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LEARNING IN PRACTICE

**Poula Marie Helth**

# LEARNING IN PRACTICE

Doctoral School of Organisation and Management

PhD Series 05.2018

**CBS** COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL  
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

PhD Series 05-2018

# **Learning in practice**

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PhD School in Law, Information,  
Operations Management, Accounting and Culture  
Copenhagen Business School

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## **Preface**

I have studied how leaders in the organisational practice can transform their leadership.

Based on aesthetic performance leaders from 10 organisations in Denmark have experimented with new ways to learning in their own practice. The leaders' experiences and the impact of those have contributed to design for transformative learning valuable for development of aesthetic leadership.

What seemed to be an appropriate approach to leaders' learning as individual based experiments ended with quite another approach, namely leaders' learning through collective sessions with leaders from different sectors and leaders from the same management team.

I hope my study will offer inspiration to leaders, their organisations and leadership programs, when it comes to methods for learning in practice.

I owe recognition to all participants in my empirical research, who believed that we can improve leadership from a humanistic perspective based on aesthetic leadership and create leadership as co-creation through collectives with others.

To underline my acknowledgement, I quote this little fragment from Margaret Wheatley's book 'Turning to one another' (2009:23):

*Everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else. Nothing exists in isolation. We have to stop pretending we are individuals who can go it alone.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Many people have helped and supported me during the journey to complete the work into this thesis. I am grateful for their ideas, comments, curiosity and loyal critique. There has been a number of both Danish and foreign researchers, educators and practitioners who have been interested in my empirical research. Changing position from lecturer in management education, writer and consultant to Ph.D. student was a big challenge in my professional life.

I am grateful to Professor Preben Melander, former director of CVL, who believed that I, as a former management consultant was capable of conducting research into leadership in a field I had been interested in for years. During my early years at Copenhagen Business School, I met a senior researcher, now the new director of CVL, Christa Amhøj, with whom I started the journey of affective movements in leaders' practice. Without her courage and creativity in this new academic field I would not have had inspiration and personal belief to conduct a long and demanding research process.

During my research, I have had the best possible research team to spar and cooperate with. They are body therapist and Master in Psychology and Learning Sofie Kempf, from Core Energy, Sanna Waagstein, visual artist and Master of Arts in Educational Psychology and Katrine Schenstrøm Møller, facilitator and Master of Human Resource Management. Without their significant and highly qualified effort, I would not have been able to do research in the field I did.

My special thanks go to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dorthe Pedersen, who has been the head of the Master of Administration course at Copenhagen Business School for more than ten years. Her great knowledge and ability to overview and structure academic work was the most important help I could receive to get a grip on my writing. With patience and empathy, Dorthe has challenged my sometimes, fixed analytical positions. I am grateful for her questions to me, which made me clarify what were the important contributions of my research.

I also want to thank postdoctoral student Mia Hartmann, from CBS, for her advice and inspiring talks about ethnographical methods. In general, I am grateful to my brilliant and inspiring colleagues at CVL, a centre with a long tradition of contribution to research of community value, and now with a perspective of new action research into welfare-in-the-making.

An outstanding resource in my research process has been Professor Richard Schechner, of the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Schechner is one of the founders of the avant-garde theatre, based on a new anthropological approach to theatre and art. Schechner invited me to spend a semester at NYU in 2014. I was lucky to get the opportunity to follow Schechner's course at NYU and gain insight into Performance Studies, which turned out to be a very important basis for my research of leaders' learning in practice. I was inspired by Schechner's perspective on performance, which is not only relevant in the theatre, but also includes performance in the everyday life, and unites all applications of performance under one theory, which is inclusive of its many applications.

As for Schechner, I have great respect and gratitude for the Danish professor of philosophy, Ole Fogh Kirkeby, from Copenhagen Business School, who taught me to think and write through philosophical reflections. Ole's support and interest in my study of leaders' aesthetic learning in practice has been encouraging and affirmative of what I decided to focus on in my research.

Throughout the process of my Ph.D., I have been lucky to meet and talk with Donald Sutherland, who is Dean of the School of Music at Memorial University in Canada. Sutherland has developed art-based leadership and the notions of reflection and reflexivity. In this field, I also met Professor Steven S. Taylor from Foisie Business School, Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the US. Steven has been pursuing his research in organisational aesthetics and believes that management is as much an art as it is a science, and he has encouraged me to continue my research into aesthetic leadership and aesthetic performance.

During one of the seminars, in Birmingham, UK, with Copenhagen Forum, a European network for researchers teaching on management programmes, I met Professor John Diamond, who is Director of the Institute for Public Policy and Professional Practice at Edge Hill University, and the Head of Academic Planning for the Faculty of Education. My discussions with John have led me to an increasing focus on the value of learning processes, and development of research based learning methods in leaders' practice.

I am also very grateful to my husband, Hans Jørn Filges, who has been my partner in both professional and private life for many years. His willingness and ability to give me feedback on my papers and research process and, at the same time, his provision of food and practical activities necessary for my survival in this long period of my life, have been fantastic. I have no words to describe my great gratitude to him.

Besides, my son, Simon, working in Novo Nordisk has been the first proof-reader of my texts, and both critical and constructive in his feedback to me. He has also given me the opportunity to answer questions from an outside position.

Finally, I would like to thank family and friends for being patient and supportive, although they did not always know what I was doing, and had to wait hours and days for my presence at family gatherings. Without the world's best family, I would never have been able to complete this work.

Last, but not least, I want to thank the 10 companies who made it possible for me to do empirical research in leaders' art-based ways to learn from their own practice. Especially, a big thank you to the leaders and human resource consultants who, though sometimes sceptical, believed in my project and worked on the aesthetic performance in their own practice, as I encouraged them to do.

## English summary

The thesis presents the essence of my study of how leaders transform their practice through aesthetic performance. The background of the study is leaders' need for learning in and through practice, as an alternative to learning in classrooms and to leadership education programs. The study is based on theories of aesthetic performance and transformative learning, and on empirical studies through interventive methods within action research and ethnography.

Transformative learning in my study has been developed based on aesthetic performance addressing leaders' learning in practice. This kind of learning happens when leaders become aware of the potential for transformation of their leadership practice when they experiment with aesthetic performance integrated in a learning process. The greatest impact in relation to organisational transformation is, when leaders base their learning on a collective of leaders, which seems to underpin leaders' feeling of togetherness and encourage a shared understanding of the prerequisites for changes in the organisational practice. Transformative learning takes place when leaders sense what emerges and affect others in a way that lead to changes of their practice.

In three separate topics, my study firstly explores how aesthetic performance affects leadership at a personal level, secondly enhances transformation of leaders' practice in the daily organisational context and thirdly helps leaders to handle dilemmas when an overall learning design is combined with the aesthetic. In my study of leaders' practice through the different topics, one topic builds on another.

1) From the beginning of my study, the topic was how leaders as individuals can experiment with aesthetic performance in their personal practice. I developed a series of specific interventive methods for leaders' aesthetic performance, whereby the leader transports the daily problems that occur as a social drama into an aesthetic drama, which leads to a new social reality and to potential of changes of leadership practices. The convergence of the social and the aesthetic drama makes transformation of leadership possible.

Leaders experienced that they used body, thought and space as key elements in the aesthetic performance, which taught them to experiment with leadership problems in a playful way instead of struggling with the problems.

I found that leaders can transform their leadership when they work with an interventive method called **model of the aesthetic embedded transformation (MAET)**. This model moves leaders' senses and affect others in the organisation and opens up to new actions in leaders' daily practice.

2) However, I found that leaders' aesthetic performance only led to episodic changes in their organisational practice. Therefore I decided to explore a new research topic, which focused on how leaders can integrate learning methods that lead to sustainable changes of their organisational practice. Through the second topic my intention was to study how leaders could achieve more profound and fundamental changes based on their interventive methods.



The finding from the second topic was that leaders could change the organisation's daily practice, when the interventive methods were based on reflection. The method developed for study of this topic was based on a technique where the leader, in the role of performer, is separated from others in their role as audience. The technique I called 'The Audience Wheel' consists of firstly an affective reflection on the leader's aesthetic performance and secondly a perspectival reflexivity focusing on the organisational potentials of the performance. It became apparent that the leader experiencing others' affections, was able to carry out transformation in the daily practice.

In relation to this second topic of my study, I found that transformative learning in leaders' daily organisational context first occurs, when leaders combine aesthetic performance with reflection and reflexivity. The process that enabled the transformative learning took place in group sessions with other leaders and members of the research team. In-between the group sessions, leaders had to experiment with aesthetic performance and learning processes in their own organisational context. The second topic showed clearly that the strongest impact of the learning processes occurred in sessions with groups of leaders; especially leaders from the same management team had a potential to complete organisational changes.

3) I observed that, even though leaders in general pursued aesthetic performance in a suitable way, they also experienced unsuccessful applications. This led to a question of how leaders can handle dilemmas and resistance when they work with aesthetic performance in the organisation.

My study explored how leaders can handle dilemmas, if their aesthetic performance is framed through learning as liminal rituals, affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity. The finding on the third topic was that leaders deal best with dilemmas through a whole learning design, which integrates learning methods in processes where leaders' performance is based on the aesthetic.

Apparently, through this learning design, leaders became aware of the potential of aesthetic performance, because they achieved a view on dilemmas as normal. This finding underlines that leaders need to organise learning in order to handle resistance to implementing the aesthetic in their daily organisational context.

## Dansk resume

Afhandlingen præsenterer essensen af min forskning i, hvordan ledere transformerer deres praksis. Min forskning viser, at transformationen kan ske, når ledere gennem æstetisk performance og kollektive læreprocesser åbner for forandringer af deres lederskab i en organisatorisk kontekst.

Baggrunden for forskningen er lederes læring i og gennem praksis, som supplement til læring i klasseværelset og på lederuddannelsen. Forskningen har baggrund i teorier om æstetisk performance og transformativ læring, og i metoder til interventioner inden for aktionsforskning og etnografi.

Gennem tre adskilte forskningsemner har jeg undersøgt, hvordan æstetisk performance kan føre til ændringer af lederens praksis i den organisatoriske kontekst, når ledere, i samarbejde med andre engagerer sig i læreprocesser baseret på deres erfaringer med det æstetiske.

De tre emner har hver deres afsæt, og har udgangspunkt i adskilte forskningsspørgsmål. Tilsammen udgør de bidraget til min forskning om lederes læring i praksis.

*Forskningsemne 1:* I det første forskningsemne var spørgsmålet, hvordan lederes eksperimenter med æstetisk performance kan ændre deres ledelsespraksis. Individuelle ledere eksperimenterede under dette emne med en metode, hvor de kunne forandre deres daglige problemer gennem et såkaldt æstetisk drama. I stedet for at løse problemer, som ledere ofte er nødt til i deres hverdag, gennem et såkaldt socialt drama, konvergerede de nu problemet til et æstetisk drama, hvor de brugte metoden MAET (Model of Aesthetic Embedded Transformation) som grundlag for at eksperimenterer med problemet.

Når ledere oplevede sammenhængen mellem det sociale og det æstetiske drama, fik de ofte mod på at bruge æstetisk performance til at ændre problemer i deres praksis. Min forskning viser, at ledere kan bruge MAET til at forandre deres ledelsespraksis, når de erfarer, at det æstetiske drama ændrer deres håndtering af problemet.

Selv om æstetisk performance blev oplevet som en brugbar metode, var det dog også en udfordring for de individuelle ledere at anvende metoden som en integreret del af deres praksis. Desuden viste virkningen af den æstetiske performance sig at være episodisk og ikke føre til varige forandringer. Derfor besluttede jeg at forske videre med udgangspunkt i et nyt forskningsemne, som kunne udvikle metoder til at fremme mere bæredygtige forandringer i lederes praksis.

*Forskningsemne 2:* I det andet forskningsemne var spørgsmålet, hvordan æstetisk performance kan føre til en mere vedvarende ændring af lederes organisatoriske praksis. Jeg anvendte læringsteorier som grundlag for at ledere kunne reflektere over deres erfaringer med æstetisk performance. Her var det metoder til refleksion over den påvirkning, der sker gennem æstetisk performance, som blev udviklet for at lederen kunne forstå og dermed ændre sin daglige praksis.

Resultaterne under forskningsemne 2 viste, at ledere kunne ændre den organisatoriske praksis, når de anvendte læringsmetoden 'The Audience Wheel' i forbindelse med æstetisk performance, og når læringen skete i grupper med andre ledere. Læringsmetoden bestod i en struktureret refleksion i grupper, hvor lederen som 'performer' var adskilt fra andre deltagere som

'audience' i de seancer, hvor læringen blev gennemført. En del af 'audience' fik opgaven at reflektere gennem kroppen ud fra den påvirkning, de mærkede gennem lederens performance. Andre dele af 'audience' fik til at opgave at reflektere over de perspektiver, der opstod gennem lederens performance. Lederen samlede til sidst op på refleksionen og blev derigennem i stand til at gennemføre forandringer i sit daglige lederskab.

Den form læring der skete gennem 'The Audience Wheel' skabte forandringer i lederes praksis, når lederen oplevede et nyt perspektiv på problemer i den daglige praksis. Derved blev der skabt grundlag for en organisatorisk transformation, som rakte ud over den personlige forandring. Især ledergrupper fra egen organisation har i min forskning vist sig at have mulighed for at gennemføre mere radikale organisatoriske forandringer.

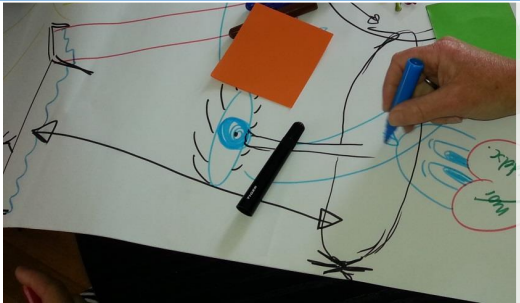
*Forskningsemne 3:* I dette tredje forskningsemne var spørgsmålet, hvordan ledere håndterer dilemmaer og modstand mod æstetisk performance i organisationen. Fokus i dette emne var hvordan ledere, der oplever modstand og dilemmaer, håndterer situationen.

Resultatet af min empiriske forskning viste, at ledere havde gode forudsætninger for at håndtere dilemmaer, når de anvendte et samlet læringsdesign, hvor æstetisk performance indgik i en sammenhæng med liminalitet og refleksive læringsprocesser.

Man kan derfor sige, at æstetisk performance både åbner for modstand i organisationen, men samtidig også skaber mod og evne til at håndtere denne modstand, når æstetisk performance anvendes bevidst, og ikke kun tilfældigt.

2017

Ph.D. thesis:  
Learning in Practice (LIP)



Poula Helth

CBS

14-12-2017



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## Introduction

The purpose of the framework of this thesis is to unfold and clarify the research questions, the core concepts, the research methods and the empirical part of my research project “Learning in practice (LIP)”.

The point of the research has been to explore why and how aesthetic based interventions lead to transformation of leaders’ practice. In LIP, the exploration of these interventions led to a new conceptualization of transformative learning, which means a learning process that leads to changes of leaders’ daily practice in an organisational context. Aesthetic performance used in leaders’ interventions means performing through senses and reflections on affects that arise through aesthetic performance.

The study is based on action research<sup>1</sup> in leaders’ practice, explored in three papers about learning as aesthetic performance<sup>2</sup>, transformative learning<sup>3</sup> and the effect of a learning design on aesthetic performance<sup>4</sup>, which together comprise the contributions in my empirical study.

The three papers cover how action research entails a study of, firstly, leaders’ aesthetic performance as a method to transform their practice, secondly, methods aimed at the transformative learning in leaders’ daily organisational practice and, thirdly, handling of dilemmas associated with aesthetic performance in the organisational context.

The study in LIP has focused on:

1. How leaders can transform their leadership through *movements between social reality and aesthetic performance*, when they actualise the potential in their organisational practice through aesthetic-based interventions;

---

<sup>1</sup> 81 leaders from ten different organisations have participated in LIP, in the form of both individual and collective sessions, organised in groups of 3-4 up to 10-15 leaders (Appendix 1 and 2). Besides, 12 human resource consultants from 6 organisations have participated in collective sessions. A research team, including a specialist in body therapy, an experienced visual artist and a facilitator of processes, has guided the collective sessions. There have been 68 individual sessions guided by a member of the research team and 52 collective sessions with 2 or more members of the research team. The individual sessions lasted 1½ hours and the collective sessions 3 hours each. Furthermore, LIP included 4 days of kick off and follow-up sessions for all leaders in the project plus colleagues, human resource agents and researchers from different fields. The empirical research lasted for a period of two years.

<sup>2</sup> *Leadership through aesthetic performance - an empirical study of leadership development*

<sup>3</sup> Helth (2016): *The Audience Wheel as a Technic to Create Transformative Learning*, in: *Developing public managers for a changing world, Emerald Insight*

<sup>4</sup> *A learning design to handle dilemmas in aesthetic-based leadership*

2. How leaders' practice can be studied through *leaders' self-observation*, which becomes the *point of observation for the researcher's analysis of the leaders' transformation of their practice*;
3. How the *research process itself has focused on experimenting and developing methods for transformative learning* based on action research and ethnographic studies.

In this thesis, I will unfold what learning through aesthetic performance is, and how theories used in my study have formed a basis for empirical research into leaders' learning in, and through, their practice.

### **Background of my study – from classroom to practice**

As LIP has explored, leaders' learning in practice is a way for leaders to learn from their organisational practice, contrary to the learning they receive through generic and theory based management education in the classroom or courses far from leaders' everyday life. Through the research process, it has been possible to study learning in the leaders' own practice that engenders transformation of their leadership. The process has opened a source of learning in practice, in terms of methods targeted at leaders' interventions, and has contributed to a new conceptualization of transformative learning.

My point of departure is that practice is a social process. The process is participatory, in that it encompasses the lived experience that constitutes identity, but also entails a materialisation of ideas in leaders' practice (Wenger 1998). As such, my study defines 'practice' in relation to leaders' organisational contexts, which give rise to new rationalities in leadership practices.

From 2013, I had the opportunity to study leaders' practice in ten public and private companies in Denmark. Companies frustrated at the gap between management education and organisational practice sponsored and participated in my empirical research. This gap between education and practice encouraged me to study how leaders can develop their leadership through learning in practice. I realised that I had to find interventive methods that could open leaders' approach to their organisational leadership in order to enhance potential to transform their practice. On this basis, I preferred a methodology that could explore leaders' learning in practice through interventions and self-observations from an inside-and-out position (Ladkin 2010, Grint 2005).

The background of my study is the critique that leaders' learning is often based on cognitive, abstract, instrumental and disembodied methods (Vince, 2002, Gray 2007, Dey and Steyaert 2007, Zundel 2013, Helth 2012). Learning methods should instead include explicit ways of learning that activate sensory perceptions and aesthetic awareness in leaders' organisational practice (Mack 2012, 2015, Gagliardi 2006, Vince and Reynolds 2007, Taylor and Hansen 2005, Strati 2007, 2009).

Based on this approach, I decided to study developing and testing learning methods in order to enable leaders' sensing of their interventions in practice and their learning of how the senses affected others. My decision also included the inside-and-out focus to be explored through leaders' interventions in their daily practice. The lack of knowledge about learning in practice

would be reduced if my research could lead to a study of leaders' methods to transform their own practice through their own observations.

To create a platform for leaders' learning in an organisational practice I decided to study transformative learning, which is a learning approach that can change leaders' social practice and sometimes also their identities (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998, Argyris and Schön 1996, Schön 1983, Mezirow 1992, 2009, E. Taylor 2007, 2009). To study how transformation unfolds in and through leaders' practice, I chose to conduct my empirical study based on *action research* (McNiff and Whitehead 2011). The purpose was to create a learning environment that promoted leaders' potential to obtain the transformation they wanted and, in their own view, also needed. The transformation takes place through aesthetic interventions in leaders' practice, which will be unfolded below.

### **Leadership based on aesthetic performance**

My approach to leaders' practice is a social focus on leadership and a practice-oriented look at learning (Grint 2005, Wenger 1998). Leaders' social context in LIP is defined as a social drama that remains locked until leaders learn to open their senses to new potentials in practice. Leaders' way to learning in practice goes through a 'socially constructed' social drama, which is a condition arising in leaders' organisational contexts (Edwards 2015: 66). The social drama, as applied in my study, is defined by the leaders themselves, and can converge with an aesthetic drama, when leaders learn to play with the social drama through methods based on aesthetic performance. As such, my study is limited to leadership as a practice based on aesthetic performance.

My empirical study has clarified that, if leaders leave the social drama for a moment, and transform it into an aesthetic drama, they can make their leadership visible and sensing through the flow between the two dramas. The aesthetic drama that has been unfolded in my empirical study through leaders' interventions in their practice has proved that the aesthetics can offer leaders fruitful transformative tools, as the aesthetic drama can release the social drama and transform leaders' practice (Schechner 1988/2003 and 2013).

Thus there is a convergence between the social drama, characterised by organisational rationalities, and the aesthetic drama, characterised by affective responses in sensory systems as spatial and human artefacts and bodily, kinaesthetic expressions (Coleman and Ringrose 2013, Schechner 1988/2003, 2013). The convergence functions as a flow between the social drama and the aesthetic drama, and forms the basis for the transformation of leaders' practice. When the aesthetic drama replaces the social drama, as my study has illustrated, a collapse of structured distinctions and rules will occur (Massumi 2002:27). Thus leaders experience an openness that can create a new approach to practice, when they play with the social drama, as if it was an aesthetic drama.

As I will unfold in this thesis, the social drama seems to block the way leaders see 'learning opportunities'. The social drama creates more of the same. If we look at studies of leadership as socially embodied, this leads to a theoretical understanding of leadership as a social phenomenon unfolded in an interplay between individual sense-making, collective cultures and institutional norms, depending on how situations are perceived by a leader (Ladkin 2013: 322). The aesthetic-

based learning perspective rather observe learning as based on experiences interwoven between the individual level and the collective, which emerges between our bodies (Coleman and Ringrose 2013:11). The example below unfolds how the aesthetic-based experience emerges and affects the leaders and other participants in the setting, when they feel their bodies and the sensations between them.

This focus on learning in practice can help leaders to experience how the aesthetic drama is a way to create new forms of leadership and learning opportunities in and through practice. Thus, as researchers, we have to examine, explore and analyse whether, and how, action research can help to promote and cultivate the movement between social and aesthetic dramas in ways that transform leadership into a beneficial practice for leaders and their organisations. The potential to transform leadership emerges initially as virtual learning, when leaders experience that they may transform their practice through their aesthetic-based experimental interventions. ‘Virtual’ means that the new practice has not yet occurred. After a while, the virtual can be transformed into a materialisation of the potential of new interventions in leaders’ practice, and become a real transformation of their leadership in the organisational context.

The transformation of leaders’ practice may lead to leaders’ appraisal of a better performance and experience of enhanced quality in their practice; however, as unfolded above, leaders do not know what will happen when they engage in aesthetic performance in the organisation. In LIP it was always the leaders who estimated whether the aesthetic performance led to better results in their practice. Sometimes leaders experienced good effects of their performance; sometimes they experienced resistance, when dilemmas occurred in relation to aesthetic performance in the organisation.

### **Example of transformation of leaders’ practice**

The example below illustrates an intervention in LIP with a group of 15 leaders from a management group in a public organisation. Interventions in leaders’ practices often consist of a number of smaller experiments, as is the case in the example below. These leaders experimented with aesthetic performance with the intention of prompting transformation of their practice.

The example is a snapshot from one of the settings in LIP, which illustrates how aesthetic-based methods, in this example an experiment with clay, opened leaders’ awareness of their practice. The session led to leaders’ expression of the potential they have to transform their practice, as one of the leaders reflected: *My figure in clay shows something soft that appears when I have to concentrate on coaching of others. I have to concentrate mentally, find an inner peace, but also a presence, which involves vulnerability.*



*Before the aesthetic intervention, the research team guided the leaders through a liminal ritual (grounding exercise where the leaders take deep breaths). The ritual made the leaders sense their bodies. As an introduction to the experiment with clay, the research team asked the leaders to close their eyes and sense which challenges in their social drama they had faced in their practice as leaders. The research team now handed clay to the leaders and asked them to create a figure of the social drama. The leaders had to conduct the experiment in silence, as an experiment in the aesthetic drama. The picture to the left illustrates how the leaders work.*

*There was complete tranquillity in the room when the leaders worked with the figures in clay in the aesthetic drama. We asked the leaders to sense and feel the condition they experienced when they made the figure in clay. The leaders were allowed to complete this experiment in 15 minutes, first with closed eyes and later with open eyes. One of the figures can be seen in the picture in the middle.*

*After this experiment, we asked the leaders to move to the floor, find a chair and sit in a circle with other leaders, shown in the picture to the right. Now, the leaders were asked to sense their bodily feelings. The research team continued: "Feel how the person next to you is affected by what you have done. Feel what there is between your bodies now, where you have opened yourself through the aesthetic drama. Feel the strength, vulnerability, and tranquillity between you. How is your condition now? Open your eyes and look around. Try to share your sensations with others in the room".*

*The research team asked the leaders to share their aesthetic experiences, one by one. The person next to them had to retell the experience and illustrate the experience through a body figure.*

The leaders who participated in this setting expressed in different ways how they were affected by the experiments, as theories about the affective movements describe (Spinoza 2001, Massumi 2002). This affect occurred through sensations and emotions, when the leaders were sharing their experiences with others in the room. The aesthetic-based processes always included leaders' own interpretations of the event why the leaders had to express their responses to the aesthetic performance in the setting, and their observations and interpretations of the performance.

The methods for leaders' interventions in their practice through aesthetic performance, as in the example, enabled leaders' sense based observations of their practice, because they learned to observe from an inside-and-out position. This means that the leaders learned to use their senses before they used their cognitive abilities to analyse and estimate the impact of the aesthetic based experiment.

The aim of the aesthetic intervention in LIP was to enhance transformation of leaders' practice and reflect theories of interest for the study of their learning process in practice. On this basis, I will define transformation as:

1. A sensation where leaders open their senses and affect others;
2. An aesthetic-embedded response to events based on bodily sensory perceptions;
3. A transformation based on reflection and reflexivity on aesthetic based experiences as potential for changes in leadership practices;

4. An awareness of the importance of aesthetic performance that enhances new interventions.

That means that the aesthetic-based methods for interventions in leaders' practice can be assessed as different forms of learning in practice.

The methods developed for transformation of leaders' practice are based on an abductive research method and elaborated through exploration of core concepts through empirical interventions. Thus methods for leaders' interventions in their practice had to be developed, in order to study leaders' transformation of their practice from new perspectives.

### **Thesis content**

After this introduction, I first unfold the two research questions in order to explore transformative learning, when learning is integrated in aesthetic performance and used as interventions based on action research.

Secondly, I unfold the core concepts in LIP, i.e. the models of social drama and aesthetic drama, the learning concept, including affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity and, finally, liminality as rituals used in LIP to conduct transitions between spheres.

Thirdly, I unfold the theoretic background of my study, namely theories of aesthetic performance, transformative learning, action research and ethnography.

Fourthly, I present the research methods in order to clarify the way methods have been developed based on an abductive approach.

Fifthly, I present the findings of my research by way of five categories of methods used for interventions, and categories of indicated impact of interventions in leaders' practice related to applied methods of aesthetic performance.

Sixthly, I briefly present each paper in the thesis

Seventhly, I discuss a perspective on future studies of transformative learning in leaders' practice, based on results from the project.

Eighthly, I leave room for the three papers in the thesis.

### **Research questions**

Below, I unfold the two research questions in my study of leaders' learning in and through practice. The first question is focused on aesthetic performance as a method of transformation of leadership, and the second question on how aesthetic performance can integrate learning methods in order to enhance transformation of leaders' organisational practice.

The research questions are answered through a research process that builds on an abductive approach, which will be unfolded later in this thesis. Furthermore, the core concepts, unfolded in the next section of the thesis, are both the basis for the empirical research, and empirical findings obtained through the LIP project.

In order to clarify the connection between research questions and findings, I present an overview in Fig. 1. The first research question leads to the first finding of a Model of Aesthetic-Embedded Transformation (MAET), which also develops a core concept for leaders' interventions in practice. The second research question leads to the second finding of a learning method called the 'Audience Wheel', which develops another core concept. The third finding, based on both research questions, occurred as a clarification of the use of a learning design, when leaders implement aesthetic performance in organisations, and leads to the third core concept.

