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This Issue

African Leadership Studies: Beyond Theoretical Exceptionalism	11
Baba G. Jallow	

The claim by leadership scholars like Geert Hofstede (1993) that leadership studies theories are not suitable for non-western leadership represents a form of theoretical exceptionalism. While context should always be taken into full consideration, valid leadership studies theory may be applied to the study of leadership in any human community. Using a few African case studies and drawing from the works of leading leadership studies scholars, this article demonstrates that leadership studies theory may usefully be employed in the study of African leadership and that the field itself stands to benefit from engagement with non-Western leadership cultures.

Experience-Based Green Board Capital: Linking Board of Directors and Firm Environmental Performance.....	16
Birton Cowden, Hadi S. Alhorr, Josh Bendickson	

Antecedents to environmental performance are an increasingly important area of study for strategic management scholars. Accordingly, we believe that boards of directors have an important impact on environmental performance. While other studies have found relationships between board demographics and environmental performance, we suggest that the relationship is also deeply embedded in the resources and abilities of board members. More specifically, we study board members with green corporate human capital, green regulatory human capital, and green relational capital and test that having certain board capital will have a positive impact on environmental performance. Empirical findings support our theoretical arguments.

First Ladies: Leading Their Way	30
S. Irene Matz, Donald L. Stelluto	

Using Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Rodham Clinton as case studies, this paper explores the importance of historical context and personal communication styles in determining how well political messages and ideas have been transmitted by American first ladies and how well these activities have been received by the American public. Both Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Rodham Clinton were strong personalities and exercised various roles that were ancillary to their president husbands and served as extensions of their husbands' presidential administrations. These two women, however, faced significant challenges and demonstrated quite marked differences in their success as first ladies.

The Americans With Disabilities Act, Telecommuting, and Reasonable Accommodations	42
Darrell M. Crosgrrove, Laurence S. Fink, Alison Dillion, Donald K. Wedding	

The Americans With Disabilities Act, along with the ADA Amendments Act, court decisions, and technological advances, have combined to create a situation which, at the time of original ADA's passage in 1990, would have been virtually unthinkable—employees with some disabilities now have the right to legally demand that they be allowed to work from home. With the advancing age of the workforce, and increases in networking abilities to link the home into the office, the number of employers facing said demands is certain to increase. The following is a guide for analyzing and dealing with said demands.

Body Paradox: Multiracial Students, Minority Status, and Higher Education 51
Nicholas Reyes Franco

This qualitative pilot study explored the extent to which three half-White graduate students identified as racial minorities, and how that understanding influenced their decisions to seek out and apply for minority-based resources at higher education institutions. To some degree, all participants recognized themselves as racial minorities, but did not actively seek out or apply for minority-based resources due to tensions between being "in the majority" and being "in the minority," which seemed intricately connected to how participants personally defined racial minority. The study adds qualitatively to emerging research on non-monoracial identities and appropriateness for affirmative action and minority-based resources in higher education, and provides questions and implications for higher education administrators to consider.

Dialogical Leadership: Dialogue as Condition Zero 62
Rens van Loon, Gerda van Dijk

Organizations are confronted with enormous leadership challenges. Experts around the world formulate the greatest leadership challenges as being able to cope with deep complexity, global interconnectedness and continuous change - 'wicked problems'. This type of leadership issues needs a dialogic approach. This means high expectations of leadership, as many of our current leaders are trained in dialectical management skills. As leadership is relational and contextual, it is created and sustained through discourse. In this article we explore the role of dialoguing in 'wicked problems'. We argue that the role of dialogue cannot be overestimated, in particular regarding ethics and authenticity.

An Epidemicological Approach to Workplace Bullying..... 76
Lynn Godkin

The purpose of this paper is to describe how emotional contagion spreads the incidences of bullying through an organization. The model positions management as an enabler or foil of Bullying. The paper explains how bullies affect their targets, tangentially influence the emotions of onlookers, and how witnesses may respond in turn. It details how emotionally susceptible targets of and witnesses to bullying spread their associated feelings to others. The emotionally susceptible affect Emotion Infectors who transfer bullying-related emotions to their work groups infecting others. Group susceptibility to emotional contagion determines the flow of emotion associated with the spread of bullying.

Shaping Leadership Culture to Sustain Future Generations of Women Leaders 92
Carmela R. Nanton

Women have always been leaders in and outside of organizations, yet they remain underrepresented in the highest leadership positions. The radical adult education stage approach is applied to the contemporary leadership context to address complex challenges of social role perceptions in societal and organizational responses to contemporary women's leadership. The role of ethical leadership is explored for overcoming barriers, creating new leadership realities, collaborative partnerships, and emergent leadership competencies at the individual, organizational and societal levels in order to sustain the next generation of women leaders.

Benchmarking Global Leadership	113
Darrell L. Smith	

Many studies identified the universal traits and skills of leadership that should be sought out in a leader in order to best handle and lead organizations in a global setting. By recognizing these leaders and analyzing the best practices that make their organizations successful, one may build upon his or her business strategies and core tenants of global leadership. This paper attempts to define and benchmark the importance of teamwork, conflict management, and organizational diversity essential in the current and future success of global organizations.

