

Images of Leadership Development From the Inside Out

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Abstract

The Problem.

With the codification of leadership into frameworks, models, and theories that can be taught, leadership, an art that is essentially subjective, symbolic, and context-specific, is “translated into” an objective, pragmatic, and universal domain. Development can be elusive when approached from this universal perspective if external models distract leaders from exploring their own views and practices of leadership.

The Solution.

This article explores the subjective and symbolic reality of those in leadership roles to discover what leaders can learn about their leadership and its development from awareness of their own mental models. These models are illuminated by an exploration of leaders’ naturally occurring metaphors and implicit leadership theories (ILTs) using clean language to acknowledge experience exactly as described while minimizing external influence or interpretation.

The Stakeholders.

Leadership development practitioners can benefit from the innovative personalized approach to surfacing and exploring leaders’ own metaphors facilitated by clean language, offered in this article. Examples are given of the range of leadership metaphors surfaced with this method. Researchers can appreciate a novel approach to qualitative research interviewing and identify future research in surfacing ILTs through naturally occurring metaphor facilitated by clean language.

Keywords

metaphor, leadership development, clean language, implicit leadership theories

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Introduction

This article aims to contribute to understanding how self-awareness and authentic leadership might be developed through illuminating a process by which leaders can become aware of their mental models, naturally occurring metaphors, and implicit leadership theories (ILTs). The approach explicated moves away from a reliance on external frameworks and turns attention inward to the mental models and metaphors that people hold about leadership. These mental images are explored using clean language, which is a novel method to direct attention to the symbolic domain with minimal interference from the outside. This exploration increases the ways in which human resource development (HRD) can offer a personalized, creative, and reflective approach to development. Findings of a pilot study are provided to illustrate the range and personal nature of metaphors used by a sample of international leaders from diverse industries and nationalities. This demonstrates the kind of exploration possible using clean language. The article concludes with suggestions and implications for future practice and research.

Developing Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership has claimed to be the root construct for all positive forms of leadership development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Although the theory is relatively new and somewhat contested, there is widespread agreement that a focus on self-awareness, development, and a moral perspective is central to the concept. It is one of the few leadership theories to consider development from a conceptual stage. Authentic leadership claims to have three perspectives: intrapersonal, developmental, and interpersonal. The intrapersonal perspective highlights that leadership is a personal concept that requires self-knowledge and an ability to lead from who the person is rather than adopting other models that may not resonate. The development perspective suggests that authentic leadership can be developed and that it is not reserved for the chosen few with the “right” traits. The interpersonal perspective highlights that leadership is exercised in relation to others and emphasizes that leaders both influence and are influenced. As current authentic leadership theory does not explain how self-awareness is developed, Nichols and Erakovich (2013) have suggested that one way to develop authentic leadership is through attention to ILTs. These are the everyday images of leadership that exist in people’s minds that operate largely out of conscious awareness. Their suggestion resonates with Hackman and Wageman’s (2007) claim that “leaders may be unaware of the degree to which their models are shaping their leadership behaviors” (p. 46). The approach highlighted below stems from a cognitivist view of learning in which leaders actively engage with their own mental models to understand their leadership from the inside out, which situates this approach in the intrapersonal domain. Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) claimed that although development in the intrapersonal domain is the foundation on which other leadership skills are developed, development in this domain can be harder than acquiring skills in other domains. The approach outlined in this article aims to contribute to development at the intrapersonal level, thereby expanding the practice of HRD in this domain.

Much leadership development theory emphasizes the pivotal role of personal development or “the process of becoming more aware of one’s self” (Hall, 2004, p. 154). Practicing leaders echo this desire for self-knowledge. For example, 300 leaders who have worked with the author on leadership development programs over the last 5 years have stated their primary expectations as understanding themselves and learning about the strengths and weaknesses of their leadership. These expectations of 20th century leaders resonate with the timeless inscription, “Know Thyself,” on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi dating 2,000 years back. It is as if despite all the theories of leadership, people know that they lead from who they are, and therefore, to enhance leadership they need to look inward.

