Human Relations

Relational leadership

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What is This?

Relational leadership

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Abstract

This article aims to extend contemporary work on relational leadership theory by conceptualizing leadership as embedded in the everyday relationally-responsive dialogical practices of leaders. Relational leadership requires a way of engaging with the world in which the leader holds herself/himself as always in relation with, and therefore morally accountable to others; recognizes the inherently polyphonic and heteroglossic nature of life; and engages in relational dialogue. This way of theorizing leadership also has practical implications in helping sensitize leaders to the importance of their relationships and to features of conversations and everyday mundane occurrences that can reveal new possibilities for morally-responsible leadership. We develop and illustrate the notion of relational leadership by drawing on the work of Bakhtin and Ricoeur, and on an empirical study of Federal Security Directors.

The origin of the story

Researcher:	What are your thoughts and feelings about leading, managing and everything in TSA?
FSD:	The best of worlds and the worst of worlds. I mean, you know, it is a great position to have. It is a hands-on position. If you think you are going to sit in your office and just work the phones or work paper and the computer all day, you will not be successful. It takes probably every facet of leadership that I ever been taught throughout my career.

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> It is self-defined . . . I think that every FSD kind of became a creature of his own environment and realized right away what he had to do to survive. How he had to manage to survive – at least the successful ones. The ones who have not been successful, and there have been several of those, are the ones that came in with their own management style that they thought would work in any environment. They found that it did not. The aviation environment is a very, very unique community and a very close community, a very protective community. (Excerpts from a research conversation with Federal Security Director [FSD3])

The genesis of our study began while Matthew worked at the Transportation Security Authority (TSA), which had been established by the US government after 9/11 to have overall responsibility for the US transportation security system. We realized that this provided an excellent opportunity to study leadership under emerging circumstances. The entirely new position of Federal Security Director (FSD) was created and given responsibility for setting up coordinated security services at US airports. Many FSDs arrived at their first day on the job with a week's training and no staff, no formal organization structure, no systems or procedures, no strategic plan, no equipment, and no office:

> The FSDs got a week or two of orientation in headquarters and they were thrown out to these airports with basically a cell phone and maybe living out of the trunk of their car in a hotel. (FSD5)

Few FSDs had previously worked within the aviation industry and found themselves creating a new organization and a new leadership role within already-existing airport organizations. They had to establish relationships with many people within and outside the airport: airport directors, airport retailers, carriers, the Governor's Office, the Offices of Counter Terrorism and Homeland Security, local police agencies, the FBI, the Secret Service, City Hall, state and city transportation services, the media, and so on.

> And we virtually have no intelligence for the first year whatsoever. So you were just basing it on your personal contacts that you had, and the staff that you hired and their personal contacts. We would literally meet every morning and talk about what did we hear, you know. You talk about rumor and innuendo and everything else, but that was all we had to go on. We made decisions based on that type of information. Now we are a little more sophisticated . . . (FSD3)

At the new TSA Headquarters in Washington, employees with no prior field experience in the industry were creating policies, directives and regulations for circumstances different to any faced before – policies that did not necessarily make sense to FSDs working in the field who were dealing with ambiguous, evolving and stressful situations. They had to balance an absence of 'structure' and 'systems' with TSA regulatory oversight, an absence of routine security practices and interactions with already-established practices within airport and other agencies. A number of FSDs commented:

In April I knew that by November 19th I had to put up an organization that would screen 50,000 passengers a day. (FSD5)

They [Washington] tried to overwhelm us with paper, most of which we could not read or fully understand, nor did it not have any connection to reality. (FSD1)

We do not know that we have a problem right now – until we have a problem. Then we are trying to react to that problem and create a support system. (FSD3)

They found themselves dealing with the 'mundane' reality (Garfinkel, 1984 [1967]) of inventing the nation's airport security system and themselves as leaders in an elevated terrorist threat situation.

They were thrown into situations in which they didn't know they had problems: circumstances that required 'every facet of leadership' and a high degree of adaptability (FSD3). This need to deal with increasingly complex, uncertain and unpredictable situations is not unique to FSDs, but is also shared by leaders of other organizations. Yet many leadership theories and self-assessment tools attempt to capture a simplified and coherent version of a world and position the leader as a discrete individual who can change situations by applying leadership techniques, principles or strategies. While such theories may offer a way of reflecting on practice, they do not necessarily help leaders to grapple with the complexities *within experience*.

So how do leaders cope with these circumstances? How does one become a leader? How do leaders create and lead organizations in a new, uncertain and already-established complex and regulated environment? These questions drove our initial 3-year study of US Federal Security Directors.

Additionally, at the same time we began our research, Ghoshal's (2005) claim that the business schools focus on propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories that 'actively freed their [management] students from any sense of moral responsibility' (p. 76) took on sharper focus as a number of CEOs were criticized for their actions during the economic crisis. In 2008–9, public anger erupted in the UK after the discovery that the 68 percent taxpayer-owned Royal Bank of Scotland was planning 20,000 job losses while giving £1 billion in bonuses to senior management. The Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor summed up public feeling, 'This is unbelievably crass and irresponsible behaviour by people who have learned absolutely nothing' (Cable, 2009).[1]

With this broader context in mind, we began to focus on the need to conceptualize the practice of leadership in a different way: to offer 'theories' of practical relevance. If egocentric and heroic approaches to leadership are instrumental in contributing to such behavior by advocating confident action without consideration of its affect on others, how can we conceive of leadership in ways that emphasize the crucial nature of moral responsibility and encourage leaders to engage in moral debate?

The questions we encountered caused us to rethink our ideas about leadership. Our analysis focused initially on language use, but as we engaged more with what FSDs were saying, we began to notice their emphasis on relationships and conversations, and so examined the literature on relational leadership as a conceptual frame. But even this did not help us explain how FSDs described their experience, so we looked to the work

of Bakhtin and Ricoeur to help expand our conceptualization of relational leadership. What we offer in the following discussion is a way of 'theorizing' and 'doing' leadership differently, not in terms of applying models or recipes, but as embedded in the everyday interactions and conversations – the relational practices – of leaders. What we began to notice in our conversations with FSDs was that they did not talk about individualistic heroic action, but their sense of the importance of mundane small details, actions and conversations (Garfinkel, 1984 [1967]) and importantly, that these were usually seen in relation to others. It is these small details we highlight. Specifically, we aim to:

a) Contribute to contemporary leadership theory by offering a way of conceptualizing relational leadership as an inherently moral and dialogical practice, based on Ricoeur's notion of ethical selfhood and Bakhtin's work on dialogism.
b) Contribute to leadership theory and practice by offering new kinds of action guiding anticipatory understandings (Shotter, 2008) that may sensitize leaders to the impact of their interactions and enable them to become more reflexive and ethical practitioners.