Dialogical Leadership: Dialogue as Condition Zero

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Organizations are confronted with enormous leadership challenges. Experts around the world formulate the greatest leadership challenges as being able to cope with deep complexity, global interconnectedness and continuous change - 'wicked problems'. This type of leadership issues needs a dialogic approach. This means high expectations of leadership, as many of our current leaders are trained in dialectical management skills. As leadership is relational and contextual, it is created and sustained through discourse. In this article we explore the role of dialoguing in 'wicked problems'. We argue that the role of dialogue cannot be overestimated, in particular regarding ethics and authenticity.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of increasing interconnectedness and continuous change. Our world has become extremely transparent (accounting reporting requirements included in regulations), perpetually uncertain (black swans like 9/11, tsunamis), instantly obsolete (speed of changes of, e.g., information technology, genomic medicine and organic chemistry), and is deeply complex (e.g., energy renewal, environmental sustainability problems) (Helt, 2007; Ismail 2014, Hagel 2012). As society, we face significant challenges, including the financial and economic crisis – which also represents a crisis of integrity and leadership – and issues relating to the public sector: “how do we rethink and recalibrate security, healthcare and education?” (Van Dijk, 2014). Some of these issues are global, like population growth, a growing gulf between rich and poor, food safety and the food supply, depletion of natural resources, etcetera. In such a complex world we are confronted with issues that have to be designated as complex and wicked.

These issues require a specific type of leadership, characterized as *dialogical leadership*. Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) emphasize that complex problems require complex solutions. You cannot apply a single-focus approach. You have to be multilingual and show an approach whereby you broaden and deepen the definition of the issue at hand in order to get all the relevant parties committed to participate - to create participative power. In line with Grint (2005), Kahane (2007) and Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) we explore this dialogical approach in a relational process of leading. *Wicked issues urgently need dialogical leadership* is the core thesis of this article. By using *generative dialogue* (Gergen, 2009; Bojer, Roehl, Knuth and Magner, 2008) and *dialogical self-approach* (Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon 1992, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010, Hermans and Gieser 2012) we allude to recent and innovative

trends in human and organizational development to demonstrate that dialogue in this sense is condition zero for leadership.

This article is the first in a series about a dialogical approach to wicked issues. Here we focus on individual issues, in the next one on organizational problems, in the last one on societal and (cross-) cultural questions.

LEADING IN A CONTINUOUSLY CHANGING CONTEXT

Social, technical, cultural and environmental changes have made leadership a complex process. Kilburg and Donohue (2011) tried to give a unifying definition of all aspects of leadership: “a complex multidimensional, emergent process, in which the leader(s), follower(s) and other stakeholders (formal and informal) in a human enterprise use their characteristics, capabilities, thoughts, feelings and behavior *to create mutually influencing relationships* that enable to co-evolve strategies, tactics, structures, processes, directions and other methods of building and managing human enterprises with the goal of producing adaptive success in their chosen niches in the competitive evaluative and evolving ecology of organizations.” This definition encompasses the complexity of the subject and the lack of clear universal guidelines and principles but also emphasizes the essentials of leadership.

Firstly, leadership, by definition, is relational – within the leaders themselves and vis-à-vis others and their organizations. Secondly, leadership is contextual. As leadership is relational and contextual, it is created and sustained through discourse (Hersted and Gergen, 2013). We describe leading as a *relational* process (Gergen and Hersted, 2013) and dialogue as *generative* – a practice designed to enable *emerging new meaning* (Gergen, 2009; Bojer, Roehl, Knuth and Magner, 2008). Our scope here is individual leadership.

To develop leadership (in yourself and others) implies that leaders have a deep understanding of ‘who’ and ‘where’ they are: ‘why’ are *you* a leader at that particular time and place, ‘why’ are *you* being able to make sense of the world around in terms of rational and emotional analysis? We believe that current and future leaders need to develop an effective interpersonal and intrapersonal capacity to become aware of their own emotional dilemmas and thinking silos, to open up and to reconcile dilemmas rationally and emotionally. Here we apply the dialogical self-theory of Hubert Hermans (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon (1992), Van Loon (2010), Hermans & Hermans-Konopka (2010), Hermans & Gieser (2012)). According the dialogical self-theory, authentic leading is an outcome of this process within the self in an accurate relation with your complex environment. Positions within you as a leader, your team, your organization, culture, and society can be described in terms of the Dialogical Self, e.g. I as a Managing Director, I as an engineer, I as a sailor-captain, etcetera. These self-concepts are relationally co-constructed in the context of interpersonal relationships and social systems. “We participate in multiple relationships – in the community, on the job, at leisure, vicariously with television figures – and we carry myriad traces of these relationships.” (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001, 696). In *Relational Being. Beyond Self and Community* (2009) Gergen puts relations at the heart of being human. His central thesis is that these mental processes are not so much in the heads of individuals as in their mutual relationships. Being aware that effective leadership implies a *mutually reflexive, reciprocally implicated* (Hawes, 1999) mindset will make leaders better prepared to deal with complexity, interconnectedness and continuous change, in themselves, in relation to their organizations and the global context.