Influences on the Approach

Noticing and developing self-awareness are central to this approach, which aims to make ILT and metaphor, normally out of awareness more explicit. The approach explicated in this article draws from literatures, such as mindfulness (Schwandt, 2005), sense making (Weick, 1995), and reflective approaches to learning (Gray, 2007), which highlight the emergent, illuminative nature of noticing and awareness. The approach builds particularly on Mezirow’s (1975, 1978, 1990, 2003) ideas of transformative learning, which explore how people make meaning through their frames of reference, which are the underlying assumptions and expectations with which they filter their experience. Through attention to naturally occurring metaphors, this article explicates how leaders are able to notice the assumptions by which they lead. This is an important addition to HRD as it offers a personalized approach to leadership learning encouraging leaders to examine and reflect on their own assumptions and experience as suggested by Petriglieri, Wood, and Petriglieri (2011). The central ideas of ILT, metaphor, and clean language that inform this study are described below.

ILT. Rather than an external theory, ILT is a mental representation of what people think leadership is. It has been said that ILT develops in childhood (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005) and that it has both individual and social aspects (House & Aditya, 1997). There is some contention whether ILT is stable over time (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004) or influenced by context and people’s experience with leaders (Nichols & Erakovich, 2013). However, as ILT operates out of awareness, it is unlikely that people are aware of the images they hold and how these influence their perception and expectations of leadership. Research by Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, and Tymon (2011) suggests that surfacing ILT can assist leaders to develop self- and social awareness as well as clarify identity and increase their development and behavioral range. Both Schyns et al. and DeRue and Ashford (2010) highlight the social and relational value of bringing into awareness the implicit models by which people conceive of leadership, which can activate a more explicit negotiation of leadership. This is important in organizations in which leadership is not prescribed by position but is distributed (Fitzsimons, James, & Denyer, 2011) and seen increasingly as a relational and social process (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Schyns et al. found that groups frequently used metaphor to

describe general qualities of leadership in their research to surface ILT. The approach highlighted in this article deliberately focuses on the naturally occurring metaphors of individual leaders to surface and articulate their own ILT.

Metaphor—“*To see a world in a grain of sand.*” The first line of William Blake’s (1807) poem could be a metaphor for metaphor—the idea that we can see a whole world in one apparently small simple thing. To see the world in a metaphor to rephrase Blake’s exquisite line is to recognize that like a grain of sand, metaphor is often overlooked, yet offers the ability to see the world anew. Metaphor is fundamental to understanding as illustrated by Aristotle’s (1924) claim that “it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh” (p. 255). This getting hold of something fresh, embedded in the Greek origins of metaphor—*meta-pherein*, meaning to “carry over” is underscored by Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) claim that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Grove (1989), and Lawley and Tompkins (2000) have all noted how metaphor can induce a creative state aided by the wandering flow of the unconscious and a suspension of everyday logic of the conscious mind. Writing about “The Creative Act,” Koestler (1994) could have been describing metaphor:

Insofar as it depends on unconscious resources, pre-supposes a relaxing of controls and a regression to modes of ideation which are indifferent to the rules of verbal logic, unperturbed by contradiction, untouched by the dogmas and taboos of so called common sense. (p. 178)

When noticed and mused on, metaphor can facilitate a lingering in experience to link conscious and unconscious material that enables new insights to be revealed.

There are various models of metaphor in organizational theory including a tool for comparison (Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002) and a method for generating new knowledge (Cornelissen, 2005) with some scholars asserting that “all knowledge is ultimately rooted in metaphorical (or analogical) modes of perception and thought” (Leary, 1994, p. 2). Despite the debates about how metaphor actually works, there is widespread agreement with Morgan’s (1986) assertion that it is a “way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervade(s) how we understand our world generally” (p. 12). As metaphor helps understand abstract, complex phenomena, it is often used in management research (Cassell & Lee, 2012; Cornelissen, 2005; Grant & Oswick, 1996; Morgan, 1986; Oswick & Jones, 2006). However, most research hitherto has been deductive so that researchers have applied their metaphors from an external perspective to the phenomena in question, such as organizations (Morgan, 1986), change (Marshak, 1993), and leaders (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). An inductive approach involves recognizing metaphors in people’s language and “examining their uses, meaning and impacts” (Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, & Phillips, 2008, p. 10). Cassell and Lee suggested that there are two types of inductive metaphor—those already existing, for example, transcripts or speeches or those elicited purposefully by the researcher. Purposefully elicited inductive studies of metaphor are rare, exceptions being studies by Cassell and Lee (2012) and Tosey, Lawley, and Meese (2014).