These aims interweave because we argue that relational leadership is both a way of theorizing leadership and being a leader: a practical theory that 'increases the prudence or social eloquence of practitioners by enhancing their ability to discern and draw upon the resources of particular social settings' (Pearce and Pearce, 2000: 420). Practical theories mean concerning 'ourselves with ". . . meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt . . ." . . . that cannot be represented in the discrete symbols of a logical theory' (Shotter, 2010: 140). Thus, our methodology is abduction, an iterative process of transposing our observations, participants' accounts and theory in relation to our research questions (Peirce, 1906). This transposition is reflected in our interweaving of theory and leaders' comments throughout the article.

We begin by situating our approach to relational leadership within the relational leadership literature, explain our use of abduction as a mode of inquiry, go on to develop our notion of relational leadership, and finally examine the implications for theory and practice.

Situating our position within the relational leadership literature

> How could we then, transform the language by which we live; how can we recognize the primacy of relationship in all that we do? (Gergen, 2009: 62).

Recently, essentialist approaches to leadership have come under criticism for many reasons (Barker, 1997; Calás and Smircich, 1991; Carroll et al., 2008; Lawler, 2005). Rost (1993) argues that by focusing on the *periphery* and *content* aspects of leadership (i.e. 'scientific' traits, contingencies, techniques and knowledge about organizations, human behavior, etc.) we still do not understand 'the essential nature of

leadership as a relationship' (p. 5, emphasis added). Contemporary leadership theories propound ways of theorizing and doing leadership that differ from traditional heroic and periphery and content views, and are informed by philosophical traditions and non-positivist modes of study including: phenomenologically-informed work (e.g. Ashman, 2007; Cunliffe, 2009a; Sparrowe, 2005), aesthetic and semiotic approaches (Boje and Rhodes, 2005; Hansen et al., 2007), psychoanalytically-driven approaches (Cluley, 2008; Maccoby, 2004), discursive perspectives (Fairhurst, 2007; Ford, 2006), gender-based (Binns, 2008; Chin et al., 2007) and critical perspectives (Collinson, 2005; Sinclair, 2005).

Yet many contemporary approaches still take leadership out the realm of everyday experience. FSDs explained their experience in very practical and embedded ways – what they did on a day-to-day basis, who they spoke with, who said what, and how they felt. As we grappled with how to move away from conceptualizing leadership as discrete individuality and in object/discursive/technique-oriented ways, to leadership occurring in *embedded experience and relationships*, we gravitated towards the literature on relational leadership as a means of making sense of our 'data'.

Over 20 years ago, Hosking and Morley (1988) and Hosking (1988, 1991) argued that rather than studying leadership within the perceived physicality of organization structures, we needed to pay attention to the *social constructions of organizing* – how leaders construct organizational 'realities' and identities in social-psychological processes occurring *in relation to* other people. A review of leadership studies explicitly taking a 'relational' approach indicates that three main themes have emerged, each emphasizing leadership as a social process but differing in terms of what those social processes are (see Uhl-Bien, 2006 for a more comprehensive review).

Theme 1: Relationships between network elements

Within this theme, which examines the relationship between leaders and organizing processes, leaders are positioned in networks in different ways. Social network theories position leaders as key to managing and sustaining the relationships between environmental, social and organizational network elements (e.g. Balkundi and Kilduff, 2005; Manning, 2010). Alternatively, actor network theory (ANT) approaches argue that leaders are one material element among many in the network organizing process (e.g. Law, 1994; Sidle and Warzynski 2003). From an ANT perspective, leaders are no more important than any other element and are both a product of the various network elements and one of the actors involved in making the network robust. Another branch of network theory, social exchange theory, examines the exchange relationship between leaders and followers (Campbell et al., 2008; Graen, 2006) or between leaders and organizations (Barden and Mitchell, 2007). By drawing attention to the relationship between network elements and infrastructures, and the macro and micro processes of organizing, network theories emphasize the need for leaders to consider and manage relational mechanisms and processes, thus extending heroic individualized models. While addressing social processes, network theories still take an *entitative* perspective (Hosking, 1995) by focusing on identifying network elements and modeling relationship mechanisms.

Theme 2: The social construction of leadership

In contrast, work within the second theme concentrates on the micro processes of organizing, how leaders coordinate action and socially construct identities, culture, strategy, etc., through language (Hosking, 2007). There are crucial differences in terms of how relational processes construct 'realities', some studies theorizing how leadership and organizations are created in interactive routines (Vine et al., 2008), relational dynamics (Ness, 2009), or through the selective use of language and/or linguistic resources (Cunliffe, 2001). Many of these studies focus on *how* leadership is done, such as Ospina and Foldy's (2010) five leadership practices (e.g. prompting cognitive shifts) to help leaders deal with the 'often vague and immaterial processes of collective leadership' (p. 303). While this work takes us nearer to understanding the micro-processes of leaders' interactions, the approach is still often entitative, focusing on linguistic processes per se (e.g. Samra-Fredericks, 2003), or on frameworks (Drath et al., 2008) rather than on leaders' experiences of struggling with 'small details' and making judgments in the present moment of their interactions.

Theme 3: Post-heroic leadership: The collective social practices of people

The post-heroic theme positions leadership as non-hierarchical, distributed throughout the organization as a relational practice of collaboration, empathy, trust, empowerment, etc.: something that collaborating actors 'do' within social interactions and networks of influence to construct realities (Fletcher, 2001; Fletcher and Kaeufer, 2003). While post-heroic models draw attention to mutuality and interdependence, a number of critical feminists highlight their paradoxical nature: that feminized relational forms of leadership are often invisible and unrewarded (Fletcher, 2003), and that both male and female leaders struggle with balancing relational practices with the macho models of leadership still prevalent in organizations (Ford, 2006).

These three themes offer a number of insights into leadership from a relational perspective around the notion that leaders need to: be concerned with identifying relationships between network elements and understand relational mechanisms; think about how they use language in networked interactions; and be cognizant of the macro- and micro-processes involved in socially-constructing collective activities. Despite the relational focus, studies often take an entitative perspective abstracting elements of leadership such as types of behaviors, network mechanisms, linguistic forms, etc., – a perspective that Dachler and Hosking (1995: 10) call relational epistemology, inviting 'questions about the social processes by which certain understandings come about', and framing leadership as still about applying models, linguistic resources, etc. We argue that relational leadership requires a relational ontology, which means going back to the fundamental philosophical issue of understanding social experience as intersubjective (Cunliffe, 2010) and leadership as a way of being-in-relation-to-others.