Dialogue and reflection are essential in the process of opening up to new ideas and possibilities. In dialogue research this is described as follows. In the *space between* (Hickman & Sorenson, 2014), in *tension as creative power for meaning making* (‘*ma*’) (Morioka, 2008), in the *space between words, the unknown emerges and becomes visible*, a new collective reality may emerge. Hosking (2011) describes dialogue and conversation in connection with transformative change work, such as the appreciative inquiry approach and other projects such as MIT Dialogue Project (Isaacs, 1999). We assume generative dialogues may lead to a greater level of authentic, effective, and ethical leadership. In contrast though, degenerative dialogues may also occur: they lead ultimately to leadership demise. Isaacs (1993, p. 34)

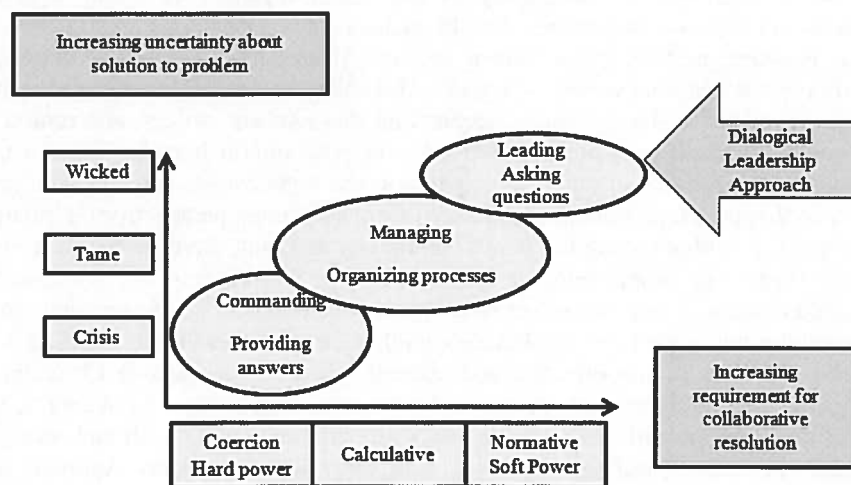
uses *oppressive* for a conversation that becomes a beating down of each other (debate). However important this process is, it is beyond the scope of this article to further elaborate this side of the process.

WHEN TO APPLY THE DIALOGICAL APPROACH?

“Dialogue lies at the core of organizational learning. Without dialogue, individuals and groups cannot effectively exchange ideas or develop shared understanding. Although dialogue has been addressed in organizational learning literature (Baker et al., 2005) it has not been examined explicitly as the core mechanism by which strategic leaders influence the learning process at and between individual, group and organizational level” (Parry, 2011, p. 63). We aim to contribute to a better understanding of dialogue at the heart of the process of leading. Implied in leadership are the concepts of *effectiveness*, *authenticity*, and *ethics*. Both in literature (George 2003, 2007; Grint 2005, 2009; Litaer 1993, Luthans & Avolio 2003) in our experience in practice, these concepts are extremely important. Authentic leaders are described as having the capabilities of self-awareness, balanced processing, self-regulation, and ethical, relational transparency. These are characteristics of an open and honest dialogue as well. Effective leaders have more impact if they are perceived by the others as effective *and* authentic, *and* ethical. Luthans & Avolio (2003) describe authentic leadership as a process “which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (quoted by Parry, 2011, p. 63). “Ethics is central to leadership because of the nature of the process of influence, the need to engage followers in accomplishing mutual goals, and the impact leaders have on the organization’s values.” (Northouse, 2007, p. 347). As a leader you have to be aware of your own values, your leadership principles and the ethical boundaries. Once you get in a situation in which you are under pressure, you can test the strength of your values and ethical leadership in reality (George, 2007).

Grint (2005) distinguishes between three different types of issues and problems leaders may face in their work. Issues can be classified as *critical*, *tame* or *wicked* based on two criteria –knowledge of the solution, and the leadership style required to tackle them. In a *crisis* (e.g. fire in the city) as leadership (-team) you have to take control of the situation, commandeering, hard power and coercion are effective answers to solve the problem. If we are faced with a *tame* problem, an issue we have seen before, where a solution is known (e.g. heart surgery), a calculative and management approach of the leadership (-team) will be effective.

FIGURE 1
A COMMON LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK



Wicked issues are those for which no known solution exists (e.g. hunger versus obesity on a global scale, religious extremism and terrorism, global leadership crisis), and for which leaders must not assume that they have all the answers. They must empower their team to deliver, and should accept the continual review and refinement of 'clumsy' solutions as a valid way of tackling wicked issues. Many options and opinions are possible, so true leadership is needed in the sense of soft power to collectively find ethical/normative answers. Because answers for these issues were not given in the past, you have to refer to your own/cultural values and explore the views of other stakeholders in the issue. In the last category of issues the implementation of a dialogic leadership approach could be effective. We focus on this last category of issues applied to how new meaning emerges in the process of leading.

LEADING AUTHENTICALLY, EFFECTIVELY AND ETHICALLY

William James wrote "I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character is to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude, in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensively active and alive. At such moments, there is a voice inside, which speaks and says: 'this is the real me'." (George, 2003, p. xvi). Leaders acting from their 'real me' have internal and external dialogues to explore their inner values, motives, and ambitions. "In leadership, the focus must then, shift from the results achieved by leaders (the 'what') and the processes used by leaders (the 'how') to the sources from which leaders (the 'who') operate. The main leadership tool is the 'self': the state of mind of the leader is the source from which all action originates. This requires the full human repertoire to be called on and employed: the intellect of the mind, the empathy of the heart and the spirit of the will – the driving force behind all action for both individuals and groups." (Van Dijk 2014). George (2007) defines 'Authentic Leadership' in five dimensions - "pursuing purpose with passion, practicing solid values, leading with heart, establishing connected relationships and demonstrating self-discipline" (p. 205). Hermans & Konopka (2010) analyze the meaning of authenticity in relation to emotions in more depth. Following Lietaer (1993) they describe authenticity as 'congruence' between experience and self. The concept can be broken down into two separate components: "The ability to be aware of one's internal experience" and "the willingness to communicate to the other person what is going on within oneself (= transparency)" (p. 274). This communicative imprint, that authenticity is not only about having contact with one's own experiences and emotions (internal), but also refers to the process of communicating with the other person, is important. In terms of relational being, as developed by Gergen (2009), the full sense of authenticity depends on this relationship. "Authentic leaders must develop genuine connections with others and engender trust. Because people trust them, they are able to motivate people to high levels of performance by empowering them to lead." (George 2007, p 206). In this sense it refers to ethical leading.