Responding to Cornelissen et al.'s (2008) suggestion that further research into metaphors is needed multi-modally and in different organization contexts, this study takes an inductive approach to purposely eliciting the metaphors of leaders from different organizations to articulate their ILTs and to see what they can learn from their metaphors. Following suggestions by Tosey et al. (2014), the approach uses clean language to elicit the metaphors to ensure that the ILT and metaphors are faithful to the leaders and not superimposed by those of the researcher. The origins, method, and contributions of clean language are outlined below.

Clean language. Recognizing that clean is itself a metaphor, clean language is an approach for using metaphor to facilitate clients' discovery of their inner symbolic world (Grove & Panzer, 1989). In essence, it is a faithful enquiry into the inner world kept as free as possible from externally introduced metaphor and assumptions through a small number of metaphor-free questions. Reflecting Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal work that "metaphorical thought is unavoidable, ubiquitous and mostly unconscious" (p. 272), Grove found that clients typically used metaphor to describe their experiences, suggesting that metaphor is essential to the inner world.

Grove noticed that metaphors have a structure and form that is consistent with a person's internal logic, claiming that metaphors can be isomorphic with experience, which has led Lawley and Tompkins to say "Rather than people *having* metaphors, it's as if they *were* their metaphors" (Foreword in Sullivan & Rees, 2008, p. viii). This is a significant claim with implications for how people can understand themselves by attending to their naturally occurring metaphors.

Psychotherapists James Lawley and Penny Tompkins who modeled Grove in the 1990s have continued his approach, which developed largely through therapeutic practice. Their ongoing work has been significant in developing clean language, making it available and accessible beyond the therapeutic domain for business, education, coaching, and research purposes. Lawley and Tompkins (2000) said the function of Clean Language is

- "To acknowledge clients' experience exactly as they describe it.
- To orientate clients' attention to an aspect of their perception.
- To send them on a quest for self-knowledge" (p. 52).

This sounds disarmingly simple; however, the practice of facilitating cleanly is anything but simple, as facilitators need to be creating a model of the client's inner world exactly as their client describes it without overlaying their own model. This involves paying exquisite attention to what they are hearing, seeing, and experiencing, remembering the client's words and gestures, all while musing about where next to direct attention. In addition, facilitators need to bracket their own ways of knowing; be respectful of the client's space, words, gestures, and models; and provide a containing presence. The essence of this approach is the recognition that the client knows more about their inner world than anyone else, and it is through directing attention on that world that the client can be sent on the quest for self-knowledge.

Three contributions of clean language are particularly worth noting: the process of modeling; the recognition of the personal, nuanced, and idiosyncratic nature of metaphor; and the less is more philosophy embedded in the clean language questions, syntax, and vocal quality. The clean language process aims to stay true to the client's experience by enquiring into their metaphors precisely as they are described. Lawley and Tompkins (2004) stated "Modeling is the *methodology*, metaphor the *medium*, and clean language is the *means*." Modeling is a process of understanding how a person makes sense of the world and how they do things. It is something that people do naturally, often unconsciously, such as a child modeling his or her parents or a new leader modeling his or her boss. As metaphor is essential to sense making, when people identify and pay attention to their metaphors, they can create a symbolic model of their way of doing things. Symbolic modeling is used deliberately with clean language facilitation to reveal how people create their models of the world so that they understand more about their own model. For this to happen, the facilitator needs to bracket his or her own assumptions and models to pay attention to the model of the speaker and to direct the speaker's attention to different aspects of their model so that they gain an explicit understanding of it.

This leads to the second major contribution of the clean language process, which is a nuanced, personal understanding of metaphor. This is important as it builds on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) claim that "we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors" (p. 158). However, most of the time, people are unaware of the metaphors they live and lead by. An example of how metaphor is surfaced and its personal meaning explored with clean language is given below in the "eagle" transcript.