FSDs drew our attention to this issue because they talked about the nature and quality of human relationships, to their own values and judgments: in other words to the mundane and imaginative work that goes on within the complexity of their everyday relationships. Few relational leadership studies address these issues. So while positioning ourselves

within a relational perspective, we work through a lens of relational ontology to empha-size relationships as living embedded and between people rather than between objects/ mechanisms – as the character, judgment and personal values of leaders rather than prac-tices or processes. This relational ontology focuses on 'small details' in our conversations with FSDs, which at first glance may seem unsurprising, but are nevertheless revealing because they draw our attention to what leaders saw as important: the values, judgments, struggles and attempts to create and maintain relationships that occur in the 'mundane' conversations and relationships.

A relational ontology causes us to radically rethink our notions of reality and who I am in the world, because it suggests the origin of our experience is intersubjective rather than individual and cognitive. Thus, organizations are not understood as struc-tures and systems but communities of people and conversations. And in contrast to the focus on process and mechanisms found in other relational perspectives, a relational leader sees people not as objects to be manipulated but as human beings-in-relation with themselves.

Methodology

Our initial study consisted of both an ethnography (Matthew worked for over a year at TSA) and taped and transcribed semi-structured research conversations with six FSDs, an Assistant FSD, and four Screeners, including one Lead Screener, at six different air-ports. The initial research question we began with, was 'How do leaders make sense of their surroundings and construct an organizational landscape within which people can act?' We asked what issues they dealt with, what they did, and how they saw themselves as leaders. In addition, Matthew completed site visits, talked with FSDs, walked the airport with them, spent time observing and talking to screeners in action and was involved in FSD orientation meetings.

As we listened to the tapes and reflected on Matthew's experience in the field, we noticed that the FSDs talked a lot about relationships. When we examined the qualita-tively similar and different ways in which FSDs experienced leadership and compared this to the relational literature, we saw that they spoke of relationships not in terms of objects and networks – but *with people*. This caused us to review the tapes in relation to Bakhtin's (1996 [1986], 2002 [1981]) notions of *living conversations*, and our research question changed to 'How do FSDs talk about their relationships and what do they see as being important in those relationships?' In this way we began building 'practical theory' abductively from the field. Abduction (Peirce, 1906) is a form of theorizing embraced by contemporary inductive and ethnographic researchers – an iterative process of reading and re-reading data, looking for 'surprises' by seeking 'out unexpected data and creat[ing] new concepts to explain them' (Agar, 2009: 294). It is particularly relevant to our study because it is concerned with 'the living process of inquiry . . . in which "the actual is interpreted and constructed in light of the possible" . . .' (Locke et al., 2008: 908–909). Importantly, what struck us was that our 'noticing' was not only part of *our* interpretive process, but that noticing the subtleties of relationships was also a crucial part of what the FSDs did on a day-to-day basis: something we see embedded in many of the following excerpts and which we argue is central to relational leadership.

Thus, what follows is not a theory of leadership in the traditional sense of 'a statement of relationships between units observed' (Bacharach, 1989: 496), but in line with our relational ontology, epistemological position (knowing-from-within) and our methodological approach (abductive) we offer what to us appeared to be the *rich points* (Agar, 1996: 31) of our conversations – words and moments that appear to carry significance. Such rich points can act as *action guiding anticipatory understandings*, ways of seeing connections that offer new beginnings for change (Shotter, 2008). Consistent with our philosophical and methodological stance, throughout the paper we interweave FSDs comments with conceptual insights as a means of illustrating the nature of relational interactions and conversations. We selected comments that particularly 'surprised' us and caused us to move through the iterative process of rethinking and refining our understanding of leadership from a relational perspective. Comments that, when transposed with the literature, bring to attention features of relationships that can sensitize leaders to the impact of their actions and relationships with others. We draw out *actively lived and felt practical theories* (p. 1428 above) articulated by FSDs rather than academic constructs, an approach reinforced by FSD1's comment that negotiating was essentially about 'communicating your sincerity, your professionalism and compassion'. In the following section we:

- Conceptualize relational leadership as a way of *being and relating with others*, embedded in everyday experience and interwoven with a sense of moral responsibility;
- Draw attention to the nature of these morally-responsible relationships within a leadership context.

Relational leadership

And I think that the thing about relationships is that people have to feel like what they say is important and that they have a stake in this, and that their contributions are going to be appreciated. (FSD2)

You know, it's funny how there's always a sense of chemistry that comes from people working together and trusting each other and contributing. If you do not have that, you do not have that trust, you do not have that cooperation – then I think you are not going to be as effective. (FSD5)

We begin our reworking of relational leadership by articulating both its conceptual and practical foundations. Consistent with other relational theories, our work is situated within a social constructionist ontology, which posits that we exist in a mutual relationship with others and our surroundings and that we both shape, and are shaped by, our social experience in everyday interactions and conversations (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1999). This ontology has very practical consequences for leading and managing organizations because it suggests that organizational members actively create their organizational world through their relationships with one another; that what we say is important (Fairhurst, 2007); and that it is the *nature* of those relationships that are

important. We suggest that four main conceptual threads run through relational leadership: leadership is a way of being-in-the-world; encompasses working out, dialogically, what is meaningful with others; means recognizing that working through differences is inherently a moral responsibility; and involves practical wisdom.

Relational leadership as a way of being-in-the-world

Within the leadership literature, researchers have adopted various social constructionist orientations (e.g. Grint, 2005; Kaczmarski and Cooperrider, 1997; Meindl, 1995; Ospina and Sorenson, 2006; Pye, 2005). We find ourselves working within a relationally-responsive orientation (Cunliffe, 2008, 2009b), which situates leadership within a broadly hermeneutic-phenomenological ontology of relational and embedded human experience – as selves-in-relation-to-others – and an epistemology grounded in *knowing-from-within* interactive moments (Shotter, 2008). Indeed, many of the comments by FSDs illustrate this form of relationality (talking with people, acting collaboratively, etc.), making sense, creating action and knowledge *with others* and from within experience using 'practical everyday' language rather than academic language – by talking *with* people in particular circumstances and getting their views on what is to be done. A relationally-responsive orientation brings into focus our reflexive relationship with our world.

