflict is neglected through attempted neutrality. These include emotional consequences such as the disappointment and embarrassment I notice as a broader pattern in my experience (Elias, 2001; Simpson & Marshall, 2010; Vince & Gabriel, 2011).

Senge's more nuanced perspective asserts that ideas are separate to people (Senge, 1990; Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.113). The suggestion here is that such conflicts of ideas are of a higher order and can take place without the emotional and bodily consequences that a clash between people might bring about. Janine's and my emotional reactions during the lead balloon conversation seem to indicate something other than a disembodied clash of abstract ideas. Since thoughts are activities of human bodies, then conflict between ideas is conflict between the actions of human bodies and therefore inseparable from conflict between people.

But, are there grounds for retaining some notion of different degrees of conflict that present different possibilities for how such conflict is interpreted? Mead talks about how bodily impulses influence how conflict arises as co-operative or competitive, pro-social or anti-social - though always socially formed (Mead, 1934; Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.370). Taking up these ideas within the broader complex responsive processes perspective, Groot (2005) distinguishes *polarised conflict* from *explorative conflict*. Polarised conflict is where people take up opposing, entrenched positions in a power struggle to win at another's expense. Explorative conflict is conversational, where people negotiate how to

interpret with each other how to interpret general principles in particular situations, and in doing so they make (unconscious) adjustments to themselves and to each other. Crucially, it is the potential for adjusting one's position through reflection and reflexivity during such negotiations that differentiates the *explorative* from the *polarised* form of conflict (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.370).

In my view, there is a danger of extending too far the idea that conflict can take two forms – ostensibly one that is potentially harmful and stuck, the other that is positively generative and malleable. This reflects the same kind of binary thinking about conflict presented in the Servant Leadership literature, in Senge's 'ideas versus people' perspective and in how I initially reflected on my narrative. Furthermore, the identification of binary alternatives seems to resolve what might more helpfully be thought of as paradox: that conflict might be explorative and polarised at the same time. Similarly, that my team might be in a dynamic state of harmonious conflict, or conflictual harmony, rather than oscillating from one binary state to another. A dynamic interpretation of this kind would seem to hold better with my experience for the emotional dimension to be similarly dynamic – that something was being felt throughout our experience of the events in my narrative, rather than emotion appearing as a sort of occasional outburst only when conflict arose.

Mead understands emotion as an embodied characteristic of the experience of conflict (Mead, 1934) and, in terms of how conflict can continue to influence the breaking down of our assumptions and habits, we can turn to Mead's contemporary and fellow pragmatist John Dewey, who relates embodied emotion to the process of reflection:

The emotion is, psychologically, the adjustment or tension of habit and ideal, and the organic changes in the body are the literal working out, in concrete terms, of the struggle of adjustment (Dewey, 1895, p. 30, in Brinkmann, 2013, p. 102)

My interpretation of Dewey, here, is that painful emotions can signal a movement in my deeply held assumptions and beliefs, rather than simply signalling conflict as a problem that calls for resolution and healing. In other words, this encounter with the social process of an adjustment to our habits is inherently disturbing and emotionally painful. Becoming accustomed to equating such pain with conflict may go some way to explaining why we have developed a patterned tendency to avoid conflict (Vince & Gabriel, 2011; Simpson & Marshall, 2010; Shields, 2005). Whereas one might think about, or become accustomed, associating such emotions as arising in conflict with other people, Dewey's point is to consider the deeper conflictual tension of habit and ideal happening in the body at the same time. As such, taking a neutral position, and rushing to solve problems of conflict, are attempts to avoid the pain of conflict with other people and the pain of adjustments in one's own habits. Thus, the idea of attempting to manoeuvre around conflict becomes highly problematic from a complex

responsive processes perspective, which sees conflict and habitual adjustment as intrinsic to the very nature of human interaction.

Conflict expectation and disappointment

This leads me to develop Groot's (2005) ideas by synthesising these with the emotionally disturbing clash between my expectations and my experience of conflict. Here, I am drawing on some of the work I have explored in earlier projects, including Annette Clancy's exposition of disappointment (Clancy et al, 2012). Within my narrative, if I was *expecting* that conflict with Meg would be of a *polarised* nature, that will have played out in terms of deferring our conversation. Expecting to encounter *polarised* resistance from Meg introduced a sense of hopelessness, fear or dread at reaching anything but a further entrenchment of views, discord between us and damage to our relationship that would continue to play out in other ways. Before the conversation with Meg even happened, I felt a familiar sense of disappointment by imagining what might happen, according to my assumptions about the nature of conflict between us, whilst at the same time continuing to feel weighed down by the memory of my lead balloon conversation with Janine. I suggested to Janine that changing tack on the prize draw would simply be picking a fight with Meg. My words reveal my predisposition for imagining the difficult conversation with Meg as a case of *polarised* conflict. That would seem to be affording no capacity for Meg or myself, or Janine for that matter, to adjust our views in the course of our conversations and reflections. So, a generalised expectation that conflict between us will be *polarised* rather than *explorative* has consequences that play out more broadly as a recognisable pattern of disappointment (Groot, 2005; Clancy et al, 2012). What I want to emphasise is the role that both in-person conversation and silent, imagined conversation (Mead, 1934) play in influencing my neutral positioning and in patterning my own experience of disappointment.

So, I can conceive of neutrality as a social process involving a struggle with conflict and the anticipation of future conflict, which become embodied as sensations of painful emotion: fear of reprisal by upsetting someone, fear of shame at being found out to be wrong about my position and guilt at breaking a promise made to a loyal colleague. These emotions arise as intrinsic to the process of interactive sense-making, through which I encounter discord in my sense of identity, through ongoing processes of reflection and reflexivity (Mead, 1934; Dewey, 1895).

The problem with viewing neutrality as detachment

If neutrality and conflict are inherently social processes, this calls for a fundamentally different way of viewing each concept. By thinking about taking a position of neutrality, to allow others' views and opinions to be promoted and to allow chance to decide who gets to go to lunch, I am assuming that it

is possible to step outside of the process of interaction through which conflict arises and thus escape being influenced by the emotions, politics and ethical struggle with the situation. Here, I am bringing into question the idea from the systemic discourse that leaders can step outside of organisational systems. In other words, is neutrality itself a position, rather than being a way of not taking a position?

The systemic perspective on this question is evident in Greenleaf's exposition on detachment. At times this circles close to what I think Elias is saying about the paradox of being involved and detached at the same time (Elias, 1956). However, Greenleaf is explicit in eliminating any paradox:

Required is that one live a sort of schizoid life. One is always at two levels of consciousness. One is in the real world — concerned, responsible, effective, value oriented. One is also detached, riding above it, seeing today's events, and seeing oneself deeply involved in today's events, in the perspective of a long sweep of history and projected into the indefinite future. Such a split enables one better to foresee the unforeseeable. (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 14)

This idea of detaching is echoed by Spears in suggesting that detachment by conceptualizing "one must think beyond day-to-day realities" (Spears, 2010, p.28)

From Elias's perspective, detachment is paradoxically entwined with one's involvement in such day-to-day realities, rather than something separate and beyond them (Elias, 1956). Elias thinks about this in terms of practising 'involved detachment' taking what he refers to as the perspectives of both the 'airman' (higher degree of detachment from events) and the 'swimmer' (fully immersed in events) (ibid.) The complex responsive processes perspective synthesises these ideas with pragmatist philosophy and group analytic theory to argue that there is no such 'whole' outside of our experiences of relating together and therefore nothing for a rationally-oriented and autonomous leader to become separate from (Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Stacey et al, 2000; Griffin, 2002). This perspective challenges the idea of neutrality being equivalent to not taking a position. In the midst of my interactions with Janine and Meg, I felt able to think reflectively about what was going on and what I felt I should and could do in the moment. My conversation with Janine about Meg not seeing the bigger picture, and about us avoiding conflict as a team, were examples of moments of greater detachment for us. However, following Elias, we were not fully detached from those events, but practising a degree of detachment whilst remaining fundamentally involved (Elias, 1956, 2001). I only experience what I do because of my participation in events, so neutrality can only be seen as a way of participating and not as an abstinence from what is going on.

Drawing on my earlier point, within these moments of relative detachment, where imagination and silent conversation play out, so too does the anticipation of future conflict. So, what is felt is not only conflict with the particular person with whom one is in conversation, but anticipation of conflict with other people as a consequence of what is happening now.

Neutrality as participation in temporal processes of gesture and response

Taking this idea further, I can conceive of my attempts at neutrality not as attempts at total detachment, but as particular ways of participating in what was happening. Both my grandiose drawing out of names and my role as envoy of the team's decision to Meg can be more helpfully perceived of as something like sending out signals of disinterest and impartiality, rather than a stepping outside of what was going on. This is an important distinction to make in terms of my inquiry into how harmony and neutrality have become idealised as traits for leadership and our experience as a team.

In Mead's concept of participation, such 'signalling', as I have called it, is a gesture that calls out a response not only in a particular other such as Meg, but in one's sense of self as we imagine future interaction with others:

The "I" responds to the gesture of the "me", which arises through the taking of the attitudes of the others. (Mead, 1934, p.174)

Mead is positing the idea that the "I" and "me" are concepts that arise together in the processual nature of conversational turn-taking. So, I can conceive of neutrality not as a chosen position, but as something that emerges in my interactions with Meg and Janine. Mead's "attitude of others" not only relates to Meg's tendency to act, but my anticipation of Meg's tendency, the general behavioural patterns of the management team and of wider and wider groupings of the "generalised other" (Mead, 1934). For me, this "generalised other" also refers to other managers, in the sense of seeing myself as part of a broader profession and a personification of the question, "what should a good manager do in this situation?" Since Mead's same concept applies to those with whom I am interacting, the complexity of something like "taking a neutral position" comes more fully into view: neutrality cannot simply be the individual enactment of a chosen position but something I find myself doing as my interaction with my colleagues emerges within a particular context such as the prize draw. My neutral 'signalling' is both gesture and response at the same time, both recreating patterns from the past and anticipating responses in the future. Mead thus presents a paradoxical notion of time, where the idea of the present moment is not simply a junction in the linear path between past and future, but where expectation of the future is combined with both re-creation and re-interpretation

of the past in something which he termed “specious present” (Mead, 1938). What emerges as a result of our actions is therefore radically uncertain, as the meaning of gestures cannot be fully known in advance of responses that can be either the same as in the past, or novel and transformative. For me, this presents a paradoxical notion of neutrality as both a position and a process that changes over time as the meaning of that position emerges. This suggests that there is a problem with idealising both neutrality and taking a position, unless one is able to see these as dynamic processes whose consequences emerge over time in ways that no-one can fully anticipate or be in control of. In terms of my narrative, both detaching from the prize draw and rushing to find a solution can be interpreted as gestures whose meanings and consequences emerged as the responses of everyone involved played out over time. So, neither neutrality nor position-taking can be held up as ‘the right thing to do’ in my narrative. With the benefit of hindsight, one might suggest that acting differently at a precise moment in my narrative might have produced a different result, but even then, the consequences of acting differently cannot come fully into view and what happened in the past is under continual reconstruction and re-interpretation. The meaning of – and responses to – whatever that different act might have been remains unpredictable, even with hindsight.

For me, this highlights how idealisations of harmony and neutrality are taken up in a prescriptive way in the systemic discourse. The idea of adopting a style of leadership, as a way of equipping managers to navigate events, is central to the very idea of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) and is prominent in contingency theories of management (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey and Blanchard, 1977; McGregor, 1960). So, whilst such theories cannot anticipate the precise details of what managers like me will find themselves doing – participating in a prize draw, for example – they do offer ways of navigating, resolving and healing conflict in more generalised ways, by offering prescribed ways for how leaders might choose to act in different circumstances. What is assumed, therefore, is that leaders like me have a choice about how to act and that there is such a phenomenon as “getting it right”, as defined by parameters such as the degree of conflict that arises as a result of what is done.

However, Mead’s idea of the specious present and the complex emergent nature of gesture and response presents a radical challenge to the idea that there can be a “right thing to do” or a “right way to act” that can be prescribed in advance and chosen by a leader (Mead, 1934). It is more helpful, I would argue, to think about ‘the right thing to do’ as indeterminate and emergent through the inherently collaborative and conflictual social process of dialogue and reflection. So, what becomes important for our team over time cannot be fully anticipated in advance, since the ‘little things’ have the potential to escalate to become significant and transformative. This brings me back to my question about navigating the uncertainty of what we *should be* doing, since what is important is inherently indeterminate.

Analysis | Exploring the ideals of autonomy and choice in deciding what's important.

One of the more painful elements in my narrative was the sense of failure, shame and embarrassment at 'the little things' going wrong. That seemed to call into question my competency as CEO and our effectiveness as a team who allow apparently small annoyances to get in the way of our real work. So, seeking neutrality was not only about avoiding conflict but about trying to assert a choice about what we should be doing.

Acting with a degree of choice

The idea that some things are more important than others only makes sense if we hold onto the assumption that we have the ability to choose what we are doing. Ralph Stacey takes up Elias, Mead and the Aristotelean notion of *phronesis* or practical judgment, to argue that as humans we are enabled and constrained by both the particular problem at hand and its general relevance, giving us a predisposition to act in a certain way and a degree of choice about what we do (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). What constrains the extent of choice that we have is Mead's idea of *self as generalised other* (Mead, 1934), reflected in Elias's notion that we are formed intersubjectively and are enabled and constrained by broader societal norms and patterns that we are paradoxically contributing towards and being influenced by at the same time (Elias, 1970, 2000, 2001). So, we act not with the total freedom of an autonomous being, but with some degree of choice amidst the historic and dynamic social norms that simultaneously enable and constrain us. My sense of irritation at finding myself becoming more deeply embedded into the aftermath of prize draw says something about the enabling-constraints of my sense of generalised other, feeling that I should be able to choose to do something more important whilst also feeling myself responding to a sense of expectation to sort out the growing discordant tension in the team.

Choosing what is important: foresight

Accepting that we have a degree of choice, rather than absolute freedom, how do we determine what choices to make? As I have been exploring, if the meaning of our actions emerges over time in a temporally complex way, what is important cannot be fully understood in advance. The systemic discourse addresses this fundamental problem squarely, as illustrated by the Servant Leadership literature, which positions this as a matter of skill:

The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way: he needs to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable. (Greenleaf, 1970, p.11)

Here, Greenleaf skirts uncomfortably close to the mystical and supernatural, but reins in his point to talk about how a greater creativity and willingness to proceed with uncertainty marks out leaders from other people. So, Greenleaf acknowledges uncertainty and indeterminacy as contextual phenomena for management, but it is not at all clear how this should be interpreted in practice, except to take for granted that a leader has skills that equip them to be able to navigate such uncertainty:

Foresight is the “lead” that the leader has. (ibid. p.14).

Meanwhile, Spears acknowledges the difficulty in attributing the skill of foresight to the servant leader, without fully understanding what this capacity entails:

Foresight remains a largely unexplored area in leadership studies, but one most deserving of careful attention. (Spears, 2010, p.28)

This interpretation cannot be said to align with or be explained by the complex view on temporality that I turned to previously. Instead, it maintains linear interpretation of causality – knowing what will happen in the future – as matter of skill on the part of an individual leader.

The leader as separate and autonomous

So, despite the apparent remedy offered towards more heroic notions of leadership, Servant Leadership is based upon the same assumption that only a person who has what it takes can become a great servant and thereby a great leader. This ideology continues to separate the leader from the led, or the servant from the served, whichever way you would have it. Spears’ formulation of ten characteristics of a Servant Leader notes that these “characteristics often occur naturally within many individuals” (Spears, 2010, p.30). For me, the notion of foresight thus remains mysterious and isolated ‘within’ a person. In this respect Servant Leadership highlights the central ideological assumption of individual autonomy that runs through the systemic literature on organisations.

One of the important consequences for practice is that this leads to the shared expectation that leaders should be doing something different to what other people are doing because of their unique abilities. My attempts at neutrality were, at least in part, about distancing myself from trivial matters in order to do something else. But, when I am involved in little things going wrong, this raises questions about whether I have the foresight required of a good leader. Meg’s idea that “it starts at the top” brings what we are all doing into question and involvement in the little things poses a significant risk to our sense of identity as a competent management team. Following this line, the more trivial the matter in hand, the greater the risk to one’s reputation. In this sense, neutrality in indeterminate circumstances appears to be motivated by self-interest, rather than the promotion of others’

interests. Compounding this idea is Greenleaf's response to indeterminacy, which recognises that we rarely have all of the information we need in order to make an important decision, but that a failure to apply foresight can be regarded as an ethical failure (ibid. p.13).

Ethics, foresight and choice

Mead presents his pragmatist interpretation of the ethical dimension to finding a position:

The moral act must take into account all the values involved, and it must be rational - that is all that can be said (Mead, 1934, p.388)

But, how are we to know what "all the values" are and when they are in front of us to be taken into account? Even in a particular situation where "the problem defines the values" (ibid.) Mead seems to call for an impossibly perfect situation where such values can be rationally taken into account, particularly in the fleeting moments such as in my narrative where there is pressure to respond. At the same time, Mead ushers in a caveat that in order to preserve one's self-respect, one might have to "fly in the face of the whole community" by conceiving of a better state for society than its current state (ibid. p.389). This would seem to be saying that "taking into account all the values involved" cannot mean *accommodating* all of those competing values (Mead, 1908, 1934; Elias 1970) against a landscape of competing power dynamics (Elias, 1970; Marris, 1996). What is more, Mead posits that "We are continually reconstructing" (Mead, 1934, p.387) in our reflective conduct, which challenges any notion that a picture of "all the values" can be one that is static enough to consider rationally.

On the face of it, Mead and Greenleaf's ideas might seem to align, presenting a sort of 'get-out clause' in terms of other people's values, where a leader under pressure to act can simply take the moral high ground by asserting that their ideas are serving the greater societal good. However, that would mean interpreting Mead in the same individualised way that is presented in the systemic discourse. Whereas, Mead's idea of the moral act as "taking into account all the values involved" must be "rational" in the sense that Mead argued: controlling one's actions by taking the attitude of others in a group. Mead's morality is thus relational, arising from interaction and not the action of an isolated individual (Mead, 1934, p.334). Whether or not this interaction plays out through open dialogue (Senge, 1990) or through internalised 'weighing-up' in silent conversation, the process is in any case thoroughly social (Mead, 1934).

Taking this point further, the basis of Mead's ethics lies precisely in the capacity for a degree of choice that we have as individuals, as it arises through social interaction. It is through the "I-Me" dialectic process that we are able to take ourselves as an object to ourselves and express spontaneity and creativity, which may or may not become amplified in a temporally complex sense into broader

patterns of experience (Griffin, 2002; Mead, 1934). For me, this offers a pragmatic, embodied interpretation of the idea of foresight. The distinction is that the individual emerges through the social process of interaction, retaining a degree of choice about what to do next, to act spontaneously. It is this capacity for choice, rooted in the idea that knowing what we are doing arises through taking the attitude of the other, that means that we are responsible for our conduct, even though we cannot foresee the outcomes of our actions, which emerge through joint action with others in a temporally complex way (Mead, 1934; Griffin, 2002, p.160). In a very simple sense, we could not have predicted the precise outcome of the prize draw but could very well be expected to have foreseen the possibility – or even calculated the probability - of a problematic result. Our subsequent struggle arose from the difficulty of accounting for what we did together, but it was one that played out in an individualised way: Meg's apparent inability to see the big picture, my rush to provide a solution and Janine's obstinacy in accepting it.

Whereas systemic ideas place responsibility on the leader because they can “see the unforeseeable” (Greenleaf, 1970, p.11), the pragmatist perspective calls for a pluralistic interpretation of the ethics of leadership. What we are doing together as a management team is not just about the choices that I make as the nominal leader, but about how we account for what we are doing together, as the meaning of our actions emerge over time. That is not to ignore the ethical responsibility any of us has for acting the way that we do given the degree of choice that we have. But it is to recognise the emergent and conflictual nature of our work together, rather seeing our experiences as a team as something that is individually determined, harmonious and subject to detached choice.

Reflection | Exploring the consequences of an individualised perspective

Reflecting critically on the idealisations of harmony and choice has revealed the highly individualised way in which management is presented in the systemic discourse, exemplified by Servant Leadership. Experiencing the limitations of being able to choose more important things to do produces feelings of irritation, of constantly being distracted by the annoying little things: a sense of never-ending triviality as their meaning emerges in unpredictable ways. Meanwhile, getting these little things wrong feels like an embarrassing failure, so neutrality is not only an attempt at preserving harmony, but a way of promoting self-interest; an escape from fear of failure.

This individualistic perspective clashes with a more collective and relational view of ethics as interactional, where ‘the right thing to do’ is indeterminate and emergent. So, this raises a question for me about why individualism is so dominant, ahead of more collective management and organisational practices.

Individualism as a historical social phenomenon

Barbara Townley, whose primary interest is in management and ways of organising, recognises individualism as a quality of a broader societal progression. She argues that the idea of the autonomous individual goes hand in hand with the development of rationality that, particularly since the age of Enlightenment, emphasises a lessening of reliance upon others for one's decision-making as a characteristic of the advancement of human civilisation and freedom. Townley posits that the advancement of autonomous reasoning produces a legacy of:

a disembedded and disembodied self that adopts a disengaged stance to the self and others. It is the construction of the individual as sovereign, autonomous, with clear boundaries. (Townley, 2008, p.24)

I take this to mean that this generalised sociological pattern influences a way of thinking about identity as impartial, not only in the sense of being open and considerate to others' views,

Rather, it is to be neutral, independent, objective, detached, unprejudiced, and disinterested, disembedded from a context and a society. (ibid.)