The third contribution of clean language is less is more comprising the clean language questions, the syntax used, and the vocal qualities of the facilitator, which combine to maintain attention on the experience of the client with minimal external interference. Less is more applies not only to the small number of questions that are used in clean language but also to the syntax, vocal qualities, and gestures. These should replicate the client's words, vocal qualities, and gestures, rather than introducing those of the facilitator. This total approach; words, vocal quality, syntax and gestures aims to stay with the client's experience and mental model, which may be embodied in gestures as well as in obvious linguistic metaphors. The syntax—or the way the questions are asked—is specific, first acknowledging the client's experience exactly as it is by use of the word "And." The client, assured that his or her experience has been heard, is then invited to attend to a particular aspect of one's experience and then asked a question. For example, "And leadership is like a compass. And when leadership is like a compass, what kind of compass is that compass?" In addition to using the client's words, directing attention to his or her experience through using their own words and the clean language syntax, the facilitator also pays attention to their own vocal quality, typically using a rhythmic curious tone to encourage exploration and minimize interference. These three aspects combine to create an affirming space and tone in which people can articulate and explore their inner models.

In HRD, there are many models that are used to teach leadership; however, it is argued that this process of directing attention inward provides a novel way to understand the actual models of the leaders themselves without imposition of external models.

Method

The method elicits the naturally occurring metaphors of leadership in a clean language facilitated interview. The pilot study reported here was of an exploratory nature to understand how the method could be of benefit to practicing leaders and the implications for HRD practice and development. The study used a purposive sample of eight leaders at CEO, CFO, and director level representing seven nationalities (Russian, German, Dutch, South African, Belgian, Swiss, Luxembourg) and eight industries (tobacco, telecommunications, business school, imaging systems, real estate, cement, electronics, and chemicals). Deliberately drawing on broad range of nationalities, industries, and job roles to gain feedback about the method from these different perspectives, the sample was drawn from leaders who had attended leadership development programs at an international business school a year prior to the study and had expressed interest in further and more personalized development. The study contains seven men and one woman, which is largely representative of the proportion of male–female participants attending leadership development programs. Participants were aged between 30 and 50 years and had between 3 and 18 years experience in leadership roles. The sample is a pragmatic approach to test this innovative method with a range of leaders from different nationalities and industries as well as a response to Nichols and Erakovich's (2013) call for research with experienced leaders in "varied organizational settings" (p. 191) to understand more about the link between ILT and authenticity. Despite the small size of the study and the under-representation of women, the results about the value of surfacing naturally occurring metaphors of leaders as a means of personal development are encouraging.

Findings

Idiosyncratic Images of Leadership

Table 1 provides a précis of the key metaphors used to describe leadership by the participants in response to the clean language question—"your leadership is like what?" The metaphors in the study include leadership falling off the table in environments of stress, an eagle, a shepherd, a wolf pack, connecting the dots, a scout on an adventure, a Greek flag, and being under the microscope. These metaphors are far more idiosyncratic and nuanced than the deductive metaphors that have been used previously to describe leadership. This sample illustrates the diversity of metaphors used to describe leadership indicating very different underlying implicit theories of leadership. For example, the shepherd is creating a safe environment, the eagle is scanning for the right vision, the leader of the wolf pack pays attention to the group dynamics, and

Table 1. Metaphors of Leadership—2012.