Leaders have to deal with the ambiguity of the "inner theatre", the many different and often conflicting values and voices – sometimes deaf to each other – (I-positions as strategist, entrepreneur, manager, coach, engineer, mother, global citizen, etcetera) (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010, p 326; Van Loon 2010) and the "external variety of issues". The ability to deal effectively and authentically with both in our view is related to the process of reconciling these values, voices, and issues. "A dialogical leader is able not only to differentiate between relevant positions in herself, but also to differentiate between corresponding positions in other participants in the organization and to invite them to make a "position-shift", so that the same problem can be seen from a different perspective (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010, p 327). Without using the same terminology as Grint, these problems are in the category of *wicked* issues. There is no simple solution. Here we observe that leading is in two directions - towards the self and towards others. A true and effective leader is someone who is able to bridge the gap between conflicting I-positions, not only in the self, but also in others, even if these refer to different values.

Our central hypothesis is that effective and authentic leaders are capable of dealing in an open-minded, dialogical, way with wicked issues. It leads to a higher level of authenticity and ethical awareness, which we believe will make leaders more effective in dealing with and acting on the "outer theater" - the daily practice of dealing with crises, tame and wicked problems. Applying the diversity of

leading styles internally (on leading the self) and externally (on leading others) may result in more versatile leadership.

DIALOGUE AS CREATING NEW MEANING

Dialogue originates from the Greek “δια-λογος” (literally: “by means of the word/meaning”), which can be interpreted at different levels. Mazutis & Slawinsky (2008) describe dialogue as a conversation with a center, enabling double-loop learning and allowing inconsistencies to come to the surface and be addressed. According to this definition, a *dialogue* is a form of conversation through which we examine and question ourselves and others on points of view, values, visions, and opinions. For individuals this means self-reflection, discovering why one thinks, feels, wants, or does something. Doing so with others implies opening up to other people’s ideas and *together* arriving at a different and often new vision on a topic. Isaacs (1993, p 33) gives some guidelines for dialogue - suspending assumptions and certainties, observing the observer, listening to your own listening, slowing down the process of inquiry. All these recommendations refer to heightening your awareness in the process of conversation. It should be noted here that discussion, dialectic, and debate must not be mistaken for a dialogue. What distinguishes these from dialogue is that the latter involves the creation of shared new meaning (Bohm, 1996), a ‘flow of meaning’ (Isaacs, 1993, 1999). This means that during a generative dialogue you arrive at something that is more/different from what each of the conversation partners brought in, and what they thought or felt at the very start. Collectiveness is created, the result are new insights arising from the dialogical process, not from multiple separate individual thinking processes. If effect, participants will experience this as a natural process (“flow”), the thinking process will spontaneously move off into different, new directions, previously unknown to the participants. People will start to view things differently. In a generative dialogue new meaning is created (Gergen & Gergen 2004; Gergen, McNamee & Barrett 2001; Hersted & Gergen 2013; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). Joining the dialogue flow will change the process of thinking, feeling, and acting: one will experience it as *creativity* or *innovation*. True dialogue means that differences are not approached through power struggles (debates), but rather as an chance to create new meaning (Mazutis & Slawinsky, 2008).

IN DIALOGUE WITH ONESELF AND OTHERS

Exploring leadership from a dialogical perspective, we start by focusing on the individual “internal dialogue” based on the dialogical self-theory of the personality psychologist Hubert Hermans and his co-fellows (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010; Hermans & Gieser 2012). Dialogical self-theory is rooted in the observation that we live with “a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions” (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992, p. 28). The self can be described as a microcosm of society – child, parent, partner, professional, worker – that has to relate to the wider society and network of others, to the context in which it must function. I-positions are both internal and external: a leader’s sense of his/her professional self (as a professional leader), for example, extends out from “my role” – “I the leader” – to “my reports,” “my organization” and “my peers and colleagues.”

The dialogical leader can be described as “A dynamic *multiplicity of I-positions* in the *landscape* of the mind. As *voiced positions* they allow *dialogical* relationships both within and between people: self as society of mind.” (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992). At the individual level, the dialogical leader is faced with the challenge of reconciling/transforming the contradiction between the various I-positions within the person him/herself. At the level of teams or organizations, the dialogical leader is faced with the challenge of reconciling/transforming the contradiction between the multi-voices of colleagues, stakeholders and competitors (etc.) between, e.g., local and global, unity and multiplicity, consistency and inconsistency, and between self and the other. In terms of Grint’s distinction these are ‘wicked’ issues; there is no fixed answer.

Dialogical leadership can be defined as “flexible movements between a diversity of I-positions that are relevant to the functioning of the organization as a whole.” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010, p.

326). Leaders faced with the challenge of dealing with tensions and multi-voices have to develop an anchor in themselves as a “compass” for their thinking, feeling, and acting. One of the challenges contemporary leaders face is how to act effectively and authentically in a fast-moving and permanently changing world seemingly without any stability and time to reflect. By consciously creating awareness and free space (time) they may become enablers, rising above the self and the organization. Isaacs (1993) uses the terminology ‘metalogue’ for this stage, referring to a process of creativity, ‘meaning flowing with’. “Metalogue reveals a conscious, intimate, and subtle relationship between the structure and content of an exchange and its meaning. The medium and the message are linked” (p. 38). This is exactly the point where effectiveness and authenticity come together.