Drawing, amongst other scholars, on Elias's idea of civilizing processes (Elias, 2000), she relates this progression of individualism to historical disciplining processes over the body, including ways of holding and moving one's body as well as

increased control through the 'rational' mind, with the 'self control' of rational thought. (Townley, 2008, p.160)

These civilising processes, she argues, have had a profound influence on management thinking, where the body per se is neglected in favour of the idea of the autonomous individual applying detached intellectual reasoning to solve problems and think strategically in highly rationalised ways. So, Townley links autonomy, rational problem-solving and neutrality in management thinking to a broader sweep of rationality and individualism in society. Thus, Townley is pointing us to an interpretation of rationality that is at odds with Mead's thoroughly social interpretation (Mead, 1934, p.334).

Townley's argument builds on Michel Foucault's interest in discourse as a "system of representation" (Hall, 1997, p.72) where he considers knowledge and its application as a form of power, presenting a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980, p.131) that has a disciplining effect upon the body. Writing primarily from an interest in cultural identity, Stuart Hall interprets Foucault to show how knowledge through discourse has a disciplining effect, where the body becomes

a sort of surface on which different regimes of power/knowledge write their meanings and effects. (Hall, 1997, p.78)

Hall is writing here about Foucault's work on crime in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) but drawing more broadly on Foucault to think about the 'subject' not as "a sovereign, autonomous, with clear boundaries" (Townley, 2008, p.24) but as socially enabled and constrained within discourse:

*the 'subject' is produced within discourse. This subject of discourse cannot be outside discourse, because it must be **subjected to discourse**. (Hall, 1997, p.79)*

So, drawing on Townley, Hall and Foucault, I suggest that this broad societal progression towards a more rationalised and individualised perspective informs and reflects the systemic discourse on management in organisations, influencing managers as subjects of this discourse who come to view what they are doing in highly individualised and rationalised terms. This perspective is exemplified by the idealisations of individual autonomy and choice that are presented in the literature on Servant Leadership and that are evident in the way that my colleagues and I experienced the events in my narrative.

Individualism and withdrawal from the politics of social life

The pattern of individualism has been identified by other scholars as a broader sociological theme in modern western society. The Canadian social philosopher, Charles Taylor, identifies "Three Malaises" of modern society in his *Ethics of Authenticity* (Taylor, 1991). Taylor's philosophy draws heavily on Hegel to mount a rejection to the philosophical basis of the natural sciences. This surfaces in him identifying "the primacy of instrumental reason" as one of these 'Malaises' that provoke a disenchantment with the world and the severely limiting and destructive consequences for freedom by the way in which this plays out through our political institutions. Taylor argues that the rise of individualism presents a disenchanting view of the world in which the things around us, including the relationships we have with others, become instrumentalised for our own purposes, dismantling the broader 'social orders' of which people used to feel a part of historically. This, he argues:

narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society. (Taylor, 1991, p.4)

So, such freedom of individuality, says Taylor, comes at the cost of these social orders and a sense of purpose and connection to others, to a community. Taylor's argument underscores Townley's point about how the broader sociological movement towards individualism and instrumental reason informs and is reflected in management thinking and practice:

Management as a science, the repository of technical expertise, induces or inculcates a certain cognitive style, that of problem-solving and the problem solver (Townley, 2008, p.76)

Drawing upon my critical reflections from my narrative, I suggest that this influence is particularly evident in the systemic management discourse, as exemplified by Servant Leadership. Rather than promoting other people's health, success and fulfilment, I argue that this way of thinking

fosters a view of relationships in which these ought to subserve personal fulfilment. (Taylor, 1991, p.43)

From my narrative, I have been reflecting on my tendency for problem solving as a means of restoring harmony, influenced by a systemic discourse that assumes this role of the leader. Now, I can also see that resolving conflict is a way of attempting to control relationships with other people to serve individual interests. A neutral, problem-solving approach reflects an individualised orientation to management and, at the same time, serves ideas of fulfilment and success that are defined in highly individualised terms. The consequences of this way of practising are for other people's goals to become subservient to one's own and thus relationships with others to become defined in instrumentalised ways as means towards one's own ends.

This reveals an important ethical question about what possibilities there might be for alternative ways of thinking about and practising leadership as a moral act, where "all the values involved" can be taken into account in a rational way (Mead, 1934). Since I have argued that this requires a relational interpretation on what Mead means by "rational", then the moral act is political, in that it requires engagement with others in an emergent process where meaning and identity arise socially, through collaboration and conflict. Reflecting back to my narrative, what I notice is a withdrawal, an attempted detachment from political engagement, evident in my own actions and in the way that Meg identifies the little things as interfering with the real work. Whereas we have come to see the little things as alien and distracting, Mead's ideas on ethics call for an interpretation of such events as moral situations. Townley takes this up, arguing that what is called for is a "collective reasoning" that is characterised by

deliberative democracy, a collective deliberation, with the aim of achieving free, uncoerced and reasoned agreement among equals. (Townley, 2008, p.194)

However, she points to a generalised tendency for withdrawal from political action, as Meg and I exemplified in my narrative, based on the idea that it is inefficient to try to involve everyone in every little thing:

Within mainstream organizations, and in the absence of any explicit reference to the directive rights of private property and ownership, appeals to specialized knowledge and concerns for efficiency are raised as reasons why a more deliberative form of democracy would be impracticable. (Townley, 2008, p.201)

Collective deliberation as leadership practice is thus neglected on the basis that it is wasteful, slow or difficult to enact. Where collective practices are adopted in contemporary organisations, Townley identifies that these fall short of a collective reasoning in Mead's terms but are instead adopted in very individualized ways, through such mechanisms as organisational development schemes, or collective bargaining activities. (Townley, 2008, p.201)

I am thus arguing that the idealisations of harmony, autonomy and choice in the systemic discourse have a disciplining effect on management practice that leads to individualised ideas of the good and a withdrawal from the politics of organisational life.

Individualism and a struggle with indeterminacy

This withdrawal leads to what Taylor calls a dismantling of the social order, giving us "narrower lives" (Taylor, 1991). Writing towards the end of his long career on themes of attachment and loss, Peter Marris argues that the kind of malaises that Taylor identifies forces...

people to accommodate to uncertainty in ways which undermine their hopes, their self respect and their will to challenge their condition. (Marris, 1996, p.86)

This sense of hopelessness, he argues, encourages a response of withdrawal from social life and the political action necessary to acknowledge, challenge and recover from this feeling of vulnerability (ibid.). Taylor's and Marris's observations present a sociological background for how organisational politics can come to be regarded as interference: as inefficient and ineffective ways of getting things done. This is congruent with Townley's argument and evident within my narrative: the sense of annoyance at the triviality of the prize draw; Meg's irritation at other people not minding their own business; Janine's appeal for us to become better at having difficult conversations.

This neglect of everyday organisational politics both emerges from and contributes to the idealisation of harmony and autonomy, so that success as a leader is defined in highly individualised terms. For me, this plays into the way that I have been thinking about fulfilment and disappointment across my career. In my first project, I drew on Axel Honneth's philosophy of identity to consider how this disappointment features as a deficit of recognition in my role as CEO. Honneth recognises the influence of Charles Taylor on his own ideas and specifically the latter's development of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 2000, p.15). Honneth describes Hegel's main intention is

to argue for the creation of the conditions whereby all people can freely experience a communicative experience that is

being with oneself in another (Hegel, 1991 in Honneth, 2000, p.42)

In his 1999 Spinoza lecture, Honneth develops Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* to argue that the lack of capacity to engage in social life, by which I believe he means participating in conflictual political processes of meaning-making, will mean that one becomes

condemned to suffer from indeterminacy (Honneth, 2000, p.50)

For me, this changes the way I have been thinking about success and fulfilment, from a perspective that is highly individualised towards a way of thinking that involves a rich intersubjective connection with others, where recognition and identity are dynamic processes involving conflict and a collective struggle with indeterminacy.

Consequences for practice from struggling with indeterminacy

Peter Marris takes a particular perspective on indeterminacy that sees power as control over contingencies rather than control over resources (Marris, 1996, p.1). Since the power over contingencies – the capacity to change tack in the face of uncertainty - is unevenly distributed through society and its institutions, this, says Marris, introduces competition into the struggle with indeterminacy (ibid.). He thus argues that exercising freedom of choice to change one's course of action is enabled only when other people do not have the same freedom (ibid. p.66). So, indeterminacy can be controlled and navigated, but at the expense of someone else. When I think about moments in my narrative where taking a position became secondary to promoting someone else's point of view, I can see how this could be seen as dominating and threatening to colleagues who might have felt exposed and unsupported by me, rather than well served by my impartiality.

To expand, Marris talks about an attractive quality of hierarchical power over others being the ability to secure their commitment to a course of action without committing anything in return (ibid. p.67). So, if I think of adopting a servant-leader perspective by promoting the position of others, whilst not offering mine, this is like getting them to show their hand whilst I keep my cards close to my chest until yet-to-be determined events play out. I thus retain the opportunity to be 'right', or 'open-minded' in the face of events not going the way that we thought. Viewed that way, not taking a position seems very much like a dominant exercising of Marris's "most attractive prerogative of superior power" (ibid.).

My final argument, then, is that the highly individualised perspective in the systemic discourse produces conditions where we come to suffer from indeterminacy. Politics and conflict in organisations are neglected as ways of collectively inquiring into meaning, ethics and identity. In the absence of the special skills of detachment and foresight that are called for within systemic notions of leadership, managers may be left with neutrality as a defence against indeterminacy. The power advantage afforded to a manager in a position of authority arises not from a set of special qualities but from the privilege of being able to appear impartial in the name of empowering and promoting the views of others. This attempt at taking a neutral position is a way of participating that instrumentalises relationships with others as means towards one's own ends.

Conclusion | Individualism and indeterminacy

I began my inquiry by highlighting two animating questions that arose from my initial reflections on a narrative that showed how my team and I find ourselves struggling with conflict in our everyday work together. I wanted to understand how we deal with the uncertainty about what's important, so that we can decide what we do within the practical limitations of the working day. I also wanted to understand why it is that, as leader of the team, I find myself adopting a neutral position, solving problems and attempting to maintain a sense of harmony by supporting other people's preferences, goals and opinions.

I turned to Greenleaf's work on Servant Leadership as an example of the systemic discourse on management that has profoundly influenced the way that I think. I drew out two pertinent themes from this discourse that related to my animating questions: the idealisation of organisational harmony and the idealisation of the autonomous choice-making individual.

What is presented in this discourse are conflict and harmony as binary alternatives, which is reflected even in more sophisticated interpretations of conflict. Drawing on Elias's sociology and the pragmatist philosophy of Mead and Dewey, I explored the inevitability of conflict as an inherent feature of our human experience of interaction. I concluded that, although appealing as a way of escaping painful emotional consequences, the concept of avoiding conflict is highly problematic.

I developed Groot's (2005) idea of polarised/explorative conflict to suggest that conflict and harmony may more helpfully be considered in paradoxical terms, as processes involving conflictual harmony or harmonious conflict. Developing this further, neutrality can be viewed as a social process involving a struggle with conflict and the anticipation of conflict. I drew on Elias and Mead to show neutrality as a way of participating in events, exploring the nature of this participation as iterative processes of gesture and response. This introduced Mead's paradoxical understanding of temporality, where not

only neutrality but the very meaning of our actions emerge in non-linear ways over time, so that the consequences of acting neutrally, and what turns out to be important in ethical terms cannot be fully understood in advance of acting. Mead introduces a more paradoxical interpretation of ethics that emerges through this temporally complex understanding of causality, where our responsibility as socially formed individuals lies in the capacity for a degree of choice about what we do that has both spontaneous and habitual qualities. Mead's moral act calls for a rational taking into account of all values and that process is relational and social.

What this means to me is that our work as a management team is emergent and conflictual, rather than harmonious and determined by what I am doing as its nominal leader. This idea contrasts with how systemic management models offer prescriptions for ways of acting, such as those presented in contingency theories of management. This discourse presents the leader as especially skilled in foresight, with the ability to detach and make rational decisions about what to do and how to act.

So, the exploration of these twin ideals of harmony and autonomous choice highlighted the dominance of a highly individualistic way of thinking that is presented in a prescriptive way in the systemic management discourse. I drew on Townley, Foucault and Hall to trace how a broader societal progression towards a more rationalised and individualised perspective forms and is formed by this discourse, influencing managers how managers think about what they are doing in highly individualised and rationalised terms. This perspective is evident in the way that my colleagues and I experienced the events in my narrative.

To understand the broader consequences and influences of this individualistic perspective, I turned to Taylor, Honneth and Marris to explore the tendency for relationships with others to become instrumentalised for our own purposes, leading to a dismantling of the 'social orders' and a deepening of the perspective of the manager as autonomous problem-solver in search of fulfilment and recognition. More collective approaches to management practice are neglected on the basis that they are inefficient and difficult, which relegates organisational politics to something that is distracting and wasteful.

I concluded that the idealisations of harmony, autonomy and choice in the systemic discourse have a disciplining effect on management practice that leads to individualised ideas of the good, producing conditions where we come to suffer from indeterminacy. As a consequence, politics and conflict in organisations are neglected as ways of collectively inquiring into meaning, ethics and identity, and relationships become instrumentalised towards pursuing an individual sense of fulfilment.

This conclusion offers the possibility that a richer, more meaningful sense of fulfilment may arise through a shift in the relational qualities of management practice. For me, this would require further inquiry into how processes of collective inquiry might be promoted over more individualised ideas of management, where conflict and spontaneity may become regarded as favoured characteristics of the emergent textural quality of our interactions over idealisations of harmony and autonomy.

Synopsis

Behind the mask of a CEO of a Management Training Institution: Exploring breakdowns of identity in the struggle for recognition.

Introduction to the synopsis

In this synopsis, I summarise each of my four projects, highlighting the themes that emerged at the time. I did not re-write my projects in preparation for this synopsis but present them as they were written at the stages of my progression through the DMan programme. As I elaborate upon in my Methodology section, this enables me to draw attention to the way that my thinking has moved – and continues to move – as a researcher in the DMan community. For me, this is important in establishing the grounds for my research as a social process of inquiry. It is only now, through the process of retrospective critical review of my projects that my overarching theme of management as performative practice of idealised identity comes more clearly into view.

Here, I reflect upon what sense I now make of my projects referring to this central theme of identity. By reflecting on my reflections in this way, I have deepened my inquiry into the concept of identity to draw out further themes that emerge for me now, as a continuation of this social process of inquiry. This reflexive turn will enable me to articulate the bases for my arguments in this thesis and the grounds upon which I evidence my contribution to knowledge and practice. So, after summarising each of my projects, I will draw together these recurring themes and reflect critically upon them to build my arguments and contributions.

Project 1 | Summary

My experience of writing Project 1 was somewhat surprising. Unaccustomed to writing any kind of narrative based on my own experiences, the intention was to practise a reflexive inquiry (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2004; Mowles, 2015) addressing the question, ‘how have I come to think the way that I do?’ What surprised me were the vignettes that emerged from the process of recalling and recounting the history of my formative experiences as a manager. At the time, I enjoyed the trip down memory lane, whilst being somewhat perplexed by the particular episodes that came to mind. I was equally surprised by the responses that my narratives drew from colleagues in my Learning Set. These were people I’d only just met, but who were interested, amused, angered – *moved* by what seemed to me to be perfectly ordinary and not terribly interesting anecdotes from my past.

Re-reading Project 1, around two years after I had completed it, I notice that my language and style of writing is somewhat detached and formal, masking the unsettling and rather messy experience of the research process itself. The structure of Project 1 is rather orderly, taking both a chronological and

thematic approach to my intellectual autobiography. Whilst constraining in some ways, this structure enabled me to make sense of my work within two distinct themes. However, looking back on this now, I no longer see these themes as different at all and were I writing the project now, I think that I would take a different approach.

The first theme was about my search for success and recognition as a manager and this is where I first touch upon the concept of identity (Honneth, 1995). I wrote about my disappointment with early experiences of management and my eagerness to be promoted to positions of influence where I could practice a more considerate and effective management. Having been overlooked for promotion by my boss, Chris, I responded by pursuing further study, hoping to improve my chances by becoming better educated and qualified in management as a discipline, which is a pattern that continued to play out over further stages in my career. This response I now see as an example of my habitualised way of thinking about recognition, which is to turn to symbolic ways of demonstrating my capability, my potential – my worthiness for a new identity – by appropriating qualifications as objective indicators of my abilities. Of course, completing the Doctorate in Management is a continuation of this pattern, but with some significant differences, having experienced a deep disturbance to my ways of making sense of, and finding meaning in the world. For me, that means that completing the DMan feels much more centred on the contribution that I am making to knowledge and practice, rather than appropriating a new qualification. For the first time, the idea of completing the programme does not feel like finishing or concluding anything other than a negotiation into a community whose conversation about organisations and change is ongoing.

The second theme that I wrote about, allied to this notion of success and recognition, was a fascination with life in the Boardroom: how organisations are led and managed ‘at the top’, what is different about life ‘further down’ in an organisation, and what skills and attributes are needed to survive and succeed in the Boardroom. My later experiences on Boards continue to puzzle me, where I find myself embroiled in ritualised displays of power and political manoeuvring, where informal alliances and shadow conversations provide an alternative reading to what is going on and how decisions are made. In retrospect, I see that this fascination with life at the top was about answering, “what do I have to do to get here?”, or more pointedly, “whom do I have to be to get here”? This reflects an interest in the performative qualities of identity as a successful Board member. I was in a rush to appropriate the *right* characteristics to gain recognition, to become included in groups that I regarded as successful and powerful. I am still unsure of why that was important to me and I continue to reflect on the various ways I might have been influenced into such ways of thinking from my childhood and adolescent years.

What I notice in re-reading Project 1 is an individualised perspective on identity, approached through themes such as success and fulfilment. I found it difficult to write about what was going on in a social sense, revealing a view that relationships with people at work were secondary to my own sense of progression and irrelevant to *my* identity and *my* fulfilment. This shows itself in how I write about some of the people in my narratives in somewhat caricatured ways, presenting Waldorf and Statler *only* as comical bad guys, for example. Allied to this individualistic stance is the way in which I think about my *self* as autonomous and detached from others (Stacey et al, 2000), which is a way of thinking that is typical in contemporary society (Taylor, 1991). I think that this comes across in my style of writing in the project as well as in its content. I refer to Mead (1934) in an attempt to think about recognition from a social perspective but do not yet approach his ideas of the social nature of the self. Instead, what is revealed are ways of thinking about my self as separate to the selves of other people. That is not to deny my biological status as a bounded organism or the uniqueness of my history, of course, but to draw attention to how my sense of self was deeply influenced by Kantian notions of autonomy. In later projects, I will come to recognise this individualised interpretation of identity as a quality of the systems perspective on management that influenced me profoundly from the beginning of my career (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Townley, 2008).

I write about ideas of success and recognition in instrumentalised terms: being promoted over others and gaining recognition in a way that is related to hierarchical status. What comes across is a competitive perspective on success, a rush to get to the top ahead of other people, revealing a view of relationships as instrumental to my own ideas of success, as means to my own ends. This instrumentalisation of relationships is evident in the way that I notice and write about politics. My insight was to start to paying more attention to politics as an important facet of organisational life, but the way I describe this in the project is to regard political action merely as means to an end, and as something special, that I can choose to partake in or not, rather than what I now see as an inherent quality of everyday experience. Re-reading the project, I'm reminded of the struggle I felt in articulating what I meant by success and achievement. I came closer to something more satisfactory by starting to use 'fulfilment', but I did not continue a line of inquiry into what I meant by this. The idea that there is a destination to be reached, some goal like 'success' or 'fulfilment', is an assumption in Project 1 that continues to occupy me as I deepen my inquiry into identity and indeterminacy in this synopsis.

This sense of a search for constant development, continuous improvement and progression towards some future achievement emerges here and continues to echo through my other projects, although it is only in Project 4 that I recognise this as part of a broader societal pattern in recent history (Brinkmann, 2017; Rosa, 2013; Taylor, 1991). Re-reading my first project, I notice how I am

preoccupied with thinking about change in the future at the potential expense of noticing what is happening now. What I mean by this is that I tend to draw conclusions about insights and express these in terms of how I (or others) might use them to improve something next time around. I will encounter this stance in my summary of later projects, where inquiring into breakdowns comes to be about trying to identify a blueprint for better ways of doing things in the future, to learn and to improve. This is an approach that is recognisable from my thinking about the nature and role of management – to solve problems, to anticipate gaps and to seek continuous improvement. What comes across in Project 1 is how I apply this way of thinking to my own sense of identity and fulfilment. The recognition I seek seems to be a means to some future end – to get promoted into a better job, to become qualified in order to win higher esteem, to constantly strive towards some imagined future which renders my present work and relationships less important than a future that is somehow *better*.

