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The Aesthetics of Leader Development: *a pedagogical model for developing leaders*

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Abstract

The basis for a new pedagogical model of leader development is presented. The model draws its philosophical underpinnings from the science of hermeneutics and consequently views leaders primarily as meaning-seekers and meaning-makers. Three basic principles are set forward: the principle of the transcendental field, the principle of the contextualized-Self, and the principle of primary intentionality. Building on this base, the paper addresses the value of direct experience and the various means of contemplation of this direct experience as key requirements of leader development. Aesthetic processes are then offered as prime experiential candidates for engaging the leader in the types of experiences necessary to meet hermeneutic demands. Natural dynamics within the leader are triggered by these processes. Through aesthetic processes, leaders trigger the dynamics of wonder, enchantment, and imagination, helping the leader to develop a more expansive palette. The leader learns as well to use this expanded palette to craft meaning into complex organizational social circumstances. The design parameters for aesthetic-based learning experiences are briefly discussed.

I. THE ARGUMENT

This work pertains to the development of leaders – to the what and how of leader development. It provides the theoretical foundations but also the principles and methods for a new pedagogical model for developing leaders. The foundations in section II stem from the constructivist and phenomenological traditions. The principles of experience-based learning in section III build naturally on the theoretical foundations to provide a useful, well developed methodology. Finally, the specific methods of this approach to leader development rest on a growing body of aesthetic processes needed to inform and design practical leader development experiences (sections IV and V).

Outlined here is an approach to the development of leaders that differs significantly from the current, behaviourist approach in the field and from the current practices of The Banff Centre's Leadership Development division. The competency-based approach currently in vogue in the field draws heavily on positivist/objectivist theoretical foundations based largely on objective, descriptive and explanatory methods. This particular approach is based on identifying current best practices from examples of successful leaders. Specific behaviours or competencies are then distilled, denoted, researched and become the basis for designing leader development experiences.

Whereas the current approach draws heavily on the behavioural sciences, the pedagogical approach, outlined here, draws predominantly on the science of hermeneutics – the science of interpretation and meaning creation. The behaviourist approach views leading as the application of identified actions. The hermeneutic approach views leading as a constantly emergent, creative act. Both have value but they are, essentially, two different views of the same phenomenon. If leading is conceptualized as behavioural, then the approach to developing leaders focuses on the training, application and practice of specific, well-defined skills and competencies. If leading is viewed hermeneutically, then the developmental approach focuses on the act of learning itself, on discovering questions, and on the constant creation of meaning.

If leading is viewed as largely meaning-making, then the methods used to develop leaders must reflect the commensurate foundational assumptions. From this view, leading is not only viewed as a continuous act of meaning-making but as the ability to reflect on and learn from the continuous process of meaning-making. A leader learns not which behaviours, skills or competencies to develop and apply, but how to make sense, reflect on that sense-making and shift the means of sense-making as needed. A leader, then, can be viewed as applying skill and competence onto a circumstance or situation - a *Practitioner*, and as a *Hermeneut* – a seeker, questioner, and crafter of meaning. The former view reflects the dominant thinking and practice currently in leader development, the latter an emerging but, as yet, not fully developed approach to developing leaders.

Meaning-making/sense-making starts with experience, real experience from and in the world. The experience provides the ground, grist, and raw material from which meaning is made. The leader's own past experiences, mental models, predispositions, attitudes, and opinions engage with, sift, manipulate, and mold this raw material. The cultural

context of the leader and the immediate situational circumstances contribute to the pot of material for consideration. How a leader opens up to experience and how that leader is affected by these experiences determines how the leader's imagination is engaged in the act of meaning-making. The ultimate action that is taken is also culturally influenced and nuanced.

Learning through experience creates a sound framework for leading and for developing leaders. Understanding one's own learning methods and assumptions becomes, then, a prerequisite condition for leading. Further, recognizing one's own style, the effects of present attitudes, and the conceptual models used to make sense are critical components of leading. Finally, the ability to shift conceptual models and even whole thinking frameworks as needed provides the required quiver of self-reflective, constantly creating processes required by the leader.

A leader, however, needs also to act and to act in a manner that produces effects that are informed, valuable, and ethical within the leader's context. The action creates more experience which then must be understood - thus perpetuating the cycle of meaning creation. If self-reflective tools are incorporated into action then reflection-in-action becomes a powerful means of learning in and through action. Add in again the process of 'collaborative reflection'¹ and a leader is capable of creating meaning through and with others.