DIALOGICAL LEADERSHIP

The concept of the dialogical leader is about transcending the self and the organization by reconciling/transforming various I-positions and multi-voices. Inside businesses and between organizations, leaders may, at any one period in their lives, be performing different roles to different groups in their network. The potential for conflicts can be significant: “I as the entrepreneur or I as the founder,” for example, could clash with “I as the employer or manager.” Meanwhile there will be competing demands outside their working lives, tensions between the positions “I as the parent and partner” and for example “I as the employer and boss.” Our answer is that leaders could transform these tensions by developing a *meta-position* through dialogue (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). This can be internal dialogue of the self and/or external dialogue with other persons. In a meta-position they *distance* themselves from the immediate stream of experiences while still being in a dialogical relation with the self and the context. In a meta-position leaders create and/or encourage new meanings and narratives.

Dialogical leaders create an environment in which new perspectives, narratives, and meanings are nourished and shared. Hence Hersted & Gergen (2013) view dialogical skills and *free space* as vital for dialogical leaders. Dialogical leaders must suspend their judgment (the “automatic thought”), and instead be an observer of the “thinking process” - as if from a distance. Leaders should be made aware of this, so they will be able to think and act more effectively instead of purely automatically. In fact, leaders facilitate exactly this by enabling their employees or teams to think as a collective and act deliberately. Shedding fixed ideas is difficult for most people, so a certain measure of self-awareness, effort, and discipline are needed; and *safety* is an important condition for the dialogue process - feeling *secure*, even when what is about to happen may be *uncertain*.

Each leader is a member of more than one team. Leaders become aware for example, of the difference between influence through hierarchical power (as team leaders) and not using hierarchical power (as colleagues). As a “good” leader you will start a dialogue with yourself and your environment, and you will be fully aware of your various roles. Kohlrrieser (2006) endorses the development of this meta-position as the “mind's eye” - developing of a state of mind within yourself by which you can rise above yourself and the situation and look at yourself, what you say, feel, and do. Once a group is actually able to reach this depth of the dialogue and tolerates the uncertainty of not knowing the answers through rational sources, new insights and perspectives will materialize. Instead of articulating existing ideas, it activates the process of ‘*thinking in the now*’. This is about expressing you while respecting the autonomy of others, who have a question to which they do not have the answer (yet). It seems as if both the individual and the team gains access to a source exceeding the collective of individuals. Isaacs (1999) refers to this as “*the art of thinking together*”, while Jaworski (2012) speaks about “*source*”.

Before diving into the depths of some case-studies, we summarize the foregoing. Leading is an act of relational and reciprocal influencing. Dialogue, discussion, and instruction are appropriate styles of influencing, depending on the issues at hand, dialogue and leadership for wicked issues when we need an open mind with no standard solution available; discussion and debate, is an effective answer for problems that have already been solved in the past, while instruction and coercive power are called for in issues of

crisis, when we need to act quickly and without losing time. The ultimate challenge for each leader is to assess the situation and apply the appropriate style *flexibly*.

In our case-studies we focus on the first category.

CONTEXT OF THE CASES

We illustrate dialogical leadership and the process of reconciling I-positions with two qualitative, anonymized cases from our practice and our collaboration with leaders. In our practice we work with mature leaders, most of whom have an academic background that have gone through a process of training in crisis interventions and management skills. The starting point is never training in behavioral skills on the foregoing levels. The conversation was with one of the authors; normally it takes more than a day. The conditions for a generative dialogue were put in place carefully, such as complete confidentiality, no reporting, and a quiet, informal setting of the conversation. Participants agreed to use dialogue as an instrument in a joint effort to identify their different I-positions, the beliefs, values, feelings, and emotions involved in each of the I-positions, and the potential sources and dysfunctional barriers for leadership between these I-positions. The last part of the dialogue focused on a process of reconciliation - how to tap into the potential sources of the different I-positions and reduce dysfunctional barriers by developing a meta-position.

The project consists in a series of conversations with a personality/organizational psychologist, trained in narrative psychology, organizational psychology, and leadership development. The psychologist is qualified in working with I-positions in the way described by Hermans. The crux of effective leadership - as formulated by the organization - is that through dialogue and reflection senior leaders learn to utilize different styles and sources flexibly, related to context needs, such as their department, the market, and organizational development, societal and cultural characteristics. Leading takes place in various roles, such as entrepreneur, manager, coach, change leader and expert. As a manager, you can use different styles to achieve your goals, e.g. a visionary style emphasizing the 'why', a push style accentuating the 'what' and 'when', or a pull style stressing the 'who'. As a leader you use different sources for influencing - rationality, intuition, and non-verbal behavior (Van Loon, 2010). Fundamentally, good leadership means applying different styles and sources flexibly, effectively, and authentically, without losing your internal value compass.