I drew attention to my preference for and reliance upon reified models of management that offer prescriptions for how to act in certain situations. I acknowledged my orientation in the systems perspective on management and started to draw some insights into the way that this enables and constrains my practice. What I notice now, however, is a dismissive reaction against systems thinking approaches, in response to negotiating my inclusion into the DMan community. What I mean, is that joining the DMan introduced me to critical perspectives on systems theories of management and the possibilities offered by viewing organisations as complex responsive processes of interaction. One of the ways of starting to explore what this new perspective might mean for me was perhaps to dismiss too quickly the ways in which I had become accustomed to thinking about management and to instrumentalise the complex responsive processes perspective (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000) as a new set of prescriptions for enacting management practice. In retrospect, I can see that there was a performative quality to this reaction, as I negotiated my inclusion in the DMan community, adopting and responding to the linguistic and affective characteristics of this new group (Elias, 2001; Goffman, 1959, 1981). I now see that the tools and techniques of management that I had become familiar with had been enabling as well as constraining for my practice and for my relationships with people at work. These continue to offer ways of talking about what is going on in the indeterminate messiness of organisational life. So, from today's perspective, I am less inclined to simply dismiss models from the systems-thinking school but see value in thinking critically about the assumptions and beliefs that constitute their formulation as part of the process of inquiry that seeks to take experience seriously.

I began to explore ideas of inclusion-exclusion following Elias (2001). At the time, I didn't develop these ideas much beyond recognising my desire to be included in groups of powerful and influential people. With the benefit of further inquiry into patterns of inclusion-exclusion in my later projects, I now see a greater connection between my two themes (the pursuit of success, and boardroom

dynamics) by considering the paradoxical tension of inclusion-exclusion. What I mean is that by seeking inclusion into groups that both compete and cooperate, I find myself excluded from both. So, being a member of my Quarry Manager team meant moderating my identity as a member of the Postgraduate Diploma (DMS) cohort by careful experimentation with new thinking and language learned from my studies. Similarly, my CEO position later in my career meant being a member of the Board and the Management Team, whilst being outsiders to each of them at the same time. My ideas of recognition presented similar dynamic tensions between a desire to be included and a desire to be excluded by being recognised as someone worthy of being promoted into new group with higher status. It is within the context of inclusion-exclusion that I start to recognise power as a theme (Elias, 2000; Elias & Scotson, 1965). However, the way that I write about power is very different in this project than the way I do so later on. Although I do hint at power as dynamic and relational, I refer to power as something to be found by being included in particular groups and as a force to be wielded or to be gifted, in the sense of *empowering others*.

I first touched upon the performative quality of management practice (Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1986; Simpson et al, 2017) in my first project although this becomes much more apparent as a fundamental aspect of my research now that I am engaging reflexively with the progression of my work in this synopsis. In this first project I wrote about the role that ritual plays in the Boardroom, having first encountered this as a rather exotic feature of my childhood experiences with the committee of the fishing club. At the time of writing this project, I noticed the more obvious examples of ritual performativity – dress codes, the ordering of agenda, the layout of rooms, the use of honorary titles and so on. What I didn't identify at the time were the more subtly performative elements that played out in my experiences with others within and outside of the Boardroom. For example, my comic villains, Waldorf and Statler gave powerful accounts of the public transcript on stage whilst revelling in the hidden transcript in the safety of the greenroom (Goffman, 1959; Scott 1990). Meanwhile, a less theatrical performativity can be interpreted in the way that my management education enabled and constrained my use of language in conversation with peers (Simpson et al, 2017). Going further, seeking out and relying upon 'best practice' can be understood as a codifying of cultural norms that come to be repetitively and habitually enacted by people in management positions, eager to find the 'right way' of doing things – an idea that I will develop later in this synopsis (Butler, 1990, 1993; Gond et al, 2016; Learmonth, 2005).

Finally, whilst I began to identify conflict and harmony as relevant themes in my experience, I notice the fleeting way that these are mentioned in my first project, given that I come to pay increasing attention to conflict and its emotional qualities in my later projects.

Project 2 | Summary

Writing Project 2, I shifted my focus from an historical account of my career to the narration of a recent experience that, at the time of writing, was very much on my mind as a raw, painful and confusing event. I drew attention to the emotional quality of the episode as indicative of its importance as a learning experience, relevant to my research work on the DMan (Vince & Gabriel, 2011).

My narrative described a recent Board meeting in which I had felt unjustly and unfairly treated, leaving me feeling angry, embarrassed and disappointed. First, I described how the Board and I gathered in the convivial setting of a restaurant the night before the meeting, sharing jokes and catching up on news. That atmosphere stood in stark contrast to what unfolded over the next two days. A discussion on my salary was aborted, my proposals for new business activity were attacked and undermined, and a guest – Raj - that the Chairperson and I had invited along, was rudely interrupted and ejected from the room in an embarrassing and disturbing way. The meeting came to be dominated by Ashley, who was new to the Board and due to take over as its Chairperson. No one spoke up to challenge his behaviour, including me, and this left me feeling let down and betrayed by people upon whom I had been relying for support. I also felt that I let myself down by not speaking up when I felt angry and ashamed, but instead found myself covering over these emotions by trying to maintain a sense of calmness and positivity, acquiescing to unreasonable demands and quietly absorbing blame for things not turning out the way that anyone had expected. When confronted by other people's distress, I attempted to calmly reassure them. Ultimately, after two days of very disturbing emotional experience, when Ashley asked me how I was feeling, I said, "I'm fine".

Writing my narrative felt like replaying my experience for others in a persuasive fashion in an attempt to gain support and sympathy for my side of the story. When I presented my narrative to my DMan colleagues I focused heavily upon a dramatic representation of the narrative, which, looking back, felt rhetorical and theatrical. I characterised other people in a particular way, as victims and villains of the piece and relied upon the drama of the story to cover over what might otherwise have been too painful and intimate an exploration of its meaning. Writing and re-telling my experience felt like an exercise in sense-making, of making connections between micro-events in my narrative, memories of past experiences and engagement with other scholars and writers. Reflecting on that, I see how my dramatic performance of my narrative played out as a pattern of avoidance within the analytical writing of the project itself.

Looking back now on my experience of the narrative itself, as well as the way I presented it, I am surprised at how my inquiry did not take a dramaturgical perspective in an effort to make greater

sense of that experience. When I think about the presentation I gave to my DMan Community, I find it hard to think of any other way that I could have described my experience to my colleagues other than in a highly dramatized way that somehow conveyed the raw, embodied emotional churn that textured my memory of what happened. Yet when it came to writing about the themes and insights that emerged from the experience, I did so in a detached, intellectualised way that dealt with abstract concepts like power (French & Raven, 1959; Elias, 1970; Foucault, 1982). With the benefit of hindsight afforded to me by further critical reflection in this synopsis, I would have revealed different and potentially more generative insights by taking dramaturgical approach that matched the felt theatricality of the event itself: the dramatic changes of scenery and mood; the ritual and symbolic setting; the mutually constitutive character roles of those of us present; and the affective arc of the narrative as it unfolded from my perspective. It is revealing to me that I did not entirely overlook the potential value of this perspective as I was writing my project: in reviewing my historical notes for this synopsis, I found a short document that I'd written for myself setting out ideas for how a critical engagement with Goffman's dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959) might offer some openings for my inquiry, but none of this perspective featured in my finished project at the time.

To illustrate, some of the tense and awkward moments in my Board narrative – Ashley's aggressive interruption to Raj's presentation, for example – are incidents of disruption to the performance in service of what Goffman and others refer to as the social order (Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986). These include glimpses behind the curtain to backstage areas where we as actors are thrown into improvisational covering-up (Goffman, 1959, p.134-135). In those moments, our commitment to mutually sustaining and repairing the "ritual order" was threatened and even lost (Goffman, 1967). Ashley's interruption was perceived as rude, dangerous, arousing feelings of fear, embarrassment: *what's going to happen now, where is Jim, why is Phil not speaking up?* At the same time, Ashley was taking a risk in disrupting the social order in this way and needed to draw in support from others in order to do so to reduce the risk of being excluded himself. Raj, Gayle and I were ejected from the room, creating two new, parallel scenes playing out either side of a door. In this respect, Ashley's disruption of the social order was enabling in the sense that it opened up the possibility of a necessary negotiation of roles and power relationships as he prepared to take over the role of Chair. My polite, deferential "I'm fine" at the end of my narrative was an exercise in saving face, an expression of commitment to the rules of the game of social framework and a restoration of identity as a "ritually delicate object" (Goffman, 1967, p.31). I think that particular scene shows something of my patterned preference for stability of the social order in my role as CEO. This same sense of dramaturgical portrayal and protection of an identity could also explain why I avoided, or found it so very difficult to stay with the affectual heat in the analytical exploration of my narrative, because to do so put at stake

the performance of my sense of identity. So, staying with abstractions of power, politics and emotion kept the limelight on theories about those concepts, rather than what the experience said about my identity in respect of the interactional social order within which I was engaged (Goffman, 1967). So, my writing, reflections and interactions with my Learning Set about “what is it that’s going on here?” were performative, sustained by a habit of skilfully covering-over and reparation of breakdowns in the social order as a member of my Set, where identity as both a competent CEO and competent researcher were at stake (Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986).

As with Project 1, I notice now how I took an individualised and rationalised perspective on events, describing how other people had not acted according to expected norms, how I saw this as a problem and how, then, I wanted to find ways of acting differently in the future to prevent similar problems recurring. So, I was caught up in an ideology of constant improvement (Rosa, 2013; Taylor, 1991), based upon a simplistic view of causality, concerned with what and how I could change in the future - still firmly rooted in ways of thinking influenced by the systemic discourse on leadership and management. This constrained my ability to take a different perspective, to pay attention to the patterns emerging for me and others in the unfolding of ordinary everyday life, to delve deeper into my experience and stay with the difficulties I encountered. Reading some of John Shotter’s work on ‘witness thinking’ (Shotter, 2005, 2012) felt like an invitation not to seek a conclusion at the end point of my inquiry, not to determine some action plan for improvement, but to appreciate instead what I might learn through the process of inquiry. I attempted to do this at the time, but, looking back, I can see how my way of thinking was still dominated by finding new prescriptions for my future practice.

I reflected that my narrative illustrated a wider pattern where I find myself in intense negotiations of power, identity and recognition with others. These lead to heated emotional episodes that become covered over in an attempt to appear strong and in control, which both constrains and enables my practice in relation to other people. In order to explore the idea of power from a social perspective, I started a line of inquiry into figurations of relationships (Elias, 2001), relative dependency within group relations, how changes to those figurations affect and are affected by power dynamics and how these are experienced as senses of inclusion and exclusion. This enabled me to take a more nuanced view of power than the way that I perceived the concept in Project 1 (Elias, 2001; Foucault, 1980, 1982).

Reflecting on that now, I see further openings for exploring power and figuration as performative concepts, in terms of how fulfilling our respective roles may be seen as a habitual and mutually-constituting enactment of identity, and how power might be seen as a quality of performative interaction in the social order (Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1986). This line of inquiry offers insights into my

burgeoning research question about experiencing disappointment - for example, if viewed as a patterning of embodied performativity as a CEO emerging battered and bruised from Board meetings.

But, when I re-read this Project, I started to become annoyed with myself for taking what now seems a diversion from the emotional heat into thinking about power instead. I agree with my justification for why power, as a theme, was important, but find that I dealt with the concept in a rational, orderly, almost mechanical way. I drew on Elias's (2001) ideas on figuration to consider structural explanations for the shifting power dynamics in the Board: role definitions, law, agency theories of management (Eisenhardt, 1989 in Cunliffe & Luhman, 2013) and so on. In doing so, I revealed some interesting conclusions about how much of the contemporary management discourse adopts a binary and linear approach to power relations that ignores chance, variance and the dynamic ebb and flow of power as a textural feature of interaction (Mowles, 2015; Stacey & Mowles, 2016).

However, all of this attention to conceptualisations of power now seems to me like a distraction away from the emotional heat of the narrative: why I didn't speak up, why I hid my anger and disbelief at feeling betrayed by others, why I tried to calm and reassure others when I was seething with irritation and confusion myself, and why I and others allowed – co-created even – the aggressive, rude and dominant behaviour displayed by colleagues. Pursuing power as a theme strayed a little too distantly from potentially more revealing inquiries into conflict and emotional suppression as a means of attempting to maintain harmony and positivity. Looking back, I get a sense of some of these more provocative and searching ideas such as deference, politeness, how alliances become negotiated in the micro interactional messiness of pressurised situations, feelings of betrayal, emotional disguise, restraint and so on. Taking a perspective from Goffman's dramaturgy would have enabled a more thorough engagement with these ideas.

I was aware of being prompted, provoked even, by my DMan colleagues about this apparent avoidance but did not find a way of addressing this heat, this pain more directly at the time. I did respond by experimenting with talking more freely about the emotions involved but in a way that, on reflection now, is still detached, rational and disengaged from the heat and drama of what was going on for me and others in the narratives. Having started to take more notice of the emotional quality of my experience, however, I became intrigued by what is not expressed: silence, the unsaid, suppressed emotion and attempts at emotional disguise in everyday interaction. I reflected on the performative qualities of my practice - staying silent, exercising self-control and suppressing my emotions – concluding that these serve to reinforce my patterned experience of disappointment and lack of fulfilment in my identity as a manager.

But, whilst stating my interest in these things, my patterned tendency of avoidance led to me suppressing a thorough discussion about them at the same time. Mid way through the project, I made a promise to get closer to the emotional heat of the narrative, but then turned to look at how emotional suppression might be seen as a political defence from the standpoints of financial capacity and identity. These avenues took me back to thinking about power in terms of inclusion-exclusion (Elias, 2001) and I arrived at the conclusion of my project with a guarded admission about skirting around the more painful emotional qualities of the experience that I narrated.

My perspective, through this inquiry, shifted significantly, to pay much more attention to political dynamics, coming to better appreciate organisational work as highly relational, intersubjective, interdependent and therefore inescapably political. In this way, I began to call attention to the apparently enabling and constraining consequences of the systems discourse on management but hadn't yet begun to make sense of how and why such enabling-constraints may come to influence practice on a daily basis.

Taking a more social perspective than I had in Project 1, I noticed a pattern of excluding members of the Board in several ways and thus reflected that I might well expect people on the Board to feel anxious, disappointed and angry as a result (Elias, 2001; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). These feelings would play out in relationships with Board members, which suggests that there could be an opportunity for me to be more inclusive of the people on Boards in my daily practice, in other words, to engage differently in the conversational politics that constitute organisational life. Again, I note how I was thinking rather instrumentally, in terms of putting my insights into use in the future to be *better* and to experience improved outcomes for myself and others.

Project 3 | Summary

In Project 3 I heeded my DMan colleagues' reflections about a tendency to avoid a thorough engagement with emotions, deliberately turning my attention to a narrative of a turbulent meeting with my management team, rather than the Board. I felt that this would mean that I could consider the emotional qualities of more ordinary, day-to-day elements of my experience, rather than my less frequent, more pressurised meetings with the Board. So, thinking about more everyday occurrences would, I hoped, mean inquiring into how a sense of disappointment arises through daily practice, less so than special circumstances such as Board meetings.

I told of a regular meeting at which we grappled with why one of our Board members had sent a long list of questions in advance of her visit to the office. Some colleagues were anxious about this, whilst others were more relaxed. I became impatient, annoyed at why we were spending time on the discussion but noticed how I disguised these feelings in an attempt to understand more about what

was concerning us. Everything seemed to calm down for me and the team when one of my colleagues volunteered to phone the Board member and work out a better agenda for the visit. Matters took a wrong turn when that conversation seemed to backfire, which left everyone feeling shamed and exposed, with some of the team distancing themselves from what had happened on the call, pinning the blame on one team member, Kaye. The experience left me feeling angry, embarrassed at being perceived as incompetent and guilty about how one of my colleagues came to be seen as the villain of the piece. I realised that delving into this painful emotional experience, in the way that my DMan colleagues were encouraging me to do, might reveal new insights into my life as a manager and my emerging research questions about disappointment and identity.

I wrote about how we encounter competing expectations of what it means to be competent: tensions that are felt as embodied emotions (Tangney et al, 1992; Vince & Gabriel, 2011), heightened, I argue, within the context of an institution that is intensely focused on management as a discipline. Such struggles are not fully recognised and accounted for in the rationalised discourse of managerialism that promotes qualities such as staying positive, being decisive and maintaining control (Fineman, 2008; Townley, 2008). I considered how this discourse largely overlooks emotions within organisations, except to promote ideas of positivity and harmony as synonymous with successful, competent management. With less critical depth than I would go on to pursue in Project 4, I noted that this discourse forms a sort of background set of expectations and assumptions for our team conversations. So, negative emotions such as shame and disappointment become signals of things going wrong, of failure and disappointment as a manager in relation to this background set of expectations.

Following my second project, I attempted here to stay with the turbulent emotional heat of the experience. I considered how fluctuating power dynamics and expectations to be in control have consequences for a sense of identity – for me and for my team - when things go wrong. I turned directly to look at our tendency to cover over and disguise our emotions, drawing on the literature to understand more thoroughly how working together involves struggles for recognition and a sense in which identity is under constant negotiation (Aram, 2001; Fineman, 2004, 2006, 2008; Hochschild, 1983; Shields, 2005; Simpson & Marshall, 2010; Simpson et al, 2017; Townley, 2008; Vince & Gabriel, 2011; Wetherell, 2012).

One sign of movement in my thinking is how I became better able to write more plausibly and openly about emotion. I noticed that as I was re-iterating my project over a period of a few months, I began to talk more openly at work about emotions and the affectual quality to meetings and other conversations with colleagues. At times, this felt risky, unfamiliar and deliberate – clumsy, perhaps.

This heightened my curiosity about the idea of habitual suppression of emotion in workplace conversations and about what may be at stake by more freely expressing emotion.

I related emotional suppression and disguise to the idea of performance and pretence. I took insights from scholars who draw on both pragmatist philosophy and complexity theory to consider the ordinary, everyday nature of such performance as micro-expressions and turning points in conversation (Simpson et al, 2017). I deepened my inquiry into performativity noting that in our relationships with others, we are constantly adjusting to conflicting and unstable senses of identity. This is enabled and constrained by historical patterns of gesturing and responding, contextualised by shifting power dynamics and competing interpretations about the game we find ourselves caught up in (Elias, 2001; Goffman, 1959; Simpson et al, 2017; Wetherell, 2012). This view of identity as a performative process is congruent with the idea of the social self from pragmatic philosophy and contrasts with more Kantian notions of an autonomous core self that features in much of the mainstream writing on management (Stacey et al, 2000). Taking up Wetherell (2012), Shields (2005), Vince and Gabriel (2011) and others, I considered management team meetings as *affective performances*, where emotional gesturing and responding may be manipulated through very ordinary concrete interactions as political action.

However, I questioned how much freedom and choice we have to suppress or disguise our emotions. Combining ideas from Fineman and Wetherell, I concluded that emotional expression has a paradoxical quality that is interwoven with our social processes of relating; that we cannot wholly control our emotional experiences but that such experiences are, at the same time, radically open to influence and novelty (Griffin, 2002; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). I took up the idea that we have a degree of freedom in our emotional expression to consider such performance as political action that presents consequences for our relationships and sense of identity (Mead, 1934). Looking back, I continued to think instrumentally about these insights: how can I experiment differently with emotional expression in my practice; what might the consequences be for my relationships with others? Furthermore, this revealed again my inclination to think about what might be changed, improved in the future, rather than make better sense of what is already happening in my current experience. However, my writing in the project contained more of a sense of history, of continuity of reflections on identity and habit, not just a relentless gaze towards future improvement. My writing was becoming more nuanced, not so much about adopting a new scheme for my management practice but thinking about breaking into my habits through experimentation and improvisation in conversations with my colleagues. On reflection, I notice how my project contains references to an *actor stepping into role*, to *improvisation*, to *rehearsal*, to *affective performance*. I think now that these theatrical references were cues (to coin

another theatrical word) for taking up Goffman's dramaturgy as a way of inquiring into my narrative, although I did not follow up with this at the time.

I can see a movement to a more socially oriented way of thinking, where I consider the consequences for other people and how our relationships may develop. This shift to a more social perspective shows up in the way that I drew upon Mead (1934) and Aram (2001) to look at shame as an emotional response to dissonance between what I expected to happen and what actually happened in the course of both verbalised conversations with others and as privately conducted conversations with my *self* as a representation of the 'generalised other' (Mead, 1934). So, I concluded that taking my experience seriously means paying closer attention to private, silent conversations as instances of conflict with myself – my *self* being the silent articulation of my colleagues' attitudes towards me.

I went on to relate this new way of thinking about identity as dissonance between different senses of self that are represented by different interpretations of the social. This showed up as a movement from earlier iterations of this same project, where my thinking was dominated by the idea that I am not quite living up to a set of generalised expectations about being a CEO that are outside me and my interactions with others, abstractly located within a broader historic and contemporary discourse on management and leadership. What I moved towards in this project is a much more complex interpretation of my *self* as a continuous, embodied process of negotiation with Sheila, Kaye and my colleagues that features breakdowns involving shame, guilt and anger. So, the richer my relationships with other people, the richer my sense of self and the greater insight I can have into patterns within my own experience that involve disappointment and a search for fulfilment. In that respect, my research had started to highlight how individualistic ways of thinking that are prominent in contemporary society (Taylor, 1991) are bound up with a tendency for relationships with others to become instrumentalised and therefore poorer, thus limiting the possibilities for a broader, richer sense of self to flourish.