The acts of leaders become manifestations of meaning and so resemble expressive acts. They are context influenced, conceptually driven, and reflectively created. In this expressive mode a leader needs to call on and depend on qualities of a more personal nature, on internal mechanisms, and on qualities of character. Various forms of expression become important as does exposure to different ways of thinking and experiencing. From a hermeneutic perspective, exploration of the inner self becomes essential in any leader development work.

With a hermeneutic focus on leading, leader development requires a totally different paradigm from a behavioural focus. The latter focus requires clear definition and articulation of requisite behaviours and their conditions for application. In this vein leader development programs contain the underlying theory for the behaviours, specific behaviour descriptions are then discussed and modeled, and finally, the opportunities to practice the behaviours are provided. The hermeneutic approach, on the other hand, requires rich experiences, multiple means of engaging in these experiences, and a number of ways to reflect on those experiences.

More specifically, the hermeneutic approach requires leaders to experience deeply and fully and to craft their actions through reflective thought and deep self-understanding. To this end, various aesthetic processes operate as the means or methods of developing self-reflective expression. Various artistic processes are used to create a space for expression, ecological principles provide some powerful conceptual models for meaning-making, and the dynamics of culture provide the rich context for deeper learning and action. The leader, as Hermenaut, seeks both personal meaning and personal expression, the means to

conceptualize and reflect internally, and finally, the ability to act thoughtfully in the world.

II. FOUNDATIONS – PRINCIPLES, MIND MAPS, AND SENSUAL TERRITORIES²

This section provides the theoretical and philosophical foundations for the hermeneutic approach to leader development. A hermeneutic approach to leader development that focuses on the art or method of ‘meaning-making’ and ‘learning to learn’ is asserting fundamental principles. And a principle regardless of the kind of certainty potentially aimed at (whether essentially qualitative or quantitative) must be supported empirically. Whether it is Lonergan’s philosophical notion of the *transcendental field* that shall shortly be discussed, or one that falls within the scope of deductive thinking, there must be correlates linked to the empirical world. If not, the mind is likely to be remanded to the confines of quasi empirical truth - private, esoteric narrative thought full of speculation and imaginative fancy. As well, a phenomenon treated quantitatively in its capacity to enhance inter-subjective dialogic discourse (distinct from top down less active expository exchange), must similarly be judged against empirical standards. To insist that principles are empirically identifiable means, then, they must be rooted in an interiority of personal experience, linked to the physical senses that report an external (extra-mental) world³.

In this process of meaning-making three restrictions are necessary to ensure that the internal activity of making sense or meaning is valid and connects in some way to the external world. The first restriction is *instrumental* and takes the form “if you want to know this, do this’. To meet this restriction there must be knowledge of the means by which something is learned or known. The second restriction is that of *direct apprehension* an “...intuitive...immediate experience of the domain”³ under question. The third, and final restriction, *communal confirmation, (or rejection)* entails the “...checking of the results - the data, the evidence-with others” who have also met the first two restrictions.

Principle #1 - Transcendental Field

The first principle, *the transcendental field* is defined by Bernard Lonergan as “not by what man knows, not by what he can know, but by what he can ask about; and it is only because we can ask more questions than we can answer that we know about the limitations of our knowledge”⁴. This principle suggests that developing a leader as a Hermeneut requires the concept of questioning – of raising or evoking questions in order to make sense of self and of the world. The questions arise from what is known, what is knowable, and surfacing questions about what is unknown. It is through posing questions that the field of study or the particular problem or issue is ‘transformed’. This movement from away from dependency on ‘assigned’ skills, garnered objectively from multiple cases in the ‘world of leading’ to the more ‘subjectively-focused self-directedness’ created through the leader questioning his/her own knowledge, follows this first principle⁵.

This principle also suggests that no one explanation or description is ‘true’ but always conditional and open to modification and change. In the development of the leader as Hermenaut, the focus is on rich experiences that will be interpreted differently by all involved. This principle suggests that developmental work should move leaders towards more self-directedness by helping them recognize what parts of reality they focused on, how they learned in the experience, how they created meaning themselves, how they jointly created meaning with others, and finally, what questions they raised.

Principle #2 - Contextualized-Self versus Separate-Self

The little “s” self (variously designates an isolated self, bounded ego, or separate-self) philosophically speaking, runs contrary to everything currently held to be true in eco-environmental thought. It is in fact a contradiction in terms. For example, David Suzuki, has argued for years that the biosphere, though populated by billions of seemingly distinct species, is actually a beehive of causal interdependence, and this includes humanity whether we wish to admit it or not⁶. Unfortunately, the contradiction is not easily detected, due more to extreme obviousness than subtlety, hence its hiddenness. Thus, undisclosed, the assumption of a separate-self functions unverified (as if it was true) in our private worlds, as well as the more public world of leadership. If one listens carefully to the cross chatter in any home or business there is constant reference to I/me as an undeniably held separate-self.

Second, once we acknowledge all is not well in a universe populated by things of a distinct, monistic order, questions like, “What is the nature of this ‘who’ that characterizes the person as participant (metaphysical question)”, or, “How does the person who knows validate her knowledge of the world? (epistemological question)” begin to force themselves to the surface. As they arise, they challenge the notion of separateness, of a single “I” living as if the “I” was alone.

However, once these metaphysical or epistemological questions are given serious space for consideration, consciousness begins to shift (however painfully resistant the change might be). In short, individuals experience themselves as expanded, as *more than...* As a result a much larger sense of Self (denoted by upper case “S”) comes into metaphysical focus, which we shall designate as contextualised-Self.

‘Contextualised’ because this ‘who’ that knows appears to exist within a series of continuous sub-stratums, a ground within a ground within a ground, a continuum of interrelationships, always something in context to something else. This context, though weakly defensible and intangible at first, begins to gain momentum. Imperceptibly it gains ground in the face of the more overwhelmingly obvious - those solidly conditioned social norms. If pursued long enough and far enough what was originally felt as a discrete monistic separateness gives way to a seamless context, where sense of Self *defies* a strictly knitted boundary line separating “it” from “other”. Therefore, as an interiorly observed phenomena (psychological felt-sense of being this contracted separate-self), self does not and cannot defend either the existence of its own metaphysical ground as something solid/real in the world, nor can it epistemologically justify the common

perception that the world lies out there external/apart from its very own existence as this other, restricted, bounded something.

From the standpoint of hermeneutics, *bounded-self* is really only capable of rallying around a notion of solipsism whereas a *contextualized-self* reflects the true reality – that we are all in connection. For a leader, the Self defines not only the individual leader but an individual within a context and not separate from that context. Meaning is made and learning is accomplished within a richly dynamic and resourceful environment.

In summary, *separate-self* cannot guarantee the existence of anything beyond the skin of the individual who looks out from his peep hole portals upon the world. In fact it cannot even guarantee what is within the skin. The separate-self, then, is a contradiction in terms because it does not actually exist, even though, it is commonly perceived to be an obvious fact. The separate-self (bounded-ego) is an idea (thought), but like all ideas is only capable of being labeled real if it can sustain serious empirical correlation with what is known about real world beyond the cranial activity of formal thinking, which it cannot. From a hermeneutic point of view, a leader cannot suffer the misuse of consciousness. It leads to the loss of freedom, a lost opportunity for on-going *openness towards the other*. It capitulates into flatland reductionist thinking that looks like ‘my opinion over yours, ours over theirs’.

The developmental activity of learning-to-learn and meaning-making is nothing short of reinforcing the meta-cognitive activity of self-remembering. Understanding the phenomenon of self-remembering (notice what you notice) is achieved by doing it. Of course to understand by doing implies the method of collaborative-reflection in conjunction with others. In the act of self-remembering the Contextualized-Self, while focusing on the issue of whatever occupies the mind’s eye in that moment, maintains simultaneous awareness of its peripheral outer circumstances. This dual activity is not judged to have actually taken place until one is able to hold both states (sometimes more) together, a perpetual unfolding in context (syntony) with everything else emerging out of the ever present moment (and always paradoxically arranged). This is what is meant by Contextualized-Self in relation to self-remembering.

Principle #3 – Primary Intentionality

Heidegger says *intentionality* has by virtue of its root “tend” a close affinity with “caring”. To tend something is to take care of it, and so at the centre of intentionality lies ‘to take care of’.⁷ This primary directive towards care designates subjective and objective correlates. That is to say, it assigns a link between the subjective world and the objective world out there. In this sense, then, intentionality should be viewed as verb rather than noun. Consequently, primary intentionality is an act whereby the power of consciousness intends an object. In other words, consciousness actively reaches out, gives chase to the potentially graspable object found within its scope. However, just as true is the reverse whereby the object intends the subject. That is to say, the object reaches back in its surplus to inundate the subject⁸.

In short, the primary epistemological act of knowing - premised on a dual informing/conforming mind - creates a thoroughly dynamic state of inter-dependent origination (causal reciprocity), one describable in simple terms as 'co-existence-with'. And it is just this mode of mutual 'giving-over', which is responsible for childlike states of awe (enchantment/wonderment). It is this mode that triggers the imagination while deeply connected with what is happening. This form of intentionality can be naturally triggered/experienced and leads directly to many more 'perspectives' or associations with the external world.

Aesthetic processes talk directly to primary intentionality. Artistic practices, experiences of nature and the environment, and the artifacts and processes of culture all speak deeply to the leader (participant observer). The first creates knowing through self-expression, the second triggers knowing from feeling a part of something much larger, and the third acknowledges the mythological themes and deeply human stories of the culture. The type of knowing that comes through these paths link the leader's internal world of deep values, attitudes, and cultural beliefs, which are often unspoken and unconscious, with the demands of the moment.

In contrast, Co-existence-with is not to be confused with 'knowledge-of' (information-of) which emerges as the second mode of knowing - secondary intentionality. This is conceptual reasoning, and is most easily recognizable as ordinary thinking. This form of knowing originates due to concepts, hence its designation as secondary or latter in the way the mind comes to know itself and the world 'by means of' concepts. This form of knowing can also lead to thinking about knowing which extends the exploration and creation of meaning. The way one thinks can be reviewed and compared to other ways of thinking and so increase perspective.

Primary intentionality depends on immediacy of experience (German *erleben*) - direct recognition - whereby one knows that one knows since one gets it on one's own pulse (integration of head/heart/hand). Here mind is simply in a state of acknowledged openness so that which informs does so in the absence of distorting factors. The immediacy of the knowing act is very different from secondary intentionality in which the act of knowing is mediated.

In mediated acts of knowing (knowledge-of) one insists on something by presumption. That is to say, it rests on the authority of secondary sources regardless of whether these sources are persons or codified disciplines of knowledge (e.g. literature, economics, psychology, management studies etc.) and, therefore, knowing is unverified by the immediacy of personal experience. To say it differently, the realm of secondary intentionality explores assumptions/beliefs premised on the primary value of former concepts, and so on. It mines the truth value logically contained within the connections between concepts linked in a series. Primary intentionality upholds immediacy of experience (non-mediated act) in which there exists no possible default to a separate-self. No monologue, no interior tape of moral shoulds or should-nots endlessly played over. Rather, immediacy means truly the authoring of one's own words.

The means to and through these two modes of knowing to truth (learning how to learn) is dialogic inquiry - the posing of a leader's questions together with others. So simple yet so far reaching, something so often unrecognized because our culture is consumed by the deaf half of language (speaking, speaking, speaking) at the expense of the open half (listening, listening, listening). And in one stroke questions frame the possible, the not-yet-actual stance of the leader. Herein lies the way though dissolving the sticky places that inhibit a person's future growth as a leader. In this sense, leaders create meaning not by fixing something – by correcting a misinterpretation – but by a shifting of ideas and frameworks – *kaleidoscopically*.

III. THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE IN LEADER DEVELOPMENT

The three principles above provide the foundational support for viewing leaders as hermenauts. However, they also point the way to how those leaders could be developed. The seeds for designing the types of experiences required by budding hermenauts are also found. The means to develop these kinds of leaders are richly experiential – indeed they are profoundly experienced-based. However, experience is seldom a straight-forward affair but is often rather ambiguous, messy, and confusing. Experience is subjective and open to multiple interpretations, not all of them mutually supportive. This section provides arguments for learning to learn through felt experience, ambiguity and paradox.

Arguably, at one level, learning can be said to be the acquisition of content comprised of knowledge, competencies and skills (transmission model). However, learning how to learn supersedes content proper. Rather, learning how to learn constitutes a meta-language in which what one knows (knowledge-of) is scrutinized and where mind *observes/is mindful of* its own contents. In other words, the claim is that mind is capable of mirroring back (witnessing) to itself its sense-making contents.

This means the human mind has the capacity to engage in at least two dissimilar psychological states of knowing. One state is designated typically as 'either/or' thinking. It tends to tether the mind to linear, often reductionist - 'it should be this way and only this way' - types of thinking. However, as is frequently experienced in daily life, logic regularly goes amuck and is found wanting. When this happens, the mind typically abandons position and seeks the alternative 'or'. The psychological state of 'either/or' thinking is marked by the mind's incapacity to forge a conjunctive link between 'holding' more than one cognitive thread at a time, while acknowledging uncertainty to the truth of what-is. The standard conclusion - each state is dissimilar enough not to warrant suspending them in a 'lets see attitude' while continuing to listen and explore. This is a difficult thing to do. Most of us trained in this culture do not value this process as a profitable approach to truth.

However, in the case of a mind that can simultaneously forge a conjunctive link between the state of *either* and the state of *or*, that person can be said to have jumped a level. In short, she has acquired an order of knowing that is different in kind to the former, and entered the realm of paradox. To think paradoxically is to hold *both* the object or content

of one's awareness *and* simultaneously acknowledge its ambiguity. The person is wisely attuned to ambivalence and so any future claim to truth is tempered against the human desire to be definitive with respect to unassailable certitude (the classic Greek position).

For the uninitiated, paradoxical thinking is absurd, and since it is unthinkable it is summarily rejected. Usually the explanation is that a wrong turn had been taken in seeking truth, and so such a mind merely picks up where it left off and trundles along its merry way, secure in belief that the next avenue examined will surely yield the gold of certitude. Alan Watts⁹ referred to paradox as the wisdom of insecurity in which religious and metaphysical truth is vindicated precisely by being jettisoned. Kaufman's Ricoeur regards paradox as capable of yielding truth indirectly by means of the fallibility principle, and adds positively, "the very opacity" of our ambiguities and confusions exist as the "surest guides to the real."¹⁰

Learning to learn then, requires the witnessing of two psychological (mental) states of being (in paradoxical tension), and requires a considerable amount of discipline and practice to accomplish. The difficulty is not in being able to recall these states from memory involving some sort of linear-time succession. All of us can do this. The key is not their acknowledgement under separate cover but the capacity to actually hold both states at the same moment. When initially introduced, this novel take on thinking causes developing leaders to practice the two states separately from each other - first one then the other, and so on.

A second process incumbent in the act of learning to learn is advanced by Taylor¹¹. He encourages us to think of learning in terms of different ways of knowing. He posits a simple epistemology that includes 'knowing in your gut' and 'knowing in your head'. The former is considered 'embodied knowing' and similar to tacit knowledge¹² or to aesthetic knowledge¹³. Embodied knowing tends to reside in the body or in the senses whereas knowing in the head resides in the concepts we use when reflecting on experience or when we communicate.

Gut knowing or embodied knowing tends to correspond with the second principle of primary intentionality where the experience is felt directly through the senses – a direct way of knowing. Knowing in the head corresponds to secondary intentionality where the knowing comes from concepts, second-hand, through the use of conceptual tools. Taylor's challenge is how to move from one to the other in a way that ensures learning – how can an individual move from knowing in the gut to knowing in the head and vice-versa?

His challenge is compelling because an approach to leader development that depends to a great degree on rich experience that generates a great deal of embodied knowing must be accompanied by the means to translate that primary knowing to in-the-head knowing so it will be more firmly anchored and rendered capable of action and communication. Without such a means of translation, the primary experiences may be lost or remain out of consciousness. The next section addresses this issue.

IV. AESTHETIC PROCESSES AND THE HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

The hermeneutic approach requires methods of leader development that extend logically from the theoretical foundations and from the methodological principles of this approach. Put succinctly, if leaders are considered primarily as meaning seekers and meaning makers then the means for developing them must also be hermeneutic in nature. The means, themselves, used to develop leaders must trigger and engage the meaning-making processes of the leader while the leader learns.

A growing body of methods, known collectively as Aesthetic methods, however, provide a reasonable means of engaging the learning leader in meaning-seeking and meaning-making as a form of learning. The term ‘aesthetics’, however, may require some elucidation – in short, aesthetics refers to any activity or artifact that engages the senses. Normally, when we speak of organizations we do so through an economic lens – our meaning comes from value-based, financially commoditized, strategies and alliances. Sometimes we use an organizational development lens – our meaning comes from structural rationalities, performance improvement, structural change, and input/output efficiencies. Or we may use a political lens – where meaning comes from power and status, turf protection, ideologies, control, relationships of influence, etc.

A significantly different lens is the aesthetic lens where meaning comes from our sensual territories. The aesthetic lens addresses embodied, emotional, sensual, symbolic elements of ourselves and our cultural environments¹⁴. Aesthetic entities are qualitative, requiring description and a high degree of interpretation. Aesthetic knowledge is situated in the body. The aesthetic dynamic is present within all people and in all interactions between and among people - an integral part of existence whether it is used consciously or goes unnoticed below the surface. The aesthetic dynamic intuitively synthesizes fluidities into decisions, acts, structures, etc. often without rational or logical justification. Aesthetic knowledge is a way to perceive, a way to produce meanings and realities.

To briefly review, the hermeneutic approach is based on the science of interpretation, of creating meaning. This approach reflects the basic human interest in communicating and because leading is largely about communication through conversation, hermeneutics provides a sound conceptual foundation for leader development. This approach requires views of the world, stories as told through individual expression. These stories or expressions are put forward and tested in concert with others through affirmation or rejection. It is also assumed that knowledge arises within the process of conversation. There exists then, a complex interaction of self and object (issue, circumstance, or problem) in a definable setting (culture).

Experience and reflection are keystones of this approach. Hermeneutics requires attention to experience in a manner far deeper and more systematic than our routine daily existence. External events, reading, spontaneous internal ideas, and dreams all provide the ground that triggers questioning and the reflective stance that may or may not happen in-the-moment. This approach requires an individual to be a witness of his/her own

conversations - both internal and external – and others who bear witness to the conversations of the group.

Hermeneutics is an effort after meaning. Mechanisms of expression and interpretation are then primary processes. To fully explore the interpretive requirements of this method, psychological, socio-cultural, historic, and environmental influences on interpretation must be emphasized. The leader's inner world and external context are primary elements for consideration and they connect intimately through the process of meaning-making. Hermeneutics requires the connection of the psychological with the social with the cultural and environmental contexts. The dynamics of mini-cultures (small groups, organizations, etc.) require an appreciation of the interconnectedness of individual to context to environment and the cycles/patterns of interaction inherent in these interconnections.

A hermeneutic approach to leader development, then, requires methods of learning that reflect and support the psycho-socio-cultural-environmental nature of meaning-making. Aesthetic processes provide a solid foundation for selecting and developing these methods. To this end, artistic processes, principles of ecology, and the dynamics of culture creation provide three avenues of selection and development. Each of these is discussed.

Artistic Process

The creative process as often displayed through the work of artists has been well researched but still remains a source of mystery. Psychological models have been presented to explain creativity, programs have been designed to develop creativity, and societally, debates arise as to the value and worth of creative outcomes. The hermeneutic approach focuses not on the creative process per se or on the desire to develop creativity in the leader but to use the artistic process to explore and express self. The specific focus of artistic process is on triggering the leader's imagination, on engaging the enchantment process whereby the leader is open to and curious about self and the world.

Artistic processes allow the leader to explore self. Through well developed artistic practices such as mask, theatre, painting/drawing, music and sound, ceramics, sculpture, etc. a leader utilizes processes for self-exploration and self-expression. Because a hermeneutic approach requires interior work, artistic methods provide the means of engagement that evoke curiosity, invoke imagination and provoke question, challenge and reflection. Artistic processes, then become a key cornerstone of a hermeneutic approach to leader development.

Ecological Awareness

If artistic processes provide the interior work, the concept of 'ecology' and the principles involved provide a way for viewing the leader in context. An ecology, in the most general sense, is a family of interconnections. It is the nature and dynamics of these interconnections that provides the context for the outer work of the hermenaut. As

outlined in the foundations section, leaders require context to fully create meaning. The context is just as important as the internal psychological landscape of the individual leader.

Ecological principles provide a way of understanding the nature of the critical interconnections required for sound meaning-making. Principles of ecological functioning are rich with metaphor and scope for the developing leader. Ecological dynamics provide a much larger scale within which the leader operates. The complexity of these interconnections leads to many phenomena that directly affect the leader and/or his organization. The dynamics of the economy, of an industry, and or sector create the fluid world of the leader and the organization.

Ecological dynamics provide a means for entering into a complex world and for making sense of this world. The meaning to be found in cycles of decline and renewal of forests can be applied to markets and industries. Events and patterns can make sense if viewed from a broader, ecological perspective with a clear focus on the dynamic, process nature of the events and patterns. Recognizing the complex, systemic nature that characterizes the world of the leader can provide a firm grounding for sense-making.

Ecological principles also provide a vast field of rich metaphors for the leader to help in sense-making and communication. Ethical issues inherent with such concepts as ‘sustainability’ force the leader to connect personal values and beliefs to consequences in the world. When a leader crafts an action, she places this action in a very dynamically rich environment where unintended consequences are always possible. Through imagination the leader crafts an act but this act is never without context and never without complete effect. Using concepts of ecological dynamics gives the leader a larger view within which meaning is made.

Dynamics of Culture

No approach to meaning-making can be complete without the element of cultural dynamics. Each leader was raised in a cultural milieu complete with social norms, expectations, doctrine, and principles. From the level of the society to the community, to the organization, to the family, cultural dynamics are at play. These dynamics often have a deep history. Over long periods of time, traditions of thought, action, and meaning have been deeply ingrained in the psychology of societal members. Leaders are, first and foremost, members of society and bring with them to their roles as leaders deeply ingrained, almost unconscious vestiges of that culture.

A hermeneutic approach to leader development, by necessity, includes knowledge of cultural dynamics. Teasing out the cultural threads of an experience, reflecting on the origin of a deep emotional reaction, or discussing underlying assumptions behind a given action requires the backdrop of cultural forces and influences. This is no small task. How can anyone truly separate one’s own daily psychological reality from the larger cultural spectacles that are ingrained into our unconsciousness?

For a developing hermenaut, the laboratory for cultural work is the small group. All cultural dynamics can be observed and felt as well as replicated when a small group of people come together. The group creates norms almost automatically. These norms are based on cultural beliefs and assumptions that guide group interaction. The leader cannot help but be both a member and an observer of the group but this provides practice in the dual perspective needed for creating meaning. The group also provides the means by which the hermenaut engages in meaning-creation with others. The cultural dynamics of the group, because they are close to automatic, can be observed and discussed and made sense of. They can also be changed given the will of the group. The process of change itself requires meaning-making.

Cultural dynamics also provide another avenue for the hermenaut. These dynamics entail the mythological. The deep currents of ideas, cultural icons, images, and archetypes are found through the mythological mirror. For the leader, the mythological perspective operates to place the individual human in context. The mythological helps to connect the individual to the greater forces of the universe. Over our history, humans have developed deeply engrained notions of what it means to be human on this earth. This perspective cannot be ignored.

V. Engaging the Aesthetic Processes in Leader Development

The three arenas described above operate as a means to an end. The end is the development of the practice of hermeneutic leading. Inherent in the hermeneutic approach is both reflection and action. To develop as a true hermenaut, the leader builds a solid, considered practice that operates daily. This practice is not based on exercising learned skills, although some skills are involved, but on the utilization of what is already within the individual leader. The hermeneutic approach draws forth much of what the leader already brings into the world. The practice is developed largely by drawing on the dynamics of meaning-making embedded in the leader's individual psychology and in the inherent nature of the group grounded in a distinct culture. It is upon these two naturally occurring dynamics that the leader builds his/her practice. Acting more as a magician, the leader elicits the psychological and cultural dynamics into the process of meaning-making.

The experiences designed for developing this type of leader create the context for triggering these innate processes. The following four processes act as focus points in the design of developmental experiences.

1. Enchantment

The ability to let oneself feel wonder. This capacity reflects the leader's ability to find fascination, allure, and attractiveness in everyday people, events, and objects. The ability to fantasize and to be seduced by things of the world is also included. The willingness of an individual to be entranced and arrested by a moment, scene, or phrase. The human spirit has an absolute, unforgiving need for regular excursions into enchantment. The ability to identify and create the sacred.

2. *Imagination*

The ability to see something that is not real or present. The ability to engage and work with imagination and to use imagination as a personal resource – the ability of an individual to see new possibilities and paths and to read deeply into events, people, and stories to find hidden or deeper meaning. The capacity to think metaphorically and mythologically. The art of reading life experiences for their poetry. This capacity provides a key element in living through experience and provides the basis for inquiry and exploration.

3. *Craft*

Crafting is about making something or bringing something into being. The capacity to live intentionally with mindfulness and deliberation. This capacity includes the effort to explore, discover, create and express often with a degree of artistry one's character. This capacity requires thought and reflection as well as a style of spontaneity that captures and expresses the needs of the immediate.

4. *Lifeworld Sensibility*

This is not so much a capacity as the environment into which the leader expresses him/herself. It is a living, ecological system made up of nature, people and their networks, material things, ancestors, spirits, etc. The required capacities are the ability to remain unique in a world that uses culture to normalize. The capacity is to find a way of engaging in the lifeworld, to gain its opportunities and riches without losing one's self. There is also the capacity to identify and believe in the providence of the lifeworld – that it will support and allow expression but can just as easily oppress and deny the expression. The capacity here is for leaders to develop an ecological sensibility.

These four processes are considered and utilized on many levels in leader development at The Banff Centre. They reflect the means by which new aesthetic processes are explored and ultimately become part of our program offerings.

As researchers and developers, we begin by simply paying attention. With hundreds of professional artists, ecologists, and cultural thinkers coming to The Banff Centre every year from all over the world, we simply watch what they are doing – how they become inspired, create ideas, how they craft their work into the world and how they consider the meaning of what they are doing. *We open ourselves to the wonder of the aesthetic process at work.* We provide the same opportunities for developing leaders – to experience the same wonder, to observe and participate in the same aesthetic processes.

We then let our imaginations consider the possibilities aesthetics brings to their work. We begin to imagine avenues for application in the world of leader development. At this point we gather a number of aesthetics in the field of interest in a workshop format to explore the possibilities. In workshops we explore the selected process (mask, improvisational acting, sculpting, drawing, new media design, percussion, ecological

dynamics, cultural journalism, etc.) with other aesthetics and a few facilitators of leader development programs. Workshops result in a number of sequenced activities we believe have promise for leader development – activities that engage the leader and ignite the imagination.

The workshop sequences are then crafted and tested in a Thought Leader Forum. These Forums have a particular topic of interest to leaders (e.g. Ethical Governance, Leading in a Media Dominated World, Cycles of Renewal, etc.). We bring together three to four thought leaders (writers on the topic) and a variety of business leaders, alumni, and faculty to explore the topic through the work-shopped sequences. This incubation space provides a real testing ground for the artistic process. Based on these results we further refine the aesthetic processes with an eye towards how the leader will need to take the proceeds of imagination and craft them into the world.

Promising results lead to very focused work with the Leadership Arts Ensemble, a group of aesthetic facilitators in the Leadership Lab. *Once the sequences are crafted* into a usable process complete with facilitator instructions and themes for exploration a place for them is found in the programs or they may spark a new program. The new aesthetic process is then brought into the *lifeworld of developing leaders* through our program series for public and/or customized clients where the aesthetic process is used as a major component of the program and is evaluated along with all program components.

Through this developmental process the researchers, the program designers, and the leader participants in the programs are connected by the same four elements of the aesthetic processes. The goal is to assist leaders in developing an aesthetic sensibility as a primary requirement of leading hermeneutically.

VI. CONCLUSION

The problems of leadership do not present themselves to leaders as well-formed structures – they are not presented as problems but as messy, indeterminate situations. Well-formed problems do not require leadership! Complex, indeterminate situations are complex, uncertain, unstable, and conflicting conditions of practice. Leaders face this complex, ill-defined mélange of financial, economic, environmental, social and political factors and well as their own psychological factors.

The leader constructs the ‘well-formed problem’ from the ‘materials’ of the situation – they are often forced to frame the problem so others can get to work in solving it. The leader chooses and names the things that she will notice – she ‘christens the ground’. The leader must complete the two complementary acts of naming and framing - the leader selects the things for attention and action and organizes them, guided by an appreciation of the situation and the broader context that gives coherence and sets direction for action. Problem setting is an ontological process (world-making) - solving it is an epistemological one (different frames view different facts). The backgrounds of the

leader will determine how the problem is framed. A leader must be able to see this bias and work to overcome it through conversation with others

Being a leader is about dealing with the unique – that which is new, not seen, perhaps even totally unknown and unconsidered. Leader development then, deals with preparing people to deal with the unique, the uncertain, and the unknown. These types of experiences are multi-faceted – they have layers of meaning – a surface technical issue, a deeper underlying systemic issue, complex cultural dynamics, short and long-term implications, values conflicts, and they often draw on or trigger the darker side of leader.

This paper presents an epistemology of the professional practice of leader development. It has outlined the underpinnings of a philosophical view of the leader as a meaning-maker and communicator. Given the nature of the world that leaders must navigate, its constant change and dynamic character, leaders are required to first make sense and to recognize how this process of sense-making will affect the world. The paper also provides the methodological foundations for developing leaders largely through experience and the ability to reflect deeply and collaboratively on this experience. Finally, a body of methods, collectively known as aesthetic processes, was provided to guide the design of leader development experiences that will ultimately result in a sound praxis.

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