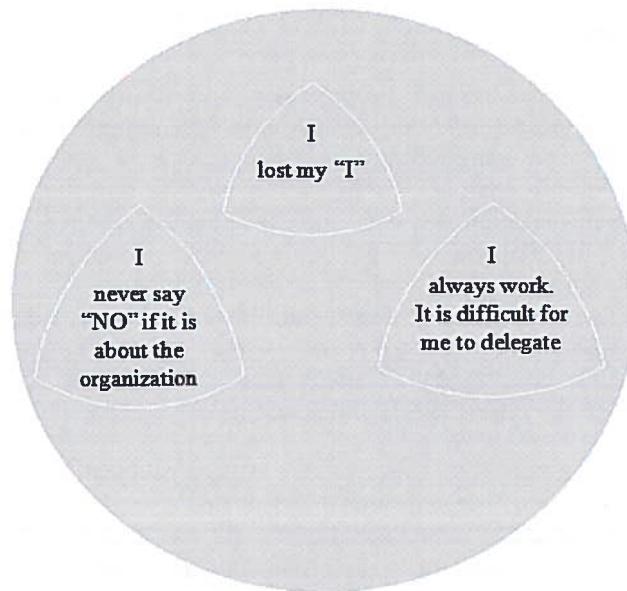
The structure of the conversation is starting from the *past*, 'where do you come from as a leader, as a person?' through the *present* 'where do you stand now as a leader?' to the *future* 'where are you going?' Context is an important theme in the conversation - company, market, peers, clients, superiors, team, and direct reports. Topics such as profession, family, identity, values - and occasionally religion - are talked about, and in more detail thinking processes about strategy and purpose, motivation, trust, dealing with ambiguity, stress, handling confrontation and conflict, taking risks, using different styles, dealing with change, making choices. Positive and negative (behavioral) examples will be requested.

CASE STUDY 1

A 45 year-old Belgian male engineer works for a multinational where he is responsible for medical instruments across Europe. His hope is: "*how can I recover my "I"?*" Although he is very successful as a leader in his local companies, he does not feel happy in his role. He thinks about taking a sabbatical to sail around the world, to make the trip of his life. As an engineer he tends to solve issues in a rational way, but he is often confronted with emotional issues in his daily leading practices. He is married, the couple has no children.

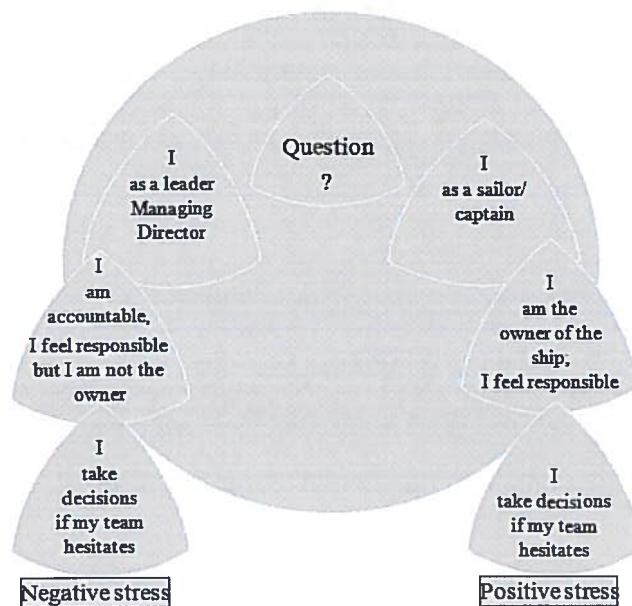
The figures represent his own words, fragments of his personal narrative.

**FIGURE 2
CASE STUDY 1**



His expression 'I lost my I' means that he never says no, if it is about the organization. As a consequence he is *always* working and has serious difficulty in delegating some his responsibilities. The dialogue revealed a basic stress in his functioning to involve the roles of *engineer-leader* and *sailor-captain*.

**FIGURE 3
CASE STUDY 1**



As *the managing director* he feels accountable and responsible for the end result of his business. Although he is not the owner of the company it feels as if he is. He is strong when it comes to taking decisions: if his team hesitates, he shows his decisiveness. In this I-position he feels generally negative stress. His emotions are even more stressed if hierarchically higher leaders give instructions out of sync with what he thinks is good for the company. He does not accept this type of influence and his stress becomes ineffective as he vents his emotions on his environment. In his I-position as *sailor-captain* he is the owner of the ship – he also feels responsible and takes prompt decisions, but his stress is positive. He feels relaxed, stays calm even in stormy weather and dangerous situations over which he has no influence.

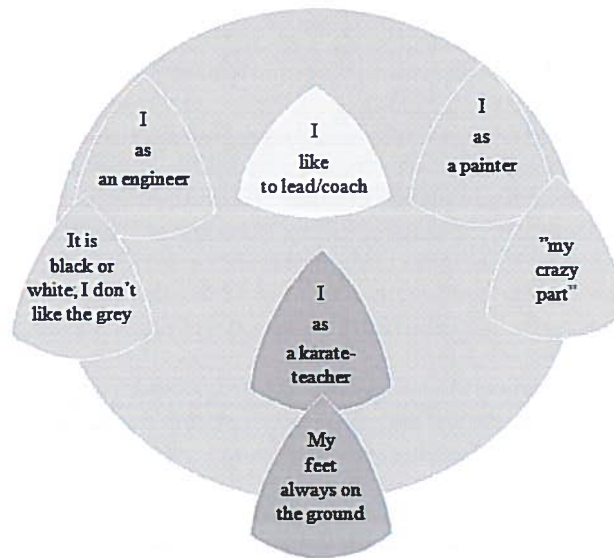
In the process of becoming more aware of these two I-positions, this man understood that, being one and the same individual, he reacted completely different in similar situations. In his role as MD he did not accept corporate directions, which were not aligned with his own will and strategy. As a consequence, he often felt negatively stressed and got upset and emotional. In his I-position as captain of his ship, he accepted the unpredictability of the weather, the climate and the fact that he is unable to influence these. His emotional state was calmness, even in (objectively) very stressful, maybe even more risky situations. His stress generally was positive.