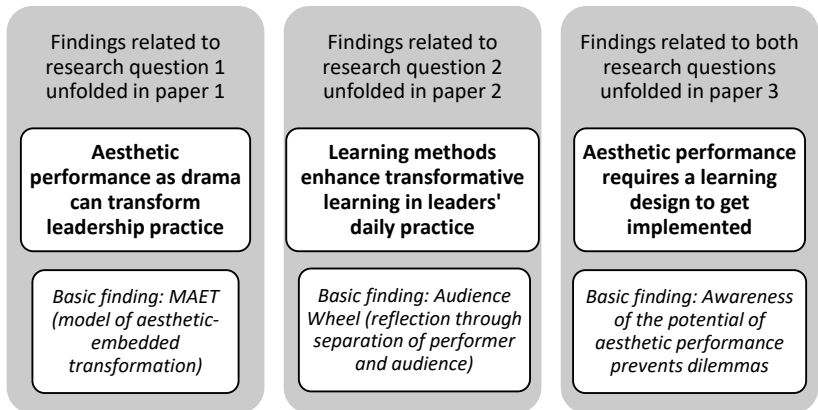


Figure 1: Overview of main findings related to research questions

### ***First research question***

Leaders participating in LIP were instructed to include aesthetic performance in their practice as a method of performing interventions based on action research. The purpose was to answer the research question: *How can leaders transform their practice through aesthetic performance?*

In order to answer this research question, I have developed a series of specific interventive methods for leaders' aesthetic performance in their organisational practice. My purpose was to develop an aesthetic approach to leaders' transformation of their leadership in order to develop their capacity to change their leadership in creative ways. This required the leaders to be able to both sense and affect others by these interventions. In the research process, I planned, guided and observed leaders' experiences with the aesthetic performance through their use of interventive methods.

The knowledge of interest to this first research question made me conduct aesthetic interventions as action research over a longer period, as development of new aesthetic interventive methods would seemingly not take place as 'a once-and-for-all' intervention. Through interventions based on aesthetic performance, leaders gained the potential to transform their leadership when they learned to 'play with' social drama, which I have unfolded in the first paper: *Leadership through aesthetic performance - an empirical study of leadership development*.



The purpose was that leaders should develop methods for aesthetic interventions in order to change the social drama, which is a 'place' where they are often confronted with problems they find difficult to deal with. Through the aesthetic interventions, leaders learned to convert the social drama to experiments in the aesthetic drama through movements of body, thought and space, revealing potential for transforming the way they lead.

When the leaders conducted aesthetic-based experiments in practice, they were able to transform the social drama into an aesthetic drama. However, based on my empirical findings, leaders' experiences were primarily based on individualised interventions, without reflections on how the experiences affected others in the organisation. This was why I decided that aesthetic performance required a guided, organised learning process, which should take place with facilitation from the researcher.

The knowledge of interest in studying leaders' learning in and through practice led to a methodological requirement for leaders' self-observation of their experiences, which served as an important point of observation for me as the researcher. From an outside position, I could not gauge the essence of learning in practice: the leaders themselves had to be fieldworkers in order to observe and translate the learning going on in practice.

In the few collective sessions I conducted in the initial phase of the empirical research, the interventions led to the transformation of leaders' practice, which individual interventions did not the same way lead to. Therefore, I decided that to study leaders' transformation of their practice required collective sessions, if the transformation had to be explored in the leaders' organisational practice.

### ***Second research question***

The challenge of answering the first research question in relation to leaders' transformation of their practice prompted me to formulate the second research question: *How can leaders learn aesthetic performance that leads to transformation of their organisational practice?* As stated above, the individual interventions in leaders' practice seemingly did not lead consistently to transformative experiences.

As aesthetic performance as isolated experimentation does not transform leaders' practice, this led to a twofold challenge when I had to answer my second research question:

1. How could I explore how leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance transform their leadership when they use the aesthetics in their organisational context? and
2. How could I develop appropriate learning methods which would be valid and reliable for my study of leaders' transformation, based on their aesthetic experiments?

The two aspects address, firstly, the exploring of leaders' experiments in practice based on appropriate learning methods and, secondly, the development of learning methods suitable for my study of leaders' transformation of their practice. Until I had developed methods suitable for

experimentation, I was not able to study the impact of leaders' learning in practice based on aesthetic performance.

The consequence was that I had to explore how methods for leaders' learning of aesthetic performance could be organised in order to create the basis for leaders' transformation of their organisational practice. In order to study leaders' learning in practice, aimed at transformation of their organisational practice, the empirical study had to include other interventive methods than aesthetic performance appropriate for transformation of leaders' practice in the organisational context. Therefore, I decided that leaders had to learn to reflect on their experiences to transform their practice in order to answer the second research question. Thus, I as researcher had to develop learning methods to enable the leaders to prepare, train, and observe their aesthetic performance. This was why I decided to integrate theories of reflection and reflexivity in creation of learning methods.

When I found that aesthetic performance did not per se lead to transformation of leaders' practice, the knowledge of interest was how to motivate leaders to engage in aesthetic-based experiments and explore how they could both experiment with, and observe their own practice. Based on my empirical findings and theoretical studies, I decided that leaders had to receive more guidance and orchestration of their learning processes, in order to enhance their learning of the aesthetic performance in their organisational context.

The purpose was to create a point of observation for my analysis of leaders' learning in practice, which was based on the leaders' experiences and not on my subjective aspiration as action researcher. The balanced connection between the methodological development and the research subject was necessary, if I as researcher should be able to judge the impact of leaders' learning in practice.

When answering the second research question, I found a need for an overall learning design that would heighten leaders' awareness of doing aesthetic performance. The purpose was that leaders should be able to recognise the social drama through methods of embedded aesthetic transformation (MAET). Their bodies should be able to remember aesthetic performance as an answer to the social drama when it recurred in their practice. Although I did not want to base the learning on cognitive methods, my claim was that transformative learning first takes place when leaders combine their experiences of aesthetic performance with different reflection based learning methods (Sutherland 2013).

In my empirical study, I developed methods to explore how leaders could transform their practice, and it seemed that liminal rituals (Van Gennep 1960) and orchestrated reflections could facilitate a more permanent transformation of leaders' practice. Transformative learning in leaders' practice, when they experiment with aesthetic performance, is explored in the second paper about a learning technique I have called the "audience wheel": "*The Audience Wheel as a Technic to Create Transformative Learning.*"

Furthermore, my empirical research has revealed that, even though leaders in general pursued aesthetic performance in a suitable way, they also experienced unsuccessful applications. These

experiences had to undergo in-depth study of how aesthetic performance may complicate leadership in the organisational context. This sometimes happened when leaders wanted to apply aesthetic performance in their daily practice and did not consider that they could meet resistance. My study has explored how leaders can handle dilemmas, when they engage in aesthetic performance conducted through liminal phases, affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity.

I have developed an overall learning design which has shown to have an impact on leaders' transformation in practice, when they learn to include the learning design in processes based on aesthetic performance. Furthermore, the learning design also implies awareness of the impact of aesthetic performance, in order to keep the leaders attention on possible negative reactions when using aesthetic performance in an organisational context.

Given awareness to aesthetic performance, it seems leaders will be able to handle dilemmas related to aesthetic performance, because they realise how they can actively work with their own potential in practice through aesthetic performance. Furthermore, they will be able to attain even better impact, when they engage in aesthetic performance integrated in a learning design. This kind of experience with aesthetic processes, when dilemmas related to aesthetic performance occur, is presented in the paper: *A learning design to handle dilemmas in aesthetic-based leadership*.

## **Core concepts in LIP**

To unfold the basis for my study of developing of methods for leaders' learning in practice, I will present the core concepts in my research.

During the action research in LIP, I explored how the development of aesthetic-based learning methods in leaders' practice can be unfolded. The most significant elements in the overall learning design have been the coherence and continuity between social drama, liminality, aesthetic drama, affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity, see Fig. 2. These elements are linked to core concepts unfolded below.

As shown in Fig. 2, the interventions in the transformative process started with the social drama, where the leaders experienced problems in their daily practice as leaders. Leaders were asked to find examples of their social drama. From there, leaders should transmit the social drama through a liminal ritual into the aesthetic drama. This happened, i.e. when the research team guided the leaders through a grounding exercise before the aesthetic-based experiment. After the liminal phase, the research team asked leaders to perform in the aesthetic drama.

Other participants in the sessions, who observed the performing leader/leaders, were normally touched by the aesthetic performance, which they expressed through affective reflections. From there the learning process changed into a perspectival reflexivity, which included a reflection on the potential of the aesthetic based performing of the problem. After these two kinds of reflections, the leaders and other participants finished the transformative process with another liminal ritual,

which brought them back to their social practice, now often in a transformed role and with a different approach to the social drama.

The data from my empirical study has been coded (Appendix 3) and serves as a background for the significant elements in the learning design aimed leaders' transformation of their practice (fig. 2)

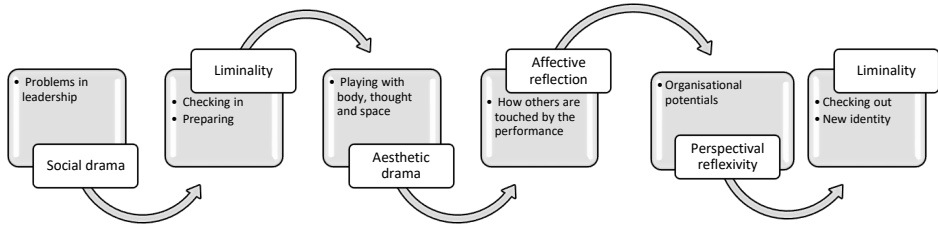


Figure 2: Significant elements in the learning design aimed leaders' transformation of their practice

I had to explore how action research could enable my study of leaders' transformation of their practice and how I could develop and facilitate transformation processes based on aesthetic performance in and through leaders' practice. This study was based on clearly marked core concepts as key elements in developing leaders' transformative learning.

The core concepts in LIP:

1. Model for aesthetic-embedded transformation (MAET);
2. "The Audience Wheel" including affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity;
3. Liminality as rituals to promote transition from one state to another.

The core concepts could also be called a conceptual framework, because they comprise different subcategories. However, I have chosen the simpler 'core concepts', in order to keep an overview of the structure during the research process.

The purpose of the core concepts is to align the research questions with the empirical study in LIP, in order to frame the object of my study. The core concepts are also the basis for developing methods aimed at leaders' interventions in their organisational practice. Furthermore, to be able to measure the impact of the interventions, a coherent methodological approach was necessary, as I will explore later in this thesis.

The core concepts will be unfolded below.

***First core concept: model for aesthetic-embedded transformation (MAET)***

LIP focused from the beginning on leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance, based on a specific model that is characterised as a flow between a social drama and an aesthetic drama, as I have named the model of aesthetic-embedded transformation (MAET). This was the first core

model in the leaders' experiments in practice during the empirical research (Fig. 3). This approach is inspired by performance studies and anthropology and was initially developed by Turner (1969, 1979), Schechner (1988/2003) and McKenzie (2001).

Figure 3 presents the model of the aesthetic-embedded transformation (MAET), as a flow between the social and the aesthetic drama. This model has been used as a basis for all interventions in leaders' practice. The further development of learning methods is also based on this core concept.

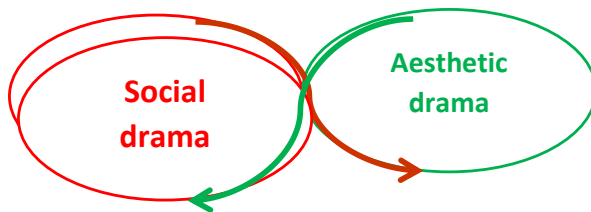


Fig. 3: Model of aesthetic-embedded transformation (MAET)

The two dramas cross-feed and can be seen as a relationship with specific enactments that move between the social drama, defined as feedback that works 'in the world', and the aesthetic drama, defined as feedback that works 'on consciousness', which means that leaders become aware of the impact of opening up, when they work with aesthetic performance (Schechner in McKenzie, 2001: 91). Feedback theorises how transformation takes place, the more the feedback processes move as the flow between the social and the aesthetic drama. The social drama consists of processes in everyday life, which means administrative behaviour, leadership practice and other forms of organisational rationalities and the risk of increasing problems. When the social drama, and the performing that is common in this drama, converge with the aesthetic drama and a performing different from the social drama is expressed, there will be feedback to the social drama, which has transformative potential (Schechner 1988/2003, McKenzie 2001).

The link between social drama and aesthetic drama originates from the anthropologist Victor Turner (1969). The model came to life again through Richard Schechner, who brought experiences from his work and research in the postmodern theatre into the model (1988/2003). Later, Jon McKenzie (2001) further developed the model into a theory of feedback loops, intending to develop an immanent "meta-meta model", based on different performative fluxes and opened up by the limen of performance management and performance studies (McKenzie, 2001: 89). Besides, I draw on Hansen, Ropo and Sauer (2007), who conceived the idea that leaders have to engage in aesthetic performance, when they want to follow their desire to do things better.

Aligned with the idea of changing social realities through aesthetic performance, Levi-Strauss (1969) has called aesthetic-based transformation 'from raw to cooked' as a paradigm of culture-making (Schechner 1988/2003). The MAET model may help leaders to escape from the often hidden and negative responses inside the social drama and to get started with the 'journey' between the two dramas, as a feedback process. This journey may then trigger the potential in the

social drama, when the transformation of leaders' acting in the social drama is released through the aesthetic performance.

Sharing this view of the feedback process as a flow between the two dramas, McKenzie (2001) stresses that liminal rite also enhances the cyclical process, when participants in the process are firstly separated from the daily life for a certain period of time and then reincorporated back into it. These rites have been integrated as a part of LIP with the purpose of marking the difference between the two dramas.

In LIP the social drama and the aesthetic drama are defined as follows:

- The social drama is defined as a part of leaders' daily life where everyday problems occur, and habits are caused by an often instrumental approach to leadership, which may prevent leaders from changing their practice the way they want. Leaders may try to change the social drama from the drama itself, but often they do not succeed in achieving the desired changes.
- The aesthetic drama is the place for leaders' creative experiments in playing with their everyday problems from the social drama. When performing as an aesthetic drama, leaders have an option to do something different from what they do in the social drama for a limited period of time, often 5 – 20 minutes. Despite the limited time for the aesthetic drama, this drama seems to hold the potential to change leaders' approach to their everyday problems and can lead to transformation of their leadership, if they become aware of the potential in the ongoing flow between the two dramas.

The leaders in LIP had to experiment with aesthetic performance as interventions in which the social drama moves on to the aesthetic drama through the limen between the two spheres; and, in a transformed performance, flows back and changes the social drama. When the flow between the two dramas is embedded in the leaders, which happens if leaders learn to sense their doings, their bodies will remind them of the potential for aesthetic performance.

This learning occurred in LIP through aesthetic performance carried out in the form of processes in which leaders acted through breathing, silent walking, a sigh, smiling, or tuning in with their body, drawing, making body figures etc. They performed without knowing how the sensation would affect others and then also themselves as leaders.

In addition, Thrift (2008) has argued that sensation and intensity often get lost in the representational techniques of the social sciences; however, this may not happen if a performative organisational geography is attuned to the material, embodied, affective, and multiple sites of organising (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011: 83). This is also an argument why this first core concept that opens for sensing through performative actions, was developed through many different kind of experiments in leaders' practice.

During the sessions in LIP, the leaders either recounted their experiences based on experiments in their individual practice, or carried out aesthetic performances in settings with others, where they also reflected on their experiences with the aesthetic-based experiments. The reflections unfolded below ended up being the second core concept.

***Second core concept: The audience wheel based on reflection and reflexivity***

A focus I perceived from performance studies (Schechner 2013) was the view of the relationship between the performer and the audience that led to ‘set ups’ in my action research, where the leader ‘as performer’ and other participants in the sessions ‘as audience’ had shifting roles. Frances Harding (2004) saw the audience-performer relationship as an opportunity to create a suspension of the ordinary rather than a suspension of reality. The performer may at one time be acting a ‘role’ and at another time present the ‘self’, which means that a representation is not required in order to convince the audience of an ‘other’ as a role outside the ‘self’ (Schechner 2013: 176). This means that a person moves between the presentation of ‘self’ and the representation of an ‘other’.

With that background I developed the second core concept called “The Audience Wheel” where performer and audience have shifting roles. However, to clarify this second concept, I will first unfold how the interventions through body, space and thoughts affected both the leader and others who observed the aesthetic performance. The affects led to development of this concept, which reinforced the aesthetic-based learning from MAET.

I found that leaders’ aesthetic interventions in practice occurred in the form of movements of body, space and thought. When the words and bodily expressions were coordinated in a truthful way, it had a strong impact on the audience, who were affected by the performance (Schechner 1988/2003). Aesthetic performance can be expressed in terms of the way it affects others. When leaders in LIP engaged in aesthetic performance, they often sensed a coherence between the three elements in the aesthetic drama illustrated in Fig. 4.

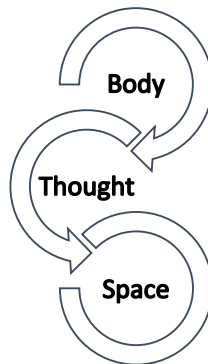


Fig. 4: Three elements of the performer’s sensing that affects the audience

Affects involve both body and mind, and are reflected by human beings, who are eager to achieve a “greater perfection” (Spinoza 2001). According to Spinoza, the body informs the thoughts of our potential, when we are affected by senses. As such, the figure of body-thought-space means that leaders are able to understand events as drivers of organisational life across their present bodies, from which sensory experiences emerge (McCormack, 2007). This sense-based approach

to learning is the opposite of a cognitive-analytic approach, where the body only has a secondary role.

The presence is then important for understanding the impact of body-thought-space in the aesthetic performance in relation to the focus on learning in leaders' practice. Often the performance was accompanied by music and drawing, to enhance the mood in the setting, which entailed a sensory awareness and spatial thinking. Space might be a psychic, but also a virtual space, which means that things going on lead to a new, not yet visible or conceivable impact (Massumi 2002).

The participants in the sessions in LIP were primarily affected by the bodily interventions, and I found that many of the interventions started with the bodily movement, often in a flow with space and thoughts. According to Ladkin, Merleau-Ponty stresses that we cannot perceive without our body telling us what we feel, hear and smell (Ladkin 2013: 330). The body is essential to awareness of what is going on around us (Butler 1993). As such, the body is closely related to thoughts, and often leaders' interventions with bodily movements in LIP occurred before the leaders started to think of what happened. Thus, bodily movements affect the thoughts, which lead to a new affective reflection on the top of the aesthetic performance.

Bodily movement and space alterations were methods I integrated in interventive methods developed in LIP, although it was sometimes difficult for the leaders to imagine what movements with bodies and spaces would cause. The bodily interventions in LIP often included grounding and breathing exercises in silence, and mimetic body sculptures, where the performers were mirroring each other (Aristotle 1996, Scharmer 2009, 2013). Especially, when the leaders were quiet, worked in silence and moved their bodies without a strategy for their movements, the effort of the intervention seemed to influence the leaders' thoughts. Such interventions led to affections that made those, who watched the performance, reflect through their senses.

When the leaders started bodily movements without a strategy or a certain purpose, they often deliberated on their bodily experiences and were able to talk about them. As Ladkin and Taylor (2010) stress, it is through the body that the leader can express a "true self" and come across as authentic. This means that leaders have to use the body when they present themselves, unlike when they represent a role. Thinking based on this approach will become an expression of an affective materiality that performs space, which means pondering an intensity of relations of capacity, taking place before a thought kicks in (Thrft 2004).

The affective reflection in LIP occurred from the performer's bodily and spatial movement in the present. The affective reflection based on body, space and thought opened the senses among other participants in their roles as audience and led to reflexivity. In the development of the concept "The Audience Wheel," leaders' moving of senses that led to affective reflection was a prerequisite for the reflexivity focusing the potential in the problem performed as an aesthetic drama.



This means that, after the affective reflection, the audience was ready for the perspectival reflexivity, a notion based on the work of Sutherland (2013). He has developed a notion for complexifying thinking or experience by exposing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities in the process of reflection. Sutherland uses the definition ‘aesthetic reflexivity’ as a concept that arises from considerations of the pressures on the self where the human being has to be highly adaptive and is constantly challenged by new perspectives and circumstances (Sutherland, 2013:4).

In LIP, this aesthetic reflexivity has become a creation of knowledge through the appropriation and transformation of the sensory–emotional characteristics of experiences, based on affective reflections. The reflexivity tends to encourage learning at transformative levels (Sutherland, 2013). As core concept the combination of reflection and reflexivity seemed to be an important basis for leaders’ transformative learning. Especially when the kind of reflection I have used in LIP should transform leadership, reflection and reflexivity had to open up and involve instead of creating distance. As Sutherland (2013) argues, reflecting *with* an object has more potential than reflecting *on*, because to reflect ‘on’ an object makes the object static, immutable and isolated, whereas reflecting ‘with’ an object opens up associations with the art-based experience. This approach seemed to be valuable for leaders’ transformative learning, which means that transformation was associated with learning.

Affective reflection can be explained as ontologically based learning, where the perspectival reflexivity is an epistemological term of learning. The concept “The Audience Wheel” was supposed to promote the learning process and make leaders ready to make changes in their practice. The second concept has thus created the basis for transformative learning.

### ***Third core concept: liminal rituals***

Based on experiences from developing of both MAET and ‘The Audience Wheel’ the research team and I decided that we had to conduct liminal rituals and clearly mark them as transitions from the social to the aesthetic. The liminal rituals prepared leaders to engage in aesthetic performance, in which they had to experiment without a cognitive binding. The leaders gained the capacity to renew their leadership during rites of transition and re-incorporation (Van Gennep 1960, Schechner 1985).

Hawkins and Edwards describe liminal moments as moments in and out of time during which a transition occurs, and where the individual is transported from one state of being to another (Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960 in Hawkins and Edwards, 2015: 26). The concept of liminality is according to Turner (1979) a state of betweenness, applying to individuals on the verge of a different stage of being (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015: 26).

Liminality, originally developed by Van Gennep (1960), offers the possibility of engaging in transformative practices: trying out, questioning and adopting or rejecting new identities. In Van Gennep’s concept of liminality, there are three phases in liminal rituals (Hawkins and Edwards,

2015: 26). First the *separation*, where leaders are detached from their previous roles in the social structure; then the *limen* or threshold, a state of transition in which the liminal subject is 'passenger'; and finally the *reincorporation*, in which the transition is consummated, and the subject regains a stable, often higher identity in relation to others.

In the rite of separation, the social role or position is broken down; then the middle phase involves a trial or a test; finally, in the rites of incorporation, a new status, position or identity is established and recognised (Stenner and Moreno 2013: 19).

Although Turner (1969) suggests that a liminal space offers its occupants the possibility to engage in transformative practices - trying out, questioning and adopting or rejecting new identities - he also regards liminality as a time of enchantment when anything *might* happen (Turner, 1979: 465). As such, the learning process is a sacred place in time and space, a kind of symbolic 'social limbo', loaded with promise, potential and the unknown (Hawkins and Edwards 2015: 27); a ritual that opens up for 'the new and not yet possible' to observe.

In most aesthetic performance, the transformations are often temporary and, after a while, the aesthetic drama may have no impact. This was of interest in LIP, where leaders' learning in the organisational context was at play and had to be object for further studies of how leaders could obtain sustainable changes through aesthetic performance. The need for transitions in leaders' interventions was the argument for developing the concept of liminality. Like Schechner, I found that initiations that are marked carefully as liminal rituals can lead to a permanent transformation of those who are involved in the play (Schechner, 1985: 20).

The knowledge of interest in liminality in LIP led to the framing of aesthetic performance, which had to both open and close every event (session) when leaders experiment with aesthetic interventions. At the beginning of LIP, the leaders were not able to conduct their own rituals and do the liminal framing in their own practice. However, LIP gradually developed leaders' capacity to practice not only separation, but also transition and re-incorporation, during the processes related to aesthetic performance, for instance as checking-in and checking-out to events.

The liminal rituals structured learning sessions in a balance between affect and emotions which also created conditions for transformative experiences that would not have occurred without the framing based on liminal rituals. These rituals, as core concept in LIP, encouraged the flow between the social drama and the aesthetic drama (MAET), and framed the settings with transformative learning based on the aesthetic interventions in leaders' practice.

## **Theoretical background**

The knowledge interest of the study in LIP has been to explore how action research can create transformative learning based on aesthetic performance in and through leaders' practice. In this section I will unfold the basic theories for my research, which are a non-representative approach to learning, theories about aesthetic performance, transformative learning, action research as interventive method and a combination of action research and etic ethnography.

### **Non-representative approach in LIP**

The way we have often studied leaders' learning in practice relates to the tradition of individual learning and leaders' behaviour, which limit the understanding of leaders' learning in the organisational practice (Vince, 2002, Gray 2007, Dey and Steyaert 2007, Zundel 2013). This tradition is based on a representative paradigm that can lead to understanding of leadership as discourses, institutional grids and isolated individualised behaviour, where leaders' roles are locked in theoretical stereotypes (Thrift 2008).

The gap between theoretical and practically-oriented learning pushed my decision to study how leaders learn to perform in their organisational context, in order to explore how they could experience successful transformation in practice. This led to empirical research based on practically-oriented non-representative movements, i.e. through the affective turn as materialistic-affective responses that intensify relations (Massumi 2002), and through minor bodily movements or micro movements that affect space-thinking (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011). Translated to the LIP project, non-representative movements have taken form of the convergence between the social and the aesthetic drama.

The non-representative approach allows for learning in leaders' practice that goes beyond constructivism. It entails human activity for movements in leaders' practice in which thinking materialises. This type of learning includes aesthetic performance and material bodies of work or styles, and the ways in which human bodies interact with things and carry out experiments (Thrift 2008, Latour 2005). In my study, this approach was unfolded as aesthetic interventions and aesthetic-based reflections on leaders' experiences.

### **Aesthetic performance in studies of leaders' practice**

My argument for the use of aesthetic performance in the interventions leaders was instructed to make in their practice was based on my search for methods that could open to leaders' inside-and-out focus on their leadership. I found that the connection between art and leadership could meet what I was looking for, as theories of aesthetic leadership and theories of aesthetic performance have explored this connection (Grint 2000, 2005, Ladkin 2010, 2013, Taylor 2012, 2013, Ladkin and Taylor 2010 a, 2010 b, Schedlitzki and Edwards 2014, Edwards 2015, Geertz 1973).

The notion of aesthetic leadership (Ladkin 2010, 2013, Taylor 2012, 2013, Ladkin and Taylor 2010 a, 2010 b, Schedlitzki and Edwards 2014) was the first opening for my understanding of why performance art might be relevant in the study of leaders' learning in practice, because art brings leadership a whole new dimension, creating a new insight into leadership practices and a potential for transformation.

I gained the inspiration to unfold theories about performance from e.g. McKenzie (2001), who had studied methodologies from theatre and anthropology as alternative perspectives on management and leadership development (McKenzie 2001, Schechner 1988/2003, Turner 1985, Bateson 1972). I found that performance studies (Schechner 1988/2003, 2013, McKenzie, 2001)

were appropriate for developing methods leaders could use to conduct experiments in their own practice. These theories proved to be key elements in my study of leaders' learning in practice.

Moreover, Taylor (2008, 2012, and 2013) has studied the advantages of a manager's artistic impulses, and argues that the world desperately needs to address complex problems in a way that lead to beauty in organisations as an artistic impulse (Taylor 2013: 70). The artistic impulses in leadership, that Grint (2005, 2010) has also suggested, might be more memorable and have the potential to inform leadership more incisively than cognitive learning methods (Schedlitzki and Edwards 2014). I found these theories relevant for my study, in which I use artistic impulses equivalent to micro-movements and aesthetic performance occur through body, space and thought, unfolded under the section of core concepts.

Performance in relation to leadership is often cognitive-based and does not contribute a deeper insight into the artistic impulse that moves leaders and make them capable of changing their practice (McKenzie 2001). However, performance art and modern theatre focus on minimalistic performance, e.g. less is better. The performer has to learn to experiment and be free to act. This notion of aesthetic performance has been an inspiration for developing methods in my empirical study of leaders' learning in practice aligned with the studies of Ladkin and Taylor (2010).

### **Transformative learning**

In the first part of my research, aesthetic performance based on performance studies was the dominant approach in my study of transformation of leaders' practice (Schechner 1988/2003). Thus transformative learning as approach to my study was not clearly defined until later, when the findings in the empirical research required an explicit use of learning theories in the research. The learning theories that served as background for my action research, are theories of transformative learning (Lave and Wenger 1991, Argyris and Schön 1996, Schön 1983, Mezirow 1992, 2009, E. Taylor 2007, 2009). My argument is that transformative learning is needed to create changes in practice at times when solutions of organisational problems are not given in advance. This is why organisations and their leaders have to develop leadership technologies based on transformative learning.

From the beginning of my study of leaders' transformation of their practice, I did not have empirical background for analyses of why transformative learning connected to aesthetic performance required orchestrated reflection, if the learning had to change phenomena in the organisational context (Harris et al 2008). Then I also understood why transformative learning, based on aesthetic interventions, is different from cognitive-based learning. I found a useful theoretical approach in Peterson, DeCato and Kolb (2015) who stress why movements create experiences that become the basis for reflecting and acting, because movements encompass more than gestures or physical expressions, emotions and thoughts as organised patterns of movements.

Movements launched by aesthetic performance help to express new thoughts, and integrate new information and experience into neural networks. Movements are vital to all actions by which a person embodies and expresses learning and self-understanding (Hannaford 2005 in Peterson, DeCato and Kolb, 2015). Peterson, DeCato and Kolb (2015) hypothesise "*that when a person is able to move using a full palette of movements, he may be more flexible in both movement and*

*learning, and will be able to adopt an integrated approach to learning*” (p. 236). In LIP the learning process was a prerequisite for transformation of leaders’ practice, which became evident when leaders began to reflect on their experiences with aesthetic performance.