Project 4 | Summary

In contrast to the rather more structured occasions at the centre of earlier projects, I found myself here writing about what at first felt like a trivial experience. The sense I make of this now, having engaged in critical reflection of my narrative, is that this contrast reflects how I have come to think of life as a manager. I have tended to think in a binary way about the formal, structured aspects of my practice – meetings, presentations, strategy papers, written reports, commercial negotiations – as my real, substantive work. In the meantime, I diminish more informal everyday experiences - the impromptu conversations, the light-hearted chat, the politics. I notice a subtle change in tonal quality from earlier projects, where I try to take more notice of what happened and reflect on how that shows

up as a pattern that continues in my practice today. I seem to be less caught up in resolving what happened in order to do something differently in the future and more interested in what is already happening in the present. At the very least, I have become more aware of my tendency to think about change as something to be implemented in the future and of the possibilities of revealing insights by staying with puzzling experiences in the present.

On reflection, I see how this apparent shift in interest shows how my thinking about management practice has been moving towards a more dramaturgical interpretation inspired by Goffman's sociology (Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986). The performative elements of the 'big moments' of management like presentations and meetings are pretty self-evident (where a lot is riding on a convincing single performance as CEO in front of an identifiable audience). What has changed is noticing a similar but far more subtle performativity in the everyday conversations with Meg, Janine and my other colleagues that comprise the bulk of our experience together. It is the nature of this performativity in ordinary, everyday interaction that interested Goffman and that interests me now in thinking about how identity as a CEO comes to be enacted, embodied, contested and experienced.

In my narrative, my management team and I had organised a prize draw to allocate a limited number of places for a special lunch to our colleagues. I found myself caught between competing opinions about whether or not the result of the draw was problematic. Having tried and failed to find a compromise, my colleagues nevertheless stayed in conversation about the problem, rather than avoiding or covering over it. Discussions with different colleagues revealed deeper differences about the quality of relationships in the team and competing ideas about what we should be doing as senior managers. My initial reflections caused me to question how we decide what's important and what is trivial amid everyday uncertainty and pressure to deliver results for our organisation. I noticed that my narrative revealed a familiar pattern where, as leader of the team, I became preoccupied with trying to negotiate a restoration of harmony amongst my colleagues, whilst at the same time experiencing a confused annoyance at having to be involved in something so apparently mundane.

Reflecting on how, as CEO, I tend to be an enabler, problem-solver and facilitator amongst my colleagues, I recognised this as a particular feature of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). Looking back now, this was a helpful shift in my thinking as it illuminated a particular example of what I had been referring to in a rather sweeping fashion as the mainstream systemic management discourse. I had become somewhat stuck up to this point in a binary way of thinking that was dismissive of this discourse in order to promote what I was discovering from the complex responsive processes perspective on organisations (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). In this way, I was still thinking instrumentally about what this latter perspective might offer in terms of a new way of

perceiving the world and of practising management. This showed itself in earlier iterations of the project, where I fell into a dualistic way of interpreting my reflections: first from a systemic perspective, contrasted with a stance from the complex responsive processes of relating. Thinking critically from a Servant Leadership perspective enabled me to find my way around the more concrete aspects of my experience and the themes that emerged from my narrative. In writing about Servant Leadership, however, it was important to describe how I do not see its core themes and assumptions as a single model that I have tried to adopt within my practice. Rather it is a particular example of the broader school of systems thinking-based management approaches that enables and constrains my practice and that of my colleagues (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Townley, 2008). Looking back, this seems to me to represent an important insight that enabled a growing recognition, through the first three projects, of the ways in which an orientation in mainstream management thinking had come to shape my wider experience of life in organisations and my particular experience of this episode with Janine, Meg and John.

I first presented an argument that Servant Leadership and broader systemic views of management assume conflict and harmony to be binary alternatives, where a team might be either in a preferred state of harmonious equilibrium *or* in a temporary and problematic state of conflict. Drawing on Elias (1970), Mead (1908, 1932, 1934) and Dewey (1895), I explored conflict as an inherent feature of intersubjective human experience. I concluded that, painful as it may be, conflict is unavoidable and intrinsic to human interaction, which includes our encounter with and adjustment to our sense of self. I critiqued Groot's (2005) framing of polarised/explorative conflict to suggest that it may be more helpful to consider these as paradoxical processes of conflictual harmony or harmonious conflict.

It became clear from my narrative that I had struggled with finding and articulating my own view of what we should do at various points in the experience, and had – congruent with ideas from Servant Leadership – played the role of diplomat, envoy and problem-solver, all the time finding myself in a neutral position between colleagues whose opinions clashed. Picking up on this idea of neutrality, I developed my inquiry into conflict, arguing that neutrality can more helpfully be viewed as a social process involving the navigation of conflict in the present and of conflict anticipated in the future. My thinking had moved from viewing neutrality as a deliberate choice of detachment from what is going on, to neutrality as a way of participating in events, drawing further on Elias and Mead to consider the nature of this participation as iterative processes of gesture and response (Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Stacey et al, 2000; Griffin, 2002; Elias, 1956, 2001).

Reflecting retrospectively on my inquiry, I now see that there are opportunities for deepening the idea of neutrality as participation by incorporating Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, in the same way

that I pointed out for Project 2 (Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986). In that sense, neutrality can be thought of as performative gesturing to restore the social order (Goffman, 1967) when one's claim to identity as a caring servant leader is brought into question. I will spend more time developing this line of thought in my critical reflections and arguments that follow next in this synopsis.

My inquiry led me to Mead's paradoxical understanding of temporality (Griffin, 2002; Mead, 1934, 1938). Mead's perspective suggests to me that neither the consequences of acting neutrally nor an understanding of what will become important over time can be fully understood in advance of acting. I interpreted Mead to consider how our nature as socially formed individuals means that we have a degree of choice about what to do that has both spontaneous and habitual qualities. This idea presents a more nuanced perspective to the idea of foresight that is espoused rather mystically within the Servant Leadership literature. I concluded that rather than applying this mysterious ability for foresight, managers' responsibilities lie in the rational process of taking into account all the values that are relevant to a given situation (Mead, 1934, p.388), to consider what might happen in the future, arguing that this process is relational, social and therefore political.

I thus argued that our work as a management team is emergent and conflictual, rather than ideally harmonious and determined by what I am doing as a detached, neutral leader with the ability for foresight. This argument brought to light how systemic management models offer prescriptions for ways of acting, notably those presented in contingency theories of management. The exploration of these twin ideals of harmony and autonomous choice illustrates the highly individualistic way of thinking that is presented in a prescriptive way in the systemic management discourse, exemplified by Servant Leadership. I drew on Townley (2008), Foucault (1977,1980) and Hall (1997) to trace how a broader societal progression towards a more rationalised and individualised perspective has informed this discourse, which forms managers as subjects who come to view what they are doing in highly individualised and rationalised terms. What I will come on to do in this synopsis is to consider how this process is entwined with Goffman's, Butler's and Sullivan's ideas of the social order and how cultural norms come to pattern both dramaturgic and habitual interpretations of performed identity (Butler, 1990, 1993; Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986; Sullivan, 2000).

I turned to Taylor (1991), Honneth (2000) and Marris (1996) to explore how patterns of progressively more individualised and rationalised ways of thinking have become recognised in broader society. The consequences of this way of thinking include our relationships with others becoming instrumentalised for our own purposes, leading to a dismantling of the delicate social order (Goffman, 1967) and a situation that Honneth describes as suffering from indeterminacy (Honneth, 2000, p.50). Drawing on Hegel and Mead, Honneth's conception of identity relates to intersubjective recognition, a paradoxical

process of finding one's *self* in another, which is a constant dialectic process of misrecognition and refinement, as we cannot completely know an 'other' and therefore cannot completely know ourselves (Honneth, 1995, 2000). As such, Honneth's indeterminacy speaks to an impoverished sense of identity if one ceases to stay in relation, becoming too preoccupied with, and thus lost, in one's self, or in the other. So, I relate Honneth's idea of 'suffering from indeterminacy' to feelings of disappointment and a lack of fulfilment, as well as the attempts at neutrality that show up in my narrative. These feelings relate to the societal patterns of individualism and instrumental rationality recognised by sociologists such as Marris (1996) and Taylor (1991).

Within this societal context, I argued that idealisations of harmony, autonomy and choice in the systemic discourse have a disciplining effect on management practice that leads to individualised ideas of the good. I relate Townley's reflections to my own experience, noting that more collective approaches to management practice are neglected on the basis that they are inefficient and difficult, which relegates 'organisational politics' to something wasteful and distracting (Townley, 2008, p.201). As a consequence, politics and conflict are marginalised and neglected as ways of collectively inquiring into meaning, ethics and identity and therefore become consigned to the shadows of management practice. My argument is that the absence of skills of detachment and foresight that are called for within systemic notions of leadership means managers may be left with neutrality as a defence against uncertainty and the risk of their position being undermined by the turn of events. Since managers are not in control of events in the ways that they expect and are expected to be, taking a position amidst uncertainty presents a risk to a CEO's identity claim as a competent and successful manager.

So, there is a power advantage afforded to a CEO that arises not from a set of special qualities but from the privilege of being able to appear impartial in the name of empowering and promoting the views of others. On reflection through constructing this synopsis, my position has moved again, seeing identity as a relational concept, formed and performed intersubjectively within the context of a social order that organises our experience (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1967, 1986). Identity expectations forged within a social order that is characterised by an individualised and rationalised management discourse can lead to neutral position-taking that is habitually performative, where relationships with others are instrumentalised as means towards securing one's claim to identity (Marris, 1996; Goffman, 1967; Honneth, 2000; Townley, 2008). This can lead to a suffering from indeterminacy, experienced as disappointment and an irreconcilable search for meaning and fulfilment (Clancy et al, 2012; Honneth, 1995, 2000; Ranasinghe, 2019) that contribute to, and are influenced by globalised patterns of individualism, rationality and constant improvement (Brinkmann, 2017; Marris, 1996; Rosa, 2013; Taylor, 1991).

Movement of thought | Establishing the ground for my arguments

A further reflexive engagement with my projects has revealed my overarching theme of identity more clearly and vividly than was apparent at the time of writing them. Reflecting on each of my projects with reference to this overarching theme of identity has brought to the fore three prominent motifs that constitute my understanding of identity: recognition, performativity, indeterminacy. I will summarise these briefly to show how my thinking has developed over the course of my projects, setting out the ground for the arguments that I am making in this thesis.

Recognition

Patterns of recognition and misrecognition are repetitive within each of my projects. Project 1 is heavy with references to success, achievement and fulfilment – mostly in terms of being in a rush to gain recognition as someone worthy of being promoted. My thinking about recognition is instrumentalised and individualised: my own success is of primary concern and I seek recognition through the appropriation of symbols of competence, expecting that my qualifications will be enough to become included in more and more powerful groups. Often, recognition appears through breakdowns involving misrecognition: in Project 2, the conversation about my remuneration gets completely side-tracked. My narratives for Projects 3 and 4 show how my colleagues and I become engaged in negotiations about who should be doing what in the face of embarrassing dramas that one or more of us have allowed to happen.

In retrospect, it is not surprising to me that the latter part of my career has been working for professional bodies who are in the recognition business, offering inclusion into certain membership groups based upon the application of occupational standards defined by the right mix of qualifications and experience. I have come to see my career history of relatively short-term assignments and my job move during the course of my DMan programme as a way of heightening a sense of recognition through a blend of affirmation by a new employer and a sense of loss from the one I'm leaving.

I came to a point in Project 3 when I felt that writing about the risk to identity might be too introspective and narcissistic, as a subjective inquiry focused entirely upon me. I noted a tendency to focus on my own identity and fulfilment at the expense of others. Reflecting now, I no longer see identity as a matter of focusing either on my identity or that of another. Instead, identity is constituted through the social process of recognition (Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995). So, it no longer makes sense to me to think of my identity as something that is separate to others, as if my identity exists as a 'given', waiting to be subjected to recognition and affirmation from other people. Inquiring into identity therefore becomes a matter of inquiring into the mutual intersubjective processes of

recognition, as we come to be recognised by others and by ourselves in recognising others at the same time. In Project 1, I applied Honneth's framework to describe the sense I had of stability of recognition in terms of Love and Rights, but that something was missing for me in the third realm, Solidarity (Honneth, 1995). Since Project 1, I felt increasingly uncomfortable with wielding Honneth's framework so instrumentally. I now consider that his most insightful contribution to my analysis is, after both Hegel (1991) and Mead (1934), to see recognition as a struggle: that is, a constant dialectic movement of intersubjective recognition and misrecognition, neither of which are given freely, but which emerge through a negotiation of self and other, of sameness and difference at the same time (Hancock & Tyler, 2001; Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995; Knights & Clarke, 2017). This conflictual and paradoxical process of recognition, where one's identity and inclusion are at stake, lies behind the emotional heat in my narratives and the difficulties that I had in reflecting and writing about them.

Finally, recognition is tightly interwoven with my other two motifs of performativity and indeterminacy. Take my Project 2 narrative, for example, when the Board and I enacted familiar and accepted rituals of impartiality in bringing the issue of my remuneration to the table. My attempted neutrality, compounded by reliance upon a dossier of objective salary benchmark data, meant that I became so detached from the grounds upon which the argument for a pay rise was constructed, that the people I was with could completely dismiss the conversation whilst I was in the room with them, leaving me feeling acutely disappointed, misrecognised and confused about what it all meant.

Performativity

As I proceeded with the synoptic summary of my projects, what began as an initial reference to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgic performativity in Project 1 grew in importance when I deepened my engagement with identity through my remaining projects. However, to say that performativity emerges as a theme does somewhat misrepresent the position that I am taking in this thesis. It is more appropriate to say that taking a performative perspective on my research opens up possibilities for deepening my inquiry into identity, as well as potentially constraining my inquiry at the same time.

I was initially interested in a dramaturgical interpretation of my narratives as a way of understanding more about the quality of interaction as performance in the theatrical sense, involving pretence, disguise and characterisations of particular expectations about the respective roles that we were portraying. In Projects 2 and 3 I became interested in the idea of emotional suppression as a way of exploring how practice is influenced by habitualised expectations to live up to an image of a competent and successful manager. However, taking a performative perspective offers more than the possibility of reaching conclusions about the extent to which an individual's performance is simply a theatrical presentation of a desired identity. Not least, it offers a way of understanding social processes of

recognition and conflict through and within which such performances come to be enacted (Goffman, 1986).

Erving Goffman's interest was in the nature of local social interaction, as he points out carefully in his own explanation of the limitations of his work, contrasting his attention on the "organisation of experience" to the perspectives of sociologists who take more of an interest in broader societal institutions and problems (Goffman, 1986, p.13). So, Goffman is inquiring into the very same intersubjective phenomena as Mead and Dewey as pragmatist philosophers, the same local interaction that constitutes the concept of self-organisation in complexity theory (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). Goffman raises a fundamental question: "what is it that's going on here?" (Goffman, 1986, p.8-10). This question brings to light the primary social framework (Goffman, 1986, p.21) contextualising my interpretation of the Board meeting narrative in Project 2 and the possibility of difference within the frameworks applied by my colleagues. For me, Goffman's description of the social order is very similar to 'habitus' or 'the game' (Bourdieu, 1977; Elias, 2000), describing a social group's "framework of frameworks" constituting "its belief system, its 'cosmology'" (Goffman, 1986, p.27). In my synoptic summary of Project 2, this perspective enabled me to reflect differently on some of the most tense and awkward moments of the Board meeting. Ashley's interruption completely derailed the performance that we were embroiled in, centred upon Raj as our invited guest. Such failures of performance, Goffman says, necessitate some form of reparation, covering up and saving of face, so that our sense of the social order can be restored, and our *commitment to the social order* reinforced (Goffman, 1967, 1986). In this respect, Goffman's perspective helped me to take a plural perspective on what happened. In my reflections, I realised that Ashley's disruption of the social order was as enabling as it was constraining and that he acted in a way that was risky to his own identity, requiring the support and reassurance of others, negotiated amidst the uncertainty of the Board meeting. At the same time, this illuminates how I tend to idealise the stability of the social order over its disruption, so that I can appear to be in control and capable of running an orderly organisation with as few incidents of breakdown as possible. This showed up in how I found myself, in the refuge of a backstage area, apologising and reassuring Raj and Gayle, improvising to restore the social order, to sustain the appearance of a professional Board meeting and my identity as a CEO in that scene (Goffman, 1959, 1986). This improvised reparation echoed through to my parting conversation with Ashley, where I felt the safest, easiest thing to do, in the heat of the moment, was to utter "I'm fine", to settle my sense of self in relation to Ashley and reinforce my commitment to the modified social order that constituted our understanding of what we were doing together (Goffman, 1986). "I'm fine" also had the effect of treating Ashley's inquiry not as an inquiry at all, but as a standard in our repertoire of farewell rituals. It was easier to part company than answer truthfully, which would mean digging

further into the painful effects of the experience of breakdown (Goffman, 1967, 1981). Goffman's perspective is helpful in drawing attention to how it is not just my identity at stake in such moments, but the identities of others, understood as a process of mutual recognition - those present and those absent - and our collective identity as a group to which we continue to negotiate a sense of inclusion and belonging (Elias & Scotson, 1965; Goffman, 1986; Honneth, 1995). In this respect, Goffman's perspective offers a way of understanding the contrast between the convivial setting of the restaurant conversation the night before the ritualised, formal setting of the Board meeting. On the one hand, including that description in my narrative serves as a sort of theatrical stage dressing to heighten the sense of stiffness, awkwardness and aggression of the Board meeting scene that follows. On the other, an analysis of the quality of the restaurant scene would provide further insights into how greetings, jokes, hints and innuendo all played into a similar sense of identity and social order for the Board being negotiated, remembered and rehearsed (Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1986).

Gond et al 2016 provide a wider perspective on performativity beyond Goffman's dramaturgic approach in their 2016 summary that showed an increase in the use of the term (both 'performativity' and 'performative') in management and organisation research since the late 1990s. Gond's colleague in this endeavour, Mark Learmonth, takes a linguistic perspective on performativity drawing upon John Austin and the Oxford-based 'ordinary language' school of philosophy, to argue that paying detailed attention to the everyday spoken word reveals how language can be both *constative*, describing the way things are, and *performative*, doing something, causing something to happen or to be brought into being (Gond et al, 2016; Learmonth, 2005). This means that in order to be performative, such words and phrases need to be identifiable as revealing the intention of the speaker and the context within which it is used: for example, phrases used to open a meeting, perform a marriage or launch a ship (Learmonth, 2005, p.446). For me, this relates to Mead's notion of significant symbols as gestures that call forth the same response in the gesturer as in the person to whom it is made (Mead, 1934).

When considered together with Mead's temporal understanding of the emergence of conversational gesture and response, I find the linguistic perspective helpful in deepening an appreciation of how words can do things. That is, to understand how speech, whilst clearly an act of the human body in itself, relates to action in effecting something to happen in relation to others. It is this combination of Austin's linguistic approach with Mead's temporal understanding of the emergence of conversational gesture and response that forms the foundations of Simpson et al's (2017) inquiry into *The Performativity of Leadership Talk* that I drew upon in Project 3. Their approach offers insights into how management practice arises performatively, as processes of inquiry through ordinary conversation.

Judith Butler develops her thesis on performativity drawing upon this linguistic perspective, arguing that performative speech "'works' to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized" (Butler 1995, p.157; Learmonth, 2005). For me, Butler emphasises the important influence of social norms in developing theory on gender as performatively constituted. Butler's writing on gender speaks to an embodied, stylised, repetitive performativity that is "neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance [as commonly thought of]" (Butler, 1993, p.95). Writing specifically about gender, Butler captures an important quality of performativity that I will rely upon to make my arguments about management identity. Shannon Sullivan expands upon Butler's work to introduce Dewey's notion of habit – a term not used in Butler's original works – in order to emphasise an understanding of performativity where cultural norms are deeply embedded and embodied, constituting who we are through what we do in our regular everyday action (Sullivan, 2000, p.31-32). This line of argument is, for me, an important development of Goffman's performativity, emphasising the habitual amongst the dramaturgical, and highlighting the enabling qualities of habitual performativity as well as the constraints. Here, I am applying Sullivan's and Butler's interpretations of performativity to the cultural norms of management, albeit their original application was to the issue of gender. In doing so, I acknowledge that I have not analysed my experiential narratives from the perspective of gender, which points to one of the possibilities for further research into my arguments beyond the confines of this thesis.

Indeterminacy

From a complex responsive processes perspective, social life is inherently indeterminate: uncertain, unpredictable and probabilistic (James, 2014; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). Having acknowledged as much, I will avoid an unnecessary theoretical diversion into a critique of determinism, for example, and focus instead upon how indeterminacy arises as a recurrent motif through the empirical material of my research projects. These projects reveal something of the indeterminacy of the social world: the history, continuity, and movement of the social processes through which my identity, as a subject amongst other subjects, comes to be continually shaped. My narratives describe breakdowns that are highly charged with emotion. I recall the intense feelings of anger I felt towards Kaye in my Project 3 narrative, blaming her entirely for how her conversation with Sheila backfired in a way that made me look incompetent. At that moment, I became completely absorbed – at Kaye's expense - in working out how I could recover face. As a little more time went by, I came to feel guilty about how I'd washed my hands of any responsibility for allowing her to be caught in such a tricky situation in the first place. This illustrates to me how we experience indeterminacy through our bodies, when shame, anger and disappointment are aroused as we feel ourselves slipping away from expectations of our desired

selves, our impulses stirred up by the disruption of habit (Aram, 2001; Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1895; Simpson & Marshall, 2010). Where these emotions become habitually associated with failure, our responses may include covering over or recovering from them as quickly as we can (Goffman, 1959; Vince & Gabriel, 2011). These phenomena are always encountered in relation to others: particular others with whom we're in conversation and imagined or remembered others with whom we're in silent conversation (Butler, 1993; Mead, 1934).