The excerpts above and below are illustrative of relational leading, which is not only about creating opportunities for relationally-responsive dialogue but also about the kinds of relationships between people – the need to be respectful, establish trust, and for people to be able to 'express themselves' – values that played through many FSDs' comments.

> Respect . . . for whatever reason they are in the business they are in, it does not change the human being. You have to have that respect for each other and I think we have demonstrated a lot of respect to each other. I have my assistant for the security guards at the screening. He is a man with a heart. He has established all kinds of committees . . . but it does pay off because people express themselves . . . and they come up with statements . . . 'Not on our watch'. It couldn't get much better than that. I did not put that in the briefing – they [the screeners] did. (FSD2)

> He is always there whenever we need him and, I mean, he knows his job, he knows it well . . . I think he gives us a lot of room to grow and learn from each other, not in a negative way or calling or yelling in public like some of them do – who will embarrass you, putting you aside. (Screener1)

These excerpts highlight leadership as 'character'. Character is embedded and expressed within conversations not as traits or constructs, but as a way of being-in-relation-to-others that brings a moral responsibility to treat people as human beings, of having 'a heart', appreciating others, and encouraging them to grow and learn from each other. While this might be 'common sense', it is not always widely practiced as recent actions of leaders such as Jeffrey Skilling (Enron) and Fred Goodwin (RBS) and the literature on toxic leaders indicates (Lipman-Blumen, 2004; Price, 2005).

Mr ____ [the Airport Director] immediately said, 'what do you need, let's work together and try to get this done', and because of that I think we've been able to develop a partnership that resulted in this airport being one of the most . . . best recognized airports in the country. I met with the Police Chief, the Mayor. Airports are vital to the economic welfare . . . (FSD2)

In sum, relational leadership is *not* a theory or model of leadership, it draws on an intersubjective view of the world to offer a way of thinking about who leaders are in-relation to others (human beings, partners) and how they might work with others within the complexity of experience. Relational leadership means recognizing the entwined nature of our relationships with others.

Working out what is meaningful: Dialogue and polyphony

We have internal meetings with the airport community. We get feedback from there of what is going on, what their needs are, their flight schedules, their activities if there are any changes. We have a meeting with the domestic carriers. We have a meeting with law enforcement. We have impromptu meetings on anything of a security nature on the spot. If we have to, we will assemble the airport community or those members of the airport community that have a need to know or a nexus with the activity. I have my weekly staff meetings with the staff. They have their individual team meetings . . . I want them to tell me what they think needs to be done. So we do have this cross-dialogue back and forth in terms of that is going on out there . . . (FSD4)

Relational leaders see communication not as an expression of something pre-conceived, but as emerging and open, as a way of working out what is meaningful and possible. But what does this mean?

Of course, all leaders hold meetings – formal and impromptu – but not all leaders see meetings as spaces in which meanings and actions are worked out between people in everyday 'back and forth' dialogue. Bakhtin's (1996 [1986], 2002 [1981]) work under-scores the importance of these issues in his concept of *living conversation*. In expound-ing the nature of living conversation, he differentiates between monologic and dialogic ways of talking. Heroic models of leadership are mainly grounded in monologism: based on a single *author*ity who is unresponsive to how his/her voice is being received, advo-cates a particular view or ideology, manages meanings and impressions, and aims to get a common understanding of his/her pre-established view or vision. Bakhtin criticized the oppressive nature of monologic discourse, suggesting that it rules out diverse meanings, silencing and marginalizing other voices. *Dialogism* means talking *with* people not *to* them, understanding that meaning emerges in specific moments of responsive conversa-tion between people, and that everything that is said is in relationship to 'others': other people, other ideas, other conversations. Talking *with* means all views are shared and considered – cross/back and forth dialogue (FSD4 above). We were struck by the many times FSDs talked about the crucial nature of dialogue – needing to listen, to understand different perspectives, value ideas, establish relationships, and so on:

I am meeting with different staff people and trying to see what they are doing and what they are working on. I go to them rather than them coming to me. Sit down and they brief me on where

they are on things, on certain processes, and give suggestions as to where to go. I never micromanage them. (FSD3)

So while the FSDs took responsibility for initiating and maintaining conversations and relationships, their focus was very much on dialogue and involvement. They rarely talked about advocating their view or making decisions unilaterally. Indeed, one FSD talked about the consequences of <u>not</u> engaging in dialogue:

I'll give you an example, ____[Airport]. The Agency had received a number of letters from the screening workforce with 300 signatures on those letters saying, 'This is done poorly; we never see the FSD; he does not talk to anybody in the airport; we do not even know if he works here . . .' (FSD1)

Thus, FSDs and screeners alike recognize the importance of dialogue and relationships in shaping organizational practices.

Bakhtin's (1996 [1986]) focus on dialogism also emphasizes *polyphony*, the emerging, fluid, multi-voiced and unique nature of dialogue. Each conversation is both old and new – old in the sense of being based on past conversations and anchored in linguistic, cultural and social conventions – and new in the sense of being unique to the moment of speaking as we 'craft' our responses to what others are saying in that particular moment. In doing so, we create new meanings that can both carry through and shift across conversations as responses change. Thus, because each conversation is fluid and open, involving different people, views and understandings across time, the need to continually-engage in dialogue – in meaning-making – is ongoing. Dialogism therefore embodies relationally-responsive living conversation and the understanding that conversations are never final; the need for ongoing dialogue; to be care-ful in bringing different views, values and meanings into the open; of respecting differences and shaping new meanings and possibilities for action from those differences. These ideas are anticipatory understandings that can serve to guide action (Shotter, 2008).

A number of FSDs seemed to understand implicitly this way of thinking about dialogue. And, as we have seen, *how* they enact this is important. Many of the FSDs talked not just about the many voices (groups and individuals) they needed to talk with (as in FSD4's comments above), but about discovering the 'other's' needs, views and exploring possibilities:

Immediately what I did – and inclusion is so important – was I put together a strategic transition team, included City Hall, police department, the airport – all of the major stakeholders became part of this transition team. We met every day, seven days a week, to say 'This is our goal. This is where we are. How are we going to get there? How can you help? What's going to be your part?' (FSD2)

Perhaps FSD2 intuitively recognizes the polyphony lying in the many voices of 'stakeholders'? The need to be 'inclusive' and be open by working together in the conversational moment to shape meanings and focal points for actions: by asking questions, reflecting on issues and coming to some agreement about how to move on. This reinforces Shotter's (2008) point that 'what precisely is "being talked about" in a conversation, as we

all in fact know from our own experience, is often at many points in the conversation necessarily unclear, we *must* offer each other opportunities to contribute to the making of agreed meanings' (p. 25, italics in original).