Respondent: Role Industry Nationality	Metaphors of leadership Your leadership is like what?
Managing director Global chemical Swiss	<i>Leadership falls off the table when too much stress</i> due to lack of stability and being stretched. I am confronted daily with busyness and stress. I can't get over the stress. Pulled in many different directions and by pressure of shrinking organization. Are people still in the boat with me? All that counts is results. I am worn out by the constant stress and impersonal nature of shrinking organization. Is there time to look into root causes with so many urgent, short-term demands?
Head of division Global electronics Dutch	<i>Shepherd</i> , responsible for finding safe pastures and showing direction. Keeping an overview and letting go of control. Keeping the sheep out of trouble—helping the little ones, nudging the first sheep to move out of comfort zone. I also need a sheep dog to bark a little. I am not driven by being a leader—the position—but by being able to create something—an environment. A leader (shepherd) needs to understand where people are and how to motivate them.
Chief financial officer Regional cement South African	<i>A leader with a wolf pack</i> . Have to communicate openly, heed the rules of engagement, and be brave. If you don't have a good pack, you are at high risk. I need common enough vision to get buy-in and have impact. How you walk, speak, behave everyday has a huge impact on people. Must be bold enough to surround self with people who will push you. The wolf pack leader needs to make decisions but power erodes if not open to others.
Managing director Global real estate Belgian	<i>An eagle, soaring, scanning, using the thermals to get distance and closeness</i> . I need a clear-sighted vision of direction as I am responsible to get people where they need/want to be. Have to balance responsibility with confidence and not knowing. Being on top of people can be lonely as there are few people to talk with but many to care for.
Head of IT Global optics German	<i>Connecting the dots between environment, information, and people</i> . I need to move things and people by seeing the connections between people. Is everyone on the same page? It is hard to connect the dots if on different pages. This is part of the responsibility and burden of leadership—people can sit back with senior person in the room to connect the dots.
Head of geographic market International business school Dutch	<i>A scout on an adventure with freedom to tread new paths</i> . I am moving out into the world and I see the world as an adventure to be enjoyed. There is constant creation of teams and projects. I hate politics and constraints but prefer to use energy and stories to connect people to aspirations at higher level.
Chief financial officer	<i>The Greek flag reminds me not to make fake plans but to be real</i> .

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Respondent: Role Industry Nationality	Metaphors of leadership Your leadership is like what?
European telecoms Luxembourg	As CFO, I am very goal oriented and want to hit the numbers. I can play politics upward very well—it is wrong to play politics with staff. I'm the bad guy—the black sheep who gives the bad news but I can do it straightforwardly and not make fake commitments. The Greek flag reminds me not to be fake.
Head of market development Global Tobacco Russian	<i>Constantly under the microscope for behavior and results from staff and bosses.</i> I am there to keep focus. People need to like their environment to perform well. It is important to have fun but always to have an eye on the task and achievement of results. Relaxing into role to sustain motivation and performance of self and others.

connecting the dots involves seeing what others do not. On one hand, this might not be surprising as the participants were of different ages, levels of experience, and working in diverse industries; on the other hand, the participants had attended a leadership development program at the same business school in the year prior to the interview, which might suggest that they would draw on similar models when considering their own leadership. The highly idiosyncratic nature of the ILT re-enforces Nichols and Erakovich's (2013) conclusions that ILTs are reflective of and influenced by the context. This is a subject for further investigation.

Depth Exploration With Clean Language

Although the overview of the differing metaphors indicates the breadth of the responses, an extract of one interview provides an illustration of clean language facilitation and how this supports depth exploration:

- Interviewer: And your leadership is like what?
- Participant: Exploring the journey, trying to figure out what lies next. The eagle when he's flying is observing and also exploring and figures out what to do next. There are elements of freedom, independence and that's very much me.
- Interviewer: And exploring the journey, and the eagle observing and exploring and very much you. And when very much you, is there anything else about very much you?
- Participant: I have a joyful feeling, it makes you happy and it also gives you the feeling that you can finish something. And when I have that feeling,

- you must think I'm crazy, it's like the eagle spreading his wings and it has that reach and takes a bit more distance.
- Interviewer: And joyful and feeling that the eagle can spread his wings and has reach and takes a bit more distance. And what kind of distance is that distance?
- Participant: I think I have a tendency, I know that I want to be up there and somehow too often I still get sucked in to fly low and to get involved. Purely from an energy point of view, it's a lot easier to go from high to low than from low to high. Imagine a bird, flying down takes no energy at all, you just go down. You steer but you don't have to use your wings. You don't have to use energy to go down. It takes a lot of energy to go back up. Some birds can because they use the airwaves to go back up, the thermals. Eagles do that. Staying in my metaphor, I sometimes find it hard to get back up.
- Interviewer: And when it's hard to get back up, what is hard about getting back up?
- Participant: The ability to let go of what's on the ground, the problems you want to solve, either your own or others. It is in the letting go—"You've been here long enough, get your ass back up in the sky."
- Interviewer: And letting go of what's on the ground . . .
- Participant: Yeah. And the funny thing is when you do succeed, you often find those problems on the ground solve themselves. It often takes a bit of time but they do.