When I reflected once more upon Project 4 in light of Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition* and Goffman's *dramaturgy*, this helped me to reorient my thinking about how indeterminacy can be experienced in local interaction as a paradoxical quality of the processes that shape our identity (Honneth, 1995; Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1981, 1986). These social processes involve the simultaneous recognition and misrecognition of others and of our selves in others (Honneth, 1995, 2000). Identity arises in a particular context of time and space, formed within the power dynamics of the networks of interdependent relations that we find ourselves (Burkitt, 1999; Elias, 2001). So, identity is neither a given nor a state that exists outside of these figurations, nor isolated from our interactions within a Cartesian view of *mind* that is separate to our bodies (ibid.) Identity exists through a process of recognition and is therefore always in relation to – and contingent upon – others (Butler, 1993; Knights & Clarke, 2017). There can never be any guarantee that we will be recognised the way we want to be, nor that we will be able to grasp a precise, settled view of our identity. In my arguments I will build upon the way that this view stands in stark contrast to discourse based on individualism and rational choice that arouses the expectation that we can be who we want to be or that our identity is something defined by an 'authentic self' within our core.

For me, then, indeterminacy describes both the uncertain, probabilistic, complex and contingent nature of the social world and the emotional experience of struggling with recognition, power and meaning in the heat of our everyday conversations as interdependent subjects.

Exploring how suffering from indeterminacy relates to an ideal of neutrality

When Honneth (2000) talks of *suffering from indeterminacy*, I take this to mean his way of describing the phenomenon of experiencing a poor sense of self in relation to others; disappointment in events not living up to expectations; and an intense struggle to understand the relevance, importance and consequences of what is happening in a particular moment of interaction. Although *suffering* may seem like too strong a word when one considers other ways in which humans may come to suffer, it nevertheless speaks rather accurately to experience that can be both chronic (i.e. tending to recur over a period of time) and relational (i.e. experienced by and with others, and not in isolation).

Suffering from indeterminacy is related to a reflexive encounter with the idea that one's sense of self is slipping, unstable, dependent upon others rather than autonomous and controllable (Knights & Clarke, 2017). My narratives reveal how we can find ourselves struggling to take a position with others, fearful of the risk of revealing our views without being able to determine how others will respond; or unable to *find ourselves* amid the emotional heat of conflicting opinions between others within a group. My arguments build on the idea that managers may come to respond to such experiences by idealising the notion of remaining neutral, where their position is unclear or undeclared to others, and that this can arise habitually in response to emotions of shame and disappointment. Very simply, when we feel that our competence and success are at stake, it may feel safest to retreat to remain neutral – to 'stay out of things' or leave it to others to decide what to. But I will argue emphatically that it is neither possible to take an entirely neutral position, nor to do so entirely as a matter of choice. Rather, we may have a degree of choice about how to respond, enabled and constrained by our habits and the social context within which we find ourselves in relation to others.

Organisations are rich with an asymmetry of power relations. Entwined with assumptions of individualism and rational choice in the dominant managerial discourse, this affords managers a special privilege of acting *as if* they are neutral or impartial in particular situations. Allowing oneself, as a manager, to escape to a mythical position of neutrality means that the stakes become raised for others. I describe this as 'mythical', since there is no way of standing outside of what is going on, so acting *as if* we are neutral is performative: a responsive gesture that calls out a responsive gesture in others in the ongoing flow of conversational interaction (Mead, 1934). Attempting to withdraw from the ordinary politics of organisational life in this way shows how we can come to instrumentalise relationships with other people, seeing them as a means of securing our own claims to identity. So, one of the consequences of a struggle with indeterminacy is to fail to stay in relation to others, becoming lost in ourselves, or in the other (Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995). I felt that I experienced both of these in my "lead balloon" conversation with Janine, at one moment becoming completely absorbed in saving face for myself, and in the next, losing all sense of my own self as I struggled to make sense of how Janine's position was moving in relation to Meg's and the rest of the management team. This felt like a moment of faltering performance, of hesitation and inaction. I found myself momentarily unable to respond, in a thoroughly embodied sense: silently struggling with what to say next, caught up with feelings of disappointment (why were we, yet again, clashing over something so trivial?); defensiveness (this isn't my fault, it was a random prize draw, as we'd agreed!); confusion (what does she mean, what does she want me to do?); shame (how does this make me appear?); and a melee of other feelings contending for attention in a fleeting moment. As I subsequently began to reflect and try to make better sense of the encounter, this loss of meaning in the heat of the moment

began to escalate, to combine with memories of other similar moments, manifesting into a broader struggle with the meaning of my work over a longer period of time - a sense that what I was doing had little purpose or importance; that my reputation as a leader kept getting dogged by trivial problems, leaving me with a sense of failure, feeling disappointed and unfulfilled.

The consequences of suffering from indeterminacy for meaning and a sense of self

Over time, a relentless search for fulfilment and meaning, and a preoccupation with improvement towards an intangible destination, can become patterned as consequences of suffering from indeterminacy. This is a prominent theme within my first project, where I describe my career as one where I have been seeking a sense of achievement, of wanting to reach 'the top' but being disappointed when I 'got there'; never, in fact, feeling that I have ever got 'there'; or even that there is a 'there' to get to. I described my work assignments as feeling transitory, as means for progressing towards some future goal, my career peppered with a preoccupation with continuous improvement, self-development and reinvention. Again, the way that I describe these phenomena reveal the individualised way that I have come to make sense of my experience, centred upon *my* progression, success and fulfilment as an isolated individual. As Charles Taylor, Peter Marris and others have identified, these sorts of sentiments show up as patterns in broader society as a tendency towards individualism, instrumental rationalism, and withdrawal from political life (Taylor, 1991; Marris, 1996).

Drawing on Kenneth Gergen's social constructionist perspective, Burkitt (1999) describes how contemporary social and organisational dynamics come to rely upon the idea of the flexible and adaptable person under continuous development in order to function in a social order that is preoccupied with constant growth and change:

Under postmodern conditions persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questionings, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The center [sic] fails to hold. (Gergen, 1991, p.6-7)

This idea relates to the ideology of the autonomous individual in the systems discourse, and indeed as a broader societal malaise that comes at the cost of a sense of purpose and connection to others, of belonging to a community (Brinkmann, 2017; Marris, 1996; Rosa, 2013, 2019; Taylor, 1991). In this respect, the paradoxical quality of identity as a continual, iterative and transformational process of recognition collapses as one ceases to stay in relation to one's self, by becoming preoccupied with attaining a fixed idea of a true self and losing a sense of relation to other people (Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995). Suffering from indeterminacy then arises paradoxically as a continued breakdown of

habitualised expectations to control or resolve the processual dialectic of identity (Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995). The systemic management discourse has a profound influence on managers who idealise a sense of identity that is individually defined, rendering our sense of self as an improvement project in isolation and competition to others. So, pursuing an idealised identity becomes like chasing a mirage, through which we may experience a continual lack of meaning, fulfilment and achievement. As social arenas, organisations are replete with indeterminacy. Attempting to take a neutral position does not resolve indeterminacy but may in fact contribute further to the uncertainty of the process of mutual recognition through which our senses of identity are continually formed and performed.

My Arguments

I have summarised my projects in the light of my theme of identity and reflected critically on the movement in my thinking through the motifs of recognition, performativity and indeterminacy. These motifs provide the ground on which I state four arguments that I will now elaborate upon with reference to the empirical evidence from the research projects.

1. Management practice involves a performative enactment of idealised identity influenced by assumptions in the systemic management discourse

In Projects 1 and 4, I refer extensively to how I have been profoundly influenced by management thinking that has its origins in theories that use cybernetic systems as metaphors for thinking about what organisations are and how they work (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Luoma, 2007, 2011; Morel & Ramanujam, 1999; Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Zhichang, 2007). The systems ideology extends even to the more modern organisation theories including those taking Complex Adaptive Systems as their analogical basis (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). This style of thinking, based upon formative teleology (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000), presents implications for understanding what we are doing when we are working in concert with other people including largely tacit assumptions about how managers control others' work towards achieving desired goals (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey, 2012; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Townley, 2008). Two of the central assumptions that feature in this perspective, surfaced through critical inquiry in Project 1, are that organisations are bounded wholes and comprise autonomous individuals as component parts (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.43). Here, organisations operate like systems encountering patterns of equilibrium and change, and it is a primary role of managers to apply rational choice to how the system is designed and controlled (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey, 2012; Stacey & Mowles, 2016).

These assumptions are prevalent features of the mainstream contemporary management discourse, which is not limited to a body of academic literature but descriptive of the dominant way of thinking and speaking about organisations in modern western society (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Luoma, 2007, 2011; Morel & Ramanujam, 1999; Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Zhichang, 2007). Management discourse affects practice, whilst being continually affected by practice at the same time (Hall, 1997; Mautner & Learmonth, 2019; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Townley, 2008).

Drawing on Townley (2008), Hall (1997) and Foucault (1977), my argument is that this progressive societal patterning towards individualised and rationalised ways of thinking has a disciplining effect on managers as subjects of a discourse that is founded upon assumptions of human autonomy and

choice. Foucault regards discourse as a “system of representation” (Hall, 1997, p.72) where he considers the application of knowledge as a form of power that presents a “regime of truth” (Foucault 1980, p.131). This has a disciplining effect upon the body, which becomes “a sort of surface on which different regimes of power/knowledge write their meanings and effects” (Hall, 1997, p.78).

From a thoroughly social perspective on emotions, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild considers how feelings come to be “commercialized” in dramaturgical performance of duties to the extent that a successful performance is intrinsic to a sense of satisfaction in one’s work (Hochschild, 1983, p.136). Therefore, assumptions of autonomy and choice become embodied, enabling and constraining the way that managers think, speak, carry themselves, dress, and so on (Burkitt, 1999; Foucault, 1980, Goffman, 1981; Hochschild, 1983). These bodily dispositions engrain our communicative interaction through the social process of gesture and response (Mead, 1934). Our capacity as humans to anticipate and respond to ourselves as we do to other people forms the basis of our self-consciousness through which our sense of identity arises (Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995; Mead, 1934). The patterning of our communicative interaction forms our sense of self, which is a socially constituted self, forged within the power dynamics of inclusion-exclusion that texture the ‘we’ identity of the groups, organisations, communities to which we belong (Elias, 2001; Elias & Scotson, 1965). As Ian Burkitt argues in *Bodies of Thought*, the idea of interaction as part of a group has changed significantly in the modern era, where the impact of technology has meant that “social relations become fragmented, broken up by the media of modernity and reconstituted across global vistas of space and time” (Burkitt, 1999, p.138). As such, “the mirror through which individuals identify themselves is no longer that of a purely local community, rather a global one where humanity as a whole has become a ‘We’ against which personal identity as an ‘I’ is constituted [Elias, 1991a; Giddens, 1991]” (Burkitt, 1999, p.138). Drawing on this, my argument is that the dominance of the systemic discourse, perpetuated through modern media technologies, presents a ‘We’ identity for managers to be in control, autonomous and rational, against which their ‘I’ identity is formed (Burkitt, 1999; Mead, 1934; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Townley, 2008). As such, identity from my perspective as an individual manager is entwined with an idealised ‘we’ identity for the organisation, where we come expect to feel harmonious, positive and within reach of our goals. My narratives in Projects 2, 3 and 4 describe instances where those feelings are disrupted by tension, conflict and failure, putting our individual and collective senses of identity at stake.

Contrary to the Cartesian dualism that splits the idea of *mind* from that of *body*, the pragmatist philosophical view is that identity arises through a process of habitual bodily action - action that comprises learned dispositions that are socially situated and constituted (Burkitt, 1999; Mead, 1934). Butler draws on Foucault to argue that this habitual performativity is forged from the disciplinary

power of (gender) discourse, and this is further developed by Burkitt to argue that performative bodies are “producers” of discourse, as well as its product (Burkitt, 1999, p.90-91; Butler, 1993). Drawing on these ideas, I argue that management practice involves a performative enactment of an idealised identity that arises from and contributes to the idealisations of autonomy and choice in the systemic management discourse. In Project 4, I describe how we became preoccupied with conflicting ideas of what we *should* be doing as a management team, and what I *should* be doing as CEO. My argument is that difficulties with the question of *should* arose when we struggled to make sense of what we were confronted with against these idealisations. It is in this sense that Goffman’s dramaturgy offers a conception of the social order that, similarly to Bourdieu’s *habitus*, describes how performative practice is oriented by frameworks that structure experience and organise the way that we make sense of what we are doing (Goffman, 1986).

2. This idealised identity can break down in the performative flow of practice, leading to shame and disappointment

The first part of my argument here is that managers experience breakdowns as inherent and inevitable qualities of the flow of everyday practice. I understand breakdowns to be instances in our experience, as narrated in my research projects, when what happens clashes with what we assume and expect is going to happen, such that our habitual ways of thinking about the world become vividly illuminated (Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1938). We feel, emotionally, our bodies organically adjusting to the disruption of habit, highlighting how our emotions are inherent to the way that we come to experience the world (Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1938). For Dewey, breakdowns are vital for learning and reflexivity, for if everything accorded with our expectations then learning would be unnecessary and impossible (Dewey, 1938). In illuminating *habit*, breakdowns therefore call our attention to the *habitus* of the group in question (Bourdieu, 1977; Elias, 2000). Our identity is radically interwoven with the dynamics of group inclusion and exclusion, so breakdowns call power and identity into question as thematic qualities of our habitual ways of acting and sense-making as participants in groups (Elias, 2000, 2001; Elias & Scotson, 1965).

One of the ways that Goffman views breakdowns is as failed performances involving a loss of face (Goffman, 1967). I understand ‘face’ to describe the expressive portrayal of our claim to (but not guarantee of) identity in interaction. Goffman articulates this as “the positive social value” one has established by how others regard our position on a particular situation, which reveals our attitude towards the group’s participants, including ourselves. For me, Goffman’s perspective amplifies Mead’s pragmatist view of the self as taking the attitude of the generalised other (Mead, 1934) and deepens the paradoxical perspective of the individual as thoroughly social (Foulkes, 1948; Mead, 1934). For

Goffman, social interaction is where our collective commitment to the social order is dramatized through expressive respect of one another's face. So, breakdowns in the regular flow of interaction threaten a loss of face, putting at stake our claims to identity and highlighting the fragile nature of the social order organising our experience (Goffman, 1967, 1986).

Drawing upon my earlier reading of Honneth, identity becomes more clearly animated as a continuous struggle for recognition: a dialectic movement of intersubjective recognition and misrecognition that from time to time becomes amplified through breakdowns (Dewey, 1938; Goffman, 1986; Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995). In Project 2, when Ashley halted Raj's presentation and dismissed us both from the room, this clashed with the group's habitual expectations of what would happen, stirring up questions about what to do next, illuminating the shifting power dynamics between people in the room and threatening a loss of face for everyone present. Exclusion from the group was ritually played out as we left for refuge in the corridor. The conversations that ensued became dominated by a struggle for inclusion, saving of face and sense-making in the light of the social ground rules being torn asunder. I thus argue that breakdowns in the performative flow of management practice are breakdowns of identity, involving a dramaturgical shift in how we are perceived, with potential consequences for loss of face and the disruption of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Goffman, 1967; 1986).

In my thematic summary, I concluded, drawing on Honneth (1995), Hegel (1991) and Mead (1934), that the conflictual struggle for recognition generates the emotional heat in my narratives and the difficulties that I had in writing about them. In my projects, I reflected on how shame can be a painful and inevitable quality of the shift in our sense of self that arises from transformational learning processes in breakdowns (Aram, 2001; Dewey, 1895, 1910; Elias, 2000; Mead, 1934; Vince & Gabriel, 2011). I understand Mead's (1934) notion of self-consciousness as the human capacity to take oneself as an object to oneself, so that shame arises as we experience ourselves transgressing social norms. Elias, similarly, describes shame as a conflict in one's attitude towards oneself where we recognise ourselves as inferior and at risk of losing the respect and inclusion of others – again, the 'self' being formed by a representation of social opinion (Elias, 2000, p.415). Elias also takes the perspective that shame arises in response to shifting power dynamics that threaten exclusion and thus threaten our claim to identity (Elias, 2000, 2001; Elias & Scotson, 1965).

Disappointment is widely associated with feelings of failure for events to live up to expectations and ideals. In their study oriented in the psychodynamic tradition, Clancy, Vince & Gabriel (2012) examine experiences of disappointment in organisations, acknowledging the broad diversity of scholarly perspectives that forms the literature on the subject and concluding that, with very few exceptions,

disappointment is generally viewed as a negative and dysfunctional, so breakdowns become perceived as problems to be avoided and navigated around, rather than as opportunities for learning (Clancy, Vince & Gabriel, 2012). Avoiding breakdowns then becomes important to management practice that is directed towards securing idealised claims to identity.

In Project 2, Raj lost face as his polished presentation was abruptly terminated by Ashley. Our frantic conversation in the corridor involved a covering-over of our anger and shame through apology, explanation, reassurance and dismissive humour. In Project 3, the affectual quality of our experience was not so rapidly covered over as we attempted to 'stay with' our anxiety and explore what was going on for us other than Sheila's visit to the office. At the time, this felt risky and before long the 'staying with' became too difficult to sustain. There was a palpable sense of relief when Kaye spoke up, offering to call Sheila to sort things out. This illustrates one of the limitations in dwelling on difficult emotional experiences and I shall return to this in my final argument.

These breakdowns involved a loss of face for some or all of us, accompanied by attempts to recover face, to restore a sense of the ground rules of the social order, and to re-negotiate what it means to be included in the group (Elias, 2000, 2001; Elias & Scotson, 1965; Goffman, 1967). For me, this emotional labour describes the affectual qualities of the struggle for recognition unfolding through ordinary conversation (Hochschild, 1983; Honneth, 1995). It is through everyday conversation that our *commitment* to the social order becomes dramatized as a moral act, through apology, civility, humour, forgiveness and self-effacement, all of which serve to establish ourselves as safe, trusted participants in the interaction (Goffman, 1967, 1986).

As managers, our *face* and the social order are profoundly influenced by idealisations of autonomy, control and choice. These are not merely projections of some inner world, but relational qualities that constitute and are constituted by the identities of others, within a framework of frameworks through which we experience the social order of what we are doing together in our organisations (Goffman, 1981, 1986; Honneth, 1995).

3. Breakdowns of identity can amplify a struggle for recognition and a search for meaning

Covering over emotions to restore face can be anticipatory, involving a pre-empting of the future and re-interpretation of the past at the same time. Drawing upon my earlier discussion, managers can struggle with the emotional consequences of indeterminacy, finding themselves ambivalent or silent, unable to find a position or more-or-less deliberately withholding their position from others. For me, these are entwined concepts from a social perspective, as one's position may only become clear in relation to the positions of others.

Goffman writes about how in interaction we “take a line” whether we intend to or not, informing how we become recognised by others and revealing our attitude towards the group (Goffman, 1967, p.5). Thus, I argue that it is not possible for a manager to *be* neutral, as *acting* impartially is taken up as a responsive gesture of participation towards the group (Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Stacey et al, 2000; Griffin, 2002; Elias, 1956, 2001). As such, there is no way of withdrawing to a position outside what is going on, only to remain indeterminate in how one is participating, where concealing our views or acting *as if* neutral are responsive gestures in the ongoing flow of conversation (Mead, 1934). In my view, we must also take into account the power dynamics that enable and constrain the degree of choice we have in finding and articulating a position – sometimes with a greater degree of choice and at other times rather caught up in indecision amidst the competing-colluding positions of others.

My argument is that managers can find themselves struggling to find a position in situations with a threat to identity, carrying a risk of failure, shame and exclusion (Elias, 2000; Griffin, 2002; Mead, 1938). In my Project 3 summary, I drew on Simpson & Marshall (2010) to suggest that neutral positioning can be way of avoiding guilt. I found myself caught up with indeterminacy in trying to find a position to resolve the problem of Sheila’s visit, ensnared between competing views that meant siding with one colleague over another. I avoided taking a position that might turn out to be problematic in the fulness of time.

Finding oneself acting neutrally relates to a pre-emptive covering over of shame and disappointment to defend an identity moulded by idealisations of autonomy, control and choice. Drawing on Elias, what is at stake is the potential for recognising oneself as inferior with regard to the qualities assumed of a successful manager, so the attitude one automatically adopts towards oneself becomes one that is defensive against the fear of failure, which can become habitualised in practice (Butler, 1993; Dewey, 1922; Elias, 2000). Since managers are not in control of events in the ways that they expect and are expected to be, taking a position amidst uncertainty presents a risk to an identity of success and competence; a threat of failure to live up to systemic ideals. Holding onto an ideal of neutrality amidst indeterminacy can be a way of ‘buying time’ for events to play out more clearly, for circumstances to become safer for one to re-engage. So, one power advantage afforded to a CEO arises from the privilege of acting as if one is neutral in the name of empowering and promoting the views of others. This can become habitually performative, influenced by systemic management thinking, where relationships with others become instrumentalised as means towards securing one’s claim to identity (Marris, 1996; Goffman, 1967; Honneth, 2000; Townley 2008).