But it's not easy to arrive at agreed meaning. Bakhtin (1996 [1986]) sees conversations as a process of interaction and struggle, characterized by *heteroglossia*: intersecting ideologies, ways of speaking, value judgments, and so on. Conversations are therefore – not with the aim of bringing *you* round to *my* viewpoint, but of valuing juxtaposing and pluralistic viewpoints in creating new meanings and possibilities. The importance of relational dialogue in working across different world views has been identified (e.g. Drath, 2001), but often in the context of coming to a commonly shared purpose while recognizing differences. For Bakhtin, dialogue is always heteroglossic and therefore subject to forces that concurrently *unify* and *disperse* meanings (centripetal and centrifugal forces) – it is from the interplay of these forces that new meanings and understandings emerge. Such understandings will not be total, nor fixed and enduring for, as Bakhtin suggests, meanings are dynamic and unique to conversational moments and individuals.

We began to think about the interplay of forces in FSD comments, as in the excerpts from FSD2 above and FSD2 and 3 below. For example:

unifying forces – 'This is *our* goal', 'How can *we* get the *same* results . . .', 'How can *we* do it better?' (emphasis added)

dispersing forces – 'What do *you* like?' 'Talk about resistance . . . ice cold', '. . . including the union, City Hall, the police'. (Representing different views and ideological differences)

Many FSDs were concerned with creating spaces for dialogue (transition teams, town hall meetings, coalitions) in which differences (between airport directors, TSA, FSDs, air carriers, Secret Service) collide, are recognized and worked with, to shape new meanings and possibilities for action:

Constantly asking people, you know, what do we need to do to be better, what do you like, what don't you like, you know, those types of things. I do town-hall meetings on a recurring basis. I basically get out and just talk to screeners one-on-one and find out what is going on . . . How can we do it better? How can we be less intrusive? How can we get the same security results without inhibiting the process and not adding to the wait times? (FSD3)

So, I said we need to build a coalition, we need a place and we need a coalition . . . So, if you establish a relationship, they will be able to come and tell you what it is going on . . . Talk about resistance . . . you wouldn't believe, ice cold, ice cold. But, they saw something that they had never seen before. They saw an opportunity to have dialogue. No one at this airport had even talked about this before. And, even though they did not trust us – we gotta earn our stripes – they saw a dimension that they had never seen before . . . We just want to know who you are and we want you to know us, know who we are. (FSD2)

Relational leadership is about recognizing the heteroglossic nature of dialogue and the potentiality that lies within the interplay of voices within dialogic or conversational

spaces. In the excerpts above, the FSDs do so by recognizing and surfacing conflicting viewpoints, anticipating resistance, asking questions, wanting to 'know' the 'other', and by negotiating a way between the differences – not with the intention of controlling the outcome or imposing views, but with creating new relationships, seeing new 'dimensions' and doing things differently. As FSD5 says, 'a culture of inclusion and transparency, trying to come up with some relationships and partnerships that would allow us to strategically move forward'. We found their frustration lay in circumstances where they were unable to do this – and the early relationship with TSA in Washington was a good example:

> Well you definitely have field command with your communications out of service in Washington. You can send correspondence down there, you can make phone calls down there, and nine out of ten times you will not get any response. Nothing. Zero. Black hole. It is okay because that forces you to acquire the skills you need to have as an FSD. Some FSDs stop and wait. I am using state police dogs because I can't get an answer on TSA certified dogs or I can't get an answer on whether TSA will allow me to use state police dogs. I waited a week, got no response so I'm bringing in the state police dogs. (FSD2)

> So we saw the need to make things change and it was easy for those of us who had been in organizations that were mature and had a healthy field and headquarters environment. The interchange, which is good for an organization . . . the way ahead for an agency, the maturation of an agency . . . And we drafted many proposals, sent them in and they went into the black hole of Washington because people were all consumed by the issue of the moment and just did not have the time to step back. (FSD1)

In coming into contact with the initial TSA 'black hole', FSDs had to use judgment, make choices and work with others to get things done. They did talk about a more open relationship that developed once a former FSD became head of TSA and elevated operational issues to the fore. He reinforced the importance of TSA serving the field in a way that allows the FSDs to do their jobs.

We therefore suggest that relational leadership means recognizing the intersubjective nature of life, the inherently polyphonic and heteroglossic nature of relationships, and the need to engage in *relational dialogue*. But what does this entail? Bakhtin's comments on Dostoevsky's work offers an appropriate account of what is involved in resolving the myriad of seemingly conflicting interests into something from which action can emerge, i.e. in *experiencing* relational dialogue: 'For [Dostoevsky], to get one's bearing on the world meant to conceive all its contents as simultaneous, and *to guess at their interrelationships in the cross-section of a single moment*' (1984: 28, italics in original). We might say in conventional theory terms that this means seeing all the network or system elements – but it is more than this; it means understanding that relationships are intricately entwined, embedded, constantly shifting and unique as we interact with others. Relational leaders are open to the present moment and to future possibilities, they engage in 'questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting' dialogue rather than dialogue that 'finalizes, materializes, explains, and kills causally, that drowns out another's voice with nonsemantic arguments' (1984: 285). Many of the FSDs stated that they engaged in the former, evidenced in the excerpts we present.

However, relational leadership is not just about dialogue, it also means understanding the way we engage with the world – not as already formed but as always emerging in our interactions and relationships with others.

Relational integrity: Responsiveness and responsibility

> I came from both a military and a law enforcement background, where you have a lot of bravado, you have a lot of command presence, you have a lot of stand up and, you know, 'we will do it my way, and let me tell you where we are going' . . . [now] more times than not the workers have more knowledge than the management does. They know what will work and what will not work. (FSD3)

So far, we have presented our reworking of leadership as abductively evolving from the everyday sensemaking of FSDs interwoven with our interpretive sensemaking as two academics. We have suggested that relational leadership is a way of viewing the world as intersubjective, emerging in our relationships with others, and about understanding the importance of the nature of our conversations. Relational leaders understand the polyphonic, unfinalizable and creative nature of dialogue and the always-emerging nature of leading. In reading the transcripts we noticed that many of the FSDs talked about engaging others in dialogue about what will or will not work (FSD3 excerpt above). This brings us to the notion of *relational integrity*, which we will now go on to explain.