The wicked issue in his situation was revealed – and transformed without a verbal answer – by the simple question: “how can a man who stays calm and relaxed in physically dangerous and complex situations, be so emotionally unhinged by his superiors giving him conflicting assignments?” By creating the awareness during the dialogue and allowing the process of thinking and feeling to slow down, he – as in a shock – became aware of this discrepancy between the different I-positions. It likewise revealed the ineffectiveness of his beliefs, feelings, and emotions of *the managing director*-position and their potential in the “I as the *sailor-captain*”-position when applied in the role “I as leader”. Reconciliation of these two I-positions led to the leader’s mindset being more complete. By metaphorically transferring the mindset of the *captain* to the *MD-position* the positive impact became sensible and visible. A year later, observations of his team and superiors confirmed a robust behavioral change. He said *the question* completely transformed his emotional state.

CASE STUDY 2

The man of our second case is a French/Spanish male engineer of 55; he participates in a leadership development project and there have been four one-to-one conversations over a period of a year, one session with his team of colleagues (and his leader), one team session with his team of reporting managers in the European countries (where he was the leader). He is responsible for a large part of an engineering organization’s European business. He describes himself as “enjoy[ing] life, without passion, color and fun I can’t live. I am the main actor in my life, as you are ‘playing’ your life as a human being. Life is not easy.” He went through a series of crises and episodes in his life and career. His father died when he was 16 years old. He married early; from the first marriage a son was born. Later he got divorced, married twice more. There is a daughter from his second marriage. He describes himself as impulsive. In his youth he was aggressive and tried to find a way to release his enormous energy. He became a karate-fighter, won several awards as black belt karate practitioner. He started his own organization and was very successful in doing business. He likes ‘the good life’. He is impulsive; he – in his own words – cannot accept stupidity. In the dialogue about his leadership he has several statements about him being a leader: “I like to lead/coach”. “As an *engineer* I don’t like grey. I am direct. It’s black or white”. During the conversation he spoke about his passion for painting and that he had been a karate teacher. He was not used to reflecting about his leadership career and his life in this ‘dialogical way’. He realized during conversations that ‘he has to open up more for his colleagues in the process of collaborating’.

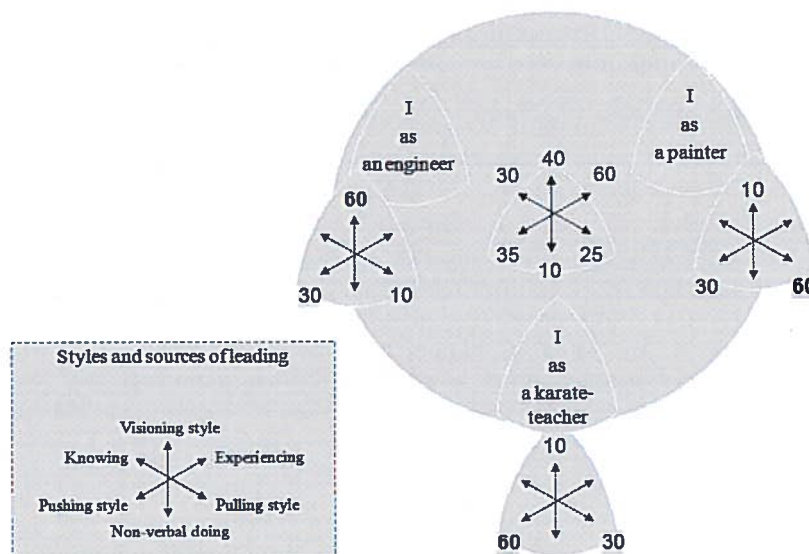
**FIGURE 4
CASE STUDY 2**



As we can see in figure 1, he formulated three I-positions:

- “I as an *engineer*: black/white, I don’t like the grey, I am direct”.
- “I as a karate teacher: respect, protocol is important; I have my feet always on the ground, stability”.
- “I as a painter: passion, color, expression; this is my ‘crazy part’”.

**FIGURE 5
CASE STUDY 2**



In figure 2 his I-positions are represented in terms of his leadership styles and sources. In our meetings with leader we also invite them to think about their styles (vision, push, and pull) in terms of how much energy they spend in each of them. The same question is asked about how they influence people around them (rationally, intuitive, non-verbally). The outcome of this process of self-assessment is a series of ratios (Van Loon, 2006). Leaders become more aware of the complementarity of the styles and sources, especially when you apply this to more than one I-position and in the context of the team.

As an *engineer* he is primarily rational and visionary (60% vision); as *painter* more intuitive and open to all impressions (60% pull); as *karate teacher* dominant and physically dominantly present (60% push). By developing a meta-position and combining the three I-positions, he realized the necessity of becoming more complementary and how they could reinforce each other. In terms of percentages he made the following scores. Leadership *styles*: vision 40%, push 35% and pull 25%. *Sources* of influencing: rationality 30%, intuition 60% and non-verbal 10%. He applied this intensified awareness immediately. In his management team meetings he opened up more about his artistic side - he showed some of his paintings and spoke about his passion. He became more aware of the impact of his non-verbal behavior - he wears the posture and directive style of the karate teacher on his sleeve.

There were still some tough challenges awaiting him, as his impulsiveness, strong nonverbal presence, and tendency to push often ruled primarily his impact. His boss recommended him to ask for more feedback and experiment with asking more open questions, instead of the more closed way of instructing his people.