Remaining indeterminate in the moral drama of life can be seen as obfuscating our position, our claim to identity and our commitment to the social order (Goffman, 1967, 1986). This raises the stakes for

other people, limiting their capacity to weigh up the consequences of finding and enacting their own position. Drawing on this idea, I contend that shame and disappointment may arise from being caught in indeterminacy, by acting ambivalently and not speaking up. Insofar as withholding our position is about the avoidance of guilt, it is also the avoidance of taking moral responsibility, since it ignores our rational capacity for taking into others values into account and acting with a degree of choice (Griffin, 2002; Mead, 1934). Feelings of regret, shame and disappointment in one's *self* arise from trying to avoid playing one's part in the moral drama of social life and attempting to escape the everyday politics that run "contrary to the narrative of managerial control" (Mowles, 2015, p.137).

But identity is contingent upon participation in everyday politics, arising only through recurring iteration of recognition and misrecognition in interaction with other people (Hegel, 1991; Honneth, 1995). Identity is always in relation to others, such that recognition means reconciliation with the sameness of the other, bringing to light one's own difference at the same time – referred to by Hegel as a constant dialectic movement of recurring negations (Hegel, 1991). In this sense identity is a paradoxical idea, always indeterminate, subject to reinforcement or denial by others in everyday interaction. "Identities only exist when they are interacting" (Knights & Clarke, 2017, p.341). For me, this means that identity is never fixed, never still enough to be grasped entirely before it slips from one's grasp, "a constantly retreating phantom, and the faster you chase it, the faster it runs ahead" (Watts, 1951, p. 56, in Knights & Clarke, 2017, p. 351).

As Judith Butler reads Hegel:

I am invariably transformed by the encounters I undergo; recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was. (Butler, 2005, p.27)

Butler is pointing out that recognition is a transformative process, rather than being an act that confirms identity as a static concept. So, identity is a paradoxical struggle in the living present to reconcile a conflicting sense of history with the indeterminacy of the future. For me, what Butler is saying is that *all* encounters contribute to the transformation of identity, not only those we might regard as special, involving emotionally charged breakdowns such as those I inquire into in my research projects. As such, every interaction – including private soliloquy – is potentially transformative, involving a conflictual dialectic of recognition and misrecognition (Brown, 2019; Butler, 1990, 1993; Hegel, 1991; Knights & Clarke, 2017; Mead, 1934). This reinforces the idea that there is no way of avoiding the shame and disappointment of breakdowns of identity in the performative flow of practice. Every interaction – even silent conversation – is political, with consequences that are uncertain.

In this respect, *suffering from indeterminacy* is something that people in organisations can find themselves caught up in, not a phenomenon affecting only managers struggling with recognition against a background of idealised assumptions. This suffering can involve an impoverished sense of meaning and self; the marginalisation of and withdrawal from ordinary, everyday politics; and for relationships to become instrumentalised towards one's own claims to identity.

4. Reflexive inquiry can be a way of enhancing our capacity to act amidst the indeterminacy of organisational life

My research provides insights into how it is possible to find ways of enriching a sense of identity and meaning within the cut and thrust of busy organisational life. This argument draws upon my experience of reflexive inquiry as a manager to describe a way of acting and of increasing our capacity to act by expanding the scope of what it becomes possible for groups to talk about.

Reflexive inquiry involves taking an “intellectual orientation, involving curiosity, openness and a willingness to rethink one's position” (Alvesson et al, 2017, p 15). This means critically reflecting on the habits and assumptions that influence the way we have become accustomed to thinking about our experience, regarding ourselves as both subject and object of the activity of reflection (Alvesson et al, 2017; Mowles, 2015; Stacey, 2014). Further clues to what reflexivity means in practice lie in the verbs that accompany some of its many explanations: *noticing*, *inquiring*, and *exploring*. These are active words, requiring that something be *done*, implying hard work and an encounter with conflict, disturbance and tension (Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1938). In everyday terms, reflexivity involves having conversations that attempt to stay with the emotional difficulties of breakdowns, rather than allowing ourselves to cover over them in the way that we might habitually do.

Reflecting on the quality of conversations between Projects 3 and 4 illuminates a movement in my experience of sustaining reflexive inquiry. In Project 3, staying with the problems around Sheila's visit proved too difficult for my colleagues and me. (Just as staying with the emotional heat when writing Project 2 became too difficult for me at that time). In that meeting, staying silent was about trying to escape from the heat of the conversation, unreflexively deferring responsibility for taking action on behalf of the group until events played out. It became too frustrating for us to continue to deviate from our already busy agenda, to continue dwelling on our anxiety, leading to a sense of relief when Kaye volunteered to telephone Sheila. So, staying with emotional heat when the spotlight of inquiry is turned on ourselves can be too difficult, especially if a group is simply not used to the provocation of reflexivity, where people may feel too exposed and vulnerable (Mowles, 2015, p.68).

In Project 4, our conversation in the booth remained explorative and inquiring in a way that felt more fluid, less contrived than the management team conversation in Project 3. Together with differences

in the topic of conversation, the participants and the setting, this says something about a movement in practice that relates to a greater capacity for us to tolerate the disturbance of identity, habit and the possible loss of face that the conversation presented. This may have been about greater skill and courage on my part as an individual manager, or on the part of the group, although I prefer a radically social interpretation that retains the paradoxical entanglement of both. As a group, we would have been unable to sustain reflexive inquiry without the willingness, conversational craft and tolerance of each individual. Conversely, as individuals, we would risk being excluded if any one of us had pressed ahead with provocative questions against the mood and tone of the group's conversation - our behaviour deemed too difficult and disruptive. I argue, then, a greater social capacity to act arises paradoxically as a social process of experimentation, reflexivity and risk-taking within an emergent social order that simultaneously shapes and is shaped by individual conversational gestures. The meaning and consequences of taking a risk with a particular gesture of inquiry are highly dependent upon the response it elicits. Our anticipation of future responses becomes fused with our habits and memories of the past in a living present within which our senses of identity and meaning are perpetually under construction. It is within this living present that the themes patterning the back and forth of conversation evolve and that our capacity for acting with a degree of choice and spontaneity can emerge (Griffin, 2002; Mead, 1934).

Other differences in the narratives relate to silences and hesitations – moments when vocal exchange became interrupted by silent conversation. In Project 4, these felt much less like moments of defensive avoidance and much more like the suspension of judgment in order to afford further reflective inquiry (Dewey, 1910, p.13). The distinction, for me, was that whilst both conversations felt like hard work, the latter involved a thorough working-through of the situation, which in concrete terms meant finding imaginative ways of speaking or gesturing to keep the conversation alive, rather than closing it down: how John and Janine exchanged a 'knowing glance' suggested to me that there was more that could be discussed and explored, for example. In the same way, my follow-up conversation with Meg moved on from changing the lunch guests to a searching discussion about the things that were bothering us about relationships in the management team and what we might do to address these.

There were differences, too, in the dramaturgic qualities of each conversation. In Project 4, I can see now that I adopted Meg's position in my conversation with Janine and John, almost playing the role of Meg in a rehearsal of potential next moves, testing out possible consequences for the action we might take. This contrasts with Project 3, when I saw the team's agitated questioning of Sheila's motives as threatening to me. Instead, I could have taken this up as an invitation to play the role of Sheila as a way of helping our understanding of her motives for sending the list of questions and an exploration of how we might respond. This reveals more of the performative nature of conversation

as patterns of words and gestures that enact something, that bring something into being, and that potentially change the course of the conversation itself (Gond et al, 2016; Learmonth, 2005; Simpson et al, 2017). In this way, conversation is action: the activity of human bodies directed towards each other. Conversation involves physical acts of speech comprising verbal utterances, physical gestures, facial expressions and silent contemplation. These are iterative bodily gestures and responses through which meanings and identities emerge as further patterning of local interaction (Griffin, 2002; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). From a complex responsive processes perspective, there is no action outside of local communicative interaction, so anything that might be thought of as action of a global nature – an organisation-wide strategy; a new understanding of Board-Management Team relations; a new seating plan for an awards lunch – arises only as a patterning of local interaction in the living present (ibid.)

Increasing our *capacity to act* relates also to what happens in conversation – both vocalised and silent. From my earlier arguments, we are always acting in one way or another even if that is by staying silent or attempting to withdraw to a neutral position. So, our capacity to act needs to be understood as arising within the temporally complex flow of conversational gesture and response, related to our capacity to apply greater detachment in order to reflect on our involvement (Elias, 1956; Mead, 1934). This means avoiding acting merely on the basis of habit, overcoming the inertia of acting in ways that we have become accustomed to doing, to engage reflexively with the practical situations in which we find ourselves and to endure the pain and unrest of doing so (Dewey, 1910). For Dewey, this means suspending judgment to afford further inquiry, so increasing our capacity to act is about nurturing practical judgment, developing a “feeling along for the way to be followed” (Dewey, 1910, p.105).

To me, this describes an interpretive ability to weigh up the competing goods within a particular situation, and to imagine ways of acting differently and their potential consequences, although these remain indeterminate. Acting differently therefore involves conflict and the potential adjustment of habit, stirring feelings such as fear, shame and disappointment as our bodies adjust in response (Brinkmann, 2013; Dewey, 1910). This can therefore be experienced as risky as we might feel misrecognised within the power dynamics of group inclusion-exclusion (Elias, 2000). But what might be both thought of and felt as an individual act of speech is always responsive, forming and being formed by the social order. Exercising practical judgment and experimenting with acting differently are paradoxically both individual and social at the same time. So, our capacity to act differently does not arise spontaneously through some mystical means, but as a processual movement in the conversational dynamics of a group’s members, simultaneously shaping the ways that participants act (Elias, 2001; Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1986; Simpson et al, 2017). This means bringing into view more of

what it is possible to say, to enact through the conversation that is shaping the evolving social order whilst being shaped by it at the same time.

Developing a capacity to act is, then, a radically social process involving courage and artful experimentation, exercising the limited degree of choice and spontaneity we have, within the power relations and social dynamics of interaction (Corlett et al, 2019; Shaw, 2002). Critically, this kind of experimentation involves both reflection and reflexivity to think about what happens at particular turning points in conversation and how that affects and is affected by our habits and assumptions; to notice what is emerging in the living present, to see possibilities opening up that might not have been evident before. So, my argument is that reflexive inquiry is a way of acting and of increasing our capacity to act. This is a thoroughly social process amidst the indeterminacy of organisational life.

Management practice that involves reflexive inquiry thus calls for skill, care, and gentle experimentation with groups to develop the capacity, over time, for foregrounding the ordinarily taken-for-granted characteristics of the social order in a way that is helpful rather than destructive, to ask Goffman's question, "what is it that's going on here"? (Goffman, 1986, p.8-10). Stacey suggests that such skill, whilst social in nature, can be attributed to an identity of competence as a manager.

The ability to take a reflexive stance is the basis of practical judgment, which is an understanding of group interaction – the expert manager is one who has developed the ability to notice more aspects of group dynamics than others do and a greater ability to make sense of those aspects. (Stacey, 2014, p.1)

For me, this is an important and necessary counter-narrative to the systemic discourse that promotes ideas of management expertise based upon autonomy and control. However, what is missing from Stacey's quote – although I believe my point to be consistent with his broader work and orientation – is a more social perspective: that the ability to take a reflexive stance is not just about the expert manager, but also about the social capacity of the group, as two sides of the same coin, as it were. Reflexive inquiry requires more than a courageous and skilful CEO, but the collective craft and stamina of the group to both invite and sustain open-ended inquiry.

Finally, I argue that the consequences of reflexive inquiry remain indeterminate. Management practice that involves reflexive inquiry remains problematic but is problematizing of itself. My argument is not therefore to prescribe better outcomes but to show, from the empirical evidence in my research projects, how management practice can evoke and illuminate vivid moments of experience to provide common points of reference for groups to find meaning and resonance with what they are engaged in, to take notice of how identities are emerging by exploring what is important, what is at stake.

Research Methodology

The research methods I have employed through my time on the DMan programme are informed by taking the perspective on organisations as complex responsive processes of human relating. As outlined in my introduction to this thesis, it is a perspective developed by Ralph Stacey and colleagues Doug Griffin and Patricia Shaw at the University of Hertfordshire and critically examined and developed by the Doctor of Management community over a number of years. Broadly located in the interpretive critical management tradition, it draws on complexity science, pragmatist philosophy, group analytics and process sociology. I will first present an outline of the specific methods that I employed before setting out the methodological grounding for these, with a reflexive account of why the DMan method is particularly relevant for my inquiry into identity. In doing so, I am aware that alternative perspectives may offer different insights into my experience and contribution to knowledge and practice: “every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” (Burke, 1965, p.49).

Research methods on the DMan programme

As will be evident from its structure, this thesis has been developed through a series of written research projects. Each has been developed iteratively, through a process of sharing, reflection and further inquiry as part of the DMan research community. In this way, the method is thoroughly social, consistent with the philosophical tradition underpinning the DMan, which enables one’s experience of the method itself to be critically examined at the same time as the empirical data that comprise the projects themselves.

Writing the research projects

Project 1 is an autobiographical account of my history, addressing the influences and assumptions that have come to form the way that I think and make sense of the world. Looking back on the process of writing Project 1 reminds me of the social nature of reflexive inquiry. I was challenged by revealing experiences that I had seen as private, hidden, unprocessed, to people who urged me to reveal even more, to imagine how other characters in my narratives might have experienced certain scenes, to rephrase my accounts to make them ‘thicker’, more vivid in detail (Geertz, 1973). Looking back, I can see that I was concerned with my performance as a narrator, both anticipating what might be important, interesting and relevant to my research and responding to how my Learning Set – *my audience* – appeared to receive my narratives. What I thought I knew to be *true* came under question, stirring up feelings of anger, exasperation and embarrassment. I found myself re-living conversations from the past in an attempt to make greater sense of them for myself and more plausible for my research colleagues. This experience was profoundly unsettling, calling into question the way in which I had been thinking about the history of my experience as something fixed, certain and indelible. In

retrospect, I see that my sense of identity was being opened up, shaken, through a critical examination of my history and how I represented it. The reiterative writing of Project 1 introduced me to the idea that what happened in the past could still be open for interpretation and re-construction and that subjecting my narratives to a process of critical social inquiry could help to reveal patterns in my habitual ways of thinking, acting and practising as a manager.

Projects 2 through 4 start with narratives that describe breakdowns in contemporary experience at work that presented me with particularly puzzling reflections on how my habitualised way of making sense of the world had been disrupted. These projects follow an abductive approach to inquiry through narrative autoethnography and critical reflexive analysis, which I will come on to describing in more detail in a moment. Thus, the projects develop iteratively through several stages, deepening the inquiry and developing the reflexive engagement with the account given. Over the course of each project and of the series of projects as a whole, this deepening of the line of inquiry develops the ground for articulating my arguments.

The synopsis represents another reflexive turn on my four research projects, which are presented as originally written and re-evaluated in retrospect. This means that each project becomes a source of empirical research material not only as a narrative and contemporaneous reflections but, as a series of projects that evidence of the movement in my way of thinking. This deepens the reflexive process by drawing attention to the shifting ways that I have come to make sense of my narratives and by enabling further critical inquiry with reference to overarching themes. As I have reported earlier in my thesis, the theme of identity, as motifs of recognition, performativity and indeterminacy became apparent only through this retrospective analysis of my earlier research work.

The DMan Community

Participation in the DMan as a research community is, therefore, an intrinsic part of the method employed in producing my thesis. My projects were submitted to my Learning Set, comprising three other researchers and my supervisor, for critical review, comment and discussion every six weeks through the course of the programme. Every quarter, the whole DMan community came together for a residential weekend meeting. These weekends comprised many informal opportunities for exchanging ideas, testing out interpretations of theory and reflexive conversations with researchers from all learning sets. The formal elements of the weekend comprised input from different theoretical perspectives that inform the DMan programme, and regular Community Meetings held as a Median Experiential Group in the group analytic tradition (Mowles, 2017, p. 8).

The only structure for these Community Meetings is a fixed start and finish time, so there is no agenda for what is discussed and no stated objectives or expected outcomes, albeit that some participants may have their own ideas for issues they want to discuss. No notes are taken, and, in my experience, it is common for meetings to feel unfinished, or that ‘things were just getting going’ when it became time to stop. The methodological purpose of Community Meetings is for the group itself to develop a sense of what becomes possible to be talked about, including the dynamics of inclusion-exclusion, what it means to join or leave, to participate or not, to take risks. For me, the meetings became a way of engaging reflexively with ideas about performativity, how it feels to recognise and become recognised, and how the meetings were qualitatively different to smaller group sessions or chance conversations over coffee. For me, the conversations that emerged sometimes involved discussing aspects of my research work, but were more often ways of taking intense notice of my experience as it was unfolding in the living present (Griffin, 2002; Mead, 1934) of the meeting itself, calling out resonance with experiences of working in organisations.

Sometimes I didn’t feel any connection with the conversation or the emotional responses of others in the meetings. At other times I felt intensely moved to speak, sometimes surprising myself with what I said. Often, I found myself struggling to find the right words to say and right moments to speak. Those felt like instances of negotiating my ongoing inclusion as a member of the Community. It was profoundly disturbing for me to notice my engrained habit of wanting to prepare a logical and fluent form of words before vocalising them. I noticed how that meant it became important for me to find the right time to speak, so that what I wanted to say would be a smooth segue in the conversation around me. Over the course of the DMan I found myself experimenting with that habit, deliberately allowing myself to speak when I felt moved to do so, without preparation. Doing so felt very risky, and I became increasingly aware of how my body tended to react – my breathing becoming shallow, my heart racing and my hands and voice trembling.

Whilst it was more often than not impossible to predict exactly what would be spoken about, some themes reappeared regularly, like loss or the difficulty with keeping up with the research work. Narratives of previous meetings and residentials came to be told and retold in a way that was reminiscent of campfire stories. These felt important to securing a sense of history for the community which, after all, is constantly changing as people join and leave the programme. I noticed, too, how the discourse at Community Meetings seemed to have a disciplining effect on the ways that people came to participate in the conversation. Early in the programme some aspects of discourse seemed taboo, like using spatial metaphors (e.g. “the outside world”) and terms that are particularly prominent in the systemic discourse (e.g. “culture”). But I experienced this tacit rule becoming more relaxed as my time on the programme went on. As such, the DMan community was ordinary and not

special, in the sense that what emerged from the participating in the meetings were highly recognisable experiences of politics, fear of exclusion, disciplining processes, negotiation of inclusion and status and many of the other taken-for-granted feelings of being part of a group that arise elsewhere in social and work organisations. What was special, in the sense that it was given extraordinary attention, was the degree of reflection upon these phenomena and the propensity of participants to talk about how they were experiencing them at the time. Thus, for me, the residential weekends, and Community Meetings in particular, were important reflexive processes of inquiry into the themes that were important to my research: processes of recognition, performativity and the way that discourse can come to have a disciplining effect on the body. What this means is acknowledging that the social process of reflexive inquiry was at the same time enabling and constraining to my work as a researcher on the DMan programme.

Literature review

In contrast to many other doctoral theses, my research follows an abductive approach, as I will come on to describe in more detail. This means that my literature review started with paying attention to particular concrete experiences, from which my research question emerged and continued to develop over each re-iteration of my projects and across my thesis as a whole. Hence, the specific literature I engaged with was informed by the iterative process of the research method, starting with a particular line of inquiry and broadening into a wider appreciation of the field. The precise formulation of my research question, overarching themes and arguments only became possible after a further reflexive turn in my synopsis. Thus, researching specific literature became a recurring exercise throughout my thesis as my research question developed and my inquiry deepened. In this way, the development of the field of literature, and the movement of scholastic references across my thesis as a whole forms part of the empirical material for reflexive engagement with my inquiry. It is more common, and therefore more regularly expected, that qualitative research projects start with reviewing the literature in order to identify a gap into which to make a contribution (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Saunders et al, 2003). However, the position I take, congruent with the methodology employed on the DMan programme over many years, has been to start with concrete problems within my experience of management practice, allowing the literature exploration to continually emerge and deepen as my inquiry unfolded. I establish the ground for doing so further in my section on *abductive research and indeterminacy*.

Interdisciplinary approach

My approach to reviewing and drawing upon relevant literature has involved critical engagement with authors who are oriented in different traditions, whose work employs methodologies that are not

necessarily consistent with each other. As I have introduced authors, I have paid attention to differences in thought style and the potential implications for my analyses and critique that flows from engaging with their work. I argue that this is a way of seeking a plurality of perspectives to help deepen an understanding of the complex phenomena that I am interested in, for which there may be multiple competing explanations. Methodologically, the basis of the abductive approach that I am following means engaging with a particular idea until it becomes more helpful to take up another perspective in order to deepen the inquiry. For me, this is not a necessarily sequential, linear approach but one that involves a dialectic movement of contradictory ideas. This is consistent with the pragmatist philosophical tradition, influenced by Hegel, which rejects the idea that there can be:

a point of view outside of the development of knowledge, what Dewey (1929) referred to as a spectator theory of knowledge, where there is a separation between the knower and the known. (Mowles, 2015, p. 30-31)

The pragmatist perspective that understands knowledge and identity to emerge through the social interaction of thinking subjects, thus calls for a plural, interdisciplinary approach to literature, where ideas may be brought together in both complementary and contrasting ways to deepen inquiry.

Methodology

Narrative autoethnography

In viewing organisations as the patterning of complex responsive processes of interaction, I am inquiring from the perspective that there is no organising blueprint that determines what is going on and that no-one (a CEO, a researcher, anyone) is able to step outside of what is happening in interaction with others, to a position of complete detachment. It is on those two principal grounds that this perspective differs fundamentally from the systemic discourse that I critique. The methodological implications are that management practice in organisations can only be understood by studying what arises in local interaction. Therefore, my narrative and reflective accounts of my experience of local interaction with my colleagues form the raw empirical data for my research.