Relational integrity encompasses the idea that leaders need to be sensitive, attuned and responsive to moments of difference, and feel responsible for working with those differences. For most FSDs these were differences with various stakeholders. But for some it was their own experience of difference, of reorienting and relating to staff in different ways, of becoming a 'creature of his environment' (FSD3, p. 1426 above). Moments of difference often meant unsettling accepted views and practices (their own and others), and working towards new ways of seeing and doing. For example, many FSDs came from a law enforcement background and contrasted this with their current leadership responsibilities and the need to act in different ways; ways that we suggest emphasize 'response' – the moral aspect – of *respons*ibility (Cunliffe, 2009b). For example:

> . . . women coming in with baby harnesses, and here we are asking mothers of two week-old babies to take that baby out of the harness so we could screen the harness separately. Now what is wrong with that picture? Mothers are often not real comfortable handling a two or three-week-old baby. Why are we doing this? Because Washington tell us to? Now come on! Let's come up with a better way . . . (FSD3)

FSD3's concern is not just for following procedures but also for the moral task of treating people as human beings and understanding their differing needs, i.e. relational integrity. Relational integrity not only pertains to a leader's personal values but also their judgment in moments of uncertainty and/or questionable actions (as above). We found FSDs not only showed concern for staff and stakeholders, but also colleagues:

> As FSDs were selected and started to report to the airports, I extended myself to offer whatever assistance I could because it was in everybody's best interest to do the right thing, knowing that these individuals, my counterparts . . . My current counterpart, _____ , who is at _____ Airport as the FSD, he had never even worked at an airport . . . So, yes, I did meet with them and I tried to mentor them . . . (FSD4)

It was through comments such as these, FSD3's questioning of the impact of directives and FSD4 feeling that the right thing to do was to offer help and mentor colleagues, that we began to think about relational leadership as being both *responsive* to differences and *responsible* for acting on them. This sense of responsibility – *to be responsive, responsible and accountable to others in our everyday interactions with them* – contrasts to individualized heroic models of leadership. In addition, we suggest that moral responsibility is embedded within relational integrity, which connects to Bakhtin's argument that dialogism and ethics are entwined and Ricoeur's notion that ethical selfhood is about how we treat others – that within our situated responsive interactions we need to be respectful of differences and see ourselves as answerable to others. For if we believe we are always speaking and acting in relation to others and that we are constantly shaping social meanings, 'realities' and identities in our conversations and interactions, then we not only need a reflexive awareness of how we do so, but to recognize our responsibility to act and relate in ethical ways.

How so? Much of our discussion to this point, both in conceptualizing relational leadership and illustrating its lived experience, has embraced the assumption that there can be no self without others – that is, the intersubjective nature of our lives. In *Oneself as Another* (1992) Ricoeur elaborates upon this notion, arguing that self 'implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other' (p. 3). He emphasizes the inherently ethicomoral nature of our relationships, saying that if we really believe our lives are so interwoven, that we are always in-relation-to-others, then we have to be open to others and recognize our moral responsibility to speak and act with integrity and self-constancy: thus, I am accountable to others for my actions and I should conduct myself so that others can count on me (p. 165). For Ricoeur, while 'character' is important, the individual is not foundational and not to be exalted (p. 318), because what is important is *the ethics of reciprocity* – of living well with others. This shifts our attention away from heroic and individualized forms of leadership to relational ones. 'Responsibility' is not just something that is formalized in job descriptions, directives and policy documents, but is fundamental to, and situated in, everyday relationships. This is relational integrity. We noticed the nature of responsiveness and responsibility in comments made by screeners about their relationships with their managers:

> My direct supervisors – I think they do an excellent job. They have taken the time because they know my position and where I want to go in TSA. So they are taking the time to train me and pull me aside and teach me any additional things I want to learn. I mean at no time have they said, 'Go away, I don't have time.' So I respect both of them. (Lead Screener)

These notions of being-in-relation-to-others, of solicitude (Ricoeur, 1992) and 'taking the time' to be morally responsible may also be seen in the excerpt below, which

exemplifies the 'questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, and objecting' (1992) of relational dialogue. The FSD is referring to a situation in which white powder was discovered on an aircraft about to depart:

> I said, no, it ain't gonna happen. I am not going to tell the Chief at this airport – who is doing everything right and that I have to live with day after day after day – that he has to step back and let the FBI Hazmat team come in and take care. Everything that he has is ready to go right now. He has all of his resources. It is not going to happen. So I told my AFSD – do it in a nice way, but tell the FBI, convince them, that they are wrong. That everything is alright, we'll control the scene, we won't lose any evidence or fail – and we will be happy to talk to the Judge about that because we are trying to put the safety of everybody first. But if he doesn't agree with you, put him on the phone and I will tell him I made the decision that this local team is going to do it. Because we have no indications that there was any criminal problem here. If it was a criminal problem I would have backed off a little bit. But they came around. The FBI has said to me many times, 'why don't you come around to our way of thinking?' But, they came around to our way of thinking and they let that go; I never had to say to our Chief, 'back off'. (FSD2)

What struck us about this situation was not only the extent and crucial nature of the FSD's relationships with various people (FBI, Judges), but also his implicit sense of moral responsibility to others, to passengers, employees, and the Airport Director who 'is doing everything right'. Relational integrity is expressed in his statements about being accountable to others ('we will be happy to talk to the Judge', 'we won't lose any evidence or fail') about solicitude and having others count on him ('we are trying to put the safety of everybody first', 'I never had to say to our Chief, 'back off''), and being able to explain his decisions and actions to others ('if he doesn't agree with you, put him on the phone'). His comments are perhaps also an example of dialogism, of guessing at 'inter-relationships in the cross-section of a single moment' (Bakhtin, 1984) and prudent action, which we will explain in the following section.

This sense of relational integrity is intricately connected to a sense of personal responsibility and a sense of self. About, as in the excerpts above and below, 'being honest' and not compromising yourself:

> I have heard the horror stories where the FSD misrepresented the facts so many times in order to get additional staffing. That was just recently in the newspaper – at a major airport. Those types of things you just can't do, you have to be honest and you have to maintain your integrity because if you compromise yourself in any way, shape or form the workforce is going to know about it. (FSD4)

So relational integrity is about *not* becoming too much of a 'creature of your environment' in the sense of carrying out directives without question, or manipulating the facts to get resources – rather it encompasses being attuned to the situation, knowing what to question and how to maintain one's integrity. FSDs see themselves as being accountable to others (their workforce, passengers, colleagues, congressman, Airport Director), and more importantly, accountable to themselves. This relates to Ricoeur's (1992) notion of interpersonal ethics, in which we act as moral agents in relation to social and institutional moral norms (see Cunliffe, 2009b).