It was my decision to integrate theories of transformative learning after my first analyses of leaders’ interventions in practice, which led to a conceptualization of transformative learning defined as:

- A. *A learning process* that takes place in leaders’ practice when leaders, through aesthetic performance, move body, thought and space;
- B. *A learning experience* that occurs as a togetherness in a collectively created setting; and
- C. *A learning method* that presupposes framing of the learning process through liminality, affective reflection and reflexivity.

The conceptualization of transformative learning is fundamental for the interventive methods I chose to develop later in the research process. Thus, transformative learning was not present from the start of my study, when I worked on the first research question that focused solely on transformation through aesthetic performance. The impact of leaders’ interventions in their organisational contexts seemed to grow, when I started to use this extensive conceptualization of transformative learning in the research process.

#### **Action research as interventive method**

It was crucial to my methodology that I based my study of leaders’ transformation of practice on an approach, which enabled leaders to intervene in their practices, based on theoretical assumptions that could strengthen the interventive methods and give my research a proper theoretical basis. My claim was as unfolded in the second research question that I worked on theories of transformative learning in my study of leaders’ learning in practice, because these theories could open to my study of changes in leaders’ practice through learning processes. As also Coleman and Ringrose (2013) underline there has to be a connection between theory and practice (Deleuze 2001). Apart from the connection of theory and practice, Coleman and Ringrose stress the need for interdisciplinary thinking to break away from methodological territorialities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984/1987 in Coleman and Ringrose 2013). These statements encouraged me to conduct my empirical research through interventive methods and through developing concepts that combine theory and practice, in order to be able to study how leaders change their practice through aesthetic performance and transformative learning.

This was also the reason why I decided to draw on the abductive approach (Dubois and Gadde 2002, Kirkeby 1994). Later in my thesis I will unfold why I chose to use this approach. As Dubois and Gadde state, learning in research processes is important and takes place in the interplay between search and discovery. Especially in a process where discoveries cannot be planned in advance, the researcher has to reconsider the “prevailing” theoretical framework as well as the conditioning of interventions and empirical observations.

The interventive methods have been developed during the research process, whenever the interventions from my point of observation needed to be redefined. These redefinitions could not have caught the multiple emerging realities in the research process if I had only focused on

knowledge of interest as methods developed and decided before the beginning of my study. Based on action research I had a legitimacy for redefining methods and research interventions through my research process that could bring into being what the leaders in my study discovered, as methods are performative and enact realities (Coleman and Ringrose 2013).

This means that I preferred to adapt theories and methods to the event, and not suppose things could happen the other way around. For example, I sometimes had to pause the process to explore what was going on and make changes in the interventive methods during the sessions. This happened when the empirical observations could not confirm the theories my research was based on. Then I had to change the theoretical approach, as leaders' learning processes should be developed through appropriate theories and methods that could lead to new concepts for leaders' learning in practice.

The concepts in LIP were suited to action research as an approach to coping with leaders' problems through action and reflecting, which improve the problem-solving process (Revans 1982, McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). Action research that has been the chosen approach in LIP turned out to enable concepts and methods to evolve for leaders' transformation of their daily practice.

### **Combination of action research and etic ethnography**

My empirical study is based on *action research*, as a kind of research used in practitioners' interventions in their own practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011) and on *etic ethnography*, as a certain view of practice determined by themes of interest to the researcher (Morris et al. 1999). The researcher defines the field for the participants' actions and observation of the object studied. But it is the practitioners who observe and judge their experience, not the researcher.

LIP draws on participatory action research, which is a kind of action research directed towards reframing and reconstructing of social practices. This happens when leaders learn to play with the social drama as if it were an aesthetic drama. Participatory action research offers an opportunity to meet other people and interact in groups of people who join together in changing practices. It is the actual practices that are involved in this kind of action research, as it was in LIP (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2008: 277)

Therefore this kind of action research requires involvement of participants in the research process. Hence the leaders in LIP had to become ethnographic fieldworkers, who were able to observe by seeing, hearing, feeling and understanding the responses to others' performance. The leaders played the role of ethnographic fieldworkers, who had to conduct experiments in their practice and assess the impact of these. Although I was the initiator of the methods used for interventions in leaders' practice, it was not I who could subject the leaders' self and sense bodily affects as responses to those leaders' aesthetic performance.

The approach to action research in my study relies on practitioners' abilities to observe and explain what they are doing (McNiff and Whitehead 2011). It also relies on the notion of 'interpretive action research' which, in LIP, implied the assumption that observers of aesthetic performance were able to explain what people said and did (Yin, 2009 and McNiff and Whitehead,

2011: 46). The knowledge interest had to be defined by the researcher, not the leader, why the role of the researcher and the participant had to be defined.

The researcher always had a double position in LIP: on the one hand, initiating the methods for leaders' interventions and interpretations of their aesthetic experiences; and, on the other hand, analysing leaders' interventions and interpretations in order to carry out the final analyses. In this sense, my position as researcher became both that of an outside observer and that of an inside game-setter and participant.

The empirical research was dependent on my trust in leaders' willingness and ability to intervene in their own practice. As action researcher I had to trust that leaders were observing their experiments in a way that made sense for them and, at the same time, according to themes my empirical research was looking for. A theme was for instance leaders' conducting of aesthetic performance in their daily practice. Many of the themes were based on the core concepts.

## **Research methods**

In this part of the thesis, I will unfold how the research methods have been developed, in order to clarify the structure of my research process. As a consequence of my position within action research, I decided to apply an abductive method. To give an overall background for my application of this method in LIP, I will firstly unfold the justification for the abductive method. Secondly, I will go through prerequisites for structuring my research in order to present the three types of interventions used by leaders in their practice. To also explain the background of who took care of the research process I will thirdly give a short presentation of the research team responsible for the sessions in LIP. Finally, I will unfold the three types of interventions in LIP to give an overview over main principles for my development of methods aimed at leaders' experiments in their practice, which will be basis for the next section of this thesis, where I will go deeper into a documentation of the interventive methods used in LIP.

### **Justification for the abductive approach**

My action research builds on an abductive approach, as data from the project can be seen as a tandem in relation to applied theories and developed theoretical categories behind my interventive methods (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). The progress in the development of methods did not per se occur from the empirical data. I had to study the phenomena I discovered in the empirical material based on new theories I found relevant to further develop methods for leaders' interventions that might lead to transformation of their practice. The action research in LIP is conveyed by an abductive approach combining structured and open-ended work. Based on the abductive approach, exploring theories of aesthetic performance on one side, and forming and testing new aesthetic-based methods of interventions on the other side, led to a development of the conceptual framework for LIP (Dubois and Gadde 2002).

Building on the abductive approach in my study implies circular processes between

- a) Theoretical prerequisites behind methods for intervention; and
- b) Developing and testing interventive methods; and

c) Empirical observations of interventions (preparation, actions, senses, affects, experiences of changes, coaching conversations, reflection, reflexivity) and registration from all the collective sessions (field notes, bullet notes, pictures and audio files).

The abductive approach was applied in order to constantly keep track of what I focused on and how my interpretation of empirical findings systematically were drawn into consideration when developing theoretical prerequisites and conceptualization of the LIP learning design. The shift between empirical data and theoretical input was necessary for the progress of production of data that could give insight in leaders' transformation of their practice. Thus the abductive approach was essential to my research because of the potential in this method, which was obtained by the circular switch between theory and practice. I would not have been able to study leaders' transformation of their practice, which is the object of my research, through either an exclusively deductive or an inductive method. My field of study required an exploratory and evolving base.

As a consequence of the abductive approach, I have constantly developed new interventive methods as basis for studying leaders' learning in practice. The aesthetically-informed theories gave rise to interventions that were performed, observed and analysed through experiments in leaders' practice. The experimenting approach in interventions turned out to be an opening into leaders' practice, which firstly led to their experiences with aesthetic performance and, secondly, to learning processes that could transform their practice. Both of these were framed by the abductive approach of oscillating between theories, designing and testing, and collecting and analysing data about leaders' practice of intervention, which is the central research object in LIP.

#### **Prerequisites for structuring my research**

The empirical study, gave me, as action researcher, the possibility of analysing the research object, namely how leaders' learn to transform their practice through different methods of aesthetic based interventions. I located the transformation of leaders' practice as a way leaders can experiment with, act out and ratify change (Schechner, 2003: 191).

The aim of my empirical study was to develop and gain insight and understanding of which types of aesthetic-based interventions correspond to which experiences of transformation of leaders' practice. Experiences of transformation was observed as traits showing the impact of the interventions conducted through leaders' experiments in their practice. In my study, the interventions should help leaders to explore the potential of changes and to let leaders observe if and how the exploration led to changes of their practice.

As researcher I had to investigate leaders' experiences and their reported changes systematically in order to keep focus on both intervention and impact. To answer my research questions leaders had to report their experiences with aesthetic-based interventions and the impact of these interventions. For instance, the collective sessions seemed to create a space, where I as researcher could control the methods used for interventions and use leaders' reported experiences (Staunæs and Kofoed 2015).

I have used both individual coaching sessions and collective settings in my study of leaders' transformation of their practice as a basis for exploring the methods used of leaders to make



interventions in their daily practice. There were never presupposed estimated causal links between input (methods of intervention within a given learning design) and output (learning impact). On the contrary, there were co-creations of experienced social realities (Staunæs and Kofoed 2015, Butler 2010).

I have found that the core concepts in LIP, developed during the research process, correspond well with an abductive approach based on interventions as performative actions, where the research process is not clearly separated between methods, researchers, experiments etc. as structuring of the research process in 'before' and 'after'. I will argue that the observation from the researcher's viewpoint is also part of, and co-creates, the phenomena to which it provides access (Staunæs and Kofoed, 2015: 50). Structuring of the research process in LIP was based on development of interventive methods in an interaction between development, testing, observations and impact analysis.

### **The research team**

The research team was a team of professionals from art-based areas, i.e. body therapy, painting and coaching. The team was coordinated by me and we planned all sessions in the team, both for longer periods and from time to time. For every session, we compiled a playbook for the process in order to develop appropriate methods for our conduct of settings and to be aware of our roles and ethical issues. All members of the research team had a responsibility to write notes and take pictures.

The team played a role as guides of leaders' interventions in aesthetic performance and, as such, we also had to be integrated into the settings. Thus we could not just observe the process from an external position, but had to become guides of the settings that led to aesthetic based interventions in leaders' practice. The research team had to be present and instruct the leaders so that they could carry out their aesthetic performance and subsequently follow up through the reflective learning processes.

The study of leaders' transformation of their practice was conveyed through leaders' self-observations of their interventions in the daily practice, the collective settings and their interpretation of what was going on there. This was one of the reasons why we tape-recorded all the sessions and took pictures. To be present and involved in the settings seemed to be important if we wanted to get the leaders involved in the learning processes (Ladkin 2010).

To be specific, we conducted 68 individual and 52 collective sessions. During the sessions the research team made brief notes and tape-recorded the 120 sessions. All collective sessions were based on different and detailed scripts, whereas the individual sessions were always based on the same manual. The notes we jotted during the sessions and the tape recordings supplied the material from the fieldnotes we wrote after the sessions, which enabled us to analyse our findings subsequently. This kind of recording of empirical data provided the basis for the leaders to be active participants and fieldworkers and for the researcher to participate in the sessions and capture what happened along the way. The collective sessions were supplemented with the

pictures we integrated in the fieldnotes in order to document the bodily expressions during these sessions.

This way of making fieldnotes created an emotional distance that is of importance when the researcher is going to analyse empirical data, especially as in LIP, where the researcher also participates in sessions where data is produced. As mentioned above, the fieldnotes were based on recordings of the sessions and included some of the researchers' notes from the participation in the sessions, as we found this method appropriate for our action research and the ongoing development and adjustment of methods (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011: 45).

Because of the performative basis for the interventions it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between methods, researchers and participants. Therefore, I found it particularly important to develop a research method that could be used to analyse the impact of interventions designed to transform leadership practices. That is precisely why the abductive approach in an action research project like LIP has been valuable to the scientific work. Below, I will unfold how I have worked on designing the research process, and how I have followed the abductive approach to clarify the methods developed for testing and assessment in relation to the research object.

### **Types of interventions in LIP**

The aesthetically informed theories gave rise to interventions that were performed and analysed through experiments in leaders' practice. The aesthetic approach, as unfolded in the first core concept, turned out to be an opening into leaders' practice, which firstly led to experiences with aesthetic performance and, secondly, when I integrated the second core concept, to learning processes that could support a transformation of leaders' practice.

The theoretical and methodological background for my action research in LIP led to findings that documented the varied use of methods in leaders' interventions aimed at transformation of their practice. The types of interventions in leaders' practice started as spontaneous and planned individual interventions. They continued through planned group interventions based on MAET and ended as a learning design through "The Audience Wheel" and liminality.

I have divided the methods developed in LIP into three types of intervention:

1. Spontaneous and planned aesthetic intervention based on initiatives from the individual leader;
2. Planned aesthetic interventions through the Model of Aesthetic-embedded Transformation (MAET) based on settings in a group of leaders
3. Planned learning processes based on the learning design 'The Audience Wheel' in groups of leaders

#### *Spontaneous and planned individual interventions*

To be able to complete my empirical study, I first developed two interventive designs, namely the spontaneous and the planned interventive methods, as unfolded below. The background was theories of aesthetic performance, unfolded under the first core concept, and described and analysed in the first paper in this thesis.

In December 2013, we completed a one day 'kick-off' seminar for all participants in LIP, in cooperation with experienced professionals in aesthetic performance. During this event with music, dance and bodily movements leaders, as participants in LIP, trained in aesthetic performance. We offered the participants an inspiration book with 36 proposals of different techniques addressed at interventions based on aesthetic performance. The purpose of the 'kick-off' seminar was to inspire the leaders to conduct experiments in their own practice.

Thus, the starting point was an inspiration addressed at leaders' interventions through aesthetic performance carried out by the individual leader, which seemed to be a sufficient basis for leaders to conduct experiments in their organisational practice.

The initial phase of my empirical research was based on leaders' individual interventions, and the inspiration book, where every leader was to follow up on his or her experiences from spontaneous and planned individual sessions. The research team did not participate in leaders' individual interventions, but listened to leaders' experiences through coaching conversations. However, the individual experiments were seen by the leaders as optional and not as interventions they had to complete as a background for empirical data in the study of transformation of practice.

Some leaders faced various problems in their daily practice: political issues, strategic priorities and a feeling of a lack of time to experiment with this new initiative. The research team did not succeed in motivating all leaders to conduct the aesthetic-based experiments in practice based on spontaneous and planned individual interventions. Many coaching sessions with the individual leaders were more about what leaders could do than what they had already done to experiment with aesthetic performance in their practice.

Therefore, these individual sessions did not yield the expected, convincing results in relation to leaders' transformation of their practice, because the individual interventions did not contribute to sufficient results in relation to the object of my study, namely how leaders were able to transform their daily practice. There seemed to be some resistance from the leaders to playing with their challenges and problems as leaders in an aesthetic way. At times they also felt a fear of being ineffective in their leadership if they used time to experiment with the aesthetic performance. The sceptical leaders did not believe that a playful aesthetic performance would promote their leadership.

My analysis of the first spontaneous and planned individual aesthetic interventions called for new methods leaders could work with in their practice. In accordance with the abductive approach, I took account of the observation that called for an adjustment in interventive methods based on further conceptualization. I needed other theories that could help leaders to explore how leaders change their organisational practice. Theories of transformative learning and theories of reflection and reflexivity, unfolded in the second core concept and described and analysed in the second paper in this thesis, proved to be a useful background in order to develop new methods for leaders' intervention that could lead to changes in their practice.

In addition to the empirical findings based on spontaneous and planned individual interventions, the few sessions with groups of leaders from different sectors gave the research team the first opportunity of observing leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance as a collective. The collective settings included leaders' testing of interventive methods, where the research team guided the aesthetic based experiments and the performance took place here and now. When the research team compared the results from the individual interventions with the collective interventions, we decided on a change.

The theoretical background now became transformative learning that could give rise to claim training of aesthetic performance in a collective of leaders, which we saw the beginning of in the first sessions with groups of leaders. At a major milestone seminar in December 2014, the research team announced the change in the research methods from individual to collective sessions that we would implement in 2015.

#### *Planned group interventions based on MAET*

Fieldnotes from the collective sessions gave the research team documentation of the importance of framing and organising the collective sessions in order to create the best possible design for learning in practice. Moreover, the leaders experienced more fruitful impact in the collectively organised sessions than when they performed on an individual basis. In the collective sessions, the leaders trained the aesthetic performance and they started to reflect on their aesthetic based experiences and learn from others when they worked with their experiences.

When the research team introduced planned group interventions as a new type of intervention, we applied MAET in collective sessions, in order to give leaders a model they could train, rehearse and remember. In relation to MAET, the research team integrated leaders' own interpretations of their doings to create an awareness among the leaders of the impact of aesthetic performance; and also create a basis for our analysis of the impact of transformation of leaders' practice. The leaders were now more clearly integrated as co-researchers through the ethnographic methods, as their integration was both obligatory in the collective sessions and served as background for their experiment with aesthetic performance in their daily practice in-between the collective settings. The role as co-researcher also indicated a role as fieldworker. This change in methodological intervention with the leaders as fieldworkers enabled the researcher to play the role of critical interpreter (Van Maanen 1979).

The ethnographic methods were suitable for gathering and processing data from the planned group interventions because the research team now had an option to get data about leaders' observations in their roles as fieldworkers. The aesthetic - embedded transformation, leaders learned in the collective settings seemed to open them to doing experiments and also to accelerate an impact of performing aesthetically.

Furthermore, the planned group interventions based on MAET gave rise to another method, which was leaders' preparation for participating in the collective events in order to enhance leadership capacity and motivate to try out aesthetic performance. The leaders' preparation helped them

unfold and work with the social drama and thereby affect others in the collective sessions, when the preparation enabled concentration in the performance of the aesthetic drama.

#### *Learning design through “The Audience Wheel” and liminality*

The research team analysed the impact of the first collective sessions based on theories of transformative learning, as unfolded in the second core concept and described and analysed in the second paper in this thesis. The focus on learning in practice proved to be decisive for leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance to transform their practices. From the planned group interventions based on MAET, the further developing and testing leaders' potential to transform their practice led to new types of intervention. These types of intervention were, first, the learning design ‘The Audience Wheel’ and, secondly, planned learning processes as a whole learning design, including MAET, ‘The Audience Wheel’ and liminality.

In the summer 2015, the empirical research turned into the final phase, when leaders had learned to use MAET as a model to transform their practice. However, the impact of this model was as already unfolded not sufficient in order to permanently change leaders' organisational practice. Thus, I decided that reflection on leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance had to be integrated in the collective sessions in order to facilitate the study of leaders' transformation of their practice (Staunæs and Kofoed, 2017). Therefore I developed planned, framed performances, integrating reflexive processes in order to encourage the impact of the aesthetic performance to open leaders to the potential to change their practice. Following the abductive approach made me develop theories of reflection and reflexivity, as also unfolded in the second core concept and described and analysed in the second paper in this thesis.

Aesthetic performance explored through MAET might lead to transformation of leaders' practice, but was not a method that ensured leaders' awareness of the integration of learning processes as basis for implementing aesthetic performance in the organisation. ‘The Audience Wheel,’ as a method that activates transformative learning, was relevant to integrate in framing the learning process, when leaders were going to work with aesthetic performance in the organisation. My claim is that planned, framed learning processes have to take place, if the intention is to change leaders' practice in the organisation. The scheme in the next section documents how I have worked with the abductive approach in my research process. I also documents what kind of reflections have formed the basis for the changes in methods applied for leaders' interventions, which the research team taught them to do.

In the final part of the research process the research team included liminality, in order to frame the learning processes, as this framing helped leaders to work with aesthetic performance at a more conscious level, as unfolded in the third core concept and described and analysed in the third paper in this thesis.

The liminal ritual made sense for leaders in the collective session. Often, they came to the session directly from a conflictual meeting and had to be prepared for the new aesthetic context. The liminal procedure established the condition leaders had to sense, before they started their experiments with aesthetic performance. The framed sessions, as the liminal rituals helped to

create were based on the whole learning design, which seemed to lead to an even better basis for leaders' transformation of their practice. How this claim can be justified, I will unfold below in the section about documentation based on findings in LIP.

## **Documentation of findings in LIP**

In this section I will provide an overview of the empirical findings in order to clarify the abductive approach, and to further explore my role in relation to the interventive methods used in the abductive processes of exploration in LIP. In the overview, I unfold my reflections on the various categories of intervention, I have found in the empirical data, in order to document how my choice of the interventive methods have influenced leaders' use of the methods in their practice.

Firstly, I unfold the categorisation of methods used in in order to transform leadership practices, which is based on a systematic review of all the empirical data. Secondly, I have in a scheme with all categories of interventive methods explored how the abductive approach has influenced the object of my empirical observations through I leader focus in intervention, II developing of interventive methods and III my role as researcher. Thirdly, I review the categories of methods in relation to concrete examples of methods and the impact of those, which is also presented in systematic overview. Fourthly, I map leaders' assessments of their interventions in terms of impact, with the purpose of offering an overview of the results of learning in practice through my empirical research in LIP. Fifthly, I adopt a critical stance towards aesthetic performance as a basis for ethical implications of aesthetic-based interventions in leaders' organisational practice.

### **Five categories of intervention**

The categories have been developed from the empirical data that includes 200 registered interventions based on aesthetic performance the leaders have conducted in the research process in LIP. The data derives from fieldnotes from 120 sessions with leaders participating in LIP. In these sessions, individual leaders as well as collectives of leaders have given feedback on the methods they have used in their interventions in practice. Feedback is synonymous with leaders' stories about performance and reflections from performing leaders and others. There can be recorded interventions based on different experiences from the same leader.

The interventions described above are a manifestation of the abductive research approach, where methods of intervention were first tested in leaders' practices and then assessed in relation to the research object, namely the potential for leaders to transform their practice. For each registered intervention, the leaders assessed whether and how transformation had occurred. Therefore, the leaders had to test the interventive methods before the transformation could take place in an organisational practice and then registered as intervention. In the categorisation, I have used leaders' narratives and interpretations of how they have conducted aesthetic based interventions. In order to use the categorisation in the analysis of impact of the interventions, I have chosen to specify the categories as leaders' registered interventions in their practice. The registered interventions are then the background for the categories.

1. **Spontaneous individual intervention** - based on the leader's self-organised individual aesthetic performance (breathing, bodily movements etc.);
2. **Planned individual intervention** – based on the leader's self-organised individual aesthetic performance (grounding, creative actions etc.) and reflections on the leader's

experiences with aesthetic performance (*both* self-organised reflections *and* sometimes reflections in groups organised by the research team);

3. **Spontaneous individual intervention and group reflection** – based on *both* leaders' self-organised individual aesthetic performance *and* the response to their experiences after the aesthetic performance (reflections in groups organised by the research team);
4. **Interventions through collective learning** – based on sessions with intersectional groups of leaders organised by the research team with the purpose of training in aesthetic performance through the model of aesthetic-embedded transformation (MAET). This includes work with the social drama and the aesthetic drama (grounding, drawing, painting, bodily movement, body figures etc.)
5. **Interventions based on a whole learning design** – based on sessions with management teams from the same sector organised by the research team and human resource consultants in order to implement a learning design in the organisation through MAET, the Audience Wheel and liminal rituals (the core concepts). All interventions start in the group of leaders and are implemented individually or in pairs of leaders as a learning process in the organisation.

The first three categories include leaders' individual experiences from interventions in their own organisations. In these categories, it was the leader's individual conducting of interventions that were the basis for the experience of interventions. In the first and second categories, the researcher obtained data about the leaders' experiences through individual coaching sessions, in which the leaders described their experiences with aesthetic-based experiments. In the third category, the researcher obtained the data about the individual leader from the collective session, where the collective reflection took place.

The second category sometimes included reflection combined with aesthetic performance, which was not the case in the first category. In the third category collective reflections were always conducted. However, in the first three categories the individual leader initiated the interventions based on a catalogue of 36 examples of interventive methods leaders could use in their practice. It was first in the fourth and fifth categories, leaders conducted their interventions based on MAET.

Data about the reflection in the group sessions, in category 2 and 3, emerged as part of the collective reflection process, through which the leaders affected other participants in the sessions and gave others and themselves insight into how leaders change the social drama when they work with aesthetic performance. This insight is based on leaders' experiences and the interpretation of those, based on leaders' own reflections.

Category 4: 'Interventions through collective learning' and 5: 'Interventions based on learning in management teams' comprise experiences from collective sessions conducted by the research team and human resource consultants (category 5). In category 4 and 5 sessions, leaders were asked to bring a social drama into play so that they could perform the drama aesthetically. In these sessions the leaders elaborated aesthetic experiences when they transitioned their social drama into an aesthetic drama, based on the MAET model.

After the leaders had experimented with aesthetic performance in relation to a specific problem, other participants in the collective sessions were asked to reflect on how they were affected. The reflection took place as a guided process, in which the leaders learned from others' affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity, described in the second paper in this thesis, as 'The Audience Wheel'.

In categories 4 and 5, leaders reflected on their experiences based on 'The Audience Wheel'. In category 5, leaders were additionally guided through a whole learning design, including 'The Audience Wheel' and liminality, which framed the collective sessions and enabled transformative learning.

In all five categories it is the leaders' unfolding of the experiment and the leaders' interpretation of the impact, which has provided the basis for the categorisation. My observation as researcher was always based on the leaders' observation of their interventions and interpretation of those based on ethnographic methods. The fieldnotes from the individual and collective sessions have formed the background for the registration of leaders' interventions.

**Scheme with categories of interventive methods**

To explore the background of the interventions ordered in the five categories, I will provide a scheme with the categories in relation to specification of interventive methods and my role as researcher, based on the abductive approach.

The purpose is, firstly: to clarify how the abductive approach has provided the basis for the changes in methods that are reflected in the leaders' interventions; and, secondly: to make my own role as researcher transparent. The phases in-between the five categories include my point of observations and the background for the abductive adjustments in each category.

Specification of interventive methods under "Project preparation" and "In - between categories" include: a) form of intervention, b) creation process, c) findings, and gives the basis for adjustments and d) the stake for the next intervention. Specification of my role as researcher includes: 1) organising action research and 2) collecting data.

The abductive based process is unfolded in the scheme below:

<b>Abductive approach</b>	<b>Leader focus in intervention</b>	<b>Research specification of interventive methods</b>	<b>My role as researcher</b>
<i>Project preparation</i>	Individual leader's self-organised interventions	a) Kick-off seminar, where leaders drew inspiration; b) The individual leader's experiments with aesthetic performance; c) Few leaders experimented in their practice; d) Coaching conversations.	In this phase my role was preparing methods for leaders' interventions.
<b>Category 1: Spontaneous individual intervention</b>	Individual leader	The leaders in the first category used aesthetic performance spontaneously.	Coach



<i>In - between category 1 and 2</i>	Individual leaders were trained to understand and master the use of aesthetic performance in order to implement interventions in their daily practice.	<p>a) Leaders could get inspiration from a book with 36 different kinds of aesthetic performance;</p> <p>b) Leaders had to self-organise aesthetic based interventions in their practice;</p> <p>c) The individual leader did not always find motivation to engage in aesthetic performance, why the research team had to prepare sessions in which leaders could learn to experiment with aesthetic performance;</p> <p>d) The individual leader had to integrate aesthetic performance in their daily practice, why the research team had to develop a usable interventive model.</p>	<p>1) I had to explain to leaders how to carry out aesthetic performance.</p> <p>2) Motivation of leaders to participate as a basis for my study of learning in practice.</p>
<b>Category 2: Planned individual intervention</b>	Individual leader	<p>The leaders in the second category used self-organised aesthetic interventions</p> <p>Some leaders were also attending collective learning sessions, which included the first attempt at reflections on experiences with aesthetic performance.</p>	Teacher of aesthetic performance
<i>In - between category 2 and 3</i>	The individual leader were asked to bring experiences from self-organised interventions into collective learning sessions with other cross-sector leaders.	<p>a) The MAET model of social and aesthetic dramas proved to be usable for leaders and therefore had to be trained by the leaders;</p> <p>b) The research team integrated different kinds of reflection in the leaders' collective sessions;</p> <p>c) Other participants' affections enabled leaders' changes of their practice;</p> <p>d) The leaders still had to experiment with aesthetic performance in their individual practice.</p>	<p>1) Organising of methods that could lead to changes in leaders' practice in conjunction with the aesthetic performance.</p> <p>2) Writing fieldnotes from collective sessions in order to analyse what kind of interventive methods could best lead to transformation of leaders' practice.</p>
<b>Category 3: Spontaneous individual intervention and planned group reflection</b>	Individual leaders and intersectional groups of leaders	<p>The leaders in the third category used the MAET model to experiment with changes in their individual practice.</p> <p>Most leaders also attended collective learning settings in an</p>	Guidance of group reflections

		intersectional group conducted by the research team (based on The Audience Wheel).	
<i>In - between category 3 and 4</i>	The leaders' intersectional groups had become the context for learning of aesthetic performance.	<p>a) Some leaders were able to implement the MAET model in their own organisations;</p> <p>b) Training and rehearsal of aesthetic performance would help more leaders to become familiar with this new performance model;</p> <p>c) Reflections based on 'The Audience Wheel' had to be organised in the collective settings in order to obtain more permanent transformation of leaders' daily practice;</p> <p>d) The learning processes had to be guided by the research team.</p>	<p>1) I was now training both leaders and human resource consultants for the purpose that they could learn to guide aesthetic based learning processes</p> <p>2) Ethnographic methods could enhance the collection of data</p>
<b>Category 4: Interventions through collective learning</b>	Group of leaders from different sectors and from the same management team	<p>The leaders in the fourth category were trained to use the MAET model in group settings with the purpose to be able to conduct interventions in their own organisational practice.</p> <p>Leaders experienced MAET as a model that could create a more permanent transformation in the organisation when they also used 'The Audience Wheel'</p>	Integrator of learning sessions in intersectional groups
<i>In - between category 4 and 5</i>	Management teams now seemed to become the new basis for transformative learning in the organisation.	<p>a) Management teams in the organisation started to participate in learning settings and use aesthetic performance and reflection;</p> <p>b) Leaders and human resource consultants had to learn to conduct collective sessions in the organisation;</p> <p>c) A whole design for transformative learning led to a better impact of transformation of leaders' organisational practice;</p> <p>e) Both leaders and human resource consultants were now able to complete the new</p>	<p>1) Framing the learning process in co-operation with human resource consultants.</p> <p>2) I managed to develop and testify a new learning design that became basis for collecting data.</p>

		learning design in a broader organisational context.	
<b>Category 5: Interventions based on a whole learning design</b>	Management team from the same department	<p>The group of leaders in this category prepared the settings. They trained aesthetic performance as a collective and planned the next aesthetic experiment in the organisation based on the MAET model.</p> <p>The aesthetic interventions planned in the management team were used as the basis for interventions in the leaders' own organisational practice. The learning process included liminal rituals and reflections from 'The Audience Wheel'.</p> <p>The research team and human resource consultants conducted the sessions through a whole learning design based on liminal phases, the MAET model and 'The Audience Wheel'.</p>	Co-creator of processes of learning in practice.