Hence, I take an autoethnographic approach, with an emphasis on providing 'thick description' in narratives (Geertz, 1973) that are rich in context, bringing to life the affectual, embodied, paradoxical nature of encounters within ordinary organisational life. Writing narratives is an interpretative process: I am producing a subjective account, as a socially formed subject, and I am engaging with others in the iterative process of writing and sense-making in an effort to contribute to knowledge. This idea is aligned with the tradition of pragmatist philosophy, that there is nothing 'outside' of our patterns of interaction with each other that constitute our experience, no objective reality to be

studied or understood separately from that experience. When I write about my experiences of breakdowns and performative failures, I am taking up a position as ‘inquiring participant’ (Reason, 1988, in Stacey & Mowles, 2016 p.36), paying attention to the micro-interactions with other people, the temporally complex nature of the experience itself and the emergent patterning of collective experiences over time. The challenge in writing thick descriptions is to provide a reflexive account of the ordinary and often-overlooked aspects of my interactions as part of making explicitly visible the way that I was thinking about what was happening at the time, to write in a way that ‘shows’ rather than ‘tells’ others what is going on.

Developing plausibility with my research community is important to my claims of validity and generalisability, holding open possibilities for differences in interpretation and resonance with other researchers, “to make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders” (Ellis et al, 2011). My claim to generalisability lies not in providing an overarching theory that can be used to predict the future based on a universal truth, but in the emotional resonance that it invokes in the reader. My research is a deep inquiry into

felt experience of bodily interaction between people, and this interaction is patterned primarily as narratives of relating between self and other (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p. 9).

So, my epistemological stance is towards phronesis over theory (Thomas, 2010) by enabling an ongoing conversation about the nature of identity and meaning that arises within the messy complexity of organisational life. This means evoking emotional resonance with others who are able to recognise themselves within the highly context-dependent experiences that I describe (Anderson, 2006). Hence, narrative is an important methodological technique for inquiring into the patterns of interaction that form our experience, and the historical process of emergence of that experience rather than its causes (Stacey & Griffin, 2005; Thomas, 2010, p.580).

Subjectivity, identity and taking experience seriously

Writing reflexive autoethnographies of experience involves a rich description of the ways in which we encounter and come to know the world through our bodies – through emotional resonance in our patterns of relating and sense making (Burkitt, 1999; Wetherell, 2012). As a researcher, then, I am deeply embedded in - and unable to separate from – reflections on my lived bodily experience of interaction. As I have discussed through this thesis, my research is therefore entwined with the processual dialectic evolution of identity, which has the potential to be sustained and transformed at the same time by my interactions and my reflexive research into them. The process of taking

experience seriously therefore involves noticing, critically reflecting upon and giving a plausible account of the conflictual, emotional and performative ways I make sense of the world through bodily interactions with colleagues. In this respect, identity is both the subject of my research and fundamental to methodology.

Taking experience seriously as a methodology is therefore subjective. In stating as much, subjectivity is inextricable from intersubjectivity: my position is that individuals are social through and through (Foulkes, 1948; Stacey, 2001). What is individual and what is social are regarded as the singular and plural expressions of the same intersubjective phenomenon (Mead, 1934). I am a subject because of the social conditions that I have been *subjected* to. The descriptor 'subjective' tends to stand opposed to 'objective', with the common interpretation being that only what is objective can stand up to the rigors of rational scientific examination from a positivist epistemological stance. However, from a complex responsive processes perspective, complete detachment to an objective position is not possible, whereas subjectivity is understood as a paradox of detached involvement (Elias, 1987; Stacey et al, 2005; Stacey & Mowles, 2016).

As I have explored with my inquiry into identity, I come to a position on subjectivity that considers how we come to be formed by the disciplining effects of social discourse and have a degree of agentic choice at the same time. From this point of view, my research is not developed in my mind as an autonomous individual, but as a participative social process, through an ongoing conversation where knowledge evolves with a history and an indeterminate future (Stacey et al, 2000). This is an intersubjective process inseparable from dynamics of power (Elias, 1970; Foucault, 1980, 1982), identity (Hegel, 1991; Mead, 1934) and indeterminacy (Honneth, 2000).

Goffman's interest was in the nature of the concrete, specific details of local interaction between people (Goffman, 1986, p.13). So, narrative autoethnography, developed iteratively in a reflexive way, offers to lay bare, to illuminate and to draw insight from the micro-gestures, the internal dialogue and emotions that take place 'behind' the performative mask of everyday interaction in a way that might well be obscured or decontextualized by other research methods.

Critique of the DMan Methodology

Having established the methodological choices as valid and applicable to my inquiry into identity, I will offer a robust defence of these by exploring criticisms and alternatives, focusing upon three primary challenges: the use of single incidence cases; the employment of narrative method; and, specifically, the use of autoethnography.

Single incidence case study

Research based upon single cases can be challenged on the basis that the incidents in question are unique and idiosyncratic, making it difficult and inappropriate to form generalisable conclusions. As such, case study can sometimes be seen as inferior to other methods (Flyvbjerg, 2011), perhaps because its definition and application remain contested, lacking consistency and agreement amongst qualitative researchers (Schwandt & Gates, 2017; Yazan, 2015). However, Thomas argues that this may associated with an aim to produce general theory from an inductive approach than a flaw of case study methodology itself (Thomas, 2010, p. 576). Moreover, several scholars agree that,

*“Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied”
(Stake 2005, in Thomas, 2010, p 575; Stake 2000, in Schwandt & Gates, 2017, p.
609).*

I join Thomas and Stake to argue that single incidence cases pose the question, “what is this a case of?” (Schwandt & Gates, 2017, p. 591). To me, this points immediately toward the potential for deep inquiry into particular, concrete events to illuminate wider thematic patterns in social life. Single incidents are indeed contextually and temporally bound, but also serve as a way into the unfolding of human experience for others, across different contexts and a broader sweep of time. This claim is tested very robustly by the community approach to research on the DMan programme, which extends beyond merely accounting for why a particular incident may be important. In my experience, the significance of an event may become apparent to the narrator only after sharing what might initially be thought of as a mundane side-story with other scholars.

One might ask, therefore, why I didn’t apply alternative methods of inquiry into studying the cases I describe, such as the use of interviews. To do so would be to risk undermining the challenge of staying with the problem-led, abductive approach that I have argued for. Interview methods would rely upon applying a framework to data collection and analysis. This not only carries with it a risk of manipulating data into a predefined taxonomy, but also ignores my role as a “participating observer” (Alvesson, 2009). To me, and to other scholars, this is a particularly important aspect of my research into identity, as

*“Interviews may be sites where a performance of self is given, but this alone
is unlikely to give sufficient insight into how social dynamics proceed.” (Beech &
Broad, 2020, p. 12)*

Problems with narratives

However, research involving the writing of narratives can be criticised as lacking reliability as empirical evidence. A reader might challenge my narratives as portraying only one side of the story, or even ask whether they are entirely fictional.

Adopting, as I do, a perspective informed by pragmatist philosophy, I argue that all inquiries are subjective to an extent, even if this remains unacknowledged, since there is no way for researchers to stand outside of their human experience to adopt a “spectator theory of knowledge” (Dewey, 1929 in Mowles, 2015, p 31). As I have already argued, my narratives are never *just* mine but intersubjectively produced, refined and re-interpreted. What is subjective is inescapably social at the same time. My aim in providing a narrative is not simply to document what happened but to lay bare the abductive, iterative steps in explaining and making sense of particular concrete experiences, digging into assumptions, beliefs and habits to deal adequately, albeit provisionally, with problems arising through breakdowns (Brinkmann, 2013). So, narratives present not only a record of events but an account of the social process of narration itself - my perspectives, experiences, habits, culture, and assumptions as a researcher – and those of the DMan community - and how socialising processes have influenced the narrative choices, language, descriptions and analyses (Cunliffe, 2003, 2020).

Located within a long tradition of ethnomethodology as an approach to researching social life, “narrative inquiry is moving toward theoretical and methodological maturity” (Chase, 2017, p.951). What narratives offer over other qualitative methods are particularly significant advantages for inquiries into identity (Beech & Broad, 2020). These include being able to convey much more about the rich, complex and paradoxical qualities of experience, emphasising the immersion of the researcher in the local and temporal context of organisational life. My narratives provide original sources of data that are not claims to absolute truths about events but are provisional and contested interpretations. They serve a temporary purpose for the community for whom they are presented, as means of engaging with and problematising aspects of organisational life, offering a deeper understanding of what might otherwise remain hidden from view (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Challenges to autobiographical narrative methods

Having established the case for narrative inquiry, the question arises about the use of autobiography and autoethnography as method. First, I want to distinguish between these two concepts by drawing on Sara Delamont’s highly critical stance in which she declares the use of autoethnography “an abrogation of the honourable trade of the scholar” (Delamont, 2009, p. 61). Whilst Delamont sees

“autobiographical reflexivity” as vital to the progress of the ethnographic project, she rejects autoethnography as an “intellectual *cul de sac*” on the basis that it promotes an introspective account that is of interest only to the researcher (Delamont, 2009, p. 51). Whilst I agree with the distinction that Delamont is making, I also agree with the way that she acknowledges the complication in making this distinction in practice, since “reflexive writing, autobiographical and autoethnographic writing are often found together in the same texts” (Delamont, 2009, p. 58). For me, the argument here seems to rest on the degree of analytic quality to the writing that relies upon a reflexive ability to draw out insights about the social world and not just the idiosyncratic tendencies of the researcher. In that respect, she identifies the same critical scholarly requirements of autobiographical ethnography as Anderson (2006) and Atkinson (2006). In his *Rescuing Autoethnography*, the latter of these two scholars, Paul Atkinson, counters with an argument to suggest that all ethnography has, to a degree, long been infused with the identity of the ethnographer, so that it is wrong to elevate the reputation of ethnography with an implied scientific detachment over and above autoethnography (Atkinson, 2006, p. 400-401). For me, Atkinson emphasises the importance of reflexivity over the linguistic differentiation between autobiography and autoethnography. That said, this distinction is helpful to me, as a scholar, in rising to the challenge of presenting work in which, as an author, I do not remain the centre of all attention.

A reasonable challenge to this argument, then, would be that other ethnographic methods might have both mitigated against such “author-saturated” work (Geertz, 1973) and produced broadly similar results in terms of emergent themes and lines of inquiry. For example, “At-home” ethnography is regarded by Alvesson and others to be of value in identity research by producing empirical narratives as an “observing participant” (Alvesson, 2009). For me, the distinction arises in the degree to which the narratives take account of my rich, embodied emotional experience in moments of interaction and breakdown, which I regard as critical elements of my empirical evidence that I would not otherwise have access to, were I not engaged as a “participating observer” (Alvesson, 2009; Brown, 2020).

From a position of greater detachment through at-home ethnography, I might then have applied an analytical framework to these at-home accounts, perhaps using discourse analysis or symbolic interactionism as a lens to afford an interpretation of events consistent with Mead (1934, 1938) and Goffman (1959, 1967, 1981, 1986). Indeed, I have done this, in a way, by drawing on Mead and Goffman’s symbolic interactionism. This may well have led to similar insights, but I would argue that this approach sets up a dualism between the narrative and the frame of reference through which the narrative is analysed. This would represent a significant inconsistency with the arguments for paradox

and the pragmatist and sociological traditions within which I take my methodological position. In addition to this significant inconsistency, applying a lens of symbolic interactionism, for example, would undermine my arguments for interdisciplinarity as a vital ingredient in the abductive approach. For example, symbolic interactionism is often criticised for a myopia regarding macro social phenomena. So, by drawing on Foucault, Taylor, Elias and others, I have mitigated against this criticism. In addition, by taking a plurality of perspectives, I have been able to take account of the history of symbolic interactionism, drawing on Hegel, for example, to engage critically with Mead's and Goffman's ideas, rather than taking them somewhat for granted as part of an analytical framework.

In summary, the autoethnographic method offers significant advantages to an inquiry into identity in organisations (Beech & Broad, 2020; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012). By recounting the experience of my relational interactions with other people, my narratives embrace as fully as possible the nuanced emotional and embodied qualities of that experience in a way that might well be lost when writing entirely about other people:

"[Cassidy's 2002] vivid account of the experience of riding a horse at the gallops is qualitatively different from the account possible from a mere observer" (Atkinson, 2006)

Meanwhile, the potential shortcomings of autoethnography are mitigated by the rigorous scholarly collaboration that underpins the DMan programme, with its emphasis on reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2020, Parker et al, 2020) and group analytical methods as a way of ensuring that the scholarly value of the research work exceeds the extent to which "the ethnographer becomes more memorable than the ethnography" (Atkinson, 2006, p. 402).

Abductive research and indeterminacy

Writing narratives to open up an interpretive inquiry in relation with other researchers is an abductive approach in the pragmatic philosophical tradition. In my narratives, analyses and reflections, I attempt to stay with the rich, concrete details that constitute a plausible account of my experience. Other research methods, such as using interviews or observations, might lead too quickly into theoretical abstraction far away from that experience. This would close down opportunities for new insights to emerge when I engage critically with others in my interpretation and sense-making. Hence, my methodology is consistent with the idea of keeping open a provocative conversation of inquiry, which is what I claim in my fourth argument and my contribution to practice. This might mean arriving at

new questions about that experience and remaining open to further interpretation by others, to help develop our ability to find meaning. This is a different approach to drawing firm conclusions to prove a generally applicable theory with a high degree of certainty, or to arrive at a way of predicting what will happen in the future on the basis that it is likely to resemble the past. Whilst I establish my position, in terms of my arguments and my methodology, I remain radically open to challenge and re-interpretation even at the conclusion of my thesis.

Abduction is aligned with the pragmatist philosophical tradition, producing a contribution to knowledge, interpreted within the context of the practical experience being recounted. My epistemological orientation is towards "phronesis not theory" (Thomas, 2010). As I have discussed elsewhere, this means attempting to evoke emotional resonance in the reader, who might recognise within their own experience dramas similar to those that I have presented. This represents the nature of my contribution, rather than, say, a new theoretical model that might be wielded out of context (Anderson, 2006).

Specifically, I start with what I find troubling in my practice as a manager: breakdowns and failures that I find bewildering and that involve strong senses of disappointment, shame and anger. This attention to 'problematic situations' (Dewey, 1938) is a way towards finding a settled view on a particular situation whilst remaining open to the emergence of novel insights as our experience continues to unfold. An abductive methodology is therefore indeterminate in the sense each iteration of my projects, each re-statement of my arguments, and ultimately the contribution that I claim to make when my thesis is submitted, are both gesture and response at the same time, eliciting responses that cannot be predicted (Mead, 1934). In this respect, the position I adopt within this thesis is most appropriately viewed as temporary, as a good-enough-for-now iteration within a process of continual and relational sense-making.

Research as performative practice

My written projects are inherently performative, in that they attempt to convey not only a plausible enough account of experience for them to be taken seriously, but also to convey an emerging research argument that offers a contribution to knowledge. Ultimately, my contributions being accepted as valuable to both practice and a body of knowledge means my arguments being accepted by a wider and wider circle of scholars (Learning Set, DMan Community, the University, academics with similar interests and so on). This therefore means negotiating my inclusion as a member of those communities, which is a process of mutual recognition involving power relations and performativity. For example, my verbal presentation of Project 2 to the DMan community was obviously performative in a dramatic sense, which both enabled a richness of response from my colleagues about the themes

arising from my experience and constrained a more critical examination of the theoretical ground I was establishing in its interpretation. Less obviously, each new iteration of a research project has a performative aspect as a response to my colleagues' responses to the previous version. These are similarly dramaturgic in the sense that each response has the potential for recognition and misrecognition where a careful suggestion can be mistaken for hostility and each other's claims to identity and inclusion are put at risk. Ultimately (as far as the award of the Doctorate is concerned) the title *viva voce* itself suggests a dramaturgic performance of a discussion of my research, within a ritualised setting, laden with power dynamics, with the potential for both confirmation and transformation of the identity of all participants. In the spirit of the *Introduction* to Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1986), that last sentence is itself dramaturgically performative, appearing as it does in this thesis. As is the last one. And this one. And the next.

Reflexivity as a process of recognition involving indeterminacy and movement of thought

Methodologically, I place heavy emphasis on *reflexivity*, which I understand as the intersubjective practice of thinking critically about how I make sense of the world. Contemporary literature places a distinction between reflexivity and reflection and indeed, distinguishes between different orders of reflexivity (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2004). Reflexivity is a social process that comprises reflecting on our reflections, which also requires

the researcher to locate his or her ways of making sense of experience in the wider traditions of thought that have evolved in the history of human interaction, critically distinguishing between one tradition of thought and another. (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p.10).

In concrete terms, I experienced reflexivity in a number of ways, including vocalised conversations with others and imaginative silent conversations with my self – both of which I recognise as intersubjective social interactions in the pragmatist philosophical tradition. As I have written previously, critical reflexive thinking involved a process of drawing on a wider and wider set of perspectives: from my work colleagues, my Learning Set, the DMan Community and a broader community of scholars who are interested in the same phenomena that arise in my work. I found, with some conscious effort, that being precise and deliberate in my use of language can be a helpful process for developing my own understanding of what it is that I am trying to say and thus how my interpretation of situations may be different from that of other people. This is a vital part of critical reflexivity as a hermeneutic process, bringing into focus not only our use of language, but differences in cultural history and traditions that inform our perspectives, which tend to remain unnoticed and hidden from view (Gadamer, 1975). For me, reflexivity is also about inquiring into the nature of the

social interaction order, through dramaturgic interpretation of our habitual tendencies to act in concert with others (Goffman, 1967, 1986).

It is through this social process that differences in interpretation and ideology reveal themselves, providing insight into my own assumptions and beliefs and those of other people in the context of what we are engaged in together. This simultaneous encounter with both sameness and difference means that reflexivity involves processes of recognition, through which our identities are potentially sustained and transformed (Butler, 2005; Honneth, 1995; Stacey et al, 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016), calling out sometimes painful emotional responses (Aram, 2001; Corlett et al, 2019; Simpson & Marshall, 2010; Vince & Gabriel, 2011).

Hegel's phenomenological account of identity as reflexive self-consciousness (Hancock & Tyler, 2001; Hegel, 1991; Mowles 2015) provides further ground for understanding reflexivity and identity as phases of the same intersubjective process, consistent with how human selves are thoroughly social (Foulkes, 1948; Mead, 1934; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). Therefore, research methodology that follows an abductive approach and draws heavily upon reflexivity represents, for me, an encounter with indeterminacy.

Effective research is potentially transformative of identity, and is therefore bound to expose vulnerability and raise existential anxiety with all the emotion this brings with it. (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p.10)

I will explain the sense I make of this by briefly reflecting in concrete terms on my experience of the research process. When I look back at my synoptic summary of my research projects, assisted by feedback I received from my research colleagues, I notice that I rely heavily upon evidencing a movement of thinking over the course of the DMan. I regard this movement as evidence of reflexivity as a socially constituted process, as I have discussed above. This movement is evident in the highly critical way that I reflect retrospectively upon my earlier research projects. This increasingly critical position arises in part from a performative response to the very clear criteria for the award of DMan that establishes a requirement for such criticality and further reflexivity to be demonstrated in my thesis. For me, writing in a way that is critically reflexive of my earlier work feels thoroughly social in that I am either responding to comments that my research colleagues have written on the page, or – and increasingly so through the DMan - I find myself writing with imaginative anticipation of what my colleagues might say about my work when they come to read it. It is as though, in my imagination, my colleagues' voices are critiquing the very words I'm using to form my sentences as I am writing them.

As I was summarising my second project for my synopsis, I felt annoyed with myself for diverting my original analysis away from the emotional heat of my narrative. I remember thinking about how my colleagues had encouraged me not become diverted at the time of writing and re-iterating the project. They pointed to my tendency to rationalise what had arisen in my narratives in a way that closed down further inquiry. At the time, I felt that I was trying to listen very carefully to what they were saying, trying to respond differently to how I had become habitualised to do. The reflexive experience of feeling annoyed with myself in my synopsis was, I think, a response that was similar to what my colleagues were feeling about my original work. I wanted to show them that I understood and valued what they were telling me but felt unable to do so convincingly. Simply saying that I was open, that I was not being defensive, felt very defensive in itself and I felt under pressure to work out what it was I needed to do, so that I could simply get on with doing it. This felt incredibly unsettling at the time. I felt misrecognised at the same time as feeling that I was misrecognising them by not appearing to take their contributions seriously. All the time, my colleagues were experiencing their own struggles with their work and sense of belonging in the DMan community. So, the process of collectively deepening reflexivity in our work featured an emotional struggle with mutual (mis-)recognition, inclusion, conflict and indeterminacy about where our work was taking us. Along the way, two of my Learning Set colleagues withdrew from the programme and those of us who remained had to find a way of going on together amid feelings of regret, guilt, anger, loss and fear of being next. The potentially damaging consequences of the method to the identities of people who found themselves excluded from the DMan reflect the same transformational processes of identity for others who continue to graduation. In a way, disclosing my annoyance at my former self is a performative nod of respect to my colleagues, a gesture of gratitude and recognition laden with an appeal for forgiveness and acknowledgment that I'm no longer who I was at the time. So, my experience of the DMan method has been one where producing the work cannot be separated from a thoroughly destabilising sense of identity and a struggle to stay in relation with my research colleagues.