Relational leaders are concerned with creating what Shotter calls a two-part corporate responsibility consisting of specific forms of interpersonal relationships and institutions, which focus on the ethical issues of 'care, concern, and respect, [about] justice, entitlements, etc' (2008: 21). For Ricoeur this means an 'ethical intention *aiming at the "good life" with and for others, in just institutions*' (1992: 172, italics in original). We go on to discuss the interpersonal aspects of ethics, having considered the issue of 'just institutions' elsewhere (Cunliffe, 2009b).

Relational leadership, knowing-from-within and practical wisdom

> With a playing field that there were no rules, there were no coaches, there were not even referees, nothing when I came to this airport. Nothing. Stand up this organization. I went home and said how am I going to do this? What am I going to do? How am I going to do it? (FSD2)

We have so far explored what relational leadership might encompass conceptually and practically: recognizing the constitutive, dialogical, intersubjective and inherently moral nature of our conversations and relationships. In this final section we will address the question, 'how do leaders develop this relational sensitivity?' In circumstances where there are no 'rules', 'coaches', and 'referees', how did FSDs find their way around and figure out what to do? None of them talked about leadership models and techniques, and few about leadership training. Instead they seemed to be concerned with developing and building upon their knowing-from-within – ways of making sense within the unique moments in which they found themselves. This meant going out and talking with people, getting many voices involved in dialogue, questioning, listening, coming to some kind of shared meanings:

> We do what we call a roll call every morning and whatever we learn, whatever activity, whenever something happens in this airport, to me that is a learning experience. I want an incident report written up. What happened, how did it happen, why did it happen . . . , I tell my screeners, don't let your ego be so fragile that you can't come forward and say, 'Hey this beat me today.' But, you know what? It shouldn't beat anybody else so let's use that as a tool. (FSD4)

> So we listened to everybody. 5 o'clock every afternoon we'd get together and say, 'all right, what did you do today? What happened?' And we would hear from the contractor, we would hear what was happening in training, we hear what's happening in hiring, we hear communications, all those people – and at the end of the meeting – about 2 hours – we knew where we had to go tomorrow, we created goals for that day step-by-step, and then – we'll see you tomorrow at 5. And we kept doing that, so we're able to move forward rather effectively. So that's kind've how we rolled out. (FSD2)

They acted from a form of knowing that seemed to embrace shared meaning-making within specific circumstances, dialogue about the issues, what could be learned, and what could be taken forward to help deal with future problems and situations – local knowledge within their context (Fairhurst, 2009). We suggest these are examples of what Aristotle calls *practical wisdom* or *phronesis*, which Ricoeur aptly summarizes as

'inventing just behavior suited to the singular nature of the case' (1992: 269). Practical wisdom takes us full circle back to Ghoshal's call for moral responsibility in management, for it is about ethical action based on moral virtue and experience (Grint, 2007).

Practical wisdom is not theoretical in nature nor does it involve abstract reasoning, it is about making judgments that draw on a sense of who one is, one's values, and on an experiential knowing-from-within that involves acting prudently: 'A truly prudent person judges thoughtfully and acts decisively, reconciling the demands of the most important with those of the most pressing' (Kane and Patapan, 2006: 711). Practical wisdom doesn't exclude, but also doesn't depend solely on, technical knowledge. Rather, we suggest that at its centre lies a recognition of the need for moral community and 'just institutions', a respect for others and for different world views. Practical wisdom also differs from technical knowledge in that it recognizes the limitations of believing in a right answer and applying techniques to obtain predictable outcomes. FSDs focused on community – having roll calls, listening to everybody, learning from experience, reflecting on and in particular situations, as a means of working out where to go and to move forward.

Knowing-from-within and gaining the experience necessary for practical wisdom, is as Merleau-Ponty (2004 [1962]) suggests, linked with attuning ourselves to situations requiring subtle discrimination and skillful responses. These responses are not based on technical reasoning, but on an understanding in which we 'experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance' (2004 [1962]: 167), in which 'consciousness is nothing other than the dialectic of milieu and action' (Merleau-Ponty, 1965: 168–169). Much of the FSDs relationship with their surroundings can be seen in this way, as 'creatures' feeling their way around interactions with others, figuring what to say, how to act and how to get things done: sometimes seemingly intuitively, other times more deliberate:

> I will wear a uniform and I will go out there and work a shift at a position . . . because I want to understand what they [the screeners] are dealing with day in and day out . . . I'll come in here, put my uniform on and go out to the checkpoints and work the whole shift with them. It is a grueling task. It is lifting bags all day long and after a while, it takes its toll on you and of course, the screeners get very artful. They learn how to do it. (FSD4)

In this example, not only is the FSD feeling his way around the screeners' experience of work, he also recognizes that they get *a feel* for how best to do their job, they 'get very artful. They learn how to do it.' This artfulness is expressed by FSD1 below, as he learns how to implement risk-based decision making through 'common sense and knowledge gained through discussions', talking through the 'thought process', and making decisions 'that kind of run counter' to previous ways of doing things.

> *Researcher*:   So, right now, you mentioned that your airport is the only one that has a strategic plan. So, how do you think most airports are going to go about making decisions?
>
> *FSD*:   Common sense and knowledge gained through discussions, whether they are informal or formal. I find a lot of FSDs who call and ask how we resolve a security breach, ask what was my thought process? We talked a lot about

risk-based decision making in the organization, but most of them do not know what that means, nor do they implement it as effectively as they should. But over time, people start to understand that they can make decisions that kind of run counter to what we did in the past. As long as you can justify the thought process, that is okay. (FSD1)

Relational leaders recognize the importance of being responsive to the present moment in organizing and problem-solving. Stern (2004) addresses the importance of the present moment, highlighting the need for a dynamic dialogue between the past/present/future in which present sensemaking needs to be temporally anchored in the past – but not too much or the past controls us (p. 28). All of the FSDs we spoke with had operational experience in other fields. Their ability to learn from this experience and realize that formulaic answers don't work (e.g. FSD3, p. 1426 above), we suggest, helped them become skillfully attuned and responsive, to create a continuous flow of dynamic dialogue (roll calls, discussions, doing the job of screening) in which learning unfolds.