Following the interview, the leader reflected that one of his biggest leadership issues was being able to take distance from the team that he had built. New responsibilities at European Board level mean he needs to balance his time and energy between regional- and country-level concerns. His metaphor is isomorphic with his experience of needing to explore the territory, figure out what comes next by scanning the horizon, and also stay close enough to local issues. His ILT involves the duality of staying involved with people and needing to take distance and get back up to let go of things on the ground. One of the other issues this managing director reflected on was that as eagles are solitary birds, he had to be careful not to take all the responsibility for scanning the environment, which could leave him in a lonelier place than necessary.

One of the questions addressed by the author in this pilot study was how clean should clean be? The above transcript illustrates the power of clean language when an interviewer is able to bracket their own assumptions and direct the attention of their client. It is suggested that future research aims to be as clean as possible to ensure maximum benefit for the client.

A Reflective Space for Authoring One's Own Leadership

In response to a final clean language question, "Is there anything else about your leadership?" seven out of eight respondents viewed their leadership as something that was

Table 2. The Growth of Leadership.

Respondent	Is there anything else about your leadership?
Managing director Global Chemical	Do I still want this leader role? What do I see in the mirror? What do I want to be?
Head of division Global Electronics	Growing into leadership. What does it take to grow into your own leadership?
Chief financial officer Regional Cement	Changing sense of self and leadership. I feel like a rose opening—it's about change and growth.
Managing director Global Real Estate	Leadership is a voyage of evolution. A constant battle of outside influences pulling you to be someone others want you to be.
Head of IT Global Optics	Movement in own leadership
Head of Geographic Market International Business School	Reinvention of self
Chief financial officer European Telecoms	Working on me constantly to be more real. I'm growing into myself in the role.
Head of market development Global Tobacco	Evolution of self and of leadership. Moving from very task focused to more developmental of others.

evolving, unfolding, or growing. It appears that in addition to exploring mental models, most also reflected on the evolutionary changing nature of their leadership. These meta-level reflections, highlighted in Table 2, were stated in metaphors such as “growing into oneself in the leadership role” (interview, November 2012). Schwandt (2005) claimed this ability to critically reflect on assumptions enables a “continuous pursuit of meaning” (p. 189), which helps leaders to examine their own sense-making frames, remain open to learning, and challenge individual and organizational assumptions.

Although critical reflection can support leaders' thinking processes as outlined above, simply taking time to think about themselves provided a sense of satisfaction. As one leader said,

The trouble is, in a busy day and a year is just a sequence of busy days one after the other, you remember fragments of it all and this interview is a moment when you have the ability to bring it all together. (Head of Geographic Market, International Business School)

The “it” that was being brought together in the interview was the leader's own thoughts about leadership—something that most respondents said with some surprise that they rarely if ever spent any time actively considering. The creation of a developmental space in which leaders can notice their own thoughts about leadership rather than be on the

receiving end of input about frameworks or coaching about a particular challenge they face offers an opportunity to develop self-awareness about their own leadership assumptions and behavior. This focus on the mental models of leaders has been called a key task of leadership development (Johnson, 2008) and the most important work of HRD (Pfeffer, 2005). Claiming that HRD can take a pivotal role in affecting the cultures of organizations, Pfeffer (2005) says, "Because what we do comes from what and how we think, intervening to uncover and affect mental models may be the most important and high-leverage activity HR can perform" (p. 128).

The other benefit of the process was that several respondents noticed a greater sense of authority and assurance with themselves. "Authority" shares the same stem as "author," and it seems that the surfacing and articulation of ILT and metaphors enabled respondents to get in touch with the source and foundations of their own leadership. For example, the newly appointed head of IT for a global optical systems company said, "It is as if I know more about what I stand for now." This has two implications—one is a realization that there is no universal truth about leadership, but rather multiple personal constructions of it that are subject to individual and social forces. If leaders recognize that their views of leadership or underlying ILT are indeed their own, it might encourage a more explicit discussion with others of underlying assumptions and negotiation of leadership.