Using the internal and external dialogue to integrate the three I-positions initiated this leader to feel more "as one". His direct reports and colleagues now regard him as more holistic, as the *painter* balances the *engineer* in a natural way. His team specifically said they liked him more this way, although his being - too - dominant permanently lurked in the shadows - the nonverbal part of human influencing is difficult to change. The basic insights he immediately started to practice were to open up more when collaborating and to adapt more effective and attuned leadership styles.

REFLECTIONS

The first reflection, in both cases, is that *establishing trust* in the relation between consultant and leader is extremely important. Establishing trust implies connecting truthfully with your partner in conversation, suspending assumptions, slowing down the process of inquiry and consciously following (instead of trying to lead). As a partner in dialogue you have to be fully present, as described by Senge et al. (2004). Be sensitive and aware of the importance of the impact of non-verbal behavior. In our cases we saw that the impact of the non-verbal behavior was difficult to influence and control. When leaders have a strong history in sports or in the military, in our practice we often see that the impact of non-verbal behavior is under-estimated, especially in a primarily rational environment.

The second reflection is the importance of applying the momentum - if it occurs - where 'new meaning' can emerge. In our experience this only happens if the minds of both partners in dialogue are truly *open*. All aspects are important in the emergence of new meaning. By opening the *mental* space between fixed thought-patterns, new meaning can surface. This process is a subtle one, as you cannot push it, but you have to prepare it carefully. In a great dialogue, As Isaacs (1993) describes the subtleness of this process in a comprehensive way, the '*act of suspending judgments*' is the most critical. If you cannot stand the pressure of uncertainty of the outcome of the inquiry, the risk of ending up in a debate (where you beat one another down) is real. These cases illustrate our experience of how in a generative dialogue the process can be described as 'reciprocally implicated and mutually reflexive' (Hawes, 1999, p. 252). The construction of new meaning is a relational process of co-constructing meaning and reality in a dialogic action (Gergen, 2009, p. 147). You cannot do this on your own; you need somebody else to ask you a question - 'a golden question'. In both cases we saw that the three I-positions were present in a very clear way, but they only could emerge *in* the dialogue, because there was *awareness* for both the content and the process in the conversation. As scientists we try to *describe* the conditions for this *momentum in dialogue*. As practitioners in conversation with leaders and their teams, we try to *set the*

conditions for possible *change*. The role of the facilitator – and the state of the facilitator's consciousness – is critically important in enabling this process of creative discovery (Scharmer & Kaufer 2013). Meeting the conditions for a dialogue is crucial if the transformations as described are to be enabled: e.g., free space, flow – both internally and with the dialogue partner – and reciprocity.

A final remark on these cases is that it again makes us aware that most of our leaders are more used to discussion and debate than dialogue as tools to convince their environment. These leaders are seasoned, but as an in-depth process of systematically creating 'ma' (Morioka, 2008), this type of self-reflection was new for them: but, once leaders have realized such a transformation, we have observed, they not only feel and act more effectively, they also experience it as more authentic and connected with their value-system.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Growing more authentic and effective leadership involves a leader becoming aware of and active in several domains, both at work and in private life – growing passion for purpose, showing behavior in line with personal values, being connected in all relationships, developing consistent self-discipline throughout work/life, showing heart-felt compassion. Carroll (2007) describes authenticity as "primordial confidence – an unshakable enthusiasm – that naturally arises when we are synchronized. Free from fear, arrogance, and greed, naturally expressing the talents that arise out of simply existing, we discover that being at ease with ourselves is powerful." Carroll designates a *mindful* leader as someone who has opened his heart to the world around him, without judging, and with the brave permission for the world to touch us. Rogers & Van Dam (2015), define mindfulness as "Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (p.35), referring to Kabat-Zinn, one of the founders of mindfulness practice in modern times. These qualities are the preconditions for a generative dialogue. Developing a practice of self-discipline to make this happen is vital. In their quest for a higher level of effectiveness and authenticity, mindful leaders develop a sustainable training to reach this- practicing sports and fitness, dancing, yoga, prayer and meditation, painting, reading, journal writing and poetry, and so on. The issue is not so much exactly *what* it is, as long as it is practiced from within and greater clarity and enjoyment are derived from this creating 'space' as a (daily) routine. Building greater personal capacity starts with a regular practice, a ritual that to which we subscribe consistently that creates greater strength and clarity. Mindful leaders use these practices to deepen their authenticity and effectiveness; they sink deeper into themselves, becoming more aware of their deepest values and purpose. This makes every action authentic, present, and mindful.

Once – over years – it has become a habit it could help leaders in periods of crisis, so they feed the source of personal power by practicing the inner and external dialogue. The ritual thus feeds their presence, their authentic effectiveness, their value-based accountability in the ethical meaning.

This idea is at the heart of *dialogical leadership*: dialogue and reflection *in* the self and *between* other selves are essential to developing effective and authentic leadership in organizations and society; they are the key to developing a deeper level of awareness and action.

The license to lead derives from this authenticity and personal wholeness of the leader. This, in turn, comes from generative dialogues and authentic self-reflection, developing the *soft* discipline to reconcile the *self and other, me and the world*, through the power of inner and outer dialogue. In terms of relational leading, as developed by Gergen (2009) the full sense of authenticity depends on this relationship. Unless affirmed by another being, authentic leading is without meaning. For the relational being there is only embodied action with others. Authenticity is a relational achievement of the moment." (Gergen, 2009, p. 138).

We live in a world of increasing interconnectedness and continuous change. A world, facing huge leadership challenges so-called wicked issues. This requires *dialogical leadership* – dialogue as a condition zero for authentic and ethical leadership.

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