Ethics

My work on the DMan has developed my understanding of ethics as an emergent phenomenon, involving ongoing negotiations of what it means to be acting and writing ethically as my research evolves. This is different to thinking about ethics as a set of fixed, universal norms or values against which action as a researcher or manager can be judged. Douglas Griffin, one of the founders of the DMan programme, writes, in congruence with the pragmatist tradition:

Instead, one can think of ethics as the interpretation of action to be found in the action itself, in an on-going recognition of the meanings of actions that could not have been known in advance (Griffin, 2002, p.216)

Thus, what is ethical, the right thing to do, or 'good' is fundamentally indeterminate. I can, however, anticipate certain ethical considerations, as I have done through the University's ethical approval process. My research work involves writing first-person narratives about colleagues with whom I work. I have informed these people about my participation as a doctoral student on the DMan programme and my doctoral work has been carried out with their full support.

Informed by my research, I consider the primary ethical consideration is a risk to identity, where one or more people that I refer to may feel misrepresented and misrecognised in my thesis. I have therefore endeavoured to write thick descriptions, intending to give as full an account as possible of the experiences I describe with the aim of showing people in the best possible light, aware of their presence in the gallery of potential readers of my thesis. Where I see shortcomings in my original narratives, I have acknowledged these in reflections in my synopsis. The risk to my own identity can be seen in the same light, where my thesis carries the risk of a hostile response from someone that I have written about. The change in my employment circumstances at the time of concluding my thesis somewhat mitigates the risk to my job security as a result of a change to the power relations with my existing employer that arise as a result of responses to my thesis.

Discussions about ethics are a standard and regular part of my work within the DMan programme and within my Learning Set, so I have conducted my research within similar ethical principles as other researchers on the DMan. In my writing, I anonymise my narratives, to reduce (as far as is practicable) the ability for people to be identified by features such as names of organisations and locations. This does not undermine the integrity of my research method as the purpose of writing and reflecting on my narratives is to analyse my interactions with reference to management theory, rather than to study other people in detail. I am not trying to arrive at any objective truth about another person, but simply to relate my account of shared experiences in order to prompt reflection on my behalf.

In summary, my research ethics have evolved through continual negotiation of the meaning and consequences of my inquiries. What is ethical is indeterminate and highly contingent upon the particulars of a situation, informed by a history of social interaction. This is a process that will continue beyond the submission of my thesis and one that cannot be fully determined or resolved by reference to fixed ideas of the good.

Conclusion: limitations and contributions

Limitations of my research

I want to acknowledge some of the more apparent limitations to my research work. In doing so, I am inviting comments on limitations that are not so apparent and leaving open the capacity for other researchers to find alternative interpretations of my reflections and arguments.

The first is to acknowledge the limited consideration of gender in my research work. In drawing on Butler (1990, 1993) and Corlett et al (2019), I apply their positions and arguments in a way that reduces the potency of the contribution that their original work makes to issues of gender. Further research, including that which I intend to continue myself, should consider the extent to which critical attention to gender can elicit further insights into my experience and arguments.

Second, I acknowledge that I have paid scant attention in my inquiry to the distinction between emotion and affect. Throughout, I refer to both and consider both as socially constituted and experienced phenomena that arise in everyday interaction. However, a deeper analysis that accounts for both emotional and affectual interpretations may allow new insights to develop into how identity is negotiated in the living present of everyday performativity of management practice.

Contribution to knowledge

My thesis takes a radically social perspective on identity and is unique in intertwining performativity, indeterminacy and recognition in the particular context of my experience as a CEO of a UK management training institution. Emerging from this unique perspective is an original insight about neutrality and power, which I will position within the context of the current scholarly conversation about identity. Then, I shall expand upon how my contribution responds to four further challenges and calls-to-action in this contemporary literature.

Neutrality as privilege arising through power dynamics

My research includes an argument that asymmetry of power relations affords a CEO the advantage of acting neutrally and impartially as a way of avoiding breakdowns of identity. This, I argue, becomes an important quality of management practice that is performatively articulated in the name of empowering and promoting the views of others, as is prominent in the Servant Leadership literature, for example (Greenleaf, 1970; Iarocci, 2017; Jit et al, 2017; Sipe, 2009; Spears, 2010). Knights & Clarke consider how assumptions in management literature and in a broader span of history since the Enlightenment perpetuate “the myth that identity can be secured, for example, through climbing the hierarchies of fame and fortune represented by the inequalities of material and symbolic wealth” (Knights & Clarke, 2017, p.338). This “myth”, they argue, obscures how identity “is partly an effect of

exercises of power that constitute us, as this or that kind of subject (Foucault, 1982)” (ibid). Andrew Brown concurs, identifying a major theme in contemporary identity literature that “concerns how identities are enmeshed in relations of power, the micro-politics of identity formation” (Brown, 2019, p.14). My contribution arises from the particular attention I give to the way in which power becomes animated as indeterminacy of position as a consequence of the struggle for recognition in the everyday conversational flow of organisational life (Brown, 2019; Butler, 1993; Elias, 1970; Knights & Clarke, 2017; Mead, 1934; Shaw, 2002). The privilege of acting neutrally arises for a CEO through micro-politics of everyday – often mundane - interaction, in which identity and power dynamics are enmeshed.

My claims to further contributions to the contemporary conversation in identity scholarship

I shall now establish how my thesis makes original contributions to four of the primary themes that are apparent in very recent literature by scholars interested in identity in management and organisations:

- *The importance of reflexivity*
- *From an individual to a social perspective*
- *From discourse to action, embodiment and affect*
- *A dramaturgical invitation*

The first three of these are summarised by Andrew Brown (2020) in his conclusion to *The Oxford Handbook of Identities in Organizations*, whilst the fourth is taken directly from Beech & Broad (2020) whose paper appears within the same opus.

The importance of reflexivity

Brown’s review of a series of 2020 papers concludes with a call for management scholars to strive “towards a more reflexive identities literature” (Brown, 2020, p.10) on the basis that reflexive writing is “often confined largely to a vignette or two” (Brown, 2020, p.9). For Cunliffe reflexivity is critical for developing more complex, rich, pluralistic and potentially transformational explanations of organisations, so that more ethical and responsible management practice can be encouraged in mitigation to aspects of the dominant managerial discourse that feature in critiques of mainstream business school education (Cunliffe, 2020). I have previously described in depth how reflexivity is of central importance to my autoethnographic methodology (Atkinson, 2006; Delamont, 2009), as a basis for exploring performative breakdowns (Parker et al, 2020), enabling me to present original empirical material forged from the intersection of recognition, performativity and indeterminacy (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012, p.15).

From an individual to a social perspective

Brown notes a consensus amongst contemporary scholars to pay closer attention to the broader social relational context within which individual selves are studied (Brown, 2020, p.6). This is echoed, for example, by Simpson & Carroll in their 'shaking of the tree of identity research', calling for a re-contextualisation of the two main theoretical strands of identity scholarship: internal/personal and external/social identities (Simpson & Carroll, 2020). A similar conceptual dualism is identified by Winkler (2018), summarising that recent literature retains a distinction between internal self-identity and external social identity, a split defended and developed in Tony Watson's work, for example, which attempts to join the two concepts "with social-identities being seen as a link or bridge between socially available discourses and self-identities" (Watson, 2008, p.121). This dualism is still central to theoretical frameworks utilised by contemporary identity scholars, for example in Afshari et al's examination of the link between identification and organisational commitment (Afshari et al, 2019).

I take issue with this dualism in my thesis by adopting a thoroughly social view of self, drawing on Elias, Foulkes, Mead and other pragmatist scholars, to examine self as a concept that arises through ongoing processes of local interaction. It will be clear to the reader how my thesis not only considers the individual-social paradox of identity but addresses directly what Brown notes as rising scholarly injunctions "following Mead (1934) and Goffman (1990) to attend also to the micro-interactions with significant others through which identities are made" (Brown, 2020, p.6).

Pratt's (2020) review of patterns in recent identity research, including an estimation of its future trajectories, calls for consideration of the inherent complexity surrounding identity, by giving a richer account of identities in context, "identities-as and in-relationship" (ibid, p.8) and identity as a theme alongside other organisational issues, like politics and power, rather than a theme studied in isolation. My thesis makes a very clear contribution in this respect, combining an interdisciplinary perspective on identity as a relational process that is entwined, through my experience, with power, politics, emotion and indeterminacy, amongst other themes.

For Clarke & Knights, future research opportunities include bringing focus to collective action and collaboration, rather than celebrating individual identities (Clarke & Knights, 2020). They emphasise the importance of problematising attachment to a particular identity, arguing that it is self-defeating to cleave to a given identity as a means of gaining stability and security (ibid.). My contribution in this thesis is to follow the same critique of idealising identities forged from assumptions in the systemic managerial discourse, and to offer what I consider to be a more nuanced addition to Clarke & Knights metaphorical march into the killing fields of identity politics, by claiming that neutrality can be a harmful feature of ordinary, everyday conversational practice.

I thus make a contribution to understanding how one may come to suffer from indeterminacy (Honneth, 2000) as a breakdown of an idealised sense of identity that renders one caught in an indeterminate position, where one habitually, performatively seeks the sanctuary of neutrality. Attempting to withdraw from conflicts that bring the fragility of one's identity claims into view fails to avoid the inevitable transformation of identity that accompanies social participation. For me, *suffering* speaks also to a reflexive sense of slipping further away from a desired self, involving "a sense that something is fundamentally missing in us and from our lives" that perpetually "leads to necessarily doomed attempts to turn the individual into a definable object 'that knows who it is and what it wants'" (Driver, 2013, p.410 in Brown, 2019, p.10). By inquiring into the concrete micro-interactions of everyday experiences as a manager, I make a unique contribution that enables a more generalisable understanding of how the indeterminacy of organisational life is negotiated in everyday practice. Additionally, I contribute a critical exploration of how management practice may come to encompass reflexivity as a way of inquiring into indeterminacy, from within the particular context of a CEO working for a leadership and management association in the UK in the early twenty-first century.

From discourse to action, embodiment and affect

Although discursive approaches to identities are still common amongst contemporary scholars, there is a discernible swell of concern for an 'affective turn' in organization studies to reflect identities as performative, intersected by emotional feelings, and enabled and constrained by physicality of embodiment (Brown, 2020; Coupland & Spedale, 2020; Kenny, 2020; McInnes & Corlett, 2020; Petriglieri, 2020; Winkler, 2020; Ybema, 2020). In his slightly earlier review of literature on identity work in organisations, Ingo Winkler suggests that "future research should examine the role of emotions in problematizing identity" so that the relations and intersections between emotions, identity, power and sense-making can be better understood (Winkler, 2018, p. 120). Winkler shares my interest in the social processes in contemporary organisations, although he takes a social constructionist stance to examine how people create and experience their reality in organisations. Winkler's interest in identity also assumes a split between what is inside and outside an organisation; although I can reconcile this with my own thinking about how wider social discourse influences patterns of thought and action in organisational life. My research offers insights into the intersections that Brown and Winkler refer to, by providing thick descriptions of what emerges in everyday organisational experience of management practice within the particular context and point in history that I have described. To that extent, I contribute towards a deeper understanding of the processual relationship between emotion and identity, which goes beyond merely mentioning one concept whilst examining the other.

A dramaturgical invitation

Beech & Broad (2020) take a dramaturgical view of performativity by studying people whose occupational identity involves performing (classical and jazz musicians). They present this as a sort of extreme-case study that demonstrates how Goffman's metaphor may be of use to studying leadership and organisations. My thesis responds directly to this invitation by not only applying Goffman's dramaturgy, but enhancing this perspective with a fuller definition of performativity that includes the linguistic and habitual, and combining this with interdisciplinary insights into recognition and indeterminacy. My contribution represents exactly the kind of inquiry into the dynamics of identity that the authors call for (Beech & Broad, 2020, p12).

Through their review of this literature, Gond et al hope to "enhance the conditions for the emergence of a 'performative turn' in OMT [Organization and Management Theory]", to which I lend my voice. However, in doing so I acknowledge that I am potentially furthering the fragmentation of knowledge of performativity that is characteristic of this field (Gond et al, 2016). Meanwhile, Andrew Brown's (2017) review establishes five approaches (discursive, dramaturgical, symbolic, socio-cognitive and psychodynamic) but as far as I understand Brown's summary, this does not take into account the habitual perspective to performativity that I do in my thesis, drawing upon Judith Butler (Butler, 1990, 1993). However, I do not aim to add a sixth category to Brown's taxonomy as a way of arriving at a model for managers to use in practice. I do not think that this is Brown's intention either, but I want to be clear that, in line with my critique of the systemic management discourse, I take issue with presenting a categorised approach to identity without critically examining the underlying assumption that it is possible to choose rationally between the categories in practice.

Summarising, I make a clear and original contribution to knowledge related to neutrality as a privilege arising from dynamics of power; and I make further contributions to the contemporary scholarly conversation on identity by addressing the methodological importance of reflexivity, by taking a paradoxical perspective on identity as individual and social both at the same time, by thoroughly considering embodied and emotional qualities of emotion, and by taking up the invitation to adopt Goffman's dramaturgy, extending this to include a habitual interpretation of performativity.

Contribution to practice

I have made contributions to practice by taking a critical perspective on identity from my position as a senior executive in a UK-based management training institution. My narratives, analyses and arguments provide other managers in similar settings with a critical account of my experience upon which to develop reflexive insights into their practice. I draw upon both highly ritualised events, such as Board and management team meetings, as well as much more mundane, conversational episodes

to call attention to how practice is patterned by tacit, mutually dependent identity claims that feature in the drama of everyday organisational life. By exploring these dynamics, I contribute openings for other managers to think critically about management practice as performative and relational, and present the case for a more thoughtful and inquiring approach.

I will describe three primary contributions to practice that I claim can be resonant, that is to say both evocative and provocative, to managers and consultants in broader contexts.

Challenging neutrality as benevolent practice

I make a unique contribution with my critical stance on the purported benevolence of Servant Leadership, by considering how it shares common assumptions with more authoritative and dominant perspectives on management. Neutrality can arise as a defensive position derived from power dynamics in local interaction as we encounter and negotiate indeterminacy. I present a view of management practice as inherently political, raising the opportunity for managers to question the efficacy of rising above the daily politics of organisational life in order to attend to something more important.

My practice has shifted in subtle yet significant ways. As I began to grapple with this insight about neutrality and politics, I noticed myself experimenting with taking a position in conversations with my colleagues. This felt rather clumsy at times: my colleagues appeared to feel shut down, our conversations truncated by their deferential acceptance of my view. I think this came about as a lack of skill on my part, but also in response to the way in which my experimental approach challenged our sense of the social order. Over time, these conversations have come to feel more fluid, more balanced as my colleagues and I learn how to challenge and accommodate each other's views in ways that are starting to feel less threatening.

Before completing my thesis, I took the opportunity to talk about neutrality in a small online workshop with other senior managers from the sector who were interested in thinking about how management practice might be changing under the conditions of the global pandemic during much of 2020. I was surprised by just how engaging my colleagues seemed to find my ideas. One person responded by revealing just how frustrating she finds it when she can't get her manager to "just make a blooming decision"! Another challenged my insight by suggesting that sometimes staying out of things is exactly the right thing to do, especially if we want to encourage other people to step up to more senior leadership positions. There is no need here to recreate the way that the conversation emerged in response to these comments, only to remark that on this occasion at least, managers other than those

with me in the DMan community clearly found resonance with the idea of problematising neutrality and the assumed benevolence of adopting Servant Leadership as an ideal.

Staying with the emotional heat of breakdowns

From a performative perspective on management practice, I contribute to an understanding of breakdowns as moments that illuminate our taken-for-granted understanding of the organisational game of life and our role within it. Such moments offer fleeting opportunities for making new sense of what we are doing together, for understanding more about what is at stake for our sense of identity and inclusion. Whilst breakdowns cannot be avoided, we have a degree of choice about staying with an inquiry or covering over the emotional heat, both of which have consequences for how we go on together in a social order that is both sustained and transformed as a result.

I argue that it takes time for the conditions amongst a group of colleagues to evolve towards a greater tolerance for staying with breakdowns, and this claim won support recently in a chance interview I hosted with the CEO of another professional association who was approaching his retirement. Far from the detached, rationalised conversation I was expecting in defence of a long and successful career, I was taken aback at just how revealing this person chose to be when I began talking about my own experience of experimenting with revealing emotions and staying with painful moments as they arose with my team. In his most recent role, he admitted that he'd "walked out of the job" three times in his first three years and that the emotional burden of his responsibilities was the most under-acknowledged aspect of his CEO role. I asked him why he thought that our job descriptions bore no mention of such responsibilities, in favour of paragraphs about finance, governance and strategy. He responded by saying that it took him years to be able to "recognise and deal with [his team's] emotions properly because of the pressure of being pulled in so many different directions". He went on to describe how relieved he was that he'd persevered with his Deputy CEO colleague whom, at first, he had found extremely difficult, thanks to a pivotal, emotionally-charged moment in their relationship when "things came to a head". Ever since "clearing the air" a few years ago, they had become close and able to share some of the emotional burden that he described as the most difficult part of his work. This had taken years, he said, but it would have been "unthinkable, impossible" to have come to such an understanding right from the beginning. My conversation with this person was highly evocative of the kinds of experiences that I have had and have written about in my thesis. It is my contention that the surprisingly intimate and revealing nature of this conversation was influenced in part by the line I took in asking about the emotional quality of his experience as a CEO – no doubt enabled to a large degree by his impending retirement and the highly temporary nature of our relationship as peers.

Finding ways of becoming more reflexive, together

Finally, I make a contribution by arguing for everyday management practice to encompass reflexive inquiry. I do so by drawing upon evidence of shifts in my practice to provoke the reader into considering ways in which opportunities for reflexivity exist in what we are already doing. I make the case for a more reflexive and inquiring approach to management that takes a social perspective and encourages vulnerability, courage and experimentation. My research projects reflect ways in which I have noticed my practice changing over the time that I have spent on the DMan programme. The movement in my thinking, revealed through reflexive engagement with my work, shows how I have started to turn my gaze from ideas of change in the future to taking more notice of what is happening in the living present. This has shown up in my practice as a tendency towards taking a more reflexive approach to my conversations. This means, for example, experimenting with speaking more freely about the emotional quality of my interactions with my colleagues. Corlett et al (2019) identify a greater tolerance of emotion and heightened compassion for others as qualities relating to the capacity for vulnerability. In particular, they point to the value of vulnerability in addressing defensive managerial identity, opening up possibilities for learning (Corlett et al, 2019). I have become more aware of moments that reflect my experience of DMan Community Meetings, where I allow myself to be moved to speak without thorough rehearsal, noticing instances when I don't know what to do or say as moments of potential novelty and surprise. It feels risky to reveal more of myself in this way, heightening the potential for both recognition and misrecognition. But it will continue to be important for me to experiment with and respond to vulnerability in my practice as a way of further exploring the sense of disappointment and lack of fulfilment earlier in my career.

Taking up a voice in the public realm

During the process of completing my thesis, I have had several opportunities to speak about my findings and arguments to broader audiences of managers and consultants with an interest in management practice. One of the ways in which I have experienced a movement in practice has been to find myself moved to speak more publicly and more often about management and leadership. Sometimes, I have found myself being too critical of cherished management models, which can lead to responses where I feel rejected or misunderstood. In a recent job interview, I was challenged for my view that "strategic plans were a waste of time" – a view I had not intended to convey in what I hoped to be a pragmatic critique of tools, plans and performance measures. So, it has become important for me to compromise, to present ideas in a more nuanced terms, and to act with political sensitivity to the people I'm with and the context in which we're conversing. Taking experience seriously has meant working hard at becoming more adept, as well as more confident, at contributing

ideas on management and organisations to people who are interested in thinking critically about practice. For me, the disciplined rigour of academic research cannot be separated from the conversational exchange of ideas and arguments with other scholars and practitioners. I have experienced my research work as a thoroughly social process of inquiry that has been fundamental to my interest in identity. I am planning to put together at least one peer-reviewed article based upon my thesis with the aim of getting it published in a management and organisation studies journal. For me, this will invite a wider community of scholars into conversation and test further my claims of a resonant and insightful contribution to practice. So, too, will taking up further invitations to speak at conferences, where the idea of resonance can be immediately and tangibly perceived.

Practical judgment and taking responsibility seriously

In contributing to practice, I offer no guarantees that a more inquiring and relational perspective on management practice will lead to better outcomes. Based upon evidence within my own experience, I claim that reflexivity can broaden our capacity to act, but amidst the indeterminacy of social life, prescriptions can only take us so far and we must rely on evolving practical judgment in the moment of interaction. The consequences for practice are that this brings a new perspective to our responsibilities to take others' values and views into account alongside our own. This may be a difficult burden to bear in practice and might mean we find ourselves unable to go on together amidst irreconcilable differences. Rather than assuming a high degree of detached rational choice, acting ethically then becomes about taking this responsibility for each other seriously.

Meanwhile, I have taken the decision to leave my role as CEO of an institution whose work as a thought collective (Fleck, 1979) is thoroughly rooted in the dominant management paradigm. As such, my practice and the context within which my practice is enacted are changing significantly. Congruent with the pragmatist ideas in my thesis, my contribution to practice continues as process extending to the ongoing conversation in the organisation that I'm no longer a part of, as well as the ones that I'm yet to join.

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