### Examples of interventive methods and impact of intervention

The basis for the overview below is leaders' recording of their use of methods for the interventions in practice and their interpretation of the impact of their interventions. I have chosen the examples in order to illustrate how leaders have experienced both the methods and the impact of interventions.

My criteria for this selection of examples are that the transformation must have taken place in leaders' practice and have resulted in changes in leaders' practice, before the intervention is registered as having a transformative impact. This means that leaders' intentions of carrying out aesthetic-based interventions were not a sufficient criteria for registration. Furthermore, I have intended to choose examples that are sustainable, which means that the transformation has been clear to the leaders over a longer period of time and also changes have taken place in leaders' habits and behaviour in their daily practice.

<b>Category 1</b>	<b>Spontaneous individual intervention</b>
<i>Example</i>	Schoolmaster (ex. paper 1) Individual experience in own context
<i>Specification of research methods (core concepts and models)</i>	The leader in the first category used self-organised aesthetic performance as intervention during a meeting after the lockout (a situation that included all Danish schools)

<i>Impact of interventions in leaders' practice</i>	Transformation occurred when this leader revisited the situation, where she has used aesthetic performance. This revisitation took place during the individual coaching session with a member of the research team. This leader's experience with aesthetic performance has not yet been integrated into her practice, as the experience has not yet been processed and made conscious for the leader.
<b>Category 2</b>	<b>Planned individual intervention</b>
<i>Example</i>	Teamleader (ex. paper 3) 1. Individual experience in own context 2. Combined with self-organised collective learning processes in a group of leaders in own context
<i>Specification of research methods (core concepts and models)</i>	The leader in the second category used aesthetic performance in a situation in which the team had problems with stress-related disorders. The leader used a creative intervention in the team asking team members to respond to the situation through body figures. Furthermore, the leader was part of a group of colleagues (other leaders from the organisation).
<i>Impact of interventions in leaders' practice</i>	The transformation took place over a longer period, as this leader continuously used the aesthetic performance which she had learned through collective learning sessions with other leaders in a cross sectional group and the research team. However, she also used the reflection as a learning approach in order to handle dilemmas that arose when the aesthetic drama opened up vulnerability to the stressed situation in the team. The reflections gave the leader courage to continue the experiments with the aesthetic processes.
<b>Category 3</b>	<b>Spontaneous individual intervention and planned group reflection</b>
<i>Example</i>	Lead tutor at a residential institution for the disabled (ex. paper 2) 1. Individual experience in own context 2. Combined with collective learning processes in a group of leaders, organised by the research team.
<i>Specification of research methods (core concepts and models)</i>	The leader in the third category used aesthetic performance: the social drama (the situation in which employees were critical towards a client from the institution) and the aesthetic drama (creative intervention in the employees' way of treating the client). Furthermore, the leader was a part of a collective learning session with colleagues (other leaders from the institution), which included affective reflections and perspectival reflexivity (The Audience Wheel). The settings were guided by the research team.
<i>Impact of interventions in leaders' practice</i>	The transformation took place over a longer period, as the leader and some of the employees changed their practice in relation to the client, according to the experiences the leader recounted in the reflection during the collective session. The leader had prepared his story about the intervention, as an example of a social drama he had worked on in his practice as an aesthetic drama. During the collective session, based firstly

	on the affective reflection and secondly on the perspectival reflexivity, this leader changed his approach to practice, as he decided to work on further transformations of his practice. Specifically, the leader realised that he would ask two of the employees, who still did not have a good attitude to the client, to change their behaviour.
<b>Category 4</b>	<b>Interventions through collective learning</b>
<i>Example</i>	School leader 1. Group based experience in own context 2. Combined with self-organised collective learning processes in new groups of leaders at the school.
<i>Specification of research methods (core concepts and models)</i>	The leader in the fourth category used aesthetic performance, based on the MAET model, as a conscious and planned intervention. Furthermore, she was a part of a collective setting with colleagues (other leaders from the school) and with an intersectional group of leaders. The intersectional settings, guided by the research team, comprised affective reflections and perspectival reflexivity (The Audience Wheel).
<i>Impact of interventions in leaders' practice</i>	The transformation of this leader's practice has been documented through a continuous testing of aesthetic performance in practice combined with reflections as prerequisites for the leader's transformation. The school leader started with aesthetic interventions in her own group of leaders and, after a while, introduced the MAET model and some other core concepts from the research project, to other colleagues and teachers at the school. After the final part of LIP, this leader has continued aesthetic interventions at the school, which have led to new collaborative relationships among the teachers there.
<b>Category 5</b>	<b>Interventions based on a whole learning design</b>
<i>Example</i>	Management team in a municipality (ex. from thesis) 1. Collective learning processes in a management team, conducted by the research team 2. Learning processes organised by human resource consultants.
<i>Specification of research methods (core concepts and models)</i>	The team of leaders started training in aesthetic performance as a collective (group of 15 leaders) and prepared their interventions in the organisational contexts in pairs of leaders. The aesthetic interventions were planned in the group and the learning sessions took place in the group. During the sessions, the leaders worked on their social drama as an aesthetic drama. They themselves had decided which social drama they would work with. The research team conducted the sessions through liminal rituals, social and aesthetic dramas, and affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity. Leaders in the example used the complete learning design.
<i>Impact of interventions in leaders' practice</i>	Training and rehearsal of aesthetic performance in a permanent management team created the basis for transformation of these leaders' practice.

	<p>The impact of transformation from an organisational perspective proved to be stronger for leaders from the same management team than for other types of groups. The human resource consultants, who were trained to conduct learning sessions with aesthetic performance, took over and continued the transformative learning in the organisation.</p>
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### **Assessed impact of leaders' interventions**

For each of the 200 aesthetic-based interventions recorded by leaders, I have monitored the interventions in two dimensions: 1) in relation to leaders' experience with interventive methods; and: 2) in relation to leaders' assessment of the impact of the interventions.

The registered interventions and their impact derive from fieldnotes from 120 sessions with leaders participating in LIP. In these settings, individual leaders as well as collectives of leaders have used aesthetic based methods and learning methods in their interventions in practice and have registered the impact of these interventions. There can be different registered interventions based on experiences from the same leader. Each of the 200 interventions and the impact of these has been registered.

The methods are categorised, as unfolded in the section above, on a spectrum ranging from spontaneous individual intervention to collective learning design. The impact is categorised from personal to organisational transformation. As with methods, it is also the leaders' own assessments that are the basis for my categorisation in relation to impact. Fig. 5 explores how interventive methods correspond with the impact of interventions on leaders' practice. I have used six different categories of impact based on the leaders' records and assessments:

1. Random impact;
2. Personal transformation (occurred in relation to one or a few other persons);
3. Personal transformation (occurred in relation to the organisation);
4. Personal consciousness without transformation;
5. Transformative learning in an organisational context;
6. Organisational transformation.

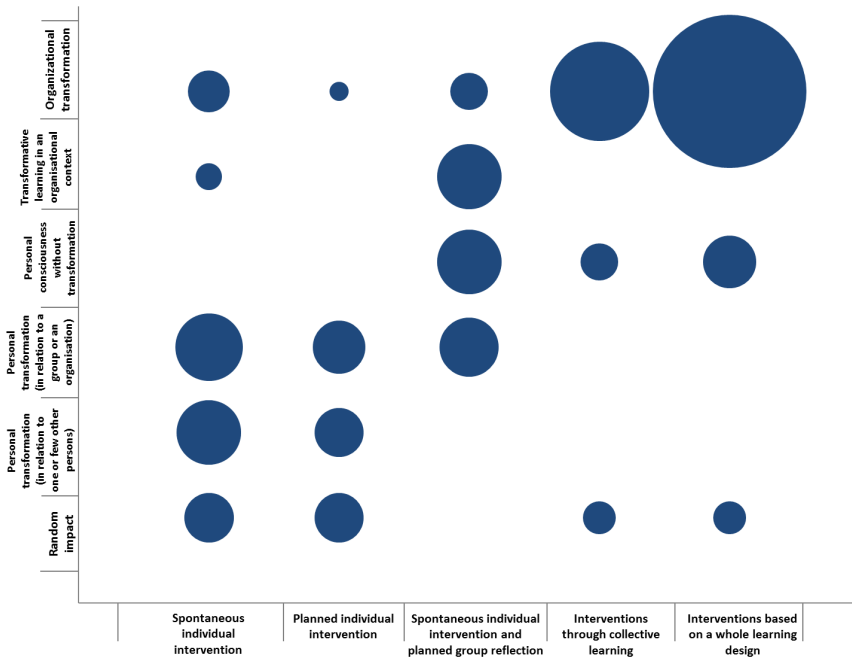


Fig. 5: A mapping of leaders' interventions and the impact of these interventions

The figure illustrates the correspondence between 1) interventive methods and 2) impact of interventions through bubbles. The size of the bubble relates to the number of times the leaders have registered a specific intervention and the coherent impact of this intervention. In every recorded intervention, it is the leader's assessment that is basis for my placement of the intervention.

My analysis of the mapping is that leaders can achieve both personal and organisational impact based on aesthetic performance. The aesthetic performance conducted by individuals without learning processes leads to mostly personal transformation, whereas aesthetic performance completed through group-based learning processes often lead to organisational transformation.

That means that, if leaders want personal transformation of practice, which is a transformation at a personal level and in minor contexts and personal consciousness of the social drama without transformation, the individual interventions will be relevant. If there is a need for transformative learning at an organisational level and a more extensive organisational transformation, the collective learning design has proved to have the best impact.

The mapping can then be interpreted as transformative learning in an organisational context being more demanding than a personal transformation, because learning in the organisational context mostly takes place in a group and is based on a complex learning design.

The results of my empirical study also document the difference between the individual aesthetic performance and collective aesthetic performance, as individual performance is singular, and less complicated than collective performance, which is based on guided, framed, planned learning processes in the organisation.

Leaders can then transform their practice through aesthetic performance both as individuals and as a collective of leaders. The results they obtain depend on which methods they choose to use. The individual approach can strengthen the personal transformation, whereas the collective approach can strengthen the organisational transformation.

Because of my use of the abductive approach in my study of leaders' transformation of practice, I found that aesthetic performance could not in itself ensure a transformation in the organisational context. The abductive based development of the interventive methods and use of theories of learning opened the way to new findings through my study.

The result of my study has contributed to a clarification of how leaders' learning can take place with the purpose to transform their organisational practice. The impact of interventive methods used in collective sessions and in broader organisational contexts showed that the more complicated interventive methods worked better than simple aesthetic performance at prompting transformation of leaders' organisational practice. Based on leaders' interpretation the impact of their interventive methods through collective organised learning function better than methods based on the individual leader in prompting organisational changes.

This result is not surprising if I take into account that aesthetic performance used in the organisation presupposes training and a conscious approach to the transformation process. The need for integration of aesthetic performance as part of a learning design based on collective sessions has been a continuous theme in my study of leaders' learning in practice. Although I have carefully registered leaders' interventions and the impacts of these, I might also have considered that I could expect that the results of my study were not far from what I found through my abductive based research process. Furthermore, I could not say that all forms of learning in practice would show the same result as unfolded above, because my research has been based on aesthetic performance, which has probably also affected the result.

### **Critical reflection on transformation of leadership practices**

LIP has involved both the researchers and the participating leaders in learning processes in a profound way. In this section I will discuss some critical aspects of intervention through aesthetic performance, firstly focused on the ethics of the researcher's conducting of aesthetic processes and, secondly, the ethics of leaders who intervene in their own practice through aesthetic performance.

*The ethics of the researcher* have had my attention throughout LIP. The interventive methods in my study were always oriented towards making a difference at the very moment when the event was going on, and the sensations had to be processed through reflections and further interventions.

The interventive methods were created during the research process as events-in-the-making (Lury and Wakeford in: Coleman and Ringrose, 2013: 7). That means that I, as researcher, could not



study learning in practice from a distance, but had to handle my participation in the sessions. There was always a risk of encroaching on the autonomy of the leaders when, as a researcher, you participated in the research process, whose contents and results are unknown, as opposed to conducting a study based on previously known themes.

The action research approach preserves the researcher's twofold view of the process, as both prepared/planned and as open/virtual. The challenge for me was to strike a balance between this double view and clarify to the participants in LIP which role I was playing in the different steps of developing, designing, organising and conducting the interventions. I had to play both roles, participating in the research process and judging what kind of interventive methods would be the most appropriate for leaders to use. This dual role might instil distrust of me as researcher.

A way to overcome the risk of being unethical was to make the research process clear for the leaders who participated in LIP. I always started the sessions with an overview of the research process, the purpose of what we invited the leaders to do, and a simplification of the methods they were supposed to use. Thus, the use of modelling, training and rehearsal of aesthetic performance in the settings clarified the purpose of leaders' interventions in their practice. I was aware of the ethics when working with aesthetic performance, because of the potential negative consequences for people involved in the processes. The negative consequences might occur, if the leaders did not acknowledge why they were pursuing aesthetic performance.

The risk for leaders of not knowing what is going on may cause violation of others' boundaries. Especially, there is a risk of seduction when people play with their problems in a joyful atmosphere, which can affect others' senses and feelings. If we are not aware of this risk, we can overstep others' boundaries. In LIP I have experienced that transparency about the methods and ongoing and upcoming processes can reduce that risk.

Leaders who participated in LIP were not always motivated to continue their interventions in practice. Some leaders did not want to be involved and we in the research team always let the leaders decide if they would be actively participating in the learning processes or not. By allowing voluntary participation, we ensured that they did not feel overwhelmed or forced to be experimental in ways they did not want.

Another ethical issue I have been aware of was my role as a researcher with the final say in the analysis (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). I had to make sure that the leaders knew how I used their interpretations of the data from their interventions in practice. I informed the leaders of their role as co-researchers, and underlined how dependent I was on their interpretations of how leaders can develop methods aimed at learning in practice. In the research process, I wrote several memos to the leaders and their organisations in order to keep them updated about my reflections during the research process. In spite of trying to make sure that the leaders always knew what was going to happen and why, I could not guarantee that there would be situations without particular attention to the ethical challenges. The ethics cannot be defined for all situations, but are invented in each relationship, as researcher and respondent negotiate sense-making through the research

process (St. Pierre, 1997: 186, in Coleman and Ringrose 2013: 12). This was way it was a strategy for the research process to reflect on observations and interpretations in a varied way, and allow a diversification in the reflections from the research team members, as this always led to a balanced solution.

I draw on Deleuze' s approach to the ethics, which is concerned with what we do and say about the existing situation in relation to the potential, when ways out of the existing situation present themselves (Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) in: Coleman and Ringrose 2013: 11). As researcher, I was aware of what was going on in every event, why we in the research team also reflected on the ethical issues immediately after the event. My experience is that the ethics place demands on the researcher, who is expected to be constantly aware of what is going on (which we were!) e.g. through modelling and designing the basis for interventions.

*The ethics of the leaders* should never be underestimated. As mentioned, I emphasised that the leaders' role in LIP was to become co-researchers, because we needed their observations and interpretations of the interventions as material for the themes which we chose to further develop and integrate into an objectification for the analysis. The appropriateness of involving leaders by placing them in charge of research results offered not only an advantage for the process. The ethical perspective also had to be considered when we involved the leaders the way we did.

Leaders working with aesthetic performance risk promoting interventions in uncontrollable issues in the organisation, as aesthetic performance might worsen emotional, political and ethical dynamics in the social dramas. However, as it was always the leaders who had to choose which social drama they would experiment with, not the researcher, the leaders also had an opportunity to work consciously with the ethical questions related to aesthetic performance. The social drama was often what leaders perceived as a minor problem and not severe business-related problems in the organisation. Nevertheless, the choice of social dramas that were bound to converge with the aesthetic drama sometimes proved to be harder to manage than could be expected of the leaders.

Through the research process, leaders became increasingly aware of how they could actualise the potential in the organisation through aesthetic performance, even when this kind of learning led to ethical dilemmas. The dilemmas sometimes resulted in emotional reactions to the aesthetic performance. What I observed was that leaders' training and rehearsal of reflective competences and use of a learning design was one of the benefits of aesthetic performance, which made leaders able to handle dilemmas in the organisation in an ethical way. The reason was the awareness leaders obtained when they worked with transformative learning in the form of 'The Audience Wheel'.

From the ethical perspective, in this project based on action research, I experienced that concepts could not be carried out the same way in every session, although the modelling ensured a certain degree of predictability. The experience with the terms of interventive methods is not possible to repeat, as there is always a difference in the repetition (Coleman and Ringrose 2013). Even within the same session, the concept had to be unfolded differently if the intervention was to achieve relevant results for the participants.

The ethical perspective should therefore be a constant factor, and I find that an intensive research process may even be an advantage in becoming aware of ethical terms, if the researcher pays attention to the consequences of interventions in practice.

## **Essence of three papers**

### **Leadership through aesthetic performance - an empirical study of leadership development**

The first paper unfolds how bodily embedded leadership can transform practice if the leaders use aesthetic performance as an interventive learning method. The researchers have conducted an empirical study in which leaders have experimented with movements of their bodies, thoughts and spaces as key elements in aesthetic performance. Empirical research has contributed with the **model of aesthetic-embedded transformation (MAET)**, which is based on theories within aesthetic performance and studies of theatre and art (Schechner 1988/2003, 2013, Taylor 2012, 2013, Ladkin and Taylor 2010, Ladkin 2010, 2013). The paper reviews how my research, based on these theories, has developed and tested a new method addressed aesthetic leadership in an organisational context.

The paper explores how leaders learn aesthetic performance in practice when, through an aesthetic drama, they play with everyday challenges and problems they want to change, instead of struggling with the problems in the social drama. The aesthetic drama imposes the social drama in a way where everybody involved in the play recognises the actions as a “playing with”, which according to the leaders is a more effective approach than trying to change the social drama as a “real doing of”.

This means that leaders, who want to change their practice because of a problem they experience as a social drama, may solve this drama through aesthetic performance. The aesthetics will affect the participants in the performance and then often lead to a transformation of leaders’ practice. In short, as the paper unfolds, it is better to make “the real” problem visible in an aesthetic form than trying to make everything real or eventually hiding the problem in the social drama. “Playing with” problems makes transformation possible, as I discuss in the paper.

When the leaders play with a problem instead of being stuck with negative feelings in the social drama, they may experience a change of their social reality. They may even experience that the problem, the crisis, habits etc. will be changed permanently.

In the paper there are three examples of interventions in the form of aesthetic performance through body, thought and space. All three examples were reported from leaders in sessions with the research team and are results of experiments in the leaders’ individual practice. Each leader had experienced problems which they had decided to try to change through aesthetic performance. The examples explore how leaders’ experiments with body, thought and space in the aesthetic drama affect the leaders and others and lead to transformation of the three leaders’ practice.

This first paper tap into discussions of the future development of aesthetic leadership, i.e. in the Journal of Leadership.

### **The Audience Wheel as a technique to create transformative learning**

One of the findings in the LIP project, unfolded in the second paper, is a new learning technique called “The Audience Wheel” based on theories of transformative learning (Dewey 1933, Argyris and Schön 1996, Schön 1983, Mezirow 1992, 2009, Sutherland 2013). The technique is developed on a basis of guided collective processes rooted in aesthetic performance. These are combined with reflections and separation of the roles of performer and audience. The paper reviews how my research, based on these theories, has contributed methods for transformative learning not only for individuals, but also for groups. In the paper, I have used a case from LIP to explore how transformative learning takes place in leaders’ practice, which is a further development, not only of methods for interventions in practice, but also for leaders’ awareness of the transformation that may happen when leaders experiment with aesthetic performance in practice.

The research team became aware of the impact of structured learning processes and the importance of the different roles of performer and observer and implemented the new learning technique in collective sessions with leaders. Transformative learning, as unfolded in the case, presupposes a separation of the role of the performer and the role of the audience. This means that transformative learning is based on different positions as performer and audience. The person who performs the story (the drama) is often only temporarily transformed, whereas transformations of the audience can be permanent. As the paper unfolds, reflection is a prerequisite for the change in a person’s understanding of the problem, whereas aesthetic performance in itself does not necessarily lead to changes.

In the course of the learning process, performer and audience have changing roles: 1) the leader as performer describes experiments in his/her own practice; 2) a reflecting team as “audience” listens with their bodies; 3) another reflecting team listens to the perspectives of the leader’s aesthetic experience; and 4) finally the leader, now in a role as audience, learns from the two reflecting teams and will be able to transform his/her practice permanently.

During the empirical research, I found that transformation requires orchestrated reflection if the learning is to lead to changes in assumptions and actions in an organisational context. Primarily, the resonance from the audience creates transformative learning and gives the background for the leader to see the social reality in a new perspective. The new perspective may then lead to changes in leaders’ organisational practice.

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### **A learning design to handle dilemmas in aesthetic-based leadership**

In the third paper, I have explored how leaders, when they work with aesthetic performance, can experience dilemmas in the organisational context. However, leaders can learn to handle these dilemmas through a learning design, which may prevent the dilemmas from escalating into dichotomies and double bind. Hence learning processes seem to discontinue the development of

situations where organisational resistance blocks leaders' efforts when they engage in aesthetic performance. The paper reviews how my research of leaders' aesthetic-based interventions, unfolded in the first paper, and their reflections on the aesthetic performance, unfolded in the second paper, can develop a strong approach to the transformation of leaders' organisational practice, even when the leaders meet resistance to the new transformative methods.

When engaging in aesthetic performance, leaders may not think of the possible negative consequences in relation to their organisation, because they feel encouraged when they open up to new creativity. The examples I draw on in the paper give an impression of what can happen in organisations when leaders start working on aesthetic performance. The covert, individualised and timid reactions in the organisation towards this new kind of aesthetic performance make it sometimes difficult for leaders to find the courage to continue their experiments in the organisation, despite the initial excitement. However, the examples in the paper document that leaders can handle resistance from the organisation, if they share experiences from implementation of aesthetic performance with others and without letting dilemmas grow into dichotomies and double bind.

Leaders can handle dilemmas that emerge as an impact of aesthetic performance when they learn that aesthetic-based experiments do not have to be individualised experiences. It is possible for leaders to deal with dilemmas through integration of the aesthetic performance into collective learning processes. Hence an integral learning design has proved to be a good basis for leaders' experiments in their practice, which enhance both their ability and their courage to perform aesthetically.

The learning design developed through LIP seems to release potential for managing dilemmas when leaders become aware of the possible useful impact of aesthetic performance in the organisational context. On that background, both the second and the third paper tap into discussions about transformative learning based on reflection and reflexivity, i.e. in the *Journal of Management Learning*.

## **Conclusions and perspectives of transformative learning**

Transformative learning in LIP has been developed as a learning theory addressed at leaders' learning in practice. This kind of learning happens best when leaders gain in awareness based on the aesthetic performance combined with a learning process in a collective. This kind of learning process creates a feeling of togetherness and an understanding of the prerequisites for leadership in the organisational practice. As such, transformative learning in LIP occurred when leaders learned from what emerged in relation to others in a way that could change their practice.

From the beginning of my empirical research, I draw on theories of aesthetic performance that could be used as methods to transform leaders' practice. The leaders were asked to perform on an individual basis, which turned out only to lead to random changes in practice. The individual interventions led to personal impact, but it was hard to see an impact in their organisations. This result made me and the research team recreate the interventive methods leaders used to change their practice. We developed a model (MAET) for leaders' transformation of their practice and

found that the leaders could be trained in the model in groups in order to make them implement aesthetic performance in their practice.

The new approach in interventive methods were successful to a certain level. However, the transformation of the leaders' practice did not seem to be permanent, although the leaders now familiarised themselves with the aesthetic-based methods. The decision to recreate the focus in my action research from individual interventions to collective sessions guided by the research team led to new findings. MAET as a model was a basis for teaching leaders to practise aesthetic performance and led to a number of changes in leadership practices. However, it was still unclear how leaders transformed their practice, which is why the research team introduced reflections into the collective sessions, as follow-up to leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance in their daily practice.

The participants in the collective sessions were affected when they applied aesthetic performance. These experiences induced me to develop and test new learning methods in the collective sessions, which in turn led to the development of "The Audience Wheel". The impact of collective sessions, recorded by the leaders, into which sessions we introduced this new learning technique, was different from the first individual experiments with aesthetic performance. The leaders now learned to transform their practice in an organisational context based on both aesthetic performance and a learning process.

In the final part of the empirical research, the collective sessions were based on a whole learning design, including liminal rituals to mark the condition that arises when working with aesthetic, which seemed to have an even stronger impact on transformation of leaders' organisational practice. The impact of a whole learning design also seemed to be effective if leaders encountered dilemmas in the organisation.

During the collective sessions leaders from the same management teams proved to be able to achieve better results with aesthetic performance than leaders in organisational cross-sectional groups. The training, and rehearsal in the management teams seemed to have a strong impact on transformation of leaders' practice, because the leaders now also prepared the sessions in the group and learned to work with their problems and experiences in the group. The openness to share experiences about aesthetic performance seemed to give new insight in other leaders' daily practice and then also to develop leaders' courage to experiment with aesthetic performance in the organisational practice.

The results, in terms of tapping potential in the organisation and following up were enhanced when the human resource consultants from the leaders' organisations were integrated into the learning processes and started to guide management teams in their practice of aesthetic performance as a part of transformative learning, at regular meetings in the organisation.

Aesthetic performance has proved to be a new approach to the development of changes in leadership practices, provided that such performance is based on learning theories. The aesthetics open leaders to bodily sensing and help them to respond and give feedback on what affects them in their daily practice. An argument for aesthetic performance is that the skills leaders gain may help them to realise the organisational potential.

My action research in LIP has contributed to new aesthetic-based learning methods, where especially framed collective processes have proved to lead to sustainable changes in organisational practice, and not only episodic changes.

LIP has been organised as action research in leaders' organisations and has not included classroom teaching and institutional curricula. However, the perspective of learning in practice could be to develop a co-creation of transformative learning between education systems and business, with a view to developing new forms of transformative learning in order to facilitate changes in social realities leaders experience in their daily practice.

I discern potential in the developing of aesthetic performance and art-based theories from a new practical, performative perspective. This co-creation between theory and practice could develop a new platform for interventive methods, which might contribute to a more original approach of learning in and through practice.

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# **Leadership through aesthetic performance**

## **An empirical study of leadership development**

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## **Abstract**

Leaders can learn to play with problems in their everyday leadership as if it was an aesthetic drama and doing so they experience that problems that often make them lose energy are dissolved. To get closer to leaders' learning in practice, a new method to do aesthetic performance, based on action research and ethnography, has been developed to study leadership in practice. A long-term empirical research of bodily embedded leadership has documented that leaders can transform their practice if they use aesthetic performance as an interventive learning method. The researchers have conducted empirical studies where leaders experimented with movements of their bodies, thoughts and spaces as key elements in aesthetic performance. This article explores how leaders have learned aesthetic performance in practice, when they by way of an aesthetic drama have played with everyday challenges and problems they wanted to change instead of struggling with the problems in the social drama.