Discussion

Dialogue here is not the threshold to action, it is the action itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is – and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. (Bakhtin, 1984: 262)

We present a different way of conceptualizing and enacting leadership that contributes to relational leadership theory by drawing attention to the 'mundane' yet revealing intentions, values and judgments that leaders see as crucial to leading in complex situations. Many contemporary relational leadership theories employ an entitative ontology and relational epistemology, where leaders are managers of networks and relational mechanisms, users of linguistic routines and/or resources, and facilitators of collaborative practices. They offer categories, frameworks, models, or social, cognitive, discursive and linguistic processes/practices drawn deductively or inductively from the data. We have sought to offer an additional perspective that emphasizes the crucial nature of 'relationships between people', 'character' and the 'small details' of conversations – often taken-for-granted because they are viewed as common sense and therefore unsurprising. Perhaps this explains why little work has been done to explore the nature of such everyday relationships.

But if we agree that the 'present moment is our primary [inter]subjective reality' (Stern, 2004: 8) then how might we enhance our understanding of what 'good' leadership looks like in ongoing moments? What action guiding anticipatory understandings help orient leaders to this way of being a leader? First and foremost is a need to become sensitized to the importance of a relational (intersubjective) orientation to our world and the need to anticipate what matters in those relationships. This not only requires a leader to examine *how* s/he relates with and responds to others in ongoing interactions, but also requires us as academics to reconsider how we teach and write about leadership (Cunliffe, 2009a). At the heart of such an examination is a critical and self-reflexive questioning of

what assumptions we hold about people; of how those assumptions play through our relationships and conversations; and of how others respond. It requires understanding the importance of creating opportunities for *open* dialogue and the need to be responsive to the subtleties within living conversations and their importance in creating understanding and respect.

How can this understanding help us '*prepare* ourselves better for living out our lives, moment by moment, from within the midst of complexity . . .' (Shotter, 2010: 138)? We concur with Shotter's urging to *pay attention* to the subtleties of the present moment and to develop new ways of 'acting, looking, listening, talking, evaluating . . .' (p. 160). Dialogic ways of talking require that we do not talk *about* something *to* others, but work *with* them in negotiating and shaping a sense of what may be happening and what *we* need to do. So this 'new way' is not about the practice of persuading, instructing, and managing impressions, but:

a) Creating *open dialogue*: conversations in which pre-judgments are not made but opportunities are created for knowing 'who you are and . . . who we are' (FSD2, p. 1436 above). Many of the FSDs created a context for open dialogue by building coalitions, creating roll calls, and developing partnerships. However, it is important to recognize that meanings are never fully shared in the polyphony of conversation.

b) Accepting responsibility for recognizing and addressing moments of difference: noticing and being responsive to the interplay of unifying and dispersing forces unfolding in conversations by engaging in dialogue that is questioning, challenging, answering, extending and agreeing (Bakhtin, 1984: 285). Many of the FSDs seemed to recognize and build on differences as a means of exploring options and creating understanding (e.g. FSD2, p. 1435 above).

c) Creating *scenic moments* that shape a context for working out differences and creating a path through the organizational landscape (Shotter, 2010). Shaping the scene occurs in the present moment by being responsive to others, together drawing out practical features of the 'landscape', and surfacing tensions so that people can notice and respond to otherwise unnoticed features. In this way *diverse voices* may be brought into the conversation without focusing on *different positions*. For example, FSD4 (p. 1434 above) trying to do so by 'constantly asking people . . .' so they could create some sense of shared meaning and work out where to go.

d) Understanding the importance of *relational integrity*: respecting and being responsive to differences, being accountable to others, acting in ways that others can count on us, and being able to explain our decisions and actions to others and ourselves.

e) Becoming more attuned to sensing and responding in the present moment by looking, listening, and anticipating (Shotter, 2010) in the unfolding conversation (e.g. FSD2, p. 1441 above).

These practices center around understanding 'communication' as a relational process of shaping some sense of our experience between us in our everyday conversations (Cunliffe, 2009b), of 'noticing' features and differences within situations and bringing

them into the realm of discussion – while recognizing the ethico-moral nature of these relationships.

Limitations and conclusions

The value of a relational perspective is that it not only offers a way of reconceptualizing relationships between leaders, organizational members and other stakeholders as an ongoing intersubjective shaping of social circumstances and surroundings, but also offers practical theories for creating collaborative relationships. It could be argued that the circumstances in which the FSDs found themselves – with no prior clearly defined 'structures', 'systems' or expectations about what they should or should not be doing – provided an ideal context for a relational approach to leadership to emerge. This may be so, but in creating their own organizations FSDs needed to be attentive to their surroundings and work out what was meaningful and actionable within already-existing airport organizations and stakeholders, each with their own established policies and practices. Because they had no formal authority over these stakeholders, many FSDs saw the need to create collaborative relationships – a way of relating that they also enacted with staff in their own organizations. It can be the downfall of many leaders of established organizations that they no longer see a need to create such relationships.

In addition, we have argued that relational leadership is about noticing the subtleties of relationships, engaging in dialogic conversations, respecting others, and so on . . . yet our 'data' is mainly conversations with leaders. We recognize the inconsistency and limitations of basing our claims on FSDs assertions of their beliefs. How do we know if they were 'walking the talk'? We did speak with screeners, a lead screener, an Assistant FSD, and Matthew worked with FSDs for a year, but we developed the notion of relational leadership abductively from the data post-conversations and visits and did not have the opportunity to go back into the field to do a more in depth ethnographic study or participant observation. We also did not explicitly address questions of power, identity, nor the relationship between leaders and organizational circumstances. Nor did we explore the role of preconscious tacit knowledge on leadership. Further fieldwork will focus on these issues by exploring the situated conversations between leaders and various organizational members, on who leaders are and the intersubjective nature of their actions, conversations and relationships, i.e. on the unfolding of meanings, relationships and possibilities for action in 'present moments'. What we offer is a tentative conceptualization of relational leadership that needs further development.

To conclude, we suggest relational leadership is a way of being-in-the-world that embraces an intersubjective and relationally-responsive way of thinking and acting. Consistent with a relational ontology and abductive epistemology we present *action guiding anticipatory understandings* (Shotter, 2008) and *practical theories* (Pearce and Pearce, 2000) to supplement contemporary relational theory and sensitize leaders to a relational stance and the need to be thoughtful about the nature of their relationships and careful about their conversations. Our aim is to 'offer a compelling construction of [leadership], an inviting vision, or a lens of understanding – all realized or embodied in relevant action (Gergen, 2009: xxiv–xxv), one in which relationships are inherently

ethicomoral; living conversations are crucial to exploring differences and possibilities for action; and relational leaders are aware of the importance of the flow of present moments in making sense of complexity, resolving problems, shaping strategic direction and practical actions

Funding

Note

1   http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/Business/Bank-Bonuses-Row (accessed 23 February 2009).

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