The second implication is an increasing reliance on one's own authorship. This is what developmental psychologist Keegan (1982) terms "the Evolving Self." Keegan's (1982, 1994, 2000) work is primarily concerned with how people make meaning. Critical to his thinking about transformational learning is the differentiation between object and subject. People can reflect on their world—what he called object—when they recognize it as something distinct from themselves. However, he claimed that people cannot reflect on the parts of themselves that are hidden or invisible—what he called subject—because these parts are held internally and taken for granted. This includes people's unquestioned beliefs about the world. Keegan suggested that people move through various stages of consciousness from the socialized mind comprising unexamined images and beliefs that they have taken in from others to a self-authorizing mind in which people construct their own images and beliefs. As leaders become self-authoring, he suggested they are more capable of dealing with increased complexity, which is essential for leadership today.

Results from this pilot study indicate that leaders can benefit from surfacing and making visible their own assumptions about leadership so that they are more aware of the assumptions on which they are operating. This process seems to offer a way for leaders to surface and articulate their own constructions of leadership, encouraging them to author and gain assurance with their own leadership rather than be unwittingly following earlier role models or generic business school models.

Implications for Practice and Research

Limited attention has been given to the naturally occurring metaphors of leaders with previous work about metaphor remaining at a generalized level, as identified by Morgan (1986) or Alvesson and Spicer (2011). The study illustrated above is a start in

exploring the potential of a more personalized non-interpretive way of surfacing and exploring metaphors. This corresponds with calls for HRD to take up an important role in leader and leadership development (Day, 2001). Leader development can occur at an individual level when a leader gains insights into their implicit theories of leadership and an understanding of how and why they think and act. This is a way to develop self-awareness, which can help individual leaders to navigate increasingly complex environments. As Johnson (2008) wrote, "The difference between effective and ineffective leaders is their mental models or meaning structures, the way they view and deal with their world" (p. 85). Leadership development can occur when the surfacing and negotiating of different assumptions and constructions of leadership can create a more enabling high-performing culture (Pfeffer, 2005). The approach described in this article offers a novel method for HRD practitioners to get beneath the surface to understand how leaders think about leadership. With relatively few clean language questions and practice in bracketing their own assumptions, HRD practitioners and practicing leaders can find out a lot more about what is on people's minds. It is suggested that the article adds a practical method for HRD to take up the vital role suggested by Pfeffer (2005) in illuminating mental models.

Despite the small nature of the study, the enthusiastic responses of practicing leaders suggest that the approach is worth further development and refinement. It is suggested that further research explores this terrain with a much broader leadership population across a range of different organizations and with a more balanced gender ratio. It is further proposed to follow up on the findings about how leaders think about growth in their roles (see Table 2) to identify how leaders conceptualize their own development. It is recommended to conduct a more systematic enquiry into how participants perceive the process of surfacing and exploring their inner world, as there appears to be anecdotal richness in this to be understood further. And finally, it is suggested that further research explores the link between exploring ILT with metaphorical models facilitated by clean language and the use of drawing techniques with ILT as articulated by Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer, and Kerschreiter (2013). This is an important avenue for further research as drawing can promote non-rational reflection and multi-dimensional processing of data that might otherwise remain unexpressed.

The approach is not unproblematic however. It is necessary to have sufficient training and skill with clean language to conduct the interview with minimal interference. Although courses are publically available in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, it takes time to become proficient in the method. The process involves a meticulous attention to detail and patience, which do not fit easily with the desire and demands of many individuals and organizations for quick development. However, it is suggested that even using some of the basic clean language principles highlighted above, leadership development practitioners can ask cleaner questions to facilitate leaders to find out more about their inner world.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated an approach to explore leadership and its development from the internal and symbolic perspective. It suggests that this kind of approach could contribute to a more robust sense of self through lessening dependence on external

frameworks and generating a greater acceptance of one's own models. It is very hard to be authentic if one is constantly following someone else's drum and not heeding the call of one's own. It is suggested that leaders have the opportunity to challenge their assumptions and taken for granted ways of thought and action by noticing and making explicit their implicit theories and metaphors. This kind of reflective approach to developing more authentic leadership can also be a creative and internally oriented counter-balance to the overwhelming array of "how to" books on leadership.

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Note

1. For further resources about clean language including its use in research, see www.cleanlanguage.co.uk

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