**Keywords:** Transformation of leadership, social drama, aesthetic drama, liminality, aesthetic performance, empirical research, leadership development

## **Introduction**

For years, leadership development has consisted of leadership education and courses aimed at development of leaders' personal competences in order to make leaders in contemporary organisations able to be trouble-shooters of complex and wicked (Grint 2005, 2010, Helth 2013). My argument is that leaders' have learned to develop personal competences in leadership education, often with less focus on practical life in organisations and rather based on abstract theories and individual skills, such as personality profiles, which have become more and more important in the professional development of leadership (Mack 2015). However, my judgement of this development is that there should be more focus leaders' learning in practice, which I will unfold below.

### ***Why is a new critical approach to leadership necessary?***

My experience before initiating my research was based on years as lecturer on leadership education courses and master's programs. From 2006-2008 I evaluated leaders' use of their personal competences, gained from leadership education, in Leadership Diploma education at the Technical University of Denmark (IHK 2009). Looking at the organisational benefit of leaders' education, my findings were discouraging. During a visit to Birmingham University in 2011, I met researchers who evaluated a big leadership program for public leaders, and they had found that the leaders fall back into what they called 'the black box' after their education and never really used the new competences to change their practice (Birmingham University, working paper 2011).

In other extensive evaluations of leadership education, leaders have found the personal development satisfying; however, they did not always experience the new competences as transferable to their organisational practice, especially if there was not a culture for learning in practice that could enhance the learning process (Pedersen and Ry 2011, Wahlgren et al. 2002).



The abstract theoretical preferences in leaders' learning seemed to be satisfying the individual leader participating in leadership education but not necessarily the organisation. My experience was that studies of how leadership competences could be more fruitful in relation to leaders' practice seemed to be difficult to identify because an often individualized and non-practical approach to leaders' learning of leadership (Helth 2012). This led me to a decision to engage in action research of leaders' learning in their own practice, in order to explore what could support leaders and their organisations to implement successful transformations of leadership in practice. The research project was sponsored by businesses who were frustrated at the gap between leadership education and organisational practice.

From 2013, I got the opportunity to study leaders' experiments in their own practice in ten public and private companies in Denmark in the project "Learning in practice – a way to better leadership (LIP) in order to make it possible for leaders to transform their practice. I realised that I had to find research methods to open leaders' approach to practical life in the organisation. However, I doubted the value of the predominance of theoretical and academic research methods, and preferred a methodology that could explore leaders' practice from an inside-and-out view (Ladkin 2010). To start a practical focused empirical research I had to study appropriate methods that could explore leaders' organisational practice, and this was the background of my decision of the emphasise of performance studies I thought might help to explore leaders' perception of how they learn to transform their practice (Taylor and Ladkin 2009). Thus, it became obvious that I should start with studies of art in relation to leadership.

From the beginning of the empirical research, I asked leaders who participated in LIP to use aesthetic performance through experiments in their own practice in order to answer the research question: *How can leaders transform their practice through aesthetic performance?*

To answer this question, I had to follow the leaders for a longer period. Two years action research and methods based on ethnography led to findings in relation to leaders' potential to transform their practice. I found that leaders can transform their leadership when they play with their problems from the so-called social drama, in the form of an aesthetic drama, instead of getting stuck with the problems in the social drama (Schechner 1988/2003). Leaders used bodies, thoughts and spaces to reveal the potential in the present aesthetic event.

This article explores how leaders in LIP experimented with aesthetic performance in their leadership aimed at transformation of their practice when they trained and rehearsed these new methods. The empirical study, based on action research (McNiff and Whitehead 2011) and auto-ethnographic studies (Van Maanen 2011), lasted for a period of two years and was organised as 68 individual and 52 collective sessions in the leaders' practice. This extensive study has led to insight into leadership as intervention in leaders' practice, and especially the ethnographic methods have made it possible to use fieldnotes and data coding as basis methods in my action research of leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance, although there has been a large time span from the beginning to the end of the research process. This time span also made it possible to change methods underway the study of leaders' learning in practice.

Thus the researchers in LIP gained a new understanding of methods used of leaders in the empirical studies and were able to change the methods addressed both individual leaders and

groups of leaders, which have proved to be an advantage for the research findings. The chosen methodology seemed to explore leaders' learning in practice through their interventions and self-observations from an inside-and-out position, which means bodily embedded experiments that affect leaders and make them change their performance in practice (Ladkin 2010, Grint 2005). This approach offers a close view on practice, when the leaders' inside-and-out position opens for their observation of practice that now becomes an object for the research, as practice is no longer observed of the researcher from an outside-and-in position.

In this introduction, I will unfold why this inside-and-out focus has been important in LIP and why leadership can be worked with as aesthetic performance in leaders' practice. Then I will shortly argue why leaders have to play themselves as human beings and not only their role as leaders. This leads to the notion about bodily movement, which will be unfolded as a background for choosing aesthetic based experiments in the study of leaders' performance in practice. As the final part of the introduction, I will argue why notions of firstly aesthetic leadership and secondly aesthetic performance has become a theoretical basis for studying leadership in practice. Hence, why the theoretical lenses known from performance studies, have been the background for the aesthetic based method developed in LIP, and explored in this article.

### ***An inside-and-out focus***

I realised that I had to develop new research methods to get the practical based knowledge I asked for, as was to get close to the leaders' practice from and inside position. I was not interested in assumptions about practice, but wanted to study how leaders might experience their leadership as a bodily embedded practice, which could then be the basis for my research. This means that the leaders had to be involved in the action research in corporation with the researcher in order to open to the potential in leaders' practice through the aesthetics and then enhance the inside view on leadership.

Leadership is often difficult to study by researchers' conventional methods (Alvesson and Sverinsson 2003, Ladkin 2010) and researchers have to probe below the surface of apparent perceptions, if they want to study aesthetic leadership. According to Grint (1997: 17) researchers should neither trace the leader nor the follower, but the mobilisation. Also, Ladkin (2010) recommended an inside-and-out perspective on leadership studies. She stresses that research has to reveal new sides and aspects of leadership where it is possible to experience leadership 'from the inside' by using methods like sensing and observation.

### ***Leadership and performance art***

To make a connection between art and leadership, I have applied theories of Aesthetic Leadership (i.e. Grint 2001, 2005, Ladkin 2010, 2013, Taylor 2012, 2013 Ladkin and Taylor 2010 a, 2010 b, Schedlitzki and Edwards 2014, Edwards 2015, Geertz 1973). However, I found that I had to go beyond these theories to get a deeper practical insight into the way leaders perform in their daily practice.

After a semester at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University in 2014, where I followed professor Richard Schechner's class in performance studies, I found that performance art could be a great inspiration for leaders aligned with what avant-garde thinking sparked in theatre and art in the 1960s and '70s (Schechner 2013: 164). In theatre, dance and music, much performance

art is the work of the individual artists using themselves, e.g. bodies, psyches and experiences, as material (Schechner 2013: 162). However, in leadership, art may also be a question of craft leaders learn to do in their practice (Taylor 2012)

### ***Playing yourself, not your role***

In the rebellion against traditional theatre, performing art as events without frames, plots or any usual visual art is examples of the new way of performing. Environments, people, furniture and coloured shapes can be moved again and again, and rearranged. This leads to performance like “the personal in the political” and then a focus on the environment and the community (Schechner 2013: 165). One example of this new way of performing is happenings, where the performers tend to be nobody but themselves, and those who do nothing but walk or stand are seen as actors (Kirby 1987 in: Schechner 2013: 175).

Acting thus exists in the smallest and simplest action that involve pretence. This and other examples from the modern theatre gave me the idea of developing leaders’ experiments, based on Kirby’s non-matrixed performance (Kirby 1987), as doing something other than just playing a character. I found it interesting to explore what would happen if leaders could play their own piece and not the role the organisation gave them.

### ***Performer and audience***

Another focus I perceived from performance art was the view of the relation between performer and audience. This led to ‘set ups’ in my empirical research, where performer and audience had shifting roles. Frances Harding (2006) saw the audience-performer relationship as an opportunity to create a suspension of the ordinary rather than a suspension of reality. One performer may, at one point, be acting and, at another point, presenting the self. Then a representation is not required in order to convince the spectators of the presence of an “other”; it is the recognising of the “two” which is important. That means that a person moves between the presentation of self and the presentation of an “other” (Schechner 2013: 176).

### ***Bodily movement***

I was astonished when I first learned that bodily movement might be even more important than the written script. What we might see was that leaders not only opened their bodies, but also their thought, working in silence and moving their bodies around without a strategy for their actions. A great influence in performance art came from ‘Open Theatre,’ that perceived physical exercises as the most important for actors, to connect to deeper impulses and to make the actors’ intimate with themselves (Schechner 1988/2003). I planned to let some of the plays start with bodily movements, where leaders as actors would be integrated in each other’s movements, as a dynamic collective movement, long before the play became a play.

### ***Movement before script leads to stronger expressions***

Furthermore, I supposed that the empirical study of bodily movements could explore how leaders create their bodily performance, as in the ‘Open Theatre,’ to develop an authentic play which they could find themselves in. If leaders started with bodily movements without a strategy or specific purpose, they would seemingly deliberate their bodily experiences. They would express themselves as part of a world with fewer boundaries, i.e. taboos about their roles might be

expressed in more powerful ways than words, tables and charts. Also, feminist theatre could be a source of inspiration for discussion of leadership as the potential of subjective and collective movement versus boundedness of objective-based structures (Harding and Rosenthal, 2006: 137).

#### ***From rule to role to performance through experiments***

If we look at studies of leadership as social constructs, this leads to a theoretical understanding of leadership as a social phenomenon, like the interplay between individual sense-making, collective cultures and institutional norms. Such an understanding depends on how a leader perceives situations at a given point in time and not on the leader's hierarchical function (Ladkin 2013: 322). Successful leadership from this perspective is dependent on its context within social and institutional structures, whose norms and rules govern the individual leader's behaviour (Wood 2005). But I wanted to go further and develop the leaders' ability to experiment with their leadership from their own, and not from an outside, perspective.

My attention was to go beyond most studies of performing leadership analysed in cognitive discourse which, I found, gave no real insight into the artistic impulses that move leaders and make them capable of changing their practice in a different way. Performance art and modern theatre focus on minimalistic performance, e.g. less movement is better than more. In some dance theatres the performers mirror each other (Schechner 1988/2003). The case is the body, and the approach tells us that talking as such does not create the important things. The performer has to learn to be free to experiment and then acknowledge the body. This is really different from the role-playing we know from the traditional theatre, but also from the roles and functions known from leadership.

#### ***Aesthetic leadership***

To lend depth to the theoretical background for my empirical study, I studied the relation between leadership and art. The first notion I found relevant was aesthetic leadership. This means art-based leadership that, in many ways, is different from and disturbs cognitive-rational ways of knowing aspects of management and organisational quotidian experience (Mack 2015: 157). Grint (2000) was one of the first to unfold why leadership has to be based on art. The reason why leadership has been explored in new ways is that in managing organisations it is a question of handling intractable challenges (Grint 2005, Townley 2002). Scholars aligned with Grint have argued that the complex and wicked problems in modern organisations should not be handled by rational technologies, but need other relevant skills (Schedlitzki and Edwards 2014).

Art-based leadership provides new ways of relating to the complexity in managing organisations that break with the traditional rationality of organisational theories (Weick, 2007) and develop an artistic impulse in managers' intervention in organisations (Schein 2005). Ladkin and Taylor (2010 b) argue for leadership as an art that takes leaders to new places and opens their senses. Art-based leadership calls for leaders' engagement through their bodies and enables leaders to stay with their senses (Ladkin and Taylor 2010 b: 239).

#### ***From an individual to a collective perspective***

When the leader stands alone, without connections to organisational contexts, the leader is not sufficiently focused on how leadership is constructed through social engagement (Edwards, 2015: 2). It is important to change the individualised focus on leadership, which might freeze leaders in

their capacity to act. The need for studies of leadership, carried out within a collective perception of leadership, raises the question of which research methods will be the most fruitful in studying leadership in the organisational context.

Studies by Bathurst et al (2010) have explored this question. The study has contributed to the theoretical development of aesthetic leadership, based on analysis of the case of Hurricane Katrina's impact on New Orleans in 2005. Furthermore, Peck et al (2009) have developed concepts of performing leadership based on performance studies, performativity and new-institutionalist theory. These two examples of leadership studies contribute to a theoretical understanding of leadership from the 'outside' but do not, in my perception, contribute an inside-and-out view on what leaders in reality do when they perform and how they can handle transformations.

### ***Aesthetic Performance***

The second notion I found relevant in studies of leadership in practice came from the theories of Aesthetic Performance (Darso 2004, Woodward and Funk 2010, Ladkin and Taylor 2010b, Springborg 2010, Strati 1992, 1999). Aesthetic Performance is not necessarily related to leadership and might be integrated in any kind of performance. When integrated in leaders' practice, aesthetic performance has to inform leadership in artistic and creative ways. Aesthetic functions make us perceive some part of the world more directly through the senses (Springborg 2010: 243), and theories of Aesthetic Performance in relation to leadership have been developed through studies of events in which problems occur in the presence (Schedlitzki and Edwards 2014, Scharmer 2009, 2013, McKenzie 2001).

Ladkin (2008) has analysed a situation from a concert in the Royal Albert Hall, where a famous vocalist, McFerrin, uses a gentle, playful and non-aggressive performance through an inclusive and open body language. Koivunen and Wennes (2011) have analysed how conductors in a symphony orchestra have used aesthetic performance, where they study relational listening, aesthetic judgement and kinaesthetic empathy. Like Ladkin, they study a past phenomenon.

Taylor (2012, 2013), Taylor and Hansen (2005) and Taylor and Ladkin (2009) have studied the advantages of artistic impulses, because the world desperately needs to address complex problems in a way that leads to arts-based methods (Taylor 2013: 70) Also, Sutherland (2013) has contributed to a new understanding of leadership through exploration of the value of arts-based methodologies using the notion of aesthetic reflexivity. These studies are, to some extent, based on empirical research, but not integrated in leaders' organisational practice.

### ***Performance Studies inspire leadership studies***

The studies of aesthetic performance led me to a decision to engage in intensive, long-term action research, in order to answer the research question, how leaders can transform their practice through aesthetic performance. I found there was a need for research methods that could explore leaders' performance in practice for a longer period, over which they could use different kinds of arts-based methods in their experiments. This was why I found it relevant to integrate theories from performance studies which, to a large extent, are developed from practice.

Studies of sensing, embodied leadership are still often based on abstract theories, and the studies often do not give rise to organisational contexts. As I have argued in this introduction, there is a need for empirical studies, like action research, of how leaders can transform their practice from an inside-and-out perspective in their organisational practice. The missing knowledge in leadership studies should be developed for three main reasons:

1. Studies of Aesthetic Leadership tend to be based on abstract theoretical knowledge and contextualised through analysis without deeper empirical insight into leaders' organisational practice. Furthermore, such studies are primarily based on analysis of past events and not on ethnographic studies of sensing in the presence
2. Studies of Aesthetic Performance have contrary to studies of aesthetic leadership taken the form of empirical studies; however, this research studies the aesthetics, unrelated to problems in leaders' organisational contexts
3. Methods that open to the real world could be non-representative work concerned with performative methodologies, which allows dialogical actions and relations, and thus may develop a non-discursive somatic practice with the intention of enhancing performance awareness (Dewey in Thrift, 2008: 148)

These were the reasons behind the need to develop new empirical methods in studies of leadership in organisational contexts. The need is for a research methodology that entails studies of leaders' ongoing practice. I find that leaders' practice has to be studied in present situations, which may happen through experiments in the leaders' organisational practice. A way to study how leaders learn to transform their practice could be based on action research and auto-ethnographic methods (Van Maanen 2011, McNiff and Whitehead 2011), whereby leaders cooperate with researchers to explore leadership through a dynamic method, such as we find in Performance Studies.

Firstly, the article unfolds the theoretical basis for empirical research into aesthetic performance in leadership known from Performance Studies (i.e. McKenzie 2001 and Schechner 1985, 1988/2003, 2013). Secondly, the article presents the model for research into aesthetic performance in leaders' practice and the research process. Thirdly, the article discusses the aesthetic model as the link between social drama and aesthetic drama, as essential content of the empirical research. Fourthly, the article unfolds three examples of leaders' aesthetic performance through body, thought and space when leaders carry out aesthetic interventions in practice. Finally, the article discusses perspectives of leaders' aesthetic performance in a personal and an organisational context.

### **Research method based on performance studies**

McKenzie (2001) was one of the first to introduce a link between performance studies and performance management and to look with new eyes at the potential in management. He included knowledge and methodology from theatre and anthropology, developing alternative perspectives on management and leadership (McKenzie 2001, Schechner 1988/2003, Turner 1982, 1985, Bateson 1972).

Below, I will unfold theories behind the specific method developed for the empirical research of leaders' aesthetic performance in practice. Firstly I will frame drama and performance, and

elaborate the role of the performer, as will be the leader in the aesthetic based experiments. Secondly I will unfold the notions of the social drama and the aesthetic drama, as the most important basis for the method developed in LIP. Thirdly the process of transformation of the social drama will be explained.

### ***Drama and performance***

Drama originates from Aristotle and, in the original version, drama presented people doing things (Aristotle 1996). Ancient Greek drawing and sculpture were not only signs and symbols, but the essence of doing, whereas doing in modern times is connected to scripts and word-likenesses. In modern western theatre, drama has consisted of abstract or metaphorical expressions of actions (Schechner 1985: 22).

When drawing, sculpting and physical acting are put back in the drama, this brings a new aspect of performing leadership to life. I decided that my research should not only include methods with a basis in brain learning, as modern drama normally does, but also body learning, intending to study how physical acting and aesthetic methods affect leaders' performance (Aristotle in Schechner 1985: 23).

Drama itself has no meaning for anyone other than its author if there is no performance; performance brings life to drama, and makes the drama visible and perceptible. Thus, drama as performance affects the performer and other participants in the drama, which again creates another drama.

### ***The role of the performer***

To understand the role of the leader as a performer, I will draw on the notion "as if" (Turner 1969, 1982) to unfold how leaders perceive themselves in aesthetic performance. When the performers realise that they are not 'themselves' and 'yet not themselves,' they cannot really say who they are. During the play the performer is neither a totally 'other', nor just himself or herself. The point is that the leader as a performer should not stop being himself or herself, when he or she becomes a leader. The performers must never be aliens in relation to themselves (Schechner 1985:3).

Contrary to Stanislavski (2010), who emphasises that the performer should play a given role in a natural way, Schechner stresses that the performers must not lose the self when playing a role. The performer should act as a person and as an artist at the same time and never lose the self (Schechner 1985: 6)

As a consequence of this theoretical approach, I prefer to focus on the leader's performance not as a role that must be played as something outside the leader's person. This implies that the leader in LIP should not act 'as if' the leader was an "artist" when doing artistic performance. A leader is not just a 'mask' but a 'self' included in the role as leader, and this means that the leader also has to play the authentic 'self' (Taylor 2014).

### ***The social drama***

To understand the aesthetic in leadership, I will look at the context called social drama where leaders are doing their job (Edwards 2015). Edwards considers social drama in relation to leadership as places and spaces that construct and perform leadership (Edwards 2015: 66). He

draws on the notions of time, space and place (Turner 1969 and Van Gennepe 1960). He defines crisis and disturbance as important to becoming another in social life.

Aligned with Edwards (2015), I find it relevant with a processual view on society, where social drama sometimes creates conflict situations. This leads to reflection on the concept of social drama as a drama that enables leadership to be addressed within a drama, where place and space construct and frame leadership. As such, social drama is a closed circuit, not open to any changes, as it exists on its own terms.

Turner (1969) and later Schechner (1988/2003) have developed a concept of a relation between social drama and aesthetic drama. Turner explains social drama as breach, crisis, redressive processes and reintegration, in flow with aesthetic drama, which creates a fluid relation between the real (the social) and the play (the aesthetic) (Schechner 1988/2003). This means that the aesthetic drama has to be understood in relation to the social drama.

The social drama will only change seriously when leaders move onto the aesthetic drama, in which they start to act creatively and are affected by the performance. The social drama will only transform into something the leaders prefer when they intervene as an aesthetic performance. Changing the social drama risks failure if the change is based on a cognitive approach, and thinking and reflection will not in themselves lead to changes of the problem. Conversely, based on my findings in LIP, using dramaturgical methodology will not necessarily lead to the wanted changes. Whether there will be a change of the problem or the aesthetic experiment will become an isolated experience, the outcome is random.

This article unfolds a different approach in which social drama and aesthetic drama converge. The leader transports the social drama into an aesthetic drama, which leads to a new social reality and might entail changes in the leaders' context. As I will unfold below, the transportation may lead to a potential in the social world when the leader's performance changes. Thus, the convergence of the social and the aesthetic drama makes transformation possible. *The key difference between the social drama and aesthetic drama is the performance of the transformations effected* (Schechner 2013: 192). *The performance as distinct from the drama is social, and it is at the level of performance that the aesthetic and social drama converges....* (Schechner 2013: 193).

### ***The aesthetic drama***

Although leaders want changes for the better in their practice, they cannot be sure that the process of making changes will be pretty. They might strive for a beautiful, authentic process; however, it is the participants in the performance who judge how they perceive the intervention. This is why the aesthetic drama as performance only makes sense when others reflect on their perception of the drama, if they like the performance or not, and especially how they are affected by the drama (Garber 1985).

Hansen, Ropo and Sauer (2007) underline that in aesthetic performance we have to avoid reference to "the art of leadership" as something performed in a special (beautiful) way. Aligned with this, Taylor (2013) stresses that there is no objective definition of beauty, as beauty is not art, but more like exceptional craft skills (Strati, in Taylor, 2013). The perception of something



beautiful depends on the felt meaning, the sensory experience and the affect among participants in the performance; in other words whether, as a result of exceptional craft skills, the performance is perceived as beautiful or ugly in the eye of the beholder.

When Schechner (1988/2003), in relation to theatre and art, developed Turner's anthropological model that depicts an ongoing and never-ending process, the social drama, played as an aesthetic drama, affects the social and vice versa. It is an interaction between social action and performance techniques: according to Schechner, some of the actions in the two dramas are visible or hidden, actual or virtual. The relationship in the model can be seen as a horizontal numeral 8, the infinity symbol  $\infty$  (Schechner 2013, 76).

This model has been further developed through the empirical research in LIP, presented in this article.

### ***Transformation of the social drama***

According to Schechner (1988/2003), the aesthetic drama imposes the social drama in a way where everybody involved in the play recognises the actions as a "playing with", which is better than trying to change the social drama as a "real doing of". This means that leaders, who want to change their practice and behaviour because of a problem they experience as a social drama, should create a new drama through aesthetic performance that will affect the participants in the performance. In short, it is better to make "the real" problem visible in an aesthetic form than trying to make everything real or eventually hiding the problem in the social drama. "Playing with" problems makes transformation possible, as I will explore in a discussion of the impact of the aesthetic-based model.

When the leaders play with a problem instead of being stuck with negative feelings in the social drama, they may experience a change, which means that the social drama is changed into an aesthetic context. When this happens, the leaders experience a change in the social drama; they might even experience that the problem, the crisis etc. will be solved permanently.

Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014) have also studied how notions of the aesthetic transform the praxis of leadership through focus on sensory experiences that lead to an embodied sense of management and leadership. They refer to Strati (1992), who were among the first societal researchers to argue that aesthetics, as emphatic knowledge, feeling and intuition, was central to management science (Schedlitzki and Edwards, 2014: 254).

## **The empirical research**

The empirical research is as mention in the introduction titled: "Learning in practice – a way to a better leadership" (LIP). There have been 75 individual and 45 collective conducted research sessions in local environments during a period of two years. The individual sessions lasted 1½ hours and the collective sessions 3 hours. A research team guided the sessions in LIP; the research team consisted of me, as the head of the team, and specialists in body therapy, psychology and coaching, painting, art and theatre performance.

### ***Model for research of aesthetic performance in leadership***

The model of aesthetic performance (figure 1) entails a social drama and an aesthetic drama, originally developed by Turner (1969) and Schechner (1988/2003). In LIP, the leaders experimented with aesthetic performance through body, thought and space. It was difficult to separate the three forms of intervention. Moreover, they emerged from practice and were not primarily based on theories. These forms of intervention will be discussed later in the article.



Figure 1: The model of aesthetic performance in leadership

The empirical research has contributed three different methodological elements in development of the **model of aesthetic embedded transformation (MAET)**:

#### **1. Liminality**

In the beginning of LIP, we used the aesthetic model without a liminal transition; however, later in process we found that there had to be a clearly marked transition between the social drama and the aesthetic drama, when leaders had to engage in aesthetic performance. The liminal transition made it clear that the leaders were going to play with a problem when transporting that problem from the social drama into an aesthetic drama. When leaders made the liminal transition, they knew they were going to conduct experiments for a limited period of time (minutes, hours) and in a limited space (room, set up).

The liminal transition also took place when the leaders had finished their experiments in the aesthetic drama, as they had to get through a liminal phase to return to the social drama. After this final transition, leaders often found the social drama had changed and the problems they struggled with were solved or changed, due to the aesthetic performance.

#### **2. Ethnographic methods**

The leaders learned to observe their own and others' practice through auto-ethnographic methods, as they had to prepare for the aesthetic drama through ethnographic observation in the organisation. These observations strengthened leaders' capacity to change their practice, as they became aware of the connection between the social drama and the aesthetic performance, when they learned to observe ethnographically. The leaders were no longer caught up in a problem which left them powerless; they experienced the potential through bodily based observations.

### **3. Training and rehearsal**

Leaders' training and rehearsal in collective sessions were fruitful in terms of developing capacities for aesthetic performance. One example from LIP was workshops with groups of leaders that led to a preparation of aesthetic intervention in the leaders' own practice, often caused by problems which called for different behaviour from the leader. The more group-oriented the rehearsal was, the more leaders experienced that their problems were similar, which gave them a feeling of togetherness. The collective training and reflection made them realise that aesthetic performance opened potential in their practice that might lead to changes in their organisational practice.

#### ***The research process***

There were three phases in LIP in the period from December 2014 until January 2016, where the action research took place, conducted by a research team consisting of professionals from art, bodily performance and academia.

#### **The initial phase**

The research process was in the initial phase, primarily based on individual sessions where every leader spoke about his or her own experiences with aesthetic performance in practice. After the first individual sessions in 2014, the research team found that the individual sessions were not adding to the knowledge we had from teaching leaders on management education courses. It seemed impossible to get beyond the logic of learning in practice, if the researchers only focused on experiences from the individual leader.

The few collective sessions in the initial phase were more fruitful in terms of the leaders' aesthetic performance. The research team then decided to implement a turnaround in the project in order to prioritise collective over individual sessions.

#### **The interim phase**

After the change in methods, the research team conducted only collective sessions during the following year (2015). After the first sessions, the researchers recognised that preparation of the aesthetic performance was important to the leaders' aesthetic performance. The research team observed how these positive features grew, the more the leaders trained and rehearsed aesthetic exercises in collective sessions.

The research team initiated different roles in the sessions to observe how aesthetic performance affected both performers and participants. The impact of this kind of casting was convincing. Reading fieldnotes from these sessions gave the research team written evidence of the importance of relating the collective sessions to aesthetic performance in the leaders' organisational practice.

#### **The final phase**

In the summer 2015, LIP moved into its third and final phase, where the collective sessions had become the new norm for holding the aesthetic based sessions. However, what the research team first observed now was the meaning of liminality, i.e. framing the processes intended to bring

participants in the sessions from one condition to another. Liminality seemed to be a condition for a better outcome of the aesthetic performance.

Later in the final phase, a few organisations decided to involve groups of up to 15 of their leaders in LIP. The research found that preparation of the sessions in these groups, i.e. leaders' ethnographic observations of their own practice, accelerated the learning process. Besides, the leaders more often experienced the aesthetic interventions as meaningful and started to experiment in their own practice.

In short, the key findings in the research process were:

- Firstly, the action researcher had to give tools to the leaders to observe their interventions in practice, and then provide a basis for the leaders' interpretation of what had really happened when they were experimenting with bodily embedded senses, without falling back on cognitive reflections about themselves.
- Secondly, the action researcher had to organise the sessions in groups to prepare the leaders to play with the aesthetic methods, and then found that training and rehearsal of the methods gave leaders sustainable aesthetic methods to use in practice.
- Thirdly, the action researcher started to orchestrate learning processes in collective sessions, i.e. using liminal methods to give the leaders a space to become aware of the transformative aspects of their aesthetic performance.

## **Discussion of the aesthetic method from studying leaders' practice**

The following part of the article will discuss how researchers can study leaders' experiments through aesthetic performance in organisational practice. Firstly, I will discuss how aesthetic performance was largely based on a theoretical method from performance studies, but as I discuss secondly, aesthetic drama as the method explored in leaders' practice was a practice based intervention combined of body, thought and space. However, each element also turned out to be theoretical informed. Thirdly, I will discuss how the playful performance was possible in leaders' practice. Fourthly, I end with a discussion of liminality as a pathway to transformation of leaders' practice.

### ***The motivation of aesthetic performance***

The intention of LIP was to answer the research question: how can leaders transform their practice through aesthetic performance? The challenge was how a researcher through action research could study leaders' experimenting with aesthetic performance as interventions in which the social drama moves on to aesthetic drama through the limen between the two spheres; and, in a transformed performance, flows back and changes the social drama. Thus as researchers we had a specific theoretical research model, but how could we get close to micromovements that could help to explore what we were looking for?

At the beginning of the research process, we saw random cases of a movable social drama as a changeable and manageable space when the social drama oscillated with the aesthetic drama. We realised that the oscillation between the social and the aesthetic drama and the use of an aesthetic

performance did not automatically lead to transformation of the real. We had to argue why leaders should experiment in order to change a social drama. However, after a while, we started to see patterns in the way leaders learned from aesthetic performance, and some non-cognitive paths they were able to follow.

Inspired by theories of performance art, we taught leaders to engage in aesthetic performance when they wanted to change their practice. In social drama, leaders often were locked in their rules and habits, and experienced negative feelings that prevented them from acting. We found that the change occurred when the preparation of the leaders' bodies and mind before the sessions seemed to make the leaders ready for aesthetic performance.

### ***Aesthetic drama as intervention through body thought and space***

We observed that leaders' performance took place in interaction between 'body', 'thought' and 'space' as elements in the aesthetic performance, which was carried out in micro processes, in which leaders acted in non-cognitive ways, i.e. by breathing, silent walking, a sigh, using different words, smiling, tuning in with their body, body sculptures, moving chairs. We often observed leaders perform without knowing what could move the real world and change their problem.

The leaders and others were primarily affected by the bodily interventions. We observed that many of the interventions started with the bodily movement, often interacting with space and thoughts. Here is an example of the interaction between body, thought and space:

If the leader feels that there is a bad atmosphere in a meeting room, he/she can take a deep breath (body) and wait one minute before continuing. When doing so, the leader will experience that the energy in the room goes up (space), the potential in the event is realised, and the space changes. At the same time the leader will be able to reflect on preferred actions (thought). Not only the performer, but everybody in the room is affected by the performer's aesthetic performance. As the example tells, the leader has to improvise and at the same time sense and observe the situation in the presence.

We found that a new dynamic susceptibility transformed leaders' performance. Based on the following discussion it has become obvious that the combination of body, through and space also have a theoretical background, as I did not pay attention to from the beginning of the research process. First of all the dynamic affection in the interventions in leaders' practice was an expression of opening a pre-cognitive domain, a silent language and "tiny masters of metabolism and movement" (Thrift, 2008: 168). The research team observed that the body is associated with the moment, and found it important that leaders act in real-time and real-life situations when they perform aesthetically (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Hence the liminal phases had to be integrated in the interventions when leaders did aesthetic performance, as the connection to real-time and real-life had to be clearly marked in the sessions, in order to encourage leaders to experiment with their practice.

*Body:* The aesthetic performances were going on as bodily interventions as grounding, breathing and body sculptures; secondly, using words in a poetic way, mirroring others' words; thirdly, colourful meeting facilities, music and dance and drawing equipment. According to Ladkin, Merleau-Ponty thinks that we cannot perceive without our body telling us what we feel, hear and

smell (Ladkin 2013: 330). The body is essential to awareness of what is going on around us (Butler 1993).

The leaders in LIP were trained to do bodily embedded experiments, and especially the sessions with bodies affected the leaders and participants in the aesthetic drama. For many leaders, the experience of bodily grounding had a strong influence on actions in leaders' practice, i.e. grounding led to calmer behaviour during a crisis.

*Thought:* If the leader does not talk from an honest mind, the body will reveal his or her playing as a game. Thus words and bodily position have impact on how followers are affected by the performance. Thoughts are combined with body, and an authentic performance will be visible for others, when the leader performs in a trustworthy way (Taylor 2014). It is through the leader's body and the way he/she expresses a "true self that the leader can be perceived as authentic (Ladkin and Taylor 2010 a).

*Space:* Space might be psychical, but it might also be a virtual *space*, where leaders can imagine the potential of the actual event (Massumi 2002). Leaders have to break the bounds of the rules in their experiments and act in new ways without knowing the potential of the virtual space they create. Thus it is not 'being' a leader, as a specific role, that transforms leadership; it is the essence of 'becoming' something new, moving oneself from one space to another, that causes the transformation (McKenzie 2001).

### ***Playful performance***

Another question in relation to studying leaders' performance is how the other participants in the play are involved. The participants were often equivalent to other leaders, employees and human resource consultants, and the question is how they were affected by the leaders' aesthetic performance, and whether they preferred to watch and judge from a distance (Brecht in Schechner, 2013) or if they wanted to be integrated in the play.

We developed an orchestrated and involving participation in the aesthetic drama, which meant that every session in the action research was organised as prepared and structured processes guided by the research team by use of screenplays. The participants experienced this kind of process as meaningful performance that impinged better on transforming the social drama than watching the performance from a distance. As Schechner stresses, performance is dependent on the performer's ability to adapt to the event and to involve participants in playing the aesthetic drama. The leader is like an instrument, in the same way as the actor on a stage; the actor uses gestures, voices and emotions to move the participants during the play.

After a period of rehearsals of aesthetic performance, the leaders became increasingly familiar with the aesthetics as an ongoing practice in their organisational context. Whenever they felt it necessary to intervene and respond to events, they were able to do so, when they first learned how to carry out aesthetic performance. This encouraged them to continue to experimenting with their problems.

### ***Liminality - a pathway to transformation***

Liminality offers its occupants the possibility of engaging in transformative practices: trying out, questioning and adopting or rejecting new identities, because there is an enchanted time and space where anything *might* happen (Turner, 1979: 465). As such, the liminality is a sacred place in time and space, a kind of symbolic ‘social limbo’, loaded with promise, potential and the unknown (Hawkins and Edwards 2015: 27); a ritual that opens for ‘the new and not yet possible’ to observe.

The liminal ritual means a separation between one context and another (Van Gennep 1960), i.e. when a leader arrives from a meeting full of conflicts and wants to set off for a new event in a good and relaxed mood; a ritual seems to be needed. The liminal ritual is a preparation for the experiment, as many leaders in LIP have experienced.

The research team found that all phases in the process had to be carefully marked. This has to do with the effect of the play, which we observed through the liminal phases, especially when we had conducted and clearly marked the flow between the social and the aesthetic drama. As an example, we asked leaders to mark out a clear ‘check-in ritual’ and ‘a check-out ritual’. If the research team, for some reason, did not integrate these rituals, we immediately observed confusion as to what was going on, i.e. lack of concentration and presence.

The first move into the liminal ‘rites of passage’ (Van Gennep 1960) made leaders able to deconstruct one condition to another through ‘rites of separation’. This could be a simple exercise, such as leaving the ‘formal clothes’ outside the door and ‘jumping’ into the room where the research session was going on. Later in the research process, the leaders rehearsed different kind of bodily and space-embedded processes. From then on, the leaders gained the ability to reconstruct new leadership performances during so-called rites of transition and re-incorporation (Van Gennep 1960, Schechner 1985). This meant that the leaders were now able to conduct their own rituals and to frame the aesthetic drama in their own practice.

In most aesthetic performances, the transformations are temporary, as transportation, and after a while the play has no impact, whereas initiations that are marked out carefully, as the liminal phases have to be, may result in a permanent transformation of those who are involved in the play (Schechner, 1985: 20). The long-term research in LIP explored how leaders’ practice was transformed by aesthetic performance framed through liminality.

As researchers, we observed how liminal methods gradually developed the capacity to practice the transition and re-incorporation, as the rehearsal of the rituals took place every time we conducted a session. The more familiar the leaders became with the liminality, the better they were able to conduct aesthetic performances in their own contexts.

### **Examples from leaders’ aesthetic interventions in practice**

Below are three examples of interventions as aesthetic performances through body, thought and space. All three examples were reported in sessions with the research team and are results of experiments in the leaders’ own practice, where each leader experienced problems as a social

drama and decided to intervene as an aesthetic drama. The examples unfolds how leaders experiments with body, thought and space in the aesthetic drama affects the leaders and others. All three names are constructed.

We asked leaders for a sensing, moving aesthetic drama based on their own observations (Barad 2003), and furthermore for their translation of the observation (Latour 2005). The purpose of this inquiry was to get close to the leader's sensing and interpretation of the aesthetic in relation to the leader's organisational context.

### **Example 1: Body intervention**

*The leader of a nursing team, Charlotte, is facing severe problems with a patient at the hospital, who has scarred many of the nurses in the section with his temper for a long time. Charlotte tells me that she did a grounding exercise with her body in preparation for a meeting with this patient. In the meeting, Charlotte sat on a chair between a doctor and the patient. She was quiet during the meeting and did not use many words; it was mostly the doctor who spoke. Charlotte felt the situation with the terrifying patient much more relaxed than normal, and though she was not talking a lot, she increasingly felt that the patient relaxed and did not throw a tantrum.*

What surprised Charlotte was her absence of fear during the meeting, and she realised that, even though the patient was not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, he never lost his temper. She interprets the event as an impact of her bodily grounding that made her relaxed and also seems to have affected the patient; she noticed a change from a fearful to a comfortable situation, a sensing that she is not able to explain in a rational way. The grounding exercise and the preparation for the meeting affected Charlotte and, according to her, might have led to the remarkable influence on the event.

Charlotte found that silence had a good influence on the complex problem; she, the doctor and the team of nurses had been threatened for a long time. She feels that she has got a new authentic method in her leadership, in which she can act as trustworthy without bodily tension, since others will now read her as authentic (Ladkin 2008). The bodily movements might affect and release the potential through her embodied leadership practice in the future.

*Charlotte had planned the aesthetic intervention, but had no experience of how she and others could be affected of the aesthetics. Without knowing what she was doing, Charlotte used both liminality and an aesthetic performance in relation to the social drama, and experienced how the social drama were transformed.*

### **Example 2: Thought intervention**

A story of 'thought' intervention is based on experiences from Ann, a headmaster of a compulsory school who had to give a speech to hundreds of teachers. The event was set up after a long period of problems at the school – as a part of a general problem in Denmark where all schools were closed for months by a lockout. After the lockout, the teachers were very angry at the political leaders of the municipality and at the school managers. Ann was mentally prepared to experience that the teachers would meet her with anger. She decided to talk from an honest heart.



*Ann entered the assembly hall, where all the teachers were already seated. The atmosphere in the room was cold and the teachers did not look at Ann but continued their small talk. Ann felt intuitively that she should walk into the middle of the hall, where she found a small chair and sat down in a position lower than the teachers' sit. Before she started her speech, she looked around for some minutes, took a deep breath, and made sure that she looked into the eyes of some of the teachers. She spoke slowly and started to express the severe situation as she saw it. For her as for them it had been a difficult time, her role as well as theirs would be changed in the future; thus, she felt that they together would have to co-create a new beginning. She alone could not develop a sustainable platform for the future. After 10 minutes, Ann felt that people listened to her, and looked at her; she saw faces with smiles.*

When Ann told about her aesthetic experience, she recognized the feeling she had through the event at the school and was emotional affected, which was surprising to her. Ann interprets that her aesthetic based experience was a symbol of the importance of being honest about personal thoughts and values; she felt that her words during the session came from her true self. She kept her formal role as a headmaster during the session, but at the same time also let her own personal feelings and thoughts come into play. She had a good feeling inside her body when she first started the performance. The smiles and attitudes from the employees were a sign of how they were affected by her genuine and truthful performance in the event.

*Ann's aesthetic performance was not planned, and she was surprised of the affect the performance had of others. Ann often used a liminal ritual before a meeting, i.e. a song. She was used to feel how the aesthetics influenced the energy in a room. However, in this situation Ann became conscious of the transformation in her practice caused by aesthetic performance because of the reflection she had on her experience.*

### **Example 3: Space intervention**

The story about space intervention is from a leader in the wind and renewable energy sector. The leader is responsible for business development in the company and has performed a new idea without knowing what the effect will be.

*The business developer, Peter, invites the board from a new wind turbine project to visit the wind farm. The board consists of lawyers, bankers, investors and auditors all of whom, for him, are normally only figures on a computer, not real people. Peter had the idea that everybody in the board should climb to the top of the wind turbine. To create the situation, Peter used his position as business developer to organise the experiment. Every board member was eager to see the wind turbine, which none of them had done before. After the experiment, Peter observed that the visit to the wind farm had affected the board members' view on the windmill's production. Questions about the heights of trees and buildings around a wind turbine and other things they were often arguing about at board meetings changed after the visit; relations among the members of the board became closer and the atmosphere at meetings was more fruitful after the experiment, Peter felt.*

Peter interprets the impact of the experiment as surprising, an impact he did not expect before the event. He did not see himself as a brave person, but had a strong feeling that something different

had to be done to obtain better results on the board. According to Peter, the experiment affected a stronger relationship among the members of the board and a better balance between every board member's personal freedom and the togetherness on the board, where important decisions for the community energy sector had to be taken. The experiment made things *real*, and he described the space intervention as a happening, a surprise for everybody.

*Peter had no idea of the impact of the experiment; however, he realised how important space thinking is. When he speaks about his projects, nobody doubts that he loves his job and tries to empower people during his leadership. The impact of the space-initiated experiment was a more open atmosphere and curiosity about future perspectives for the wind power industry. As such the aesthetic performance led to transformation, when Peter became conscious of how aesthetic performance can affect participants in an event.*

### ***Learning points from the examples***

The three examples from Charlotte, Ann and Peter's experiments in their organisational practice document how leaders may perform in an aesthetic way through body, thought and space. None of the three had scripted the experiments; they were encouraged to do something different in the event, but had no specific plan for the intervention.

My interpretation of the leaders' experiences is that they were prepared in a bodily embedded way, due to the collective training sessions they had participated in. Their senses led them to a different kind of improvisation in the occurring event, and they could not have known what would happen when they first started to perform in the aesthetic drama.

Their leadership was transformed when other participants in the events were affected and changed their attitudes to situations and problems. As we see in the stories, the social drama and the complex problems were changed after the intervention through body, thought and space. The three leaders' interventions led to what I would call strategic changes in the organisations, some of what they would not have been able to implement in a rational way. The examples also document that leadership through micro movements can lead to important and sometimes more profound changes in the organisation and in relation to the environment.

## **Perspectives of aesthetic performance in developing leadership in practice**

This article has presented contributions to the development of a new aesthetic method in leadership that enables leaders to perform the social drama as an aesthetic drama when they sense and observe actions from an inside-and-out position. Long-term research documents how leaders can transform their leadership through aesthetic performance that permits them to play with problems instead of getting stuck by them. It offers potential to transform problems through interventions with bodies, thoughts and spaces.

The perspectives of the research on leadership through aesthetic performance are as follows:

Firstly, there is *an organisational perspective* of the aesthetic performance in leadership. There is a transformative potential in relation to leaders' practice, as aesthetic dramas oscillate with social

dramas, when the flow between the two dramas is an ongoing convergent practice. This means that each drama informs the other, when the movement first gets started as an aesthetic drama. Instead of solving problems through fights over how to solve wicked problems, leaders can learn to play with the problem as an aesthetic drama and thus experience how to transform their problems in a playful and creative way.

Secondly, there is a *personal and individual perspective*, when leaders learn to address problems through aesthetic interventions based on performance with the body, thought and space. The leaders' bodily learning will remind them of the potential in aesthetic performance when problems occur, even though they are not yet aware of the impact of the performance. A silent intervention gives leaders a capacity and courage to manage the event in a creative way. Thus their aesthetic performance affects others in a deeper and more direct way than words, tables, charts and speeches permit. Leaders will experience the power of the non-cognitive and silent drama when they respond from an 'inside-and-out' approach. The more the leaders train and rehearse their aesthetic performance, the more capacity they will develop to perform in an aesthetic way, and the better they will see the potential of virtual interventions.

Thirdly, there is a *perspective in the framing of aesthetic performance*, which entails transformative learning, when the aesthetic interventions are framed through liminal phases, conducted by leaders in coordinated processes in the organisational contexts. If aesthetic performance has to be integrated into leadership practices, framing and guidance of processes are a prerequisite. This seems to be achieved when leaders have trained the aesthetic performance and are prepared for interventions in their own practice in new ways. But the preparation is not cognitive-based; it is the embedded bodily experience that informs the leaders of the potential to perform aesthetically. As such, the leaders' perspective is to perform contingent leadership in a playful way that will be perceived as more integrated in their practice than a rational outside-and-in performance. The leaders who learn to do aesthetic performance will have the potential to be more creative and innovative in their organisational practice.

Fourthly, *the perspective is the need to dedicate more research* into tracking aesthetic performance in organisational contexts, to be able to explore new ways to embody attempts to transform leadership practices. This will necessitate more ethnographic-based action research in the form of interactions between leaders' organisational contexts and research.

The future challenge will be twofold: first, dominant approaches in leadership studies, where the academic discipline might be an obstruction to action research; and, secondly, the comprehensive rational perception of management and the individualised focus on leadership will be another challenge in future studies. As Sinclair (2005) has stated, leaders are often viewed in theory as disembodied beings, because leadership is often construed as an activity of brains without bodies.

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## **The audience wheel as a technic to create transformative learning**

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## **Abstract**

### *Purpose of article*

The purpose of this article is to document how a new learning technic may create transformative learning in leadership in an organisational practice.

### *Approach*

The learning methods developed in the LIP project include aesthetic performances combined with reflections. The intention has been to explore how leadership may be transformed, when leaders work as a collective of leaders. The learning methods developed and tested in the LIP project are art-informed learning methods, concepts of liminality and reflection processes carried out in the leaders' organisational practice.

### *Findings*

One of the most important findings in the LIP project in relation to transformative learning is a new learning technique based on guided processes rooted in aesthetic performance combined with reflections and separation of roles as performer and audience. Reflection processes related to aesthetic performance serve as argument for the impact of 'the audience wheel'.

### *Value*

Leaders who perform and reflect in a collective of leaders can better deal with complex organisational problems and enhance growing of welfare-in-the-making from an inside and out perspective. Moreover, the separation between classroom teaching and practical intervention will diminish when leaders learn aesthetic performance and reflections as a practical technique.

This article discusses why learning in leaders' practice has to change from concepts of transfer to methods of transformative learning, based on collective processes and orchestrated reflections. The argument for transformative learning, based on a longitudinal study, named *Learning in practice – a way to promote leadership* (the LIP project), is unfolded in the article.

First, there will be arguments why transformative learning has become more and more important. Secondly, how learning methods have developed from cognitive learning to bodily learning in events with a transformative impact. Thirdly, follows a theoretical framing of a new learning technique, i.e. aesthetic art-based theories and the notion of the audience wheel and liminality as method in learning processes<sup>5</sup>. Fourthly, a concept for transformative learning will be designed including an actual case from the LIP project. Fifthly, the article will discuss how we can understand the audience wheel as a new technique improving transformative learning, and thus change the individual focus on leadership to a collective, since leaders have to embrace welfare-in-the-making in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> The learning methods developed and tested in the LIP project are art-informed learning methods, i.e. aesthetic leadership (Taylor and Ladkin 2009, Ladkin and Taylor 2010, McKenzie 2001) combined with concepts for liminality and reflection processes in the leaders' organisational practice (Peterson, DeCato and Kolb 2015, Hawkins and Edwards 2015, Sutherland 2012, McNiff and Whitehead 2011).

## **Why is transformative learning more and more important?**

The assumption is that experimental technologies have become more relevant because of the core of welfare in a modern society, which is no longer given in advance. The welfare issues are constantly in transformation, because contemporary discourses inform the actors in the society to think of welfare from outside and in.

However, the dominating discourse should rather give priority to leadership in-the-making processes, in order to co-create welfare involving customers, citizens, employees and politicians. Because of this, structures, routines and learning habits in organisations need to be re-activated and re-thought and thus not only to follow the logic of transfer. There is a need of an inside and out creation of welfare in changing contexts, where event based leadership is unfolded as transformative and experimental learning, happening in the presence.

Thus, leaders' have to develop new competences that face this outside and in thinking with an inside and out performance, as will only be possible if leaders learn to sense their own values and bodies. This is why need of new organisational-based learning methods are more evident than ever. These arguments will be unfolded in the following.

The background of this article is the lack of bridging *individual learning methods, often known as transfer* (Dewey 1933, Thorndike 1913, Kolb 1984) and *transformative learning* (Lave and Wenger 1991, Argyris and Schön 1996, Schön 1983, Mezirow 1992, 2009, E. Taylor 2007, 2009), i.e. bridging how to learn leadership from a general, theoretical to a practice oriented perspective. Individual learning and the notion of transfer is often aligned with studying leadership at master programs, whereas transformative learning is often related to an organisational practice. To explore why transformative learning is needed in times where the core of welfare is not given in advance, organisations and their leaders as well as master programs have to develop new leadership technologies aimed at transformative learning.

### ***From transfer to transformative learning***

The relevance of transformative learning in relation to the new core of welfare leads to a critical focus on expectations of the impact of learning as transfer. Transfer is input-output driven and focuses on the challenges of a transmitter driven process, where different devices affect the knowledge transmission.

The leader who participates in leadership education, often focuses on, how the knowledge as a 'product' he learns far from his job, can be transferred from the education system unto his working practice (Thorndike 1913). The leader is mostly interested in the use of the new competences as a product that is transferred to the organisational context. Transfer is a non-embodied, non-personal kind of learning product; leaders can pull from the education system, which consists of learning far away from the organisational practice (Helth 2011).

The focus in leadership education has changed from learning for information ("what we know") to learning for transformation ("how we know") (Baumgartner, 2003 in Harris et al 2008). More attention has to be on transformative learning (Mezirow 2000), which includes a creative learning

process where knowledge emerges in very new forms, depending on different events and leadership interventions.

Researchers have argued for a while that transformative learning focuses more specifically on connecting theory to practice (Harris et al 2008). Hence transformative learning may be more relevant in accordance to leadership in an organisational practice than learning as transfer that focuses on the individual learners' ability to bring knowledge from one context to another. More precisely, research in how to learn to become a leader should focus on, how a learning practice could transform leadership into an organisational context.

Furthermore, the individual focus on learning as transfer is often dominating in learning leadership as it also was in the initial phase of LIP project, seems to have limiting impact on learning in practice, partly because learning is not an integrated part of the leader's organisational practice. Thus, there are barriers to enable leaders' learning in an organisational practice, if learning theories are dominated by the notion of transfer. In contrast to transfer, transformative learning seems to have different advantages over learning in practice, which will be discussed in this article.

### ***From cognitive to bodily embedded learning methods***

The research team in the LIP project has guided around 30 collective experimental learning sessions in 2015, based on different reflection methods, some of which will be presented in this article. The project made a turn around after the first empirical studies; hence the methods used in the beginning only focused on the individual leader, which did not create sufficient transformative learning.

### ***Cognitive theories about reflection methods***

Reflection methods have often primarily been based on cognitive paradigms, i.e. the following four theories that are important to know in order to argue why the cognitive approach in learning theories is not sufficient when leaders want to create transformative learning.

*John Dewey* (1859 – 1952) was among the first learning researchers working with the concept of reflection. Especially in the book *How we think* (Dewey 1933), he presents the differences between concepts of thinking and reflection as the difference between what we think happens in any given situation, *and* what we imagine are presupposed connections in the real world. He defines reflection as a doubt or hesitation in relation to what is going on in the real world, and as exploration of actions that could reduce doubts and hesitations. Dewey underlines that reflection is required when disturbances and conflicts occur.

Dewey's methodology is cognitive oriented, whereas reflection methods used in relation to experimental learning also have to be bodily embedded, as experiences from the LIP project documents.

*Donald Schön* (1931 – 1997) categorized thinking and acting as a coincident phenomenon, and developed the concept of the reflexive practitioner (1983). He developed several concepts about acting in practice, among others reflecting-in-practice. Schön worked with a person's reflection on tacit assessments as a phenomenon that influences the acting person. Reflection-in-action as a

phenomenon in an ongoing acting happens at the same time as the person acts. Schön also stresses, that reflection-in-action necessarily includes experiments; the explorative playful experiment, the move-testing experiment and hypothesis testing experiment.

Schön valorises artistic, intuitive processes where leaders use “know-how” and artful competences, useful for methods that led to reflection based on aesthetic art-based methods; although he can be criticized for his rational mind-body dualism, and controlling the body through the intellect (Erlandson 2005 in Hébert 2015).

*David Kolb* (1939 - ) has developed the concept Learning Style in Experiential Learning - ELT (Kolb 1984), based on theories from Jean Piaget, Kurt Lewin and John Dewey. The learner has to move between different positions in a learning process, both as an actor and as an observer, and these different positions create different, sometimes even conflictual modes as basis for the reflection.

Kolb draws on action research in Experiential Learning Theory, i.e. laboratory models where reflections on here and now experiences are important. For Kolb reflection, feedback and actions have to be connected (Kolb 1984: 22) if learning should happen. When individuals use ELT they are able to experience an ideal, well-balanced learning process that keeps the subjective in the experience at focus in the learning and gives value of being mindful in one’s direct immediate experience, when the reflective team observes and reflects upon the experience (Peterson, DeCato and Kolb, 2015).

Kolb has contributed with developing reflection in teams, i.e. collective reflections, and with a focus on different reflection positions, as actor and observe. As the LIP project has documented, the collective learning processes and the awareness of changing roles, have had an impact on the transformative learning, as the article will discuss later.

*Jack Mezirow* (1923 – 2014) has developed a transformation theory of learning, which describes operations as a number of elements that relate to a transformative learning process. His main work presented in the book *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991) describes that a transformative learning process is an outcome of individuals facing a disorienting dilemma that causes a level of confusion, as also Dewey described as a core in the learning process. A learning process can, according to Mezirow lead to a shift in a meaning schema or meaning perspective. After a transformation, the individuals see themselves in an improved and even more effective manner; their assumptions are modified to better fit to their reality and context (Howie and Bagnall, 2015: 349).

The critique of Mezirow’s perspective in relation to learning leadership could then be, that there is not an organisational understanding included in his theory, thus transformative learning as a collective learning process is not solely based on his theory.

### ***Transformative learning requires bodily embedded reflections***

Transformation requires orchestrated reflection, if the learning should lead to changes in assumptions and actions in relation to an organisational context. Reflection is necessary, if a change in a person’s understanding of his or hers assumptions should arise, as also the four mentioned theories have described. Barnett emphasizes the importance of reflection to aid learners in applying new concepts in their practice (Barnett 2005 in Harris et al 2008).

However, transformative learning, based on aesthetic art-based experiments, is different from cognitive based learning, and newer learning theories emphasise the importance of experiential learning, although an experiment does not 'per se' create transformative learning. Peterson, DeCato and Kolb (2015) stress that movements create experiences, and become the basis for reflecting and acting, hence movements encompass more than gestures or physical expressions, as sensations, emotions and thoughts are organised patterns of movements.

Experiencing requires movement and sensitivity to embodied sensations, and furthermore movements create an embodied existence, which supports the ability to comprehend change and to gain a heightened sense of affect. Reflecting observations requires a break from action and a connection to one's internal awareness using a receptive mindset to identify sensations, images, feelings and thoughts (Sigel 2010 in Peterson, DeCato and Kolb, 2015). If the movement is integrated in the person's awareness, the perception of the world and the self will change, and furthermore the ability to observe and reflect will be more powerful, if the person observes others nonverbal communication (Mehrabian 1971).

Movements also help to express new thoughts, and integrate new information and experience into new neural networks, and are vital to all actions by which a person embody and express learning and understanding of himself (Hannafor 2005 in Peterson, DeCato and Kolb, 2015). Peterson, DeCato and Kolb (2015) hypothesize "*that when a person is able to move using a full palette of movements, he may be more flexible in both movement and learning, and will be able to adopt an integrated approach to learning*" (p. 236).

Findings in the LIP project, where movements have been integrated in the art-based experiments, document that there is a strong connection between experiments and reflections when leaders use body and space in their experiments, i.e. when bodily movements and not planned thoughts are basis for the reflection. Hence, the leaders' experiments with spacious and bodily movements also seem to be connected to the potential for transformative learning, what this article will discuss later.

## **An outline for new learning theories**

As this article has argued it is not sufficient for leaders to use cognitive based learning methods if they prefer transformative actions. First, there will be a brief review of theories about aesthetic leadership (Turner 1969/1979, Schechner 1988/2003, Hansen, Ropo and Sauer 2007, Taylor 2011, Ladkin 2010, Ladkin and Tayler 2010); especially a notion of the role of the audience will be unfolded. Next, there will be a presentation of how the concept of liminality (rites de passage) makes it possible to create transformative learning (Turner 1969 in Hawkins and Edwards 2015). Finally, a short review of alternative concepts of reflections and aesthetic reflexivity that make it possible to deal with a complexity in the organisational practice. All together the theories present a new paradigm for transformative learning in organisations where welfare-in-the-making is needed.

### ***Art-based experiments affect sensations and creativity***

Art-based experiments seem to have a potential in relation to transformative learning. The aesthetic movements make performance possible as a play in relation to a daily practice, i.e. a concept for aesthetic movements has been developed by Richard Schechner (1988/2003) and is based on the work he did with the anthropologist Richard Turner in the 1980'ies (Schechner 2013). Furthermore, aesthetic performance can be seen as a moving turn, e.g. space thinking, where the bodily performance actualises the potential of the virtual (Massumi 2001). The space thinking actualises a movement of the virtual where everything might happen, although the action has still no meaning.

McKenzie (2001) argues, that it is important to reactualise the performance aspect in management in order to get more creativity in management, and he argues that performance should be seen as becoming instead of being, to get closer to how learning and feedback processes could be organised. Thus he also emphasises the focus on micro-movements in organisations instead of macro-movements to be able to affect sensations and awareness of the present need for changes.

Thus, a method that opens creativity and actualises the potential in the organisational context, based on feedback loops, is essential for transformative learning (Schechner 1988/2003). As Turner and Schechner point out, feedback informs both the social drama and the aesthetic drama, but first when there is liminality between the two. The experiments in the LIP project are based on theories from e.g. Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, and to a broad extend the methods in the project have been developed based of the flow between the everyday social drama and the art-based aesthetic playing with problems and potentials:

*“Life itself now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now perform their lives, for the protagonists of a social drama, a “drama of living” has been equipped by aesthetic drama with some of their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes and ideological perspectives. Human beings learn through experience though all too often they repress painful experience, and perhaps the deepest experience is through drama; not only through social drama or stage drama alone but in the circulatory or oscillatory of their mutual and incessant modification”* (Turner in Schechner 1988/2003: 216).

### ***Continuous relationship between social and aesthetic drama***

The LIP project has used an aesthetic model from Turner and Schechner, as mentioned above. The model has been useful in organising a continuous flow between the social drama, understood as breach, crisis, redressive processes, and the aesthetic drama, understood as a place for playing; the model depicts an ongoing and never-ending process, where the social dramas affect aesthetic dramas and vice versa; some actions are visible or hidden, some are actual or virtual. The relationship in the model, might according to Turner be seen as a horizontal numeral 8 or an infinity symbol  $\infty$  (Schechner 2013: 76)



*Poula Helth presents the aesthetic model, December*

2014

The aesthetic experiments in the LIP project take place in the leaders' daily life, not on a stage, but as emerging interventions in organisations. The experiments contain both conscious and embodied responses to events, which is fundamental if leaders want to achieve a level of actuality and do here-and-now performances of the there-and-then events:

*Small real actions are substituted for big fictional semblances.... The real actions are themselves emblems and symbols. However, when the theatrical frame imposes strongly it permits the enactment of aesthetic dramas.... (Schechner 2013: 190)*

According to Schechner, the aesthetic drama imposes the social drama in a way where people involved in the play recognize the actions as a "playing with", which they prefer and like better than trying to change the social drama from the inside, as a "real doing of". It is better to play the real, and to make it clear during an aesthetic form than trying to do everything real in a social form.

Schechner stresses that "playing with" make transformation possible when people use the theatre's mode of performing, as a way to experiment with and ratify change (Schechner 2013:191). Schechner uses three forms of transformation in relation to the impact on the audience: 1) the story, 2) the rearrangement of the performers body/mind and 3) the changes of the audience. The LIP project includes all three forms of transformation as a technique called the "audience wheel" to enhance transformative learning in an organisational practice.

### **The audience wheel – an orchestrated reflection practice**

Transformative learning presupposes a separation of the role of the actor (the performer) and the role of the audience, and thus different positions as actor and audience. This has led to the concept "The audience wheel", a learning technique based on findings in the LIP project. The person who performs the story (the drama) is only temporary transformed, whereas transformations of the audience are permanent:

*The performance as distinct from the drama is social, and it is at the level of performance that aesthetic and social drama converges. The function of the aesthetic drama is to do for the consciousness of the audience what social drama*

*does for its participants, i.e. providing a place for and means of transformation*  
(Schechner 2013: 193)

It is the aesthetic drama and “playing with” the social drama (the story) that compels a transformation of the spectators view by affecting their senses against enactment of events. Hence, the separation of roles and the set up as theatre based on the potential to reflect on events rather than flee from them or intervene in them, make the transformation happens. In other words, it is the play that awakes reflection and thus makes transformation of the audience possible.

Reflections from the audience during a play are also known from the narrative therapist Michael White (2000) who developed praxis for a definitional ceremony. In this praxis the therapist guides a structured reflection in a group of witnesses, intending to engage these outsider-witnesses (audience) in a telling of some of the significant stories of their lives. White uses thus a sense of drama in his therapeutic work (Furlong, 2008). The LIP project also gained from White’s model for a definitional ceremony, especially the structured reflection, that has had an impact in a therapeutically context.

In the LIP project, experiments combined with structured learning processes are essential. In the beginning of the project, the researchers were not aware of the impact of structured learning processes and the importance of the different roles of actor and observer (Kolb 1984, Schechner 1988/2003). Later in the project, the researchers started to explore a learning model with changing roles: the leader, who tells about experiments in his own practice, a reflecting team as “audience” who listens with their bodies and a reflecting team who listens to the perspectives of the leader’s experience, and finally the leader in a role as audience.

First, when the research team observed the impact of the different roles and techniques during the reflection, it became clear that a more structured learning process, with rearrangement of the participants in learning sessions was necessary, to get an impact of the reflection. The reflection from the audience created transformative learning and caused changes in leader’s attitudes and actions in the organisational practice.

In the following there will first be a description of the liminality used for transformative learning (Hawkins and Edwards 2015), secondly a description of the learning process called aesthetic reflection (Sutherland 2012), with the intention of providing a basis for exploring learning in alternative ways.

### ***Liminality creates transformation***

Hawkins and Edwards draw on the liminal aspects of learning activities in relation to threshold concepts based on the anthropological literature, from which the concept of liminality originated, to offer a richer and more complex understanding of the links between the concept of liminality and learning (Hawkins and Edwards 2015).

The concept of liminality, defined by Turner (1979, 1987), is as a state of between-ness, applying to individuals on the verge of a different stage of being (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015: 26).



Hawkins and Edwards describe liminal moments as moments in and out of time during which a transition occurs, and where the individual is transported from one state of being to another (Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960 in Hawkins and Edwards, 2015: 26).

There are according to Gennep (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015: 26) three phases in a liminal ritual:

1. *Separation*, in which the individuals are *symbolically* detached from their previous role in the social structure and from related social ties and conventions.
2. *Limen* or threshold, a state of transition which Turner (1969) describes as a cultural realm that has few of the attributes of the previous or coming state, in which the liminal subject is 'passenger'.
3. *Reincorporation*, in which the transition is consummated, often ceremoniously, and the subject regains a stable, usually higher identity with clearly defined roles and obligations in relation to others

It is important to understand what liminality in reality is; a concept the LIP project found it difficult to explain to the participants in the project, particularly, because the concept might be considered too abstract. Although Turner (1969) suggests that, a liminal space offers its occupants the possibility to engage in transformative practices: trying out, questioning and adopting or rejecting new identities, he also regards liminality as a time of enchantment when anything *might* happen (Turner, 1979: 465). As such, the learning process is a sacred place in time and space, a kind of symbolic 'social limbo', loaded with promise, potential and the unknown (Hawkins and Edwards 2015: 27); a ritual that opens up for 'the new and not yet possible' to observe.

The observation in the LIP project has been that a not-knowing and open minded position requires a great courage; standing in the open, as the liminal space requires, and not knowing what is appearing on the other side of "rites de passage", i.e. a bodily exercise as grounding and centering, as the LIP project has practiced to separate the leaders in the learning sessions from their initial mode, might be frightening. However, the grounding as the first step to a liminal phase often opened up and led to major changes in the leaders' perception of their leadership.

The maze of threshold concepts and the impact of threshold, as the liminal space creates, depend on the leaders' subjective experiences and approach to learning, and their ability and willingness to manage uncertainty. In the LIP project, the leaders sometimes experience doubts and uncertainty in relation to the organisational practice, i.e. when political and economic concepts challenge their intentions of being good leaders. This happens when they are challenged from an 'outside and in' perspective. The importance is that the liminal space seems to enable the leader's view from an individualistic to a collective view on leadership, i.e. a potential to transform identities facilitated by threshold concepts in the liminal space.

The occurrence of doubt and insecurity, because of the liminal phase, is not obvious for the LIP project, since experiments often have a playing and joyful purpose. However, transformation also in a playful mode takes place when the leader learns from experiences through a concept of

liminality. When the leader, working with his problem in the aesthetic drama as a play, experiences that everything might happen, he also experiences a change in his identity, when he and others are affected, and the change in their bodies, attitudes and mood become clear and visible. The liminality as a part of a structured learning process seems to offer leaders an inside and out experience that affect transformative learning, often in a joyful atmosphere.

### ***Aesthetic reflexivity and transformative learning***

The key point in the following is that reflection is necessary if leaders want organisational changes, especially because the core of welfare is constantly in transformation, and the dominating discourse is, that management in organisations need to be more and more oriented towards 'in-the-making'. Sutherland works with the concept of reflexivity and refers to Cunliffe (Sutherland 2012: 38), who explains that reflexivity means complexifying thinking or experience by exposing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities; whereas reflection according to Cunliffe is often seen as a systematic process concerned with simplifying experience.

Thus, Sutherland uses the definition aesthetic reflexivity as a concept that arises from considerations of the pressures on the self in high modern societies where the human being has to be highly adaptive and constantly challenged by new perspectives and circumstances, as described by Giddens (1991) and Sennett (1998). He explains reflexivity as connected to the notion of aesthetic leadership:

*'aesthetic reflexivity is a mode of dealing with such perspectival and circumstantial incongruities by appropriating the aesthetics of an experience, i.e. scenic properties, feelings and sensory-emotional characteristics, as means to managing the increasing complexities of life and work (Sutherland, 2012:4)*

Aesthetic reflexivity challenges individuals to mobilize the aesthetics of experience to develop self-knowledge, where they understand how they act in relation to social contexts. The art-based leadership in the LIP project has as such been inspired from Sutherland. A finding in the project is how participants in group-sessions have developed reflexive capabilities, after they have reflected on aesthetic experiences as objects of reflection associated with configuring themselves as leaders in different contexts; and furthermore the leaders understand how these experiences are mobilized to inform future practice.

Furthermore, when the aesthetic reflexivity is the creation of knowing through the appropriation and transformation of the sensory-emotional characteristics of experiences, this form of reflection tends to encourage learning at transformative levels (Gray in Sutherland, 2012). Sutherland argues that reflecting *with* an object has more potential than reflecting *on*, because reflect 'on' an object makes the object static, immutable and isolated, whereas reflecting 'with' an object, opens up associations of the art-based experience.

## The concept of learning in practice

The transformative learning only seems to occur if it is framed; the framing could be as in the LIP project, organised around two different reflection foci: first, the simplifying, affective based reflection, second the complexity oriented reflection.

In sessions in the LIP project, the research team asks two different groups of leaders to reflect on the story from a leader. The story comprises experiences from experiments in the leader's organisation. The first group observes and senses the story as a bodily sensing of sounds, visual impressions, atmosphere and movements; the second group reflects on the organisational perspectives of the story, a kind of reflexivity that reinforces the story. Both reflection sessions are orchestrated and in the research project, guided by the research team. As a last part of every learning process, the leader who has told about his experiments is asked to reflect on, what affected him, and what he has learned.

The most important finding is related to the organising of the so-called 'audience wheel', where any person or group who reflects has to become an audience. The concept "the audience wheel" is not only based of the separation of the different roles of the actor and the observer (Schön 1983); more important is the impact of learning in groups and teams as 'audience' who observes and listens to a performance (a story, a play etc.). These groups and teams will be transformed, as Schechner (1988/2003) expresses *playing with the social drama and the separation of roles, compels a transformation of the spectators by affecting their senses.*

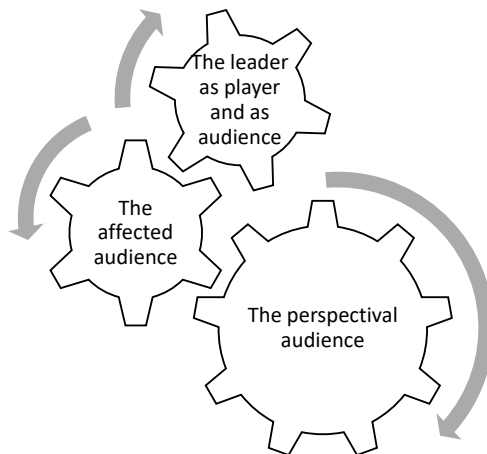


Figure 1: The audience wheel

The research team in the LIP project has often guided a session as audience wheel as follows:

- a. *The research team asks a leader, to sit down and tell about his experiment. Simultaneously the rest of the group split up in two minor groups, with different listening foci.*
- b. *The first minor group senses and listens to the story with their bodies and feels how they get affected by the story. Afterwards the reflection group tells what they have sensed during the storytelling.*
- c. *The other minor group listens to the first group's sense based reflections. After the first minor group have finished their reflections, the second group expresses a complex reflexion on the potential that emerges through the reflection. They also reflect on the future perspectives in relation to leadership in the organisational practice.*
- d. *The leader – now in the role as audience - gathers what he heard from the two different kinds of reflections in relation to the potential of his performing as leader; i.e. what might change his leadership in the future; how he will continue to experiment intending to create a continuously transformative learning.*

The art-based methods that according to Sutherland (2012) might create memorable objects for aesthetic self-reflexivity and lead to learning outcomes that inform management and leadership practice in the future, have been embedded in the LIP project. Furthermore the LIP project also provided a method useful for rehearsal in groups of leaders working with reflection and reflexivity as learning concepts in their organisational practice.

Learning processes embedded in organization are, as observed in the LIP project, a realistic concept tailored to an organisational context. The more the research team has used reflection during collective organised activities, the more leaders get familiar with reflection concepts and learning processes as a way to transform their performance in an organisational context that is changing.

### ***An actual case of transformative learning***

The methods used to frame the reflection on the leaders' experiments in the LIP project are described above. In the following, the case from the leader Carl is presented.

Carl, the leader at a home for psychic disabled people told his story during a learning session in one of the houses in a big municipal institution for disabled citizens, a place located in the countryside far away from the city. Besides Carl, there are five leaders and two researchers as a research team attending the session. The research team is guiding the learning process with Carl that lasts approximately half an hour.

The research team always actively involves participants in the learning process in order to unfold the process as a living sensing event. The event started with a collective grounding exercise, to separate the participants in the session from what they were just doing, to create a liminal space.



Carl has brought this picture to illustrate his story

Carl tells his story: *It is about Anita, she is one of our physic-disabled clients living here in our house for some years. Everybody tended to talk in a very bad way about her, because she was always herself negative and reluctant. The professionals started to give up, I noticed. Then I implemented something new. It was an experiment, however I did not know what would be the impact. I placed a large paper on the wall in staff room and asked everybody to put a yellow post note on the paper every time they talked to Anita. After some weeks, I observed a change. Most people working here became less negative. Best of all: I noticed that Anita did her work every day (she had some kind of sheltered job outside the house); she also became more visible. Nevertheless, still two from the staff were negative, and I wondered why.* Carl finished the story making two body sculptures, the first showing the care for Anita and the second the recumbence from the two staff member. The body sculptures have been a technique used in relation to experiments, intending to get the bodily movements more visible and clear for all participants in the learning sessions, and to create sensations from the experiment.

While listening to Carl, the first minor group sensed the story and observed what emerged in him and them. The reflection started with a mirroring of Carl's body sculptures, which had affected the group members; they explained: *When we did the braiding of Anita's hair (mirroring Carl) we felt the strong empathy, Carl has for his clients. It was a strong feeling!*

The first group continued the reflection: *We feel the joy seeing Anita work and becoming happier. We see Carl grounded on his chair; he is telling the story about Anita in a relaxed way. The more he tells, the more he moves his hands. He makes deep breaths during the storytelling. We feel Carl's care and desire for the wellbeing of Anita, however we wonder about the two employees' recumbence that also affected Carl with doubts. We realize how much Carl's body sculpture affected us, and we really feel Carl is caring for Anita very strongly. Good to sense the new view at Anita from most of the employees. We would ask the two employees why they are so negative. Their attitudes seem to influence Carl a lot.*

The research team now guided the second reflection group influenced by Carl's story and the reflections from the first reflection group.

The second group's reflection: *It has a spill over effect when you meet a negative person - it affects us in a bad way. We recognize the mood Carl is talking about in his frustration of the two negative*

*employees. If he uses a different approach and a different reaction, we think that something else will happen in relation to the two employees. We have ourselves experienced how Anita opens up and wanted to show us her room. She has changed her attitudes and seems more open minded toward other people. It makes us reflect on, how we can take the clients' perspective in the future. Actually, it is the simplest thing to meet another person with a positive attitude. So why do we not just do it! There is a perspective for all of us thinking differently about our clients. One should not be so stuck. It must be the creative performance, which opens up for something completely different, also for the way we see ourselves. As leaders, we must be more respectful to people who succeed with their job in a new way. This is true both when we talk about employees and clients. The most important management mission is to orchestrate and facilitate the process, and show that we mean what we say.*

Carl's final response (in a role as audience): *I will ask the two negative employees why they still have this attitude. I am happy because of the feedback I have got from you. It is important for all of us to construe a new story about Anita. Moreover, as a leader I have to see staff members who have already changed their attitudes towards Anita in a different way. It has been a very strong reflection. I learned a lot about myself.*

### ***Analysis of the case***

In the first reflection the story affects the audience in a bodily sensing way, when they listen to Carl's experiences from his experiment with yellow post it. The use of body sculptures mobilizes the listening in the group (in the role as audience) in a very intense way. The story about the experiment, now separated from Carl's daily context, gave the audience an important condition for a liminal space, when the research team guided the learning process. In the first group-reflection there was an ongoing feedback between the social and the aesthetic spheres, i.e. a moving reflection *between* Carl's experiment in his daily context (the social drama) *and* the affects emerging in the presence as art-informed actions guided through a liminal space onto the aesthetic drama (the mirroring). The instructed role as audience gave room for sensations as the affective reflection on the Carl's story took place. Furthermore, the reflection created an object for the second reflection in the other group, who had listened to the first group's sensing reflection.

The second group's reflection or rather reflexivity can be seen as the last step in the liminal space, where a reincorporation takes place. The reflection is a going on as a reflexivity that includes and opens up to the new and not yet possible. When the reflection happens from an alternative position and partly is based on reflection on the effects caused by conflicts in Carl's situation, the reflection creates new perspectives on Carl's story. Now the reflection also seems to get closer to the organisational perspective, and not only the perspective of a single leader.

The reflections on the impact of the dilemma in Carl's story are seemingly not any longer an individual problem. It is something that moves the perspective to an organisational view, and emphasizes the role of the leader as belonging to a collective – to an organisational context. The reflection has a transformative impact that also continues to affect other participant in the session.

However, first when the reflection is structured with different audience groups and the reflection mission become clear, it is possible to create transformative learning.

Carl's final reflection, now in a role as audience, based on his experiences (the story), then the body sculptures and affective reflection, and finally the reflexivity that opens up for the new and not yet possible, made Carl regain a new identity through the transformative learning process.

Observation from the research team: *The two reflection groups have been accustomed to this kind of reflections; it was the third time we guided this kind of orchestrated reflection. The first reflection group started with what they felt affected Carl, but then we asked them to listen more carefully with the body and tell about their own affections. This part of the reflection was not easy. The group preferred to use their heads and talk about what they thought and not what they sensed. Sometimes we make short stops during this kind of sessions and ask the reflection group to make a short grounding exercise; this often releases the affections.*

*During this session, we asked the reflection groups to sit in small circles when they reflect, in order to keep the concentration inside the group. All too often, we have observed, that a reflection group focuses on what is going on outside the team and forget to concentrate on the object of their reflection. We noticed in Carl's session a deep concentration; people were talking slowly but very clear. As researchers, we got affected when the reflection was going on. This happens quite often, we take part in the process; we are included in welfare-in-the-making.*

### **The value of transformative learning**

The concept for learning in practice, especially the organised sessions with separated roles as actors and audience, seems to be a new technique that has an impact on transformative learning. In transformative learning, there is a transaction between person and world. This focus on creation of leadership as learning in practice, means a departure from our common cognitive, rational perspective on learning; a person who truly learns exits transformed, not just of mind but of heart, eye, and body (Girod et al 2010).

Transformative learning is, as this article has argued, based on a combination of learning processes as structured, orchestrated sessions and aesthetic art-based experiments. At least 6 different elements seem to have influenced transformative learning in the leaders' organisational practice, in a co-creation between researchers and practioners:

1. Experimental learning based on the aesthetic drama (Schechner 2013) and aesthetic reflexion (Sutherland 2012) are ingredients in new learning theories that embrace not only cognitive learning methods but bodily embedded learning methods useful for creation of transformation of leaders' practice
2. Learning processes are organised as a reflection ceremony, hence firstly the liminality, secondly 'the audience wheel' are new elements in a learning technique that has the potential create transformative learning in currently changing contexts

3. The liminal space is a core element in a learning process, where the aesthetic drama affects and transforms the audience, as convergence of the social drama and the aesthetic drama happens through movements of body and mind in a guided reflection with changing roles as players and audience
4. Transition of identity and transporting from one state of being to another (Van Gennep, 1960, Turner 1969, in Hawkins and Edwards, 2015), happens when experiences in an organisational context question leaders' assumptions about individualistic perspectives on leadership – and transform them to collective perspectives
5. Reflections guided through liminal spaces, transform leadership from an individualistic to a collective mind-set of leadership when learning sessions are based on bodily experiments that open to the new and not yet visible in changing organisational contexts
6. However, transformative learning first has an impact, when the leader changes his routines and performances in the daily practice, and the leader senses the potential of collective steps to an emerging future that frames in-the-making as event based leadership

The perspective of learning in practice, based on the LIP project, could be a new co-creation of transformation and welfare-in-the making between education systems and human resource departments in organisations aiming new forms for transformative learning in organisational contexts *and* in leadership learning programs. The notion of transfer is not a sufficient perspective of in-the-making of new welfare, as changing contexts will be the new normal in the future. Thus transformative learning will be necessary to develop, and new technologies of learning, i.e. a technique as the audience wheel, will have to find a way in co-creation between education, organisations and research. Not only leaders at master programs but also leaders and their organisations, customers and citizens are interested in transformative learning that open for the new and not yet possible.

However, research about learning from a transformative, aesthetic perspective includes seeing the world differently. What follows is what also Girod et al (2010) pointed out, an extensive study testing the efficacy of a pedagogical framework rooted in teaching and learning for transformative, aesthetic experience against the more common, and well-established cognitive, rational learning perspective.

*We still have a way to go; actually, we are first at the beginning.*

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## **A learning design to handle dilemmas in aesthetic based leadership**

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## **Abstract**

This article draws on the author's empirical study of how leaders handle emerging dilemmas when they experiment with aesthetic performance. When leaders experience that dilemmas grow into dichotomies and double bind when doing the aesthetics, a specific collective based learning design can prevent this development as it leads to a dialectic view on dilemmas and a consciousness of the impact of aesthetic performance in the organisation. My empirical study has explored how leaders can work with dilemmas in aesthetic based experiments in the organisation, when they include a learning design based on reflection, reflexivity and liminality. Through this learning design, leaders can make dilemmas productive and not destructive.

## **Keywords**

Aesthetic performance, dilemmas, dichotomies, double bind, learning design, reflection and reflexivity, conscious learning

## **Introduction**

The research presented in this article, is based on empirical research in the project "Learning in practice – a way to better leadership"<sup>1</sup> (LIP). It offers an alternative and critical approach to leadership development (Edwards et al. 2013), as it explores how management learning as aesthetic performance may create new potentials in the organisation, although leaders, as they sometimes do, experience dilemmas as an obstacle in their organisational practice, when they work with aesthetic performance (Collinson 2014). By dilemma in relation to aesthetic based leadership, I mean difficult choices when leaders have to prefer one approach to the other in the organisational practice.

In this article, I will explore how leaders, when they work with aesthetic performance, can handle dilemmas in leadership through a collective based learning design, which has been found to prevent worsening of dilemmas into dichotomies and double bind. Hence, learning processes seem to discontinue development of situations where organisational resistance sticks leaders when they do aesthetic performance.

### ***The empirical research***

As a background of this article, headlines of the empirical research in LIP will be presented below.

From 2013, I had the opportunity to study management learning inside 10 companies in Denmark, through 81 managers' experiments in their organisations. Leaders made experiments based on aesthetic performance both as individuals and as collectives of leaders. The individual experiments were based on the leaders' initiatives, whereas the collective settings were planned and guided of a research team, a team with professionals from art, body therapy, coaching and academia. Thus, the collective settings were found to be better as a basis for studying leaders' learning in practice than the individual based experiments. This was because the collective settings took form of workshops where the leaders participating in LIP got the opportunity to learn and rehearse the aesthetic performance and reflect on their experiences with the aesthetics in the same event as the aesthetic performance, and always in collaboration with the researchers.

The aesthetic performance was based on a specific method, expressed as a flow between leaders' problems in the so-called social drama and their playing with the problem in an aesthetic drama, where body, thought and space were the three most important elements to opening leaders to their problems in practice. Many leaders experienced a transformation of their practice after the collective settings and continued the aesthetic performance in their organisational practice. However, some of the leaders did not find the courage to continue their experiments with aesthetic performance, and this is the background of the study presented and discussed in this article.

The empirical study in LIP based on action research (McNiff and Whitehead 2011) and on ethnographic studies (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011) intended to explore how leaders can transform their practice through aesthetic performance. These research methods were found to bring the researcher close to leadership in the organisational context, which was necessary in my study of leaders' learning in practice.

### ***Why learning in practice***

Management practices are normally not directly accessible, observable, measurable or definable; rather, they are hidden, tacit and often linguistically inexpressible in a propositional sense, and there is not a tradition for management learning based on an organisational practice (Corradi et al 2010: 267). Previously, most studies of learning have referred to management education and learning experiences have normally been associated with teaching situations (Mack 2013, 2015).

However, to study leaders' learning in their own organisational practice challenged me to find new methods in order to create a practically based learning concept. This was the background of developing a model for aesthetic performance through interventions in the leaders' practice, which then also created a basis for studying leaders' learning in practice.

### ***Studies of dilemmas associated with aesthetic performance***

The purpose of the aesthetic performance is to open the hidden potential, although the potential of the event is often constrained (Thrift 2008: 114). When leaders experience that resistance saps their energy, aesthetic performance often awakens powerful emotions. The feeling of energy loss may occur even when the leaders are positive about the aesthetics as a new experimental method in their leadership.

Although the examples of non-successful use of aesthetic performance were not many, some leaders experienced dilemmas to the aesthetics in their practice, which led to analysing of leaders' reactions when they experienced non-successful situations. In the data from LIP, I found dilemmas, dichotomies and double bind that challenged leaders' ability to transform their organizational practice. Thus, aesthetic performance will not necessarily lead to the transformation leaders want, when they do aesthetic performance, because it will be random whether the aesthetic experience is an isolated experience or leads to transformation of the leader's practice.

At the beginning of LIP, the aesthetic method was not combined with organised learning processes.

This made me reflect on the impact of an individual focus on leaders' practice, underpinned of a solid background for the empirical research, based on theories of aesthetic performance (Edwards 2015, Hansen, Ropo and Sauer 2007, Ladkin 2008, 2010, Ladkin and Taylor 2010, McKenzie 2001, Schechner 1985, 1988/2003, 2013, Sinclair 2005, Springborg 2010, Taylor 2012, 2013, Taylor and Ladkin 2009). My focus was the aesthetic approach that recognises unique sensory perceptions through seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching the materiality of organisations and touching on people's feelings, desires, tastes, talents, and passions (Strati, 2007).

The isolated aesthetic experiences among the individual leaders were seemingly the reason why some leaders met resistance and barriers in the organisation when they tried to use aesthetic performance in practice, and I realised the need for the researcher's guidance and framing of learning processes in an organisational context.

When I found examples of resistance against aesthetic performance, I started to explore how reactions towards leaders' experiments with aesthetic performance was influenced of the leader's context, relations to others and use of learning methods in conjunction with aesthetic performance. I looked for collective and not only individual organised learning processes in connection with leaders' aesthetic performance, including liminality, reflection and reflexivity (Kolb 1984, Schechner 1988/2003, Sutherland 2013, Hawkins and Edwards 2015).

My intention was to go beyond different conflicting issues in the challenging situation leaders sometimes feel, when they work with aesthetic performance in organisational contexts and experience resistance.

### ***Research questions***

The knowledge of interest was to explore leaders' practice, when they did not transform practice, as they wanted. In the empirical data from LIP, I found that most leaders did prevent dilemmas from growing into dichotomies and double bind, when they learned to integrate aesthetic performance in a framed learning process. Through examples from my empirical study I will explore

1. How leaders handle dilemmas that emerges in aesthetic based leadership
2. Why a specific learning design in LIP has proved to manage dilemmas in leaders' practice

I will explore how leaders handle dilemmas when they move from the pure sense of the aesthetic performance as individuals to an experience of aesthetic based events through collective learning processes (Kirkeby 2005, Deleuze 1990). As such, I will focus on the impact of a collective based learning design connected to aesthetic performance.

Furthermore, developing the Model of aesthetic embedded transformation (MAET) and the learning technique 'The Audience Wheel' as we did in LIP, requires a learning practice, which is not based on solely an academic approach to learning and reflection (Cunliffe, 2002). Thus, I realised it was important to frame the research process in organisational contexts as a reflexive dialogic practice, through engagement of the researcher in the process and building bridges between management practice and academia (Corlett 2013). This point of view was necessary as



a starting point of studying how leaders handle dilemmas that occur when they do aesthetic performance.

Below, this article will firstly give background of a learning design including the notions of reflection, reflexivity and liminality. Secondly, the article will present dilemma, dichotomy and double bind as factors that in different ways influences leaders' aesthetic performance. Thirdly, three examples from LIP will be the basis for an exploration of how leaders manage resistance when they do aesthetic performance in their organisational context. Fourthly, the article continues analysing the impact of leaders work with the aesthetics in the organisation through a learning design. Fifthly, I discuss the potential of conscious learning, when leaders use the aesthetics in an organisational context, although they meet resistance.

### **Learning design aimed at leaders' learning in practice**

Based on empirical findings in LIP I will unfold how learning of aesthetic performance in an organisational context is dependent on a framed, guided learning design, and that learning processes integrated in aesthetic performance may actualise potentials in relation to dilemmas in the organisation.

To unfold the background of the overall learning design, I will review different theoretical elements in the design, firstly the meaning of collective learning processes, secondly the role of the researcher, thirdly the notion of first reflection and reflexivity, fourthly the notion of liminality, which all together is the basic elements in the learning design.

#### ***Collective learning processes***

Learning in practice is based on learning processes in groups (Kolb 1984, Lave and Wenger 1991, Peterson, DeCato and Kolb 2015), and is related to organising a learning process whereby any person or group who reflects has to become an audience separated from the performer (Helth, 2016). The learning process consists of a shift of performer and audience in a so-called "audience wheel" concept that is reflected in groups with changing roles of the actor and the observer (Schön 1983).

In LIP the leaders' experienced that reflection based on aesthetic performance through affections of the performance and of the potential of the performance, opened their perspectives towards organisational issues and strategies. This might be because the aesthetics reflect a practical understanding of the organisational life. When organised as a collective reflection in organisations, not only as first order reflection but also as a second order reflexivity, the technique disrupts and change a the-taken-for-granted approach and leads to new perspectives in the organisation. Together reflection and reflexivity may entail transformation of leaders' practice, as I explore in this article.

#### ***The researcher's role***

The researcher's role in the action research in LIP has been involvement in the processes in a participatory action research where people meet other people and interact in groups of people who join each other in changing practices different from the researcher as an external observer of the process (Kemmis and McTaggart 2008, McNiff and Whitehead 2011). The researcher's role has

been double as participating in the process and as judging what kind of methods would be appropriate. However, the participation was not as observer, but as guiding processes, which made the research process different from many other action research processes.

To guide aesthetic events the researcher needs authority over here-and-now situations (Tomkins and Ulus, 2016), as the researcher in action research will have to conduct the sessions, and then sometimes direct, more than observe, the research process. Too many experiential learning (EL) processes have been over-psychologised and under-facilitated (Reynolds in Tomkins and Ulus, 2016: 170), thus depriving the learning process of the joy of the processes and excitement of bodies and ideas.

In LIP, the role of the researcher was guidance of collective settings in leaders' organization, as the action research made this role necessary for the learning process. An important finding was, that the more clearly the research team marked the learning sessions the better the learning process was carried out, as the leaders now understood what kind of performance and reflection they were expected to do. The guidance is connected to liminality as unfolded below and an important part of the framing of the learning process.

### ***Reflection***

The empirical research in LIP has integrated studies of reflection, to understand how leaders identify and learn from events in their own practice. However, most studies of reflection are concerned with events that refer to a cognitive process, through which individuals reflect how they are confronted with a critical learning point that demands a change in their thoughts and actions (Lindh and Thorgren 2015, Kolb 2014, Cope and Watts 2000, Taylor and Thorpe 2004, Cope 2003, Dewey 1910).

Reflection has a central position in theories of learning (Reynolds and Vince, 2004) and is often associated with theoretical contemplation and related to routinized problem-solving (Cope, 2003) As such, reflection does not lead to an awareness of critical and complex situations which require responses that reframe understandings and engage in new actions (Grint 2005, 2010).

The potential of reflection on aesthetic performance in an organisational context will be different, as the sensing caused by the aesthetics reflects a practical understanding of the organisational life (Høystrup 2004, Jordan 2010). This raises the questions why the reflective practitioner should no longer be understood as an individualised subject (Schön 1983) but has to be associated with the collective reflection within organisations (Jordan et al., 2010; Raelin, 2009; Reynolds and Vince, 2004) and why the organisational concepts of reflection should be recognised at different levels, i.e. individual, group, and organisation (Matsuo 2012).

Learning processes in LIP have been framed actions through both individual and collective embodied reflections and critical reflexivity (Argyris and Schön 1996, Schön 1983, Sutherland 2013).

### ***Reflexivity***

The notion of reflection is often based on individual psychological theories, whereas reflexivity is based on social theories and is a more critical tool than reflection (Sutherland 2013, Cunliffe 2002, Gray 2007). Reflexivity is an aspect of reflection, where we disrupt the-taken-for-granted assumption about knowledge and research, and might render the research process transparent in order to see the context in which the research is produced (McDonald, 2016). The notion of aesthetic reflexivity (Sutherland, 2013, DeNora, 1999) means that the circumstances of modern society compel the self to be highly adaptive (Giddens 1991).

Reflexivity means experiences by exploring contradictions, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities, and may embrace subjective understanding of reality in order to think more critically about the individual values and the effect of one's actions on others (Gray 2007: 497). As critical reflection, reflexivity focuses on collective, situated processes that help leaders to inquire into organisational practices (Reynolds, 1998). Furthermore, the critical reflection encourages learning at a deeper, transformative level (Mezirow, 1990, 2009, Taylor E. 2007, 2009).

As such, an aesthetic reflexivity deals with perspectival and circumstantial incongruities, by appropriating the aesthetics of experience to enable reflection on how we manage life's increasing complexity (Sutherland 2013: 9). However, I find there is a need for a connection between reflection and reflexivity as learning methods, which has not yet been exposed in relation to studies of management learning as both an ontological and an epistemological view of learning in managers' organisational practice is needed. This means a learning method that opens to sensing the subject itself, and reflecting on the event with the subject, and on the subject's objectification.

### ***Liminality***

In LIP, the liminality has been used as a ceremony guided by the researcher in sessions for groups of leaders, in order to entail a shift of leaders' performance in the aesthetic drama. As such, the liminality has actualised the potential in the everyday life, and transformed leaders' approach to their problems. Turner (1979) used the phrase "anti-structure of marking the liminality," which releases people from their roles and positions, and gives rise to experiences that create sustainable social structures (Stenner and Moreno, 2013: 21). What happens is that the limen ceremony firstly separates leaders from their daily practice, as LIP has named a social drama, before they experiment with aesthetic performance, in a so-called aesthetic drama. Later in the learning process, a new limen ceremony reintegrates the leaders and intends to transform their leadership in the daily practice. Examples of a limen ceremony are bodily grounding, breathing, 'time out', changes of 'scene' and bodily marking.

Liminality creates a liminal space that offers its occupants the possibility to engage in transformative practices, where anything *might* happen (Turner, 1979: 465). Thus, the learning process is a sacred place in time and space, a kind of symbolic 'social limbo', loaded with promise, potential and the unknown (Hawkins and Edwards 2015); a ritual that opens for 'the new and not yet possible' to observe and feel (Borg and Söderlund, 2015). What the liminality creates, in the concrete event, depends on the leaders' subjective experience and approach, and their ability and willingness to manage uncertainty, which is always one of the effects of liminality.

The liminality as a part of a framed learning process offered leaders an ‘inside and out’ experience, when they were able to sense what happened around them (Ladkin 2010). This happened after the separation from the normal daily contexts, which led to transformative learning, often in a joyful atmosphere.

### Exploring non-successful experiences

When engaging in aesthetic performance, leaders may not think of the consequences in relation to the organisation, when they open up to new creativity. In general, leaders in LIP observed and experienced aesthetic performance as joyful; however, some leaders experienced non-successful situations as dilemmas, when they did aesthetic performance in their organisational context.

Often we do not separate the notions of dilemmas, dichotomies and double bind; however, I find it important to look into the linguistic interpretation of the words, as the notions have importance when exploring the non-successful examples in LIP. In short, the difference between the three notions is that dilemmas allow a choice between alternatives, whereas dichotomies do not, because there are two mutually exclusive logics at play, and the person always prefers one solution to the other. Maybe the person does not see the other option, or sees it as something negative. When dichotomies progress, the splitting between the two opposite logics will be more evident, and a situation of double bind may occur.



Dilemmas (from Greek *dilemma*: *di*- 'twice' + *lēmma* 'premise') occur in situations in which a difficult choice has to be made between two alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable (Oxford Dictionaries). A dilemma entails the opportunity for a choice between two different solutions.

Although leaders do not anticipate dilemmas as actual obstacles in the organisational environment when they experiment with aesthetic performance, leaders sometimes have to deal with dilemmas as shadows of aesthetic performance, if they are not handled, and then can grow into dichotomies and double bind. The phenomenon ‘shadow’ covers resistance, persistence, intensiveness and ignorance, and are often difficult to see and to analyse (Collinson 2014).

Dichotomies (from Greek *dikhotomia*: *dikho*- 'in two, apart' + *-tomia* 'cutting' and *temnein* 'to cut') mean division into two parts or classifications, when the situations are sharply distinguished or opposed. Dichotomies refer to a division of some kind into two groups and two mutually exclusive logics (English Dictionaries). Dichotomies are opposed or entirely different issues, which often lead to a splitting between two opposite approaches.

Double bind means a situation in which a person is confronted with two irreconcilable demands or a choice between two undesirable courses of action (Oxford Dictionaries). It represents an emotionally conflicting dilemma in which people receive opposite messages, and one message negates the other. This creates a situation in which a successful response to one message results in a failed response to the other (Wikipedia).

Double bind is a condition that locks leaders into opposing organisational positions (Bateson 1972, Hennestad 2007, Engeström and Sannino 2011) and represents a situation where conflicting messages occur. It is important to discern what message is being communicated; however, the individual is unable to comment upon the ambiguity in double bind. Organisational dynamics may emerge 'behind the back' of people in the organisation. Attempted changes can then be experienced as double bind, and people involved in double bind patterns become victims of the logic they attempt to alter (Hennestad 2007).

According to Engeström and Sannino (2011), actors in double bind, repeatedly feel pressing and unacceptable alternatives in their activity system, with seemingly no way out. These processes tend to get aggravated, and end up as crises with unpredictable and explosive consequences.

Below, I will explore how the notions of dilemma, dichotomy and double bind are handled of the leaders in the examples. Dilemmas are normal in leaders' practice and are, as we see in the examples possible to use in a positive way, although the leader will experience resistance from parts of the organisation. Dichotomies that are reflected in situations where the leaders may experience that there are conflicting issues at play in different parts of the organisation often lead to splitting choices. This will be the result of dichotomies, if the leader is not able to prevent a worsening of the situation. If this happens, the leader ends up in a double bind with a deadlocked situation, which is very difficult to break.

As such, there is a coherence between the three notions, a coherence the leader might not notice but as important for the leader's handling of situations with resistance in the organisation, when the leader starts doing aesthetic performance aimed at transformation of practice.

In the examples, I will include theories from the learning design aimed at transformation of leaders' practice, in order to explore how this learning design consisting of liminality, reflection and reflexivity will influence and help managers to a different view of the resistance that occurs when they start working with aesthetic performance. Furthermore, I will explore how different elements of the learning design makes leaders become conscious about the potential of working with aesthetic performance.

### **Three examples of leaders handling dilemmas, dichotomies and double bind**

Based on the theories about interventions in the action research and learning processes, I will present three illustrative examples from LIP of how leaders handle situations, in which they meet resistance in the organisation when they start to do aesthetic performance. I will base the exploration on three examples from LIP.

The three examples include the following stories:

1. The first example explores how leader A experiences resistance from the top manager towards her new way of performing in stressful situations and an incipient dichotomy she strongly feels. Leader A continues her experiments in spite of opposition from the top manager, as she currently receives strong support from a group of middle managers in the organisation, with whom she reflects on her experiences, and gets a consciousness of the potential of aesthetic performance.
2. The second example explores the difference leader B experiences between a negative atmosphere at a meeting and an aesthetic event, which opens her senses when she engages in aesthetic performance and reflects on her experiences in a group of colleagues. The experience intensifies leader B's perception of her own values as contrary to the company's strategies and leads to consciousness of the importance of aesthetic performance, and a realisation of being stuck in a double bind which makes her choose to leave the company.
3. The third example explores how leader C experiences a minor experiment, which transforms her subordinates' attitudes in relation to changes in the organisation. However, leader C in internal feedback with her manager denies she had been experimenting with aesthetic performance and she never reflects on her experiences with other leaders, but keeps the experiences as individualized experiments. Apparently, due to a double bind situation in the organization, and because she never becomes conscious of the value of aesthetic performance, leader C gets stuck and does not want to continue her aesthetic experiments.

#### **Example 1: Prevention of stress causes dilemmas**

***The aesthetic performance:** In December 2014, there was a meeting in the team, where leader A asked the employees to tell in words, and later in the form of a body sculpture, how their mood and perception of the present situation was. Some of the employees started to cry when they made the body sculptures. The event affected all around the table strongly. After a while, leader A had to stop the meeting and asked the employees to meet again the following day to reflect on the event. During next day's meeting, many of them expressed relief at talking about the stressful situation in the team, where some of the colleagues had been sick, because of stress. The event gave permission to show how they felt about the stressful situation that had dominated the team. The employees concluded that, without this experience, more colleagues would have gone off sick due to stress.*

***The impact of the learning process:** Leader A's experience was that her team had moved to become more cohesive, with greater mutual trust. She told the researchers that the event had started an avalanche of new actions; hence, there was a new focus on stress management, based on aesthetic methods inspired by her conscious learning of the value of aesthetic performance. Leader A was surprised at the dramatic but also at the positive reaction from the employees. She chose to continue the aesthetic performances, i.e. body sculptures, as she felt that the aesthetic performance was based on an ethical attitude from all participants in the meeting.*

For A, a higher level of confidence was one of the important impacts of managing the present situation with respect and openness. However, leader A experienced a dilemma caused by resistance from top management, who did not like the aesthetic performance she had orchestrated. It was not in accordance with good management practice to play with employees' feelings, the

manager said. However, if leader A was not permitted to use this kind of sensing, she feared she would end in a double bind.

Leader A considered abandoning future aesthetic performance; although she felt that, the new way of performing strengthened the mutual trust in the team. However, leader A's reflection made her understand the aesthetic experiments as a good way to prevent stress, because the employees now had an opportunity to open up about bottled-up issues. It would be difficult for her to follow the rules of the top management and, at the same time, continue to create a better workplace. Leader A became conscious about the dialectic view on aesthetic performance and was able to handle the dilemma between the top managers' negative attitude and the employees' expectation to continue the aesthetic events. They wanted to continue to communicate about their problems in the open-minded way that boosted confidence.

**My conclusion:** Leader A realized that her values about the employees' engagement could not be replaced with management control, as the top manager asked her to do. Leader A's consciousness about the dilemma arose through reflections in a group of colleagues, from where she also found the courage to continue the aesthetically based experiments in her team. I find that the learning process prevented leader A's dilemma from growing into dichotomies and double bind, as she became conscious about the dialectic views on the influence of aesthetic performance.

### **Example 2: Opposite and hidden values lead to dichotomies**

**The aesthetic performance:** *Before a collectively based session with two of us from the research team, we invited a group of leaders from the company to do a grounding exercise as a liminal ritual before the aesthetic performance. We asked the leaders to draw a common picture of their condition in the organisation. The event took place in silence. As a part of the learning process, I had a dialogue with the leaders and asked them to tell us what the picture symbolised. Here is some of what leader B said: "I experienced a 'crack' during our grounding exercise. This was a strong positive feeling in response to a bad experience I have had today. It was really contrary to what I came from - a conflictual meeting I had participated in earlier today. I went from something not sensing to something that affected me in a strong way. When the crack occurred, a new experience opened for something sensuously inside me. The mood inside me changed. I suddenly was able to feel something light, like a beach ball, moving on the waves. I began to see the others' pictures and discovered something releasing in our common drawing."*

*After the grounding session, leader B was able to observe how the current situation was expressed in the drawing they drew together. She felt relief and was happy for a moment. Moreover, leader B was surprised that she together with other leaders, was able to experiment in an event organised as a creative session, something she had never tried before. She went through a liminal grounding exercise that opened her senses before the aesthetic performance and later the reflection on the experience of the performance.*

**The impact of the learning process:** Most interesting for leader B was the strong feeling during the liminal grounding session that led to a reflection on the importance of the need for more trust in the organisation. This reflection gave a new consciousness on leadership in the organisation. For leader B it was deeply felt that this kind of aesthetic actions should be expanded throughout

the organisation, hence other leaders had to be aware of the positive impact of a bodily-embedded exercises. Because of the dialectic view, leader B did not find it possible to use the aesthetic performance in the daily life in the organisation, which is a business-oriented company with no tradition of learning processes. Leader B told that she strongly felt resistance from many other leaders in the organisation towards the values she stood for.

Leader B and her colleagues in LIP became conscious about aesthetic based methods that could help them to become more innovative, and they criticised the company's strategies for being sealed off from innovative behaviour. Most of B's other colleagues believed that they worked innovatively, but she felt this was a myth; at least this was what leader B questioned after she had sensed the crack and reflected on the conflicts between her and others' attitudes to the company's values. The organisational culture seemed to reject aesthetic methods that she and some other leaders had learned to use. The resistance was not open, it was hidden, and leader B found there were many dichotomies at play in this organisation. She is now working in another company.

**My conclusion:** When leader B experienced the crack, she was able to sense the contradiction between the resistance to new aesthetic methods and the company's desire to innovate. Because of the learning process in LIP, she became aware of many other leaders' aversion to new, innovative methods; although the top managers often said, they needed such methods. However, leader B became conscious about the potential of working with aesthetic performance, which made her strong enough to stand the resistance she experienced in the organisation and not end up in the trap of being caught in a dichotomy. She was able to use the dialectic view in the organisation to become more conscious of the impact of aesthetic performance.

### **Example 3: Denial of aesthetic experiences is caused by double bind**

**Aesthetic performance:** *A division of a big political organisation had to move to a new part of the building, and this kind of change always caused problems. Leader C decided to do something different in preparation for the relocation. She bought tulips before a department meeting and put them in small vases. She said nothing about the flowers during the meeting, and thought it was an innocent gesture, that would not hurt anybody.*

*The department had never purchased plants to decorate the offices, so the idea of the tulips was unusual. After the meeting, leader C gave the employees the flowers, one each. It seemed a funny attitude to give such a small gift. However, the event gave leader C an opportunity to observe the group of employees in new ways. She noticed a change in their attitudes to the relocation process and found it surprising how big impact a minor aesthetic intervention could have.*

**The impact of the learning process:** Leader C was astonished how influential a small, innocent intervention could be. The experimental approach made it possible to release the potential in the situation and the flower affected the employees in a positive way, which was most surprising for leader C. However, leader C never reflected on her experiences with others in the organisation, which I did not know until later. She kept the experience as an individualized experiment, and never took the experience into a collective based reflection.



When I talked to leader C's manager some weeks later, I expected to hear about leader C's intervention, as I had agreed with leader C that it had been a great experience. However, I did not understand what leader C's manager told me: leader C had complained about the project, saying that she had not learned anything. I wondered if I should tell the manager about leader C's experience. However, I chose to pretend nothing was wrong.

I still wonder what was leader C's learning. What is happening when leaders like leader C get afraid of their managers' expectations and maybe are terrified of a political system, with many unwritten rules about what she was permitted to do. Moreover, I think that the absence of collective reflections in the organisation might cause negative attitude to the aesthetic performance. Furthermore, I reflect on the impact of individualized experiences, which never become an object for a conscious processing of the experience.

**My conclusion:** Leader C's example illustrates the difficulties of getting close to practice when leaders are developing new methods in their leadership. On one hand, leader C had sensed the potential in the aesthetic performance when she gave flowers to her employees. On the other hand, she was lying about her experiences, probably because of a hidden critique she expected from the manager.

I find leader C's behaviour a clear example of double bind, where a person is bound up in an emotionally conflicting dilemma. The example documents the creation of a double bind situation in which a successful response to one message resulted in a failed response to the other.

I conclude that leader C expects that every kind of intervention would be wrong, no matter what she did. She was stuck. Leader C was obviously not able to acknowledge the dilemma, and thus could neither resolve it nor escape from it. Had she been able to reflect on her experiences, I think she would have become conscious of her own and other's reaction and then found the potential to handle the situation.

## **Conscious learning combined with aesthetic performance**

The three examples of dilemmas, dichotomies and double bind document that leaders A, B and C did not find opportunities and strength to complete learning sessions by themselves. The examples give a general picture of what sometimes happens in organisations, when leaders start working with aesthetic performance. The hidden, individualized and timid reactions towards the new kind of performance the aesthetics leads to, makes it difficult to find the courage to do aesthetic performance, if leaders do not share their experiences and integrate the aesthetic performance in learning processes with others in the organisation.

First, when leaders learn from their experiences with others, they develop a consciousness, which enables them to handle dilemmas in order not to worsen the situation into dichotomies and double bind:

1. Leader A was able to continue the aesthetic experiments she and her team found fruitful, when she started to reflect on her experiences in a group of leaders, as she became aware of the dilemma in relation to aesthetic performance in the organisation. The consciousness she got about the dialectic views on aesthetic performance in the organisation made it clear for her that she needed to continue the aesthetic based events with the employees. The example

underlines the value of a conscious learning process is, if an organisation wants transformation of leaders' practices.

2. Leader B became conscious of her situation when she reflected on the liminal grounding and the aesthetic performance in a collective of leaders. Her sensing during the event opened her body and mind and the reflection after the aesthetic event made her conscious about her values. She found there was dichotomy between her own values and the dominating values that prevailed in the company. The consciousness of the potential of the aesthetic performance made her clarify her own situation. The example illustrates how aesthetic performance combined with a learning process in a group of leaders enhances consciousness of aesthetic performance.
3. Leader C had experienced that aesthetic performance could solve a problem in the organisation; however, she never reflected on the experience and was then not able to realise the potential of the aesthetic performance, as she kept the experience as an individualized experiment. My judgement is that she was afraid of resistance from others in the organisation and was caught up in a double bind situation, why she decided to stop further aesthetic performance. The example focuses, although it is based on a single leader, on the culture in the organisation that can create a basic and hidden obstacle against aesthetic performance, if leaders and employees do not talk or reflect on their experiences. Silence may be devastating for leaders' intention of transformation.

Dilemmas are a normal consequence of developing new methods in leadership. However, it should not be necessary to ignore the dilemmas and let them increase into dichotomies and double bind, as the examples demonstrate. When this happens, it is difficult to change the deadlocked positions in the organisation, to which dichotomies and double bind lead. Leaders can learn to handle dilemmas that emerge in relation to aesthetic performance, as the three examples document. How this may happen, and why it might be important to release the potentials of dilemmas, I will unfold below.

Based on the findings of LIP, I have identified two learning methods for successful aesthetic performance, which enhances conscious learning. Framing of learning processes through *liminality* and orchestrated *reflections* as affective reflection and reflexivity seems to lead to fruitful experiences of experiments based on aesthetic performance in the organisational context. These learning methods also entails a conscious learning, as the three examples in this article demonstrates, when leaders remember to clarify where and when they perform aesthetically and reflect on their experiences in collectives with others. This is not a question of a set up connected to every single aesthetic performance, it a question of remembering elements in the learning design, best as a recognition of the bodily-embedded method leaders use in aesthetic performance.

The leaders' experiences in LIP were mostly playful experiments going on for a limited period of time and in a physically defined place. The framing of learning processes seems to promote the potential to see dilemmas from a dialectic perspective, before the dilemmas turn into dichotomies and double bind. The reflections in the examples clarify that there is different, often conflicting views, on the way aesthetic performance is used in the organisation. Hence, dialectic thinking may open fresh lines of enquiry in leadership research and, in this sense, highlight the value of exploring dialectics dialectically (Collinson 2014: 47).

Below, I discuss how leaders in LIP seemed to be equipped with a learning design that would enable them to handle dilemmas, dichotomies and double bind. The aesthetic performance can be integrated in an overall learning design through three elements:

1. *Framing of the process* entails liminal ceremonies where leaders change their condition from being in the social drama unto an aesthetic drama
2. *Performing in the aesthetic drama*, contributes with a choreography (a method) where leaders ‘play’ their daily problems as an aesthetic drama
3. *Conducting a learning process*, through aesthetically based reflection and perspectival reflexivity, where the performer is separated from the audience during the reflections

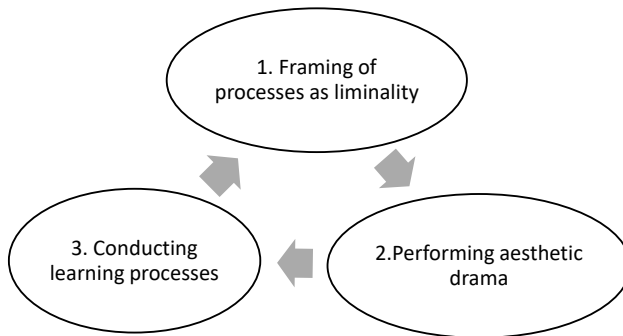


Fig. 1: Learning design integrated in aesthetic performance in organisations

Figure 1 elaborates how leaders can create an overall learning process when they experiment with aesthetic performance in the organisational context, intending to transform their leadership, as the three leaders did in the examples. The leaders in LIP stressed that learning has to be learning as collective, organised learning processes, and learning needs to build on trust in the group. Especially leader A and B followed these principles, whereas leader C did not use any elements of the learning design as described in figure 1.

The three examples from LIP, analysed above, answers the initial research questions:

1. Leaders can handle dilemmas that emerges as an impact of aesthetic performance when they learn to reflect as a collective and do not let the aesthetic experiment stand alone as an individualized experience; as such they are able to prevent dilemmas from growing into dichotomies and double bind , because they become conscious of the dialectic views on aesthetic performance in the organization
2. Learning methods integrated in an overall learning design has proved to handle both successful and non-successful aesthetic performance in organisations, when leaders become conscious about their experiences with aesthetic performance, which enhance both ability and courage to do aesthetic performance

## **Designed learning minimizes the risk of growing dilemmas**

To answer the question of knowledge of interest this article focuses on, I will finally discuss why designed, collective learning sessions can prevent dilemmas from growing into dichotomies and double bind.

Firstly, groups of leaders seemingly better than individual leaders can resist pressure from the organisation. Secondly, aesthetically based events formed as a coherent process, a design for management learning where leaders learn to integrate aesthetic performance in learning processes, also seems to have an impact on leaders' learning, in the form of planned and framed processes. This gives leaders the capacity to meet dilemmas and handle them. Thus dilemmas do not get neglected or grow to become dichotomies and double bind but, on the contrary, enhance leaders so that they use dilemmas in a productive way, when the experiences are worked out through learning processes.

Leaders will often meet different views on their leadership, when they do aesthetic performance, and then have to be prepared for sometimes dialectic views on the impact of their aesthetic performance, as opens for often unusual and sensing reactions.

There are three other prerequisites for conscious learning in relation to aesthetic performance, which I will discuss how can strengthen the value of the learning design, when leaders meet resistance in the organisation. First, collective learning, second, bodily embedded learning and third, consciousness of a dialectic view on aesthetic performance as an impact of learning in the organisational context.

### ***Collective based learning***

The findings of LIP document that the link between the affective reflection and perspectival reflexivity entails a focus that takes the individual to a collective awareness, which seems to open a dialectic view on dilemmas. This may lead to the development of organisational learning and change as a component of politics (Vince, 2002, Gray 2007).

In the learning design for leadership development, presented in this article, it is important to be aware of the difference between being a single leader and a collective of leaders. As Engeström and Sannino (2011) underline, there will be potential for getting out of the double bind when working with groups of leaders and then also dilemmas and dichotomies. As the three examples from LIP explore, individual leaders are vulnerable. The solution of a double bind situation requires practical transformative and collective action that goes beyond words (Engeström and Sannino, 2011: 374). Thus, dilemmas, dichotomies and double bind are typically situations, which an individual leader cannot easily solve without a collective based reflection.

If dilemmas have to enhance potentials in the organisation, this presupposes learning as collective processes. These processes complete events based on aesthetic performance with framed learning processes, in an organisational context. This is seemingly because the transition from the individual to the collective is loaded with a sense of commitment, which occurs when leaders share the bodily sensing and open their minds, when they reflect on each other's experiences.

### ***Bodily-embedded learning instead of cognitive learning***

An important question in leaders' learning in practