LEADERSHIP FORMATION: INTERPRETING EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

In this essay we look at leadership development differently, through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics. We show how three aspects of philosophical hermeneutics – focused on accumulating experience of interpretation, engaging in dialogue and interpreting experience – connect with insights from the leadership development literature and lead to principles for a process of leadership formation. The process we describe explains how formation: extends historically through connection with traditions; involves processes of careful, situated dialogic engagement; and encompasses aesthetic engagement with experience in each event of interpretation. Building on these insights, we derive practical implications for educational policy and practice and develop theoretical implications for leadership development debates.

Keywords: leadership; leadership development; formation; philosophical hermeneutics; experiential learning; interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay, we show how concepts from philosophical hermeneutics – a theoretical framework that helps to explain how experience, interpretation and dialogue are involved in individual formation – can contribute to current leadership development debates and support a different approach to leadership formation. Through the application of new theory in this way, we take a broad, problematizing approach. We take this approach because there is a pressing need for a radical re-examination of leadership formation at this time. Despite a persistent fascination with the idea of the strong, charismatic leader (Jan Verheul & Schaap, 2010; Parry & Kempster, 2014), recent social and economic crises have led to a critical focus on leaders and raised questions about their judgment, ethical character and self-awareness (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015).

Recently, the failings of leaders have been associated with a dehumanization (through the adoption of a reductionist view) of the concept of what a leader is and how they are educated (Petriglieri & Petriglieri 2015). In response researchers have begun to offer new ways of understanding what a more responsible form of leadership might look like, and how individuals might be developed to enact it. These characterizations of responsible leadership include, for example, servant leadership (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012) and authentic leadership (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). There has also been renewed attention to the complex, situated and relational nature of leadership. For example, researchers have shown how followers have different expectations of leaders depending on their particular contexts (Sydow et al, 2011), and how emerging situations require different narratives of leadership that are persuasive for both leaders and followers (Parry & Kempster, 2014; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015).

Conceptualizations of leadership development that involve both leaders and followers are also emerging. Most prominently, Day (2012) argues that leadership is accomplished through the social interaction of leaders and followers in pursuit of a common goal. From this perspective, leadership development should be focused on the collective context of leadership rather than on individual leaders (see also Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004). Grint (2010), Hosking & Shamir (2012) and Sugiyama et al (2016) all take a similar view, highlighting the need to consider individuals *and* their relationships in the leadership context, from which they cannot be disconnected. In a similar vein, others have focused on leadership as a dispersed activity and the characterized the diverse roles people take in enacting leadership (e.g. Currie & Lockett, 2007). This has led some researchers to consider whether (and how) leadership could be enacted by a collective – an organization or community – rather than an influential individual (Edwards, 2015; Raelin, 2004; Sutherland, 2015). In the context of the emerging debates about collective conceptualizations of leadership, Day (2000; 2012), Day et al (2014) and DeRue & Myers (2014) argue that most of the current theory and practice of leadership development would more properly be described as *leader* development – since it is focused on building the skills and competencies of *a particular individual,* rather than the leadership capacity of an organization or community. However, the need for a clear distinction between 'leader development' and 'leadership development' has not been uniformly acknowledged in the literature (see recent reviews from Carroll, 2015 and Mabey, 2013); and while Day's (2011) recent review of the field does explore such distinctions in depth, it still bears the simple title "Leadership Development"[1].

[1] Thus we use the term "leadership development" where cited authors make no distinction, and in constructing our own argument, as this remains the most general term used in the literature. However, where authors make specific points about leader development, we adopt their term.

Nevertheless, attention to the underlying *individualized* conceptualization of leadership in much of the leadership development literature has opened up debates about a number of important principles and, in particular, has identified problems with conventional approaches to how leaders are developed. Typically, leadership development has focused on the range of skills and capabilities that an 'expert leader' should develop – such as self-management, cognitive abilities, interpersonal skills and work facilitation competencies – and general business and strategic skills (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007; Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004). But authors such as Mabey (2013) have argued that such conceptualizations are too functionalist and are rooted in a 'deficit' model of leadership: simply supply the missing skills and leadership competencies are developed. Mabey (2103) argues that deficit approaches fail to consider the more difficult questions of behavioral change, and how to lead within complex and changing organizational and relational contexts (see also: DeRue & Myers, 2014; Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). Similarly, Day (2012) critiques the literature on leadership development for being too simplistic and often "prescribing the answer" (p. 109). Mabey (2013) adds detail to this critique by arguing that interpretive, dialogic and critical discourses of leadership, which engage with dissensus as well as consensus and emergent as well as pre-defined concepts and practices, are under-represented in the leadership development literature. We suggest, therefore, that it is fruitful to explore a particular holistic approach to leadership education through considering the concept of *formation* (Davey, 2013; Grondin, 2011) – an ongoing process of forming the 'whole person' – for leadership.

Formation is, therefore, simply a term that describes a holistic process of being formed. But unpacking this simple definition requires attention to: a clearer picture of how the process is understood and what it entails; insights about how the process might relate to the 'whole person'

rather than particular educational outcomes; and understanding how the process of being formed continues over the long term. We attend to all of these points in this essay, but the last of these is perhaps especially important. Day, Harrison & Halpin (2009) have drawn attention to the potential for leaders to develop over long timescales, there is a need for more attention to the processes and settings in which this occurs. Approaches to addressing this need include: Day et al (2014), who argue that theory and practice of leader development could be enhanced by incorporating theory from elsewhere; and DeRue et al (2012), who describe the need for attention to the reflective engagement with experience outside of formal learning contexts. Overall, there are ongoing debates about what the most appropriate processes for long-term leadership formation are. These debates also have a bearing on current questions about the appropriateness of individual or collective approaches to development, and the ways in which responsible leadership practice is encouraged (or not) by such approaches. To address these debates, we take a problematization approach by focusing on philosophical hermeneutics, which provides a different perspective on formation processes.

Philosophical hermeneutics (Ciulla, 2008; Davey, 2006; Gadamer, 2004; Risser, 2012) argues that *interpretation* is intrinsic to human experience, and that every interpreter (that is every individual) is historically and linguistically situated. Thus on the one hand, interpretation is informed by our particular history, which we engage with in and through tradition(s) (Gadamer, 2006). But on the other hand, interpretation is also informed by the current social context of debate. These diachronic (changing over time, but accumulating as tradition) and synchronic (current social context) aspects have been labelled by Vandevelde (2010) as 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions. Following Gadamer (2004), he argues that these dimensions set the bounds of our interpretive horizons. They are tied together in language because individuals can

enter dialogue on the 'horizontal' contextual dimension (Vandevelde, 2010), which potentiates new events of understanding that add to the historical 'vertical' dimension of tradition, or vice versa. Thus the dialogical potential of interpretive practice allows the interpreter to use tradition to speak to context, and context to speak to tradition. Over time, individuals' experience of (interpretive) practice further enriches their ability to engage in dialogue. And so from a philosophical hermeneutic perspective, the value of experience for learning – including leadership development and formation – accumulates and deepens over time through processes of interpretation and dialogue. But these processes of interpretation and dialogue require much more unpacking (and connection with existing leadership development literature) to show how we might use these insights to advance leadership development in theory and practice. It is this explication, connection and synthesis that is our primary aim.

Accordingly, in the remainder of this essay, our first objective is to address this question: *how do insights from philosophical hermeneutics add to or challenge established thought in the leadership development literature on experience, dialogue and interpretation, and consequently what principles of long-term leadership formation can be derived?* Building on this, and considering the leadership development literature, we ask: *how do the principles of leadership formation that we derive impact on leadership development in practice and debates in the field – especially in relation to the individual or collective nature of leadership development, and calls for (supporting) the development of more responsible leaders?* To address these questions, in the following section of this essay we take three aspects of philosophical hermeneutics (experience of interpretation, the role of dialogue and interpreting experience) and under each heading: explain the current thinking in the leadership development literature; set out the insights from philosophical hermeneutics that offer an alternative framing; and develop insights towards the

description of a process of leadership formation. The process we describe shows how leadership formation: extends historically through connection with traditions; involves processes of careful, situated dialogic engagement; and encompasses aesthetic engagement with experience in each event of interpretation. After developing our characterization of this process, the essay continues with a discussion section. In that part of the essay we develop implications for educational policy and practice, engage with debates in the leadership development literature, and consider the possibilities for future research. We conclude the essay with a summary of the main points of our contribution.

PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS AND FORMATION

In this part of our essay we theorize a process of leadership formation step by step, by focusing in turn on the *experience of interpretation,* the role of *dialogue* and the *interpretation of experience*, as they are understood in philosophical hermeneutics. These three aspects of the process overlap, but are distinct in their temporal focus. The cumulative *experience of interpretation* is associated with the long-term accumulation of insights and the development of judgment or taste (as we explain later). *Dialogue*, in which rich interpretive engagement with experience is enacted, has a variable but considerably shorter duration. The most temporally constrained aspect of the process is the 'event' of meaning in the *interpretation of experience*. As we drill down through each of these increasingly focused theoretical elements, we set out relevant understandings in the leadership development literature. We articulate how philosophical hermeneutic theory confirms, explains, adds to or challenges these existing understandings. In doing so, we derive a novel conceptualization of an interpretive leadership formation process.

Experience of interpretation: an open, continuing process

We begin the task of elaborating a philosophical hermeneutic process of leadership formation by focusing on the aspect of the process which is of longest duration – gaining long-term experience of interpretation.

Experience of interpretation in leadership development literature

Experience has long been seen to be an important source of leadership capabilities, and contemporary research continues to affirm this (see, for example, Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Casey & Goldman, 2010; Ligon, Hunter & Mumford, 2008). Indeed, some research accounts go so far as to root particular capabilities in experiential learning processes. For example, Casey and Goldman's (2010) work on leaders' strategic thinking skills describes dynamic, iterative processes for learning from experience. However, the leadership development literature touches on the accumulation of *experience of interpretation* only lightly.

Nevertheless, one of the clear connections between leadership and experience of interpretation is in relation to the development of self-understanding and character. For example, Cunliffe (2009) underlines the close link between accumulated experience and our character, arguing that, over time, how we interpret our experience is characteristic of who we are. Similarly, Irving & Klenke (2004) suggest that the interpretive integration of our experiences into our stories of ourselves develops our ability to construct meaning, an ability which is important for leadership effectiveness. DeRue et al (2012), DeRue & Myers (2014) and Reichard & Johnson (2011) help to explain how these leadership character and capability outcomes arise. They argue that over time (that is, in later, ongoing individual reflection) leader self-

development builds on understandings gained through experience in settings such as formal training programs. They also show that a depth of existing experience is helpful in making the most of additional experiences, but they do not unpack the process of interpretation in their work.

Research on the role of the arts and humanities in leadership development offers additional insights. For example, Ciulla (2008) has argued that these disciplines complement the social sciences by providing richer articulations of the situated, cultural, human condition that leadership addresses. Similarly, Taylor & Ladkin (2009) found that interpretive engagement with (great) art was useful in leadership development. They describe how developing an interpretive capability also gave leaders an expressive capability; both capabilities being based on a depth of understanding that is built up through engagement with powerful representations of experience. It takes time to develop the capacity for reflective engagement with experience, as well as a breadth of engagement beyond narrow confines (Reichard & Johnson, 2011; Sutherland, 2013; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). When processes of formation are extended over time and incorporate the arts and humanities, leaders are able to engage with each new experience more reflectively and thoughtfully (Cunliffe, 2009) because of their reflexive capacity for self-expression and character development (Irving & Klenke, 2004).

Experience of interpretation: insights from philosophical hermeneutics

Philosophical hermeneutic theorists describe individual formation as a process involving multiple, continuing interpretive encounters with experience (of many forms) over time (Davey, 2006, 2013; Fairfield, 2011; Gadamer, 2004; Grondin, 2011). Davey's work (2006, 2011, 2013) is key here; he has argued that seeking to develop discernment through actual interpretive

engagement in practice is important, rather than following prescribed rules for what good practice is presumed to be. Furthermore, Davey (2006:6) is keen to point out that good practice does not derive from any particular methodological approach: "Acquiring a sense for the weakness of hasty judgments or for the vulnerability of initial interpretations requires long exposure to the experience of interpretation. No one method teaches such skill, tact or wisdom". Thus, overall, extensive experience of interpretation – in terms of both breadth and depth – can be seen to be important for individual formation, as some leadership development researchers have also begun to suggest.

Similarly, in line with recent insights from leadership development, philosophical hermeneutic theorists also agree about the particular importance and influence of art. But they provide an explanation for this: formation is about the growth of the whole person, rather than the acquisition of codified competencies or techniques, and it is the whole person that is engaged by art. This makes aesthetic experiences potentially (trans)formational, since genuine experiences of this kind are captivating – we are 'caught' by something that engages us before we can codify it, and it does not allow us to rest with an initial answer about its meaning. Instead, aesthetic experiences leave us with unresolved questions. This means that aesthetic experiences are not quickly pigeonholed by descriptions that limit their meaning and impact on the individual (Davey, 2006, 2011; Fairfield, 2011; Gadamer, 2004; Nicholson, 2011). They defy ready categorization and instead engage the whole person in unpredictable ways, allowing them to learn and grow because of this. Holistic processes of formation – that do not presume or limit learning to particular planned outcomes but engage the whole person in unpredictable ways over time – therefore, involve aesthetic engagement.

Aesthetic *captivation* of the whole person obviously begins in the momentary event of interpretation, and we shall return to this theme later when we focus on that particular aspect of the process more precisely. But at this time we wish to explain how it fits into the longer term accumulation of experience of interpretation, by focusing on engagement with art. We engage with art – as we may do with each other – in a genuinely open interpretive encounter; the interpretations we develop add to our own understanding and to the work in question, which we may recognize if we return to it (Weinsheimer, 2004). This points towards engagement with art as a possible aspect of formational processes in which the leader-to-be gains, over time, the ability to accept and offer influence concurrently, in reflexive experiential processes (c.f. Sutherland, 2013). This kind of engagement can be revisited again and again, which is why we need to consider it as part of the long-term experience of interpretation. For example, Gadamer described how in his later life he continued to engage with the same work of art, which was placed in his study, for decades (Grondin, 2003).

The need for a lengthy process of gathering experience of interpretation is important (Davey, 2006), as we have already explained above. But it can be argued that the process stretches across timeframes that are longer than individual periods of formation. That is, interpretation is set in the historical context of our tradition(s) (Grondin, 2011). This adds a key insight that is not articulated within the leadership development literature, which is that our experience of interpretation has roots that lie deeper than our own; we connect with traditions of taste and judgment into which we are, to some extent at least, born (Gadamer, 2004). This means that we never entirely transcend our differences, which are deeply rooted in our different community histories, traditions and trajectories (Marshall, 2004; Risser, 1997). We build our experience of interpretation on particular foundations. With this in mind, Gadamer (2004) has

argued that individual interpretive engagement is inescapably situated in tradition(s), but also indicates that being aware of this enables us to engage more deeply and to interpret more richly from *within* these traditions. We shall return to this point later.

We have underlined the need to consider the process of formation as holistic, involving the 'whole person'. But such a holistic development process does lead to a distinct character outcome: individuals with nuanced and thoughtful judgment, who are aware of their situatedness and thus the limitations of their knowledge. For the practice of leadership, this means that individuals should be able to offer leadership more thoughtfully and draw on a rich range of experience in order to exert influence towards a desired goal. However, the inevitable incompleteness of understanding, nuanced and thoughtful judgment requires that formation should always be ongoing, even within the process of leading. This means that leadership cannot simply be about the *exertion* of influence, but should also involve *accepting* influence from others to develop a better understanding and more thoughtful direction. For this bi-directionality to be enacted, the process of formation (and leading) is built up through dialogue, as we explain in the following section.

The role of dialogue: disclosing possibilities

We now narrow our focus to consider the role of dialogue, which enables and enriches the accumulation of interpretive experience.

Dialogue in leadership development literature

The leadership development literature offers some initial insights in relation to dialogic processes of interpretation. In particular, Carroll & Simpson (2012) argue for a dynamic relational

perspective on leadership development involving 'framing movements'. From their perspective developing and shaping a social context for leadership, and allowing emergent leadership practice to develop, involves foregrounding, reflecting on and connecting frames in conversations. Similarly, Drath et al (2008) see leadership as involving dialogue and interpretation, since it has a relational nature as a joint achievement of leaders and followers. Marcinkus-Murphy's (2012) study provides further support for this conceptualization, since she found that the most effective leadership mentoring relationships were two-way. While the learning achieved was qualitatively different for each partner (the nominal mentor updated their practice knowledge and the nominal mentee gained vicarious leadership lessons), both benefited more when there was mutual openness to the encounters as learning experiences. Similar support for dialogical understandings of leadership development can also be found in work focused on coaching and peer feedback processes (Kempster & Iszatt-White, 2013; Seifert & Yukl, 2010).

Sparrowe (2005) adds another level of interpretive understanding on the role of dialogue and relationships in leadership development. He argues that, as relational beings, we cannot understand ourselves unless we recognize and listen to others. If these dialogical, interpretive experiences lead to a relational understanding of ourselves in our contexts, it still leaves us with the responsibility for drawing on such experiences as sources of thoughtful change. Furthermore being authentic, simply as individuals or particularly as leaders (c.f. Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012), involves recognizing that others have their part – are 'emplotted' – in our stories of ourselves (Sparrowe, 2005). Thus we need to have regard for the other as much as we have regard for ourselves; we are mutually responsible for how each of us comes to be, and understands, ourselves (c.f. Cunliffe, 2009).

Dialogic openness to learning from (interpreting) diverse experiences as they arise is less programmatic and structured than formal learning in conventional programs. Dialogical openness also favors diversity, not just in terms of individuals but also in terms of disciplinary breadth. In particular, it favors the arts and humanities[2] rather than relying only on the (natural) sciences. This is because science keeps "…breaking leadership into smaller and smaller pieces until the main code can't be put together. While accumulation of data is important for our knowledge of leadership, studying the parts of something does not necessarily mean that you will understand the whole. This is one reason why leadership studies needs the humanities" (Ciulla 2008:393). Similarly, Alvesson & Spicer (2012) argue that a focus on potentialities – moving beyond the dissection of current practices to see what leadership might become – is important.

Thus we can see that dialogue, in leadership development, is concerned with an open relational engagement between individuals (often cast as leaders and followers), and this relational connection may open up new ways of understanding (Carroll and Simpson, 2012; Drath et al, 2008). In addition, there are strong arguments that situating experiential learning relationships in a broader relational context – a caring community – can favor the development of altruistic leadership tendencies (see, for example: Bono, Shen & Snyder, 2010; Fry & Kriger, 2009; Militello and Benham, 2010). Furthermore, Cunliffe (2009) has argued that an (internal) interpretation of ethics is entangled with lived-out morality in practical experience; and interpreting our experiences in-and-through respectful dialogue is therefore a key formational practice. This contrasts with the conventional leadership development programs explored by

[2] And the social sciences, in as much as they are also considered to be part of the *human sciences;* we shall return to this conceptual and definitional point later, but note here that we follow Sandy (2008).

Gagnon & Collinson (2014), which ignored prior experiences and cultural diversity in favor of the development of a single 'ideal type' of leader.

Working from a different perspective on leadership development, Militello & Benham (2010) nevertheless arrived at similar conclusions, that leadership learning was a lifelong commitment to inclusive participatory engagement enabled through the legitimation of, and respect for, care and compassion. Similarly, Sparrowe (2005) has argued that interpreting our own stories as *necessarily* involving others builds regard for the other alongside our self-esteem. Thus it makes sense that, for example, a voluntary commitment to community leadership – to working with and caring for others – seems to influence the development of altruistic leadership tendencies (Bono, Shen & Snyder, 2010). Similar effects have been connected with a non-judgmental disposition towards others (Fry & Kriger, 2009), in which there is no desire to see the other as less than oneself. These effects may also be connected with the theme of humility. Humility, it is argued, supports opportunities for learning from the strengths and experiences of others in a general sense (Owens, Johnson & Mitchell, 2013). More importantly, it has also been argued to allow followers to have enough confidence to share the lessons, drawn from their interpretation of their own experiences, with leaders (Owens & Hekman, 2012).

Overall, insights on dialogue in the leadership development literature tend to focus on interpretive relational processes, diverse engagement to open up new paths of understanding, and respectful interaction that is supported by humility.

Dialogue: insights from philosophical hermeneutics

To the preceding insights, philosophical hermeneutic perspectives on formation adds additional nuances in three ways. First, new paths of understanding may indeed be opened up in dialogue,

but their direction is not predictable (Davey, 2006; Gadamer, 2004). Mutual interpretation and self-construction in dialogue cannot be driven purposively in a desired direction. Open conversation is not pre-scripted. Instead, there is the potential for something new to emerge between conversation partners. In the to and fro of conversation, connections and possibilities for 'going on', that could not have been predicted, open up; because of this, it is not possible to foresee what might come to light in an open conversation nor to lay out a predictive script for how such a conversation will flow (Davey, 2006). Indeed, if such foresight were possible, what would be the point of conversation? Thus Marshall (2004) argues that dialogue is not a method, but a demanding and risky process of trying to engage with the unpredictable meaning that emerges between conversation partners.

Second, although we cannot direct the flow of dialogue, we can interrupt it through critical reflection (Hibbert, 2013; Miller & Gomes, 2013; and see DeRue & Myers, 2014, on the role of reflection in leaders' learning from experience). From a philosophical hermeneutic perspective, this kind of critical reflection is supported through a particular disposition towards engaging with experience in dialogic conversation. Risser (1997) argues that there are three possible levels of engagement in conversation, the most superficial of which might be described as *objectification*, or 'scientific prediction', in which we interpret the behaviors of others as a pattern of their expected future action. A deeper level may be labelled *contextualization*, in which the other is seen as an historically and socially situated individual, rather than an object governed by rules and generalizations. But at this level we still interpret the other from the standpoint of objectivity as if we were ourselves *not* similarly contingent, situated beings. Thus only at the level which we might call *contestation* – where who or what we are interpreting contests our interpretations and categorizations – does critical reflection really interrupt familiar

assumptions. For this reason it is not desirable – for example through assimilation – to nullify difference. But nor is this nullification of difference completely possible even if desired (Ramsey, 2011). New understandings and new differences unavoidably develop when we recognize that someone thinks differently than we do, or when we realize we ourselves think differently about some text or object (Gadamer, 2004).

However, encountering difference can be troublesome. We are still rooted in our own historical understandings and must start from somewhere; and the exploration of differences in dialogue leads us into uncertainty rather than certainty, and possible conflict rather than harmony (Marshall, 2004). And yet from this perspective on dialogue, the troublesome distinctiveness that each individual brings to the conversation is intrinsic to critical reflection and the scope for learning, and therefore formation. Thus the value of humility articulated in the leadership development literature is explained in philosophical hermeneutics: it opens up our interpretations to wider critical reflection (and thus a greater variety of insights) in dialogue. The corollary to this argument is that the importance of others as conversation partners is inescapable. To put it another way, the development of broader perspectives and interpretive discernment comes from an engagement with others, whose horizons are different from our own (Vandevelde, 2010). Thus it can be argued that formation requires genuine encounters with difference in open, dialogic conversations. There can be an ethical dimension to this open engagement, too; Bruns (2009) argues that our ethical conceptualizations have to be grounded in practical questions about how we should live in the particular contingent circumstances of our life with others. Thus the context of dialogic engagements can constitute a formational community, which impacts on how an individual's moral stance might develop. This means that attention to the moral

character of the contextual community is important when the formation of an altruistic approach is desired.

Third, notions of wisdom gathered from experience need to be tempered with humility, because the understanding gained through dialogue is never complete. Grondin (2011) goes so far as to argue that the true characteristic of an educated person is their thoughtful awareness of their own ignorance rather than their claims to robust knowledge. For Fairfield (2011) this means that those who are 'truly' experienced recognize that the knowledge we have is only ever partial, limited and open to revision. In recognizing this, such individuals are more likely to be open to further new experiences and conversations (Marshall, 2004). Thus openness in and through dialogic conversation is the *medium-term* formational process that supports and encourages the *longer term* development we described in the preceding section as "experience of interpretation".

For us, the central characteristics of dialogue for formation are therefore the *openness to new understandings* in each encounter, and *valuing those we engage with*. Dialogue seen in this light is the engine that drives individuals towards both an ongoing accumulation of experience, and the acceptance of others as equally valued and not as 'followers'. For the practice of leadership, this open engagement in dialogue enables access to rich resources opened up in each conversational process, and helps influence to be offered in ways that can be understood. That is, it enables deeper and better connections between individuals. However, making the most of the understandings glimpsed in dialogue requires close attention to what is going on the moment, or event, of interpretation in each passing experience. We turn to this point in the following section.

Interpreting experience: understanding differently

We conclude our construction of the philosophical hermeneutic process of leadership formation by focusing on interpretive encounters in detail, and articulate how these events are important in allowing individuals to develop understanding as leaders.

Interpretation of experience in leadership development literature

As discussed earlier, experience has long been recognized as an important factor in leadership development (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Casey & Goldman, 2010; Ligon, Hunter & Mumford, 2008). Often, the focus of work in this area has been on life experience, with an emphasis on genuine encounters with 'real' problems (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Ligon, Hunter & Mumford, 2008). But it seems that opportunities for obtaining experience may not be enough in isolation, if individuals are not open to the (perhaps challenging) possibilities for new understandings that an engaged *interpretation* of the experience can offer (Popper & Amit, 2008). This engaged interpretation can include the development of more complex understandings of what leadership might entail (Lavine, 2014).

However, there is relatively little in the leadership development literature that focuses on the situated interpretation of each 'event' of experience as a source of learning and development. A rare recent example which touches on some potential insights is offered in Whatley, Popa & Kliewer's (2012) study of student experiential learning in a traditional setting, in which humility was associated with enhanced learning about community and leadership. But this general attitude towards openness in encounter with the other could also be argued to relate to the process of dialogue. Similar connections between dialogue and the event of interpretation can be found in studies that emphasize the need for leaders to undertake continuing reflective work on their self-

understanding, as they weave together their interpretations gained through connection with others with whom their experiences have been entangled (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Sparrowe, 2005).

Overall, experience in the leadership development literature has been explored in certain kinds of focused programmatic learning, or in connection with everyday encounters with 'real world' events (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Casey & Goldman, 2010; Ligon, Hunter & Mumford, 2008). But while there is a consideration of *post-hoc* interpretive engagement with experience through later reflection, the leadership development literature has little to say about what is 'going on' in each event of the interpretation of experience.

Interpretation of experience: insights from philosophical hermeneutics

Philosophical hermeneutics adds a great deal to understandings of what is 'going on' in each event of interpretation. Through the unpredictable invitation to dialogue that comes with each interpretive encounter (Davey, 2006) each event *always already* touches on the hinterland contained within the cultural and linguistic horizons of individuals. We can obtain glimpses into that hinterland in each event of connection. Thus philosophical hermeneutics argues that each experiential encounter, or each momentary experience, is a potential opening up of 'another world'. If we take up the invitation this offers to our curiosity, and continue speculating and asking questions about the encounter, we continue to extend our understanding (Gadamer, 2004; Grondin, 2011). Furthermore, these 'other worlds' may be opened up in encounters with art and texts as well as persons if we also engage with these in the same questioning spirit, in each event of interpretive experience (Davey, 2013; Gadamer, 2004; Grondin, 2011). Moreover, the primary mode of engagement is aesthetic; engagement is built on moments of captivation, in which we

are drawn into an invitation to understanding but cannot quickly resolve the questions that open up (Davey, 2013). Danchev (2011) provides a rich articulation of what this can mean in relation to a variety of texts, media and encounters from poetry to photography. For example: he engages with Don McCullin's well-known photograph of a shell-shocked marine (Danchev, 2011:35), a picture[3] that immediately invites you into harrowing speculations; and he reflects on Kafka's fiction to illuminate Abu Ghraib and the 'War on Terror' (Danchev, 2011:172-196) in unexpected ways. These examples show how a tremendous range of aesthetic events in the moment, from the direct encounter with a human individual to the most non-realistic literary forms can invite us into questioning and challenging engagement[4]. When artistic works are exceptional, and/or we are open to all of the difficult and inexhaustible questions that an event of experience may offer, we struggle to quickly find adequate language to articulate what is going on in the to-and-fro of interpretation. We are captivated by something we cannot easily – or comfortably – describe.

Aesthetic captivation is therefore a characteristic of interpretation that is uncertain and unpredictable, and is rooted in the *struggle* to understand rather than its resolution (Davey, 2006). There is always some difference and distance that is not transcended in each encounter; despite striving towards a shared language in which we might be able to communicate, as argued earlier, we never entirely transcend the differences that are rooted in our different community histories, traditions and trajectories (Gadamer, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Risser, 1997). This rooting is significant, since we are historically situated creatures, living in the context of the tradition(s)

[3] viewable at https://art.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/130204
[4] From Danchev's obituary: "The historian and biographer Alex Danchev […] believed that it was artists rather than politicians who had the power to change society." (Cowling, 2016)

in which we were born and have grown, and so we are not disconnected from the past which has shaped this context (Ciulla, 2008; Gadamer, 2004).

Despite our roots in different traditions, some kind of common language can be nevertheless reached or found in the event of interpretation. But this does not mean simply that some language was waiting for mutual discovery (Weinsheimer, 2004), as if – for example – in a rather banal way we discovered that we both understood Swedish, and that solved some communication problem for us. Instead, something is created for and in the moment of interpretation, with each of us interpreting 'from within' (that is, from our own history, tradition and trajectory) yet not isolated from the relational context and its influence (Vandevelde, 2010). This leads to an understanding that interpretive encounters with others can touch on their experience in a vicarious way, but also offer a connection with the traditions in which they are situated (Hibbert & Huxham 2010; 2011). Risser (1997) argues that making the most of this potentially rich connection requires humility from us, resulting in a stance of gentle questioning.

The kind of humility suggested by Risser (1997) is thus important in the development of understanding through our interpretive experiences. This point is underlined by Ciulla (2008, following Gadamer, 2004), who supports the argument that one cannot understand people in the present, and offer a sense of future direction, without seeking to understand their past and the larger context in which they live. There is interpretive 'work' involved here, in two temporal directions. One direction focuses on current experience and its traces of the past, while the other is imaginative and future-oriented, since we are situated in the flow of time and what we become involves our own imaginative projections (c.f. Cunliffe 2009) as well as situated retrospective reflections. Because the encounter with others' traditions offers us a new way of seeing ourselves, our imagination of our own future possibilities is enlarged alongside our interpretive

horizons, as our lives develop and we engage with our own and others' cultural contexts (Marshall, 2004). Thus our *way* of understanding can itself become different over time (Davey, 2011). Importantly, we understand differently in two senses: the partners in the event of interpretation have approached each other through a common (enough) language, but their understandings within this shared horizon are not identical. Neither is each partner's original (pre-)understanding left unchanged, even if the change is in a direction that they find uncomfortable, if they have been genuinely open to interpretive experience (Marshall, 2004; Weinsheimer, 2004).

To sum up the preceding argument, interpreting our experiences challenges us to think again, to recognize that we have been captivated by something we do not quite understand, that helps us to see our limitations and to seek to transcend them through conversation. Philosophical hermeneutics describes a participative process, but participation in this case is focused on emerging questions rather than answers (Risser, 1997; Sandy, 2008). Therefore, the focus is on individual encounters with 'the other' in which there is mutual invitation to begin participation in open-ended dialogue in each interpretive event. Possible questions are never exhausted.

Overall, the formational aspect of attention to the interpretation of experience is, for us, primarily concerned with understanding two things. First, how each moment is situated in a complex temporal flow. Second, that being sensitive to what can be drawn from each moment within that flow to enrich our understanding both of others and matters of interest. In relation to the practice of leadership this leads to an understanding of how seeking to exert (or offer) influence in each moment is still potentially about engaging with something of much longer duration. For that reason, an awareness of the connection to both wider conversations and deeper temporal anchorage (c.f. Vandevelde, 2010) leads to the insight that thoughtfulness and

reflection are important when offering leadership. Moreover, these insights bring us full circle. They show how the formational accumulation of moments of experience, in the long term, is important in helping individuals to develop the ability to engage more deeply and thoughtfully in each new moment of interpretation. The short- and long-term aspects of philosophical hermeneutic formation are, therefore, mutually supportive.

DISCUSSION: INTERPRETIVE LEADERSHIP FORMATION

In the introduction to this essay we asked: *how do insights from philosophical hermeneutics add to or challenge established thought in the leadership development literature on experience, dialogue and interpretation, and consequently what principles of long-term leadership formation can be derived?* In response to this, in the preceding section of this essay we have shown how the philosophical hermeneutic approach to formation adds to, develops, and in part challenges, earlier interpretive approaches to leadership development in three thematic areas: the *experience of interpretation,* the *role of dialogue* and *interpretation of experience*.

Through this engagement, in each of the three thematic areas we showed how philosophical hermeneutics can add to the leadership development literature to provide new insight on the process of leadership formation. The experience of interpretation, the role of dialogue and interpretation of experience can be seen in this light as overlapping, constituent elements of a leadership formation process. In Table 1, we summarize the principles of leadership formation that underpin each of the three constituent elements of the process.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Our second research question, building on the first, was to ask: *how do the principles of leadership formation that we derive impact on leadership development in practice and debates in the field – especially in relation to the individual or collective nature of leadership development, and calls for (supporting) the development of more responsible leaders?* We address this below, beginning with the practical orientation.

Leadership formation: principles, processes and politics

The principles of the interpretive, philosophical hermeneutic, leadership formation process that we have synthesized constitute the core contribution of this essay and the basis for further debate and research. The three-element structure of the principles is itself novel, bringing together the longest temporal frame of the accumulation of interpretive experience, before drilling down through the intermediate level of dialogue to the event of interpretation in each passing experience. Leadership formation is therefore shown not simply to be matter of lengthy (and thoughtfully situated) experience, but rather something that requires careful attention at three distinct temporal levels: lifetimes, conversational encounters (of various duration, including extended reflection) and particular moments of captivation. Importantly, open dialogic conversation is at the heart of this process, and therefore it cannot be nailed down to a rigid curriculum that could apply in all cases. Instead, a situated approach must be constructed that provides the best possibilities for genuine encounter (Davey, 2006; Grondin, 2011). This is because each individual, on their formational journey, brings with them their own history and traditions, and these make their interpretive engagements uniquely their own (Gadamer, 2004; Marshall, 2004). Contexts and precise approaches to formation must therefore differ.

Despite the need for variation in approaches, given the tension between careful attention to context, process and content and the unpredictability of interpretive encounters, what might a

shape might a philosophical hermeneutic leadership formation take? Understandably, it is not possible to be overly prescriptive but it is possible to set out how the principles we have outlined might be operationalized, and the advocacy required to support the development and adoption of this alternative kind of curriculum.

The curriculum we envisage can be summarized as involving the holistic formation of experienced interpretive individuals, grounded in pluralistic caring communities, who engage with experience dialogically and aesthetically. For reasons of conciseness, we describe what might be involved in constructing this curriculum in Table 2. In line with the holistic approach that we have been describing, the content knowledge and skills outcomes are described in very broad terms; for reasons already explained at length it would be inappropriate for us to offer any precise, idealized 'best way' of constructing such a curriculum. Furthermore, we suggest that the points detailed in Table 2 could be articulated in or around a range of more-or-less formal program types, since the formational process is in any case seen as extending before and after formal learning. Indeed, with the extension of the process beyond formal education in mind, educators may wish to consider developing fellowship schemes that recognize post-qualification experience and ongoing leader formation[5].

[Insert Table 2 about here]

We do not claim that this approach will deliver the kind of leaders that many people seem to *want* – that is, it does not serve the cult of the supremely confident, charismatic, strong leader

[5] Examples of such schemes already exist in many learned and professional societies, and for that reason we do not expand on this point here.

– but it could help to form the kinds of altruistic, servant minded, engaged leaders that some of the leadership development literature argues that we *need* (Mabey, 2013). Although our approach offers a vision of a new purpose and process, it still connects with some debates in the literature in interesting ways. But this new leadership formation process also raises new problems in relation to how such a radical approach might connect with broader, well established educational and leadership debates, and be promoted and adopted.

Clearly, a picture of leadership development as holistic interpretive formation is in agreement with arguments that favor the principles of a liberal arts education (see, for example, Wren, Riggio & Genovese, 2009). Sandy (2008) reinforces the value of that kind of education, and underlines the aesthetic values and practical wisdom (that is, knowledge characterized as phronesis rather than episteme) that comes from engagement with the humanities. Sandy's perspective, therefore, sees the social sciences (the usual home of leadership studies) as benefiting from connections to the humanities; this is consistent with uniting the humanities and social sciences under the banner of the 'human sciences', as philosophical hermeneutic theorists (e.g. Gadamer, 2004 and followers) would largely describe them. It is also consistent with the emphasis on aesthetic engagement in the interpretation of experiences.

Adding to the debates on educational approaches, Slattery et al (2007) help us to outline what such a philosophical hermeneutic, human sciences approach may mean in terms of our actual educational practice. They argue for a greater sense of connectedness between educators and students, united in open dialogue towards some shared, practical, common vision. Thus, alongside the necessary breadth, openness and space for unpredictability, the educational process still has to be understood as being *for* something. For us, that purpose is the development of the kind of leaders that society needs. That clarity of purpose is possible even if the precise ways in

which that is worked out in practice cannot be tightly specified in advance, but need to be developed in the connected dialogue between educators, students, communities and artistic work. This is partly because dialogical connection is not only reflective but also intuitive; it relates to each individual's embodied experience of, and reaction to, learning encounters. Indeed, the embodied character of interpretive experiences *per se* (Kearney, 2015) means that hope, excitement and anxiety (amongst other reactions) are intrinsic to the connection developed in such experiences, and the potential learning and formation that flows from them (Mabey, 2013; Shotter, 2010).

Sandy (2008) provides a hermeneutic perspective on embodied engagement, emphasizing three modes of participation. The first mode is *participation in beauty*; this is partly because it connects with the ways in which aesthetic captivation engages us deeply, but also partly because the idea of the beautiful provides a different way of understanding *social life* as well as the life of art (Sandy 2008). The second mode is *participation in friendship*. This mode supports educational relationships that are aware of diversity and difference but not dependent on formal roles, titles or distinctions. The final mode involves *moving beyond critical thinking to participation in cultivating practical reason* (Sandy, 2008:318-319); we see this as being aligned with the (never quite complete) end-point of the process of leadership formation. This emphasis on practical reasoning also connects with Mabey's (2013) call for alternatives to functionalist approaches in leadership development. The functionalist approach is, for Mabey, an a priori orientation which starts from preexisting principles. In contrast, interpretive and dialogic approaches are emergent or grounded in diverse experiences, which holds the potential for challenging a priori perspectives through interpretive experiential development. This possibility

also applies to the educator, who thereby becomes a facilitator open to changing her own perspective too.

The work of Slattery et al (2007), Sandy (2008), Rorty (2004) and Mabey (2013), that we have engaged with above, enriches and underlines the relevance of insights from philosophical hermeneutics for education and formation in general (and see also: Fairfield, 2011; Gadamer, 2004). We have shown how these and other insights from philosophical hermeneutic theory add to or modify the interpretive approaches in the leadership development literature, in order to define the principles and process for a different kind of educational practice and leadership formation. We see this as particularly relevant at the current time when the leadership development literature has identified a range of short-comings with reductionist approaches which focus only on the leader. What we offer in this essay is an alternative approach to leadership development that could work against entrenched leadership problems – short-termism and a lack of perception of complexity in context and interpretation – by opening up leadership dialogically, to incorporate others.

If we were to try to summarize the value and difference of this approach, we would say that a philosophical hermeneutic approach roots 'authentic' leadership in the human sciences, and ties leaders and followers together through mutual regard into shared stories rather than models (c.f. Frank, 2010; Sandy, 2008; and especially Sparrowe, 2005). This engages with Day's (2012) perspective on leadership development as a process of learning and engagement between leaders, followers and others. However, the process is not confined to consensus and agreement. Instead, challenge and self-challenge in formation incorporate dissensus (Mabey, 2013) and thus there is always an ongoing conversation and potential for further learning. This kind of perspective on leadership has a long history of advocacy that deserves to be recovered. We

particularly point to the work of Smith and Blase (1991), whose speculative recasting of leadership emphasized participation, dialogue and moral discourse as means of appropriate (mutual) influence, as opposed to bureaucratic or technocratic control.

Practically, advancing this perspective on leadership formation requires three areas of action that we address very briefly here. First, there is a need for advocacy in educational policy to defend the arts and humanities in universities (and society at large), by recognizing them as a rich and irreplaceable focus for human development. As part of the same action, awareness of the limitations of instrumental approaches to the development of leaders needs to be publicized. Second, there is a need for curriculum development, allied to the connections between formal and informal education strategies. Such mutually reinforcing developments can encourage individuals to engage in the broad processes of holistic, interpretive formation that we have alluded to here. The example approaches to curriculum development in Table 2 offer a starting point for this. Third, there is a need for broad public engagement to underline the *need* for this kind of approach, and build an appreciation of the multiple layers of interpretation and patient dialogue that it entails (as opposed to valuing a swift reduction to action). We provide a summary of all of these areas of advocacy and action in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Having set out our core contribution and practical considerations for its application, we now revisit the debates in the leadership development literature that we touched on at the outset of the paper, in order to address the final part of our second question.

Dialogue with leadership development debates

In the introduction we particularly highlighted debates about the individual or collective nature and context of leadership development, and calls for (supporting) the development of more responsible leaders. In addition to addressing these points, our insights here lead to a further point of contribution through considering how *responsibility* (to and for the other) might be connected to a reflective return to tradition. We attend to each of these points below.

Interpretive experience and the experience of interpretation, because they are connected through dialogue, can lead to leadership that is more concerned and *collectively* oriented than the kind that is connected to the instances of (moral) failure articulated by Petriglieri & Petriglieri (2015). However, individually focused motivations (task orientation, self-interest and even a desire for personal excitement) which have hitherto been seen as key drivers of leadership skills acquisition (Boyce, Zaccaro & Wisecarver. 2010; Johnson et al, 2012) may still be in play. We are not arguing that leaders-to-be should completely abandon self-interest, nor have we settled the debate about whether leadership development (when interpreted as building leadership capacity *in communities*) should be treated as conceptually distinct from 'individual' leader development (Day, 2000, 2012; Day et al, 2014; DeRue & Myers, 2014; Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004). However, the argument we have developed in this essay does offer a third, 'both-and' perspective. Since the philosophical hermeneutic process of formation interpretively connects individuals to others (and therefore their communities and traditions) in the process of dialogue, leaders are never formed in isolation. Others always have the opportunity to grow in the same way, alongside those learning to be formal leaders. Crucially, this potential for learning is not a short term event, but, as Day, Harrison and Halpin (2009) argue, can take place across an adult's whole life span. Moreover, in the philosophical hermeneutic conception, the person and

their relationships are changed alongside their understandings, rather than skills simply becoming more honed over time (see Sugiyama et al (2016), for more on this). This also implies that leaders cannot be delivered as 'the finished article' into a context; instead, the inhabiting of leadership relationships is likely to be dynamic over time.

Since the philosophical leadership formation process has this relational aspect, it helps individuals to develop a balancing strong regard for the knowledge and value of the 'other'. This balance also has an important regulating effect on the causes and interests for which the leader's acquired abilities are used (Sparrowe, 2005). In particular, the appreciation of others' abilities and potential to contribute is reinforced by humility (Grondin, 2011; Owens & Hekman, 2012; Owens, Johnson & Mitchell, 2013; Risser, 1997). In a philosophical hermeneutic processes of dialogue, humility also helps to make room for others to participate in enacting leadership, which may then take more dispersed forms (Currie & Lockett, 2007; Raelin, 2003). Thus the risk of forming leaders who are purely self-guided and self-serving is reduced. Others are invited into the leadership process as part of the continual process of formation. As we have emphasized, the formational process of dialogue involves learning on both sides. Thus leadership development, conceived this way, is always about more than the 'upskilling' of a particular individual. But there is a key skill for both leaders and educators from this perspective: facilitating the learning that may be unsettling and re-forming from dialogical encounters with the other (Beech et al, 2010). In this way, philosophical hermeneutic formation builds individuals in unpredictable, collective and connected ways. This is because there is always a regard for the other and what they can offer, even for those viewing others from the position of an educator (Fairfield, 2011; Marshall, 2004).

A regard for the 'other' also helps to overcome one of the possible conceptual weaknesses of a philosophical hermeneutic approach to leadership formation: it respects the value of tradition and there is a risk of the process, therefore, being overly conservative and uncritical. But a genuine respect for the other, enacted in dialogue, allows tradition to speak to context and context to speak to tradition (Vandevelde, 2010) within that conversation. A philosophical hermeneutic approach, therefore, values tradition but it does not do so unquestioningly. Instead tradition is put both 'in play' and 'at risk' (Gadamer, 2004). It is a *reflective return* to tradition that was advocated by Gadamer (2004); the central idea is not that one must speak *for* or *against* tradition, but rather (and somewhat inescapably) one speaks *with* it. John Caputo – a theologian and philosopher – provides a good example of what this means in practice. He gradually moved from conventional (traditional*ist*[6]) religious belief to a more postmodern position, through a process of dialogue with theory. Despite radical expansion and changes in his interpretive horizon, he still argued: "Where would I be without my tradition? […] I would not know what questions I would ask, or what texts I would read, in what language I would think, or in what community I could move about" (Caputo, 2001:35; and see also Caputo, 2015). Openness to the other in dialogue does not mean that one's tradition is abandoned, but how one relates to it may – or indeed must, at least to some degree – change. A good example of this in the leadership field is offered by Kaipa's (2014) appropriation of the text of the Mahabharata as a reflective resource. Leadership stories from the text were used reflectively, to shake up current thinking and open up new ways of thinking about leadership – but these stories were *not* used as unconsidered, prescriptive ideals.

[6] A key distinction: a traditionalist defends tradition for its own sake, rather than engaging with tradition thoughtfully and reflectively, to see what it might offer and how it might be adapted in application (see Pelikan, 1984 and especially Ruthven, 2004 on this).

A philosophical hermeneutic approach to formation is therefore a risky business (Marshall, 2004) for those who might value tradition for its own sake, as some kind of unchanging heritage (Ruthven, 2004). This approach to formation goes so far as to see tradition itself as a living thing, open to change if it is to endure, rather than being some deadweight of heritage that merely constrains interpretive processes (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010, 2011; Pelikan, 1984). A philosophical hermeneutic approach to leadership formation therefore engages with tradition reflectively and critically. The approach adapts that which it draws upon, in order to develop a stance that connects with the current context of debate (c.f. Vandevelde, 2010). Through interpretation, one is able to engage with the tensions that this creates (c.f. Lavine, 2014).

Overall, philosophical hermeneutic leadership formation is indeed about the development of *leaders*. But such leaders are formed in dialogue with others; they are formed in ways that make clear connections to community as both a constraint and reflective resource for leadership, to be used by leaders and others in dialogue (c.f. Edwards, 2015; Grint, 2010; Hosking & Boas-Shamir, 2012).

Limitations and research directions

We have offered a conceptual argument as a basis for theoretical developments, as well as an ambitious social and educational manifesto. For this reason it is important that we acknowledge a number of limitations, and there are three in particular that we wish to highlight. The first of these limitations is the recognition that we drew from the literature earlier, that our learning is never complete. In this essay we have opened up lines of enquiry that – at the very least – merit further theoretical explorations, from a range of complementary and contrasting perspectives. We also expect and hope that the practical agenda described above is provocative, and will

therefore lead to further discussion and dialogue. In this way richer insights that transcend our limitations can begin to emerge.

In considering this first limitation, there are opportunities for expanding the theoretical discussion that can be noted here.[7] We have responded to Day et al's (2014) call to bring more theory to bear on leader(ship) development, through developing a *particular process* of formation for leadership based on philosophical hermeneutics. But there are other process-theoretical stances that may offer complementary insights to our work. For example, there is now an emerging interest in process approaches to leadership (e.g. Kelly, 2015), and scope for more connection with the burgeoning organizationally-oriented scholarship in this area. For example, Helin, Hernes, Hjorth & Holt's (2015) collection offers a wide-ranging treatment of process philosophies and Hernes (2014) provides a focused application of process theory to organizational contexts. Such approaches – rooted in different philosophical frameworks from that which has been the focus of our essay – provide alternative ways of drawing attention to the temporally situated, complex and connected nature of the contexts within which leadership is usually enacted. The acknowledgement of temporality and complexity, which is characteristic of process theories, connects with the vertical dimension of tradition and the horizontal dimension of debate that is also characteristic of the philosophical hermeneutic approach to formation (Vandevelde, 2010). Thus there is potential for useful dialogue between these two perspectives. A further opportunity for enriching process theoretical discussion relates to Day et al's (2014) call for more longitudinal research. Studies following leader(ship) development programs over a number of years would illuminate how new interpretations of old experiences, as well as emerging interpretations of new experiences, are both involved in formational processes. This

[7] We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for opening up dialogue on this point.

kind of focus would imply a move towards research methods which are sensitive to such longitudinal process changes, such as qualitative and dialogical enquiry (Shotter, 2010). In Day et al's (2014) review, such qualitative methods were less prevalent than survey techniques, which reinforces both the opportunity and need for additional qualitative research.

If the first of our limitations presents an opportunity, so does the second. This opportunity concerns the elements of the philosophical hermeneutic leadership formation process that we offered earlier. These elements include principles that could be considered in more depth through focused empirical research. The kind of research that we have in mind is, naturally, interpretive (see Gill, 2014, for a range of approaches). Such research would focus on the experiences of individuals as they progress through and beyond their formal education, into positions where they are called upon to enact leadership. In such research studies, we might flesh out, reconfigure or connect the three summary elements of our outline process, perhaps through considering each key element separately in more detail.

Such studies might also consider competing theoretical perspectives on particular elements. For example, Habermas' (1987)[8] approach to *dialogue*, based on the concept of the ideal speech situation in which it is possible for individuals to understand each other perfectly, offers a radical contrast to the philosophical hermeneutic perspective process we have described above. The full scope of the Gadamer-Habermas debate – which preceded and continues beyond the publication of Habermas' seminal work of 1981 – is far too extensive a topic to address within this essay (for more on this debate see: Harrington, 2013; Mendelson, 1979; Scheibler, 2000). Nevertheless, empirical investigations of dialogic processes of formation might offer a route to more focused insights. Similarly, interpretive research that considered either the

[8] The date of publication of the English translation of the 1981 German original.

experience of interpretation or the *interpretation of experience* in more detail could add useful insights that enrich, complement or challenge our perspective.

The last of the limitations we explore also presents a final opportunity. The authors of this essay include individuals with experience in a variety of leadership roles. We have yet to interrogate our own experiences of formation in a detailed and systematic way, in relation to the process description that we have offered. The elements of the process 'feel right' to us. But there is an opportunity to 'explore the archives' of our experience, and engage in a re-interpretation of our own formational processes, in order to better understand our own practical and moral responses to the challenges of educational leadership (Smith & Blase, 1991). Autoethnographic research (Han, 2012; Karra & Phillips, 2009) provides useful methodologies to achieve this kind of re-learning from one's own experience, and such methods are consistent with the qualitative and interpretive approaches that we have called for above.

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have developed two main contributions that add to theory and practice in leadership development, as well as opening up further debate. The first is a conceptualization of a process of leadership formation that builds on philosophical hermeneutics. In articulating this process we have connected and contrasted insights from leadership development and philosophical hermeneutics, in order to arrive at a novel characterization of three elements of the formation process. In doing so we have explicitly stated how we confirm, challenge or add theoretical nuances to established understandings in the leadership development literature. We have also explained how key outcomes for leadership formation and the practice of leadership arise from this process. Building on these theoretical points of contribution, we have addressed

practical educational concerns by articulating the shape of a leadership formation curriculum. Recognizing that this is a challenging agenda, we have also reflected on the forms of advocacy and action that would be necessary to encourage the adoption of this approach.

The second principal contribution of this essay is to use our formation concept to engage with key points of debate within the leadership development literature, by offering an alternative perspective. We add nuance to debates on the focus of development, by showing how leadership formation is not simply about the development of an individual, nor about the development of a collective, but rather about both. That is, we have described how formation concerns the development of individuals in the context of community, in a relational process. The identification of a relational dimension also responds to calls in the literature for more responsible leadership development by showing how the establishment of humility and regard for the other, in the process of leadership formation, supports this. We have also extended the idea of relationality in leadership development in a temporal dimension; we show how our approach to leadership formation enables individuals to draw on resources from collective history without a drift towards excessive conservatism, through a reflective return to tradition.

Through developing our contribution, we have also identified theoretically informed suggestions for further research. We have suggested three avenues for further inquiry: process theoretical approaches, particular empirical studies (perhaps initially focused on dialogue), and autoethnographic research on leadership formation experiences. The last of these suggestions highlights the point that, through critical reflection, there is always an opportunity to learn more from one's own experience. However, learning from oneself can be challenged and enriched through *also* engaging with others in dialogue, as our earlier argument suggests. Thus we

conclude our essay by encouraging others to join in the dialogue on leadership formation that we have begun in this essay, and thereby open up new possibilities.

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TABLES

Elements of the leadership formation process	Principles derived from each element of philosophical hermeneutics for leadership formation
1. Experience of interpretation	(1) Lengthy experience of interpretation is important for leadership formation, and: (a) there is a need for conceptual breadth in accumulated experience, notably in relation to art; (b) the accumulation of experience needs to be deliberately associated with the development of the whole person, rather than focusing on particular outcomes or methods; (c) there is a need to develop a reflective awareness of one's situatedness as an interpreter, and a willingness to engage with roots that lie deeper in time – in history and tradition – than one's own lived experience.
2. Dialogue	(2) Dialogue in and on experience is important for leadership formation, and: (a) dialogic learning encounters need to be framed as open to continual re-evaluation, because dialogue is not entirely predictable in its direction and content; (b) need to involve others, whether persons, texts or art works, that have the ability to 'contest' the interpreter, so that the flow of content in dialogue can be interrupted and recognized in critical reflection; (c) needs humility and has a dependence on others; (d) should be situated in caring communities if the development of altruistic tendencies are desired; (e) needs to include a recognition of uncertainties, such that the interpretation of each dialogue is never assumed to be complete and cumulative experience of interpretation is therefore sought.
3. Interpretation of experience	(3) The interpretation of each event of experience has the potential to contribute to leadership formation, and: (a) interpretation needs to be understood as beginning with aesthetic captivation rather than an analytic engagement; (b) the past is involved in the present moment of interpretation of experience; (c) future possibilities are built on the breadth of encounter with others in relation to current differences and their own traditions; (d) post-hoc interpretive reflection (and further conversation) on each event of experience is valuable, since experience is seen as always open to further questioning.

Table 1: Principles for a philosophical hermeneutic process of leadership formation

Elements of the leadership formation process	Curriculum approaches – for educators and leadership development specialists
1. Experience of interpretation	• The context for leadership formation is constructed and communicated as extending before and after formal educational programs. • The context for leadership formation is constructed and communicated as a caring community, that could persist after formal educational programs. • Formal content can continue to include conventional management and leadership training, since this is part of the tradition within which the leader-to-be will be operating. • Formal content should include classes on the Arts and Human Sciences. • Assessments should be constructed around cases of complex judgement in unfamiliar contexts and circumstances. • Assessment strategies could usefully include "re-visiting" earlier cases to reflect on and reconsider judgements and leadership choices in the light of greater experience. This could provide an encouragement to reconsider judgements in practice after formal learning programs are complete. • The skills focus should be on the development of dialogic practice and interpretation – as well as influence.
2. Dialogue	• Dialogic engagement with individuals, texts and artistic media should be the core practice and skill outcome from programs. • Practice in dialogue should be core to classroom processes, but be developed as a 'portable skill'; key to this will be the development of the ability to help others engage in dialogue to some level, without the benefit of a formal program. • Assessments should include "live" practice in seeking to lead in the context of enacting dialogue.
3. Interpretation of experience	• Content (particularly in Arts and the Human Sciences) will need to be limited in volume but be complex and challenging. • Exploration and articulation of interdisciplinary insights and multiple traditions should be encouraged in each interpretive encounter. • Interpretation needs to be articulated as an intrinsic human capacity, but one that can be deepened through reflection.

Table 2: Curriculum approaches for philosophical hermeneutic leadership formation

Elements of the leadership formation process	Actions and advocacy to support the adoption of the approach and curriculum development
1. Experience of interpretation	• Advocacy in educational policy, to defend the arts and humanities in universities (and society at large) from utilitarianism, and recognize them as a rich and irreplaceable focus for human development. • Articulation of the limitations of instrumental approaches to the development of leaders. • Broad public engagement to underline the need for this kind of approach, and build an appreciation of the 'softer' style that it entails.
2. Dialogue	• Curriculum development allied to informal education strategies, which support broad processes of holistic, interpretive formation. • Broad public engagement to underline the need for this kind of approach, and build an appreciation of the 'softer' style that it entails.
3. Interpretation of experience	• Advocacy in educational policy, to defend the arts and humanities in universities (and society at large) from utilitarianism, and recognize them as a rich and irreplaceable focus for human development. • Curriculum development allied to informal education strategies, which support broad processes of holistic, interpretive formation.

Table 3: Advocacy actions to support philosophical hermeneutic leadership formation