

Elevating managers – Examining the anthropotechniques of a business simulation

Esben Langager Olsen*¹ (presenter) and Johan Simonsen Abildgaard²

¹ National Research Centre for the Working Environment, Copenhagen, Denmark

² Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen, Denmark;

Abstract (252 words)

When organizations want to improve, a frequently chosen solution is employ leadership development programs that involve going outside the everyday organizational practice, establishing instead a transformative liminal space. Besides meeting the critique of neglecting the reality of practice, two different types of risks have been highlighted. Programs that are too open-ended risk developing managers in a way that is unrelated or maybe even harmful to the organizational needs, while programs that are too structured risk developing the manager under false premises, as the liminal space will never reflect the full complexity of leadership. We approach leadership development programs from an alternative perspective drawing on Sloterdijk's study of anthropotechniques. The anthropotechnical perspective helps us reconsider how the balancing of risks is addressed in contemporary leadership development programs and the sort of developmental change they enable. We study a leadership development program, the serious game Wallbreakers, deployed in a Danish biotech company. The analysis is a qualitative case study tracing the trajectories of two participants through the program. Data consists of video, audio and observations of the training as well as interviews. In the analysis, we draw on Sloterdijk's notion of elevation, using it for reconsidering the program's effects and techniques. We show how the program both elevates the participants' sense of competence through the game mechanics, while also humbling the participants, as they simultaneously formulate higher abstract goals for themselves, which they fail to find ways of accomplishing. We consider this dual development a practical answer to the dual risk of leadership development.

**Realist Leadership Development:
Designing Leadership Development That Works With Context**

Professor Julia Rouse, Manchester Metropolitan University

(j.rouse@mmu.ac.uk)

Dr Katie Willocks, Manchester Metropolitan University

(k.willocks@mmu.ac.uk)

Word count: 740

Realist Leadership Development: Designing and practising leadership development that works in context

Introduction

Today's leaders are operating in complex business environments that are volatile, uncertain, ambiguous and changing (VUCA) (Baran *et al.*, 2020; Dooley, 2004). As leadership is an influencing process that is in relation with complex and evolving systems (Uhl-Bien, 2021), we need a model of leadership development that is sensitive to a leader's context and their position within that context. This is a deep philosophical demand because it requires that: (a) we ground our learning interventions on sound ontological ideas about how people and environments inter-relate and develop, and; (b) we deploy congruent epistemological ideas about how leaders, and leadership development programmes, can know about complex systems and judge how systems will respond to their influencing behaviours. Embedding leadership development in context also demands that we deploy empirical knowledge about effective leadership practice and organisational dynamics, drawn from both research and practice (i.e. evidence-based management), in a manner that is congruent with our underlying philosophy. In order to 'read' contexts, and to gain influence on them, we also need to work with stakeholders to design leadership learning (i.e. engaged scholarship).

Our paper will draw on the philosophy of critical realism and the principles of realist evaluation, evidence-based management and engaged scholarship to propose Realist Leadership Development as an approach to the design and practise of leadership learning that works effectively with context. Our article will offer the philosophical and empirical theory of Realist Leadership Development and explain how we developed this approach while designing, delivering and evaluating a development programme for line managers within the Good Employment Learning Lab (<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/research/research-centres/dwp/projects/good-employment-learning-lab>).

Realist Leadership Development

Realist Leadership Development evolved from using realist evaluation to design and assess the development of people management skills in the Good Employment Learning Lab. Realist evaluation was advanced by Pawson and Tilley (1997) and Pawson (2013) to consider how inserting the mechanisms of a learning intervention into a particular context creates specific outcome(s). In short, it explores how context (C) + mechanism (M) = outcome (O) and identifies C+M=O configurations that do or do not 'work'. Moreover, it considers how outcomes might include changing a context, as a desirable outcome, and how adjusting context may be a pre-condition of programme effectiveness. Desirable outcomes of leadership learning may include change, and not just reproduction, of organisational and wider systems.

Three critical realist principles underlabour our Realist Leadership Learning proposition.

1. Depth ontology (Bhaskar, 2008) - the idea that, due to the hidden character of deep underlying mechanisms, we must always treat what we observe as a partial picture of reality. To go deeper we must engage in retrodution, logically identifying the conditions that must exist for an event or experience to occur. Realist Leadership Development encourages leadership developers to engage in deep and creative thought about how learning or practise adaptions come about (or not).
2. Morphogenesis (Archer, 2014; Elder Vass, 2010; Newman, 2019, 2020) – a means of conducting a temporal analysis of how society, culture and individuals inter-relate and

Realist Leadership Development: Designing and practising leadership development that works in context

change over time. Realist Leadership Development encourages leadership developers to think about how programmes and leaders relate to specific contexts and how iterative rounds of interaction create outcomes for the context and the programme mechanisms.

3. Emergence – Elder Vass’s idea that the interactions within and between properties of Context and Mechanism and, so, from the organisation of a temporary C+M social system, create outcomes. Realist Leadership Development encourages leadership developers to identify CMO systems that enable or disable leader development.

As well as being grounded in sound philosophy, and focusing attention on $C+M=O$, Realist Leadership Development proposes how leadership developers can:

- Draw on empirical scholarship about leadership, organisations and effective leadership development practice, to design, deliver and evaluate evidence-based programmes. For this, we incorporate a critical realist informed approach to evidence-based management.
- Focus on leadership development that responds to practitioner problems and priorities and draws practitioners into a mutual sensemaking process by adopting a critical realist form of Engaged Scholarship (developing from Van de Ven, 2007). We also note how programmes can have emancipatory aims that seek to change social systems, engaging with system critics using Engaged-Activist Scholarship (Rouse and Woolnough, 2018).

Developing Realist Management Development in the Good Employment Learning Lab

Having proposed Realist Leadership Development, our paper will outline how our ideas emerged from designing, delivery and evaluating leadership development with stakeholders including the CIPD in the ESRC-funded Good Employment Learning Lab (GELL) project. Here, we ground Realist Leadership Development in the practice of leader development.

Can board games improve our change leadership competencies? Results from an organizational leadership training intervention

Johan Simonsen Abildgaard^{1,2} (presenter), Esben Langager Olsen², Karina Nielsen³

1) Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

2) The National Research Centre for the Working Environment, Denmark

3) Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield, UK

The current paper presents the results from an intervention (the Change Competency Intervention CCI) using board game-based simulations of change events to improve the change leadership competencies of managers and other change agents.

The specific context of the intervention is Novozymes A/S, a Danish biotech company whose production plants are conducting a long-term change process towards more systematic and widespread use of Lean management tools. Lean implementation is an interesting case as it is a type of change that is both potentially beneficial, as well as detrimental, to employees' wellbeing (von Thiele Schwarz et al., 2017).

Background

A primary element in CCI is training leaders to understand readiness (Holt et al., 2007) and resistance (Burnes, 2015; Maurer, 2010; Thomas & Hardy, 2011) towards change and how these can be addressed. In relation to both change resistance as well as change success, a key element in CCI is that situations, contexts and people are different and hence change impacts them differently (Oreg, 2006).

The CCI project aims to teach the participants these change concepts through a mix of dialogue tools and board-game based leadership simulations. Using so-called 'serious games' (Abt, 1987), allows for the participants to play through, and learn from, a simulation in a training setting.

Previous change-leadership intervention studies (Abildgaard et al., 2018; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991), suggest that there are potential gains in the form of reduced strain on employees after the change process when change leadership interventions have taken place. Even though this is the case substantial results of interventions targeting both employee wellbeing and organizational change goals are lacking. The current project aims to address this gap.

The programme theory for CCI is that implementation of Lean management can both improve production and be strenuous for employees due to changes in the organization of work. CCI is theorized to help participants implement Lean more efficiently and hence improve the effects of Lean on productivity and reduce the strain on employee wellbeing.

Methods

The intervention consisted of four full days of workshops focusing on developing an understanding and a vocabulary for the human side of change leadership. Key topics were handling resistance, balancing stability and change, managing stakeholders. Personal and departmental action plans were developed at the workshops. All board games and dialogue tools were developed by the change consultancy agency Workz A/S, whose consultants facilitated all workshops in the project. Ten departments in Novozymes were enrolled in the study. These consist of two production plants with each maintenance supply chain and production departments. Cluster randomization was conducted between matched pairs of departments. Roughly 700 employees are employed at the participating departments.

Measures and Evaluation strategy

For the evaluation of the project a mixed methods approach was used which included: audio/video data from workshops, workshop evaluation questionnaires, baseline and 12-month follow-up questionnaires and finally interviews with consultants, stakeholders, managers, and employees.

The project is evaluated with a mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) realist evaluation approach (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017; Pawson, 2013) as well as with in-depth theoretically driven qualitative analyses.

Results

We present both quantitative and qualitative results from the intervention following a sequential mixed methods analysis. We demonstrate how training reactions are linked to both change specific and generic learning. The results show that the two departments in the second round of training reported significantly higher learning outcome from the CCI and that these high-learning departments had significantly improved perceptions of fit of Lean in Novozymes, and change leadership. This was assessed via repeated measures ANOVA from baseline to 12month follow-up on employee data, comparing clusters of intervention departments to their matched comparison departments. No significant effects were found in the low-learning departments.

Discussion

The study presents a unique research opportunity to examine the effects of using simulations and board games as novel intervention tools in leadership training. It also contributed to knowledge on the impact of change leadership training on employee change resistance and change success. The randomized design and the potential to collect comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data additionally strengthens scientific potential of the CCI project results.

References:

Abildgaard, J. S., Nielsen, K., & Sverke, M. (2018). Can job insecurity be managed? Evaluating an organizational-level intervention addressing the negative effects of restructuring. *Work & Stress*, 32(2), 105–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2017.1367735>

Abt, C. C. (1987). *Serious games*. University Press of America.

- Burnes, B. (2015). Understanding Resistance to Change – Building on Coch and French. *Journal of Change Management*, 15(2), 92–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2014.969755>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2. ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Holt, D. T., Armenakis, A. A., Harris, S. G., & Feild, H. S. (2007). Toward a Comprehensive Definition of Readiness for Change: A Review of Research and Instrumentation. In *Research in Organizational Change and Development* (Vol. 16, pp. 289–336). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1016/S0897-3016%2806%2916009-7>
- Maurer, R. (2010). *Beyond the wall of resistance: Why 70% of all changes still fail—and what you can do about it*. Bard Press.
- Nielsen, K., & Miraglia, M. (2017). What works for whom in which circumstances? On the need to move beyond the ‘what works?’ question in organizational intervention research. *Human Relations*, 70(1), 40–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726716670226>
- Oreg, S. (2006). Personality, context, and resistance to organizational change. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 15(1), 73–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320500451247>
- Pawson, R. (2013). *The Science of Evaluation: A Realist Manifesto*. SAGE.
- Schweiger, D. M., & Denisi, A. S. (1991). Communication with employees following a merger: A longitudinal field experiment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(1), 110–135. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256304>
- Thomas, R., & Hardy, C. (2011). Reframing resistance to organizational change. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 27(3), 322–331. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2011.05.004>

von Thiele Schwarz, U., Nielsen, K., Stenfors-Hayes, T., & Hasson, H. (2017). Using kaizen to improve employee well-being: Results from two organizational intervention studies. *Human Relations, 70*(8), 966–993. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726716677071>

Gender and humanitarian leadership development

Leadership development is both a popular field for academic research and a substantial industry for practitioners. Research occurs across multiple levels of analysis, accounting for both individual and collective capability development that translate to various outcomes for leaders and the organisations in which they work (Day and Dragoni 2015). There is also significant attention to programs that are context-specific, such as leadership development for healthcare professionals (Marcelin, Siraj et al. 2019), school principals (Tingle, Corrales et al. 2019), even academics (Ruben, De Lisi et al. 2018). Due to highly distinct operating environments, as well as the importance of networking for leadership development (Cullen-Lester, Maupin et al. 2017), it makes sense that leadership development programs are frequently targeted to specific occupations, industries or sectors.

The humanitarian sector is one further example and the site of the present study. Effective leadership skills are essential to navigate the complex and difficult circumstances that often have critical consequences for the leaders and the communities they are aiming to assist (Bollettino, Kenney et al. 2019). The role of leadership development programs in addressing such important issues is an overarching question for the present study. We are particularly interested in the role such programs play in the leadership careers of women in the humanitarian sector.

There is a push for more women to take up humanitarian leadership roles, with women disproportionately underrepresented at senior levels despite comprising over 40% of the humanitarian aid workforce (Patel, Meagher et al. 2020). A key argument for increased representation is that more women in leadership roles would better account for the extent to which women are affected by humanitarian crises and lead to more holistic and sustainable solutions (Lafrenière, Sweetman et al. 2019, Patel, Meagher et al. 2020, Meagher, Mkhallalati et al. 2022). Key barriers to career progression include socio-cultural and economic barriers such as patriarchal attitudes that prevent or restrict women from participating in public spaces, as well as issues that are pervasive across humanitarian organisations such as non-existent or ineffective policies that perpetuate sexist cultures (Patel, Meagher et al. 2020). Meagher et al (2022) specifically call for research on humanitarian leadership to adopt gender lenses for a deeper understanding of these gender issues.

As one solution, Patel and colleagues (2020) recommend training and development for women working in the humanitarian sector, particularly at the early and mid-career stages. There is some research on gender and leadership development which often advocates the merits of women-only leadership development programs as spaces for important identity development (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011, Selzer, Howton et al. 2017, Madsen and Andrade 2018). What is lacking, is a gendered lens for programs that are not segregated. Indeed, a recent review of leadership development literature identified that 'only about 7% of published leadership articles mention women or gender-based consequences' (Vogel, Reichard et al. 2021: 8). Similarly, there is scant empirical research that takes the recommended gender lens and examines the motivations and outcomes for women participating in humanitarian leadership development. One study uses the example of one woman participant in an e-learning program for humanitarian leaders in the MENA region,

stating that the program gave her increased skills which translated to greater acceptance from peers and less gender bias (Saleh, Brome et al. 2022); however this is one participant in one study. We aim to address this gap through our research.

Research background

The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL) at Deakin University, Australia, is a provider of humanitarian leadership development programs. The Centre runs two main programs: the Crisis Leadership Program, which comprises three, career-staged short courses for new and established humanitarians (offered in multiple languages and locations); and the French-language graduate diploma Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH), which primarily but not exclusively services established humanitarian leaders from Western and Central Africa.

While these are not women-only courses, the Crisis Leadership Program and DESLH are central to the Centre's strategic objective of transforming the international humanitarian system towards a more equitable and inclusive system. Recruiting female humanitarian leaders is fundamental to this systems transformation vision. Our overarching research question is therefore: what is the role of leadership development in increasing the representation of women in leadership roles within the international humanitarian system?

The Centre is taking a mixed-methods approach to addressing these questions through multiple data collection points, as part of its monitoring, evaluation, and research (MER) strategy.

Initial findings from a survey on gender distributed across to Francophone humanitarian communities indicate that when asked about what structural or systemic barriers prevent women from achieving leadership roles within the system, 'confidence'—or a perceived lack of confidence on behalf of women—is the single most cited factor. While this finding comes from a small sample, it is indicative of a perceptual barrier to gender equality in leadership that will be hard to address through leadership development alone. Namely, while there may be a role for leadership development in augmenting individual women's leadership confidence and self-efficacy, the deficit framing that women 'lack confidence' devolves responsibility to the individual: in other words, women need 'fixing' (White and Burkinshaw 2017)

Our research agenda will interrogate this initial finding—and further data gathered through online surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions—to explore the role and limits of leadership development in achieving more equitable and inclusive leadership in the international humanitarian system, as well as exploring the organisational and system-level dimensions to this challenge.

Further findings and analysis will be presented at the Conference.

References

- Bollettino, V., A. B. Kenney, S. Schwartz and G. Burnham (2019). "Humanitarian leadership." Social Science Protocols **2**: 1-12.
- Burkinshaw, P., and White, K. (2017). "Fixing the women or fixing universities: Women in HE leadership." Administrative Sciences, **7**(3), 30.
- Cullen-Lester, K. L., C. K. Maupin and D. R. Carter (2017). "Incorporating social networks into leadership development: A conceptual model and evaluation of research and practice." The Leadership Quarterly **28**(1): 130-152.
- Day, D. V. and L. Dragoni (2015). "Leadership development: An outcome-oriented review based on time and levels of analyses." Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav. **2**(1): 133-156.
- Ely, R. J., H. Ibarra and D. M. Kolb (2011). "Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs." Academy of Management Learning & Education **10**(3): 474-493.
- Lafrenière, J., C. Sweetman and T. Thylin (2019). Introduction: gender, humanitarian action and crisis response, Taylor & Francis. **27**: 187-201.
- Madsen, S. R. and M. S. Andrade (2018). "Unconscious gender bias: Implications for women's leadership development." Journal of Leadership Studies **12**(1): 62-67.
- Marcelin, J. R., D. S. Siraj, R. Victor, S. Kotadia and Y. A. Maldonado (2019). "The impact of unconscious bias in healthcare: how to recognize and mitigate it." The Journal of infectious diseases **220**(Supplement_2): S62-S73.
- Meagher, K., H. Mkhallalati, N. El Achi and P. Patel (2022). "A missing piece in the Health for Peace agenda: gender diverse leadership and governance." BMJ Global Health **7**(Suppl 8): e007742.
- Patel, P., K. Meagher, N. El Achi, A. Ekzayez, R. Sullivan and G. Bowsher (2020). "“Having more women humanitarian leaders will help transform the humanitarian system”: challenges and opportunities for women leaders in conflict and humanitarian health." Conflict and Health **14**: 1-15.
- Ruben, B. D., R. De Lisi and R. A. Gigliotti (2018). "Academic leadership development programs: Conceptual foundations, structural and pedagogical components, and operational considerations." Journal of Leadership Education **17**(3).
- Saleh, S., D. Brome, R. Mansour, T. Daou, A. Chamas and H. Naal (2022). "Evaluating an e-learning program to strengthen the capacity of humanitarian workers in the MENA region: the Humanitarian Leadership Diploma." Conflict and Health **16**(1): 27.
- Selzer, R., A. Howton and F. Wallace (2017). "Rethinking women's leadership development: Voices from the trenches." Administrative Sciences **7**(2): 18.
- Tingle, E., A. Corrales and M. L. Peters (2019). "Leadership development programs: Investing in school principals." Educational Studies **45**(1): 1-16.
- Vogel, B., R. J. Reichard, S. Batistič and M. Černe (2021). "A bibliometric review of the leadership development field: How we got here, where we are, and where we are headed." The Leadership Quarterly **32**(5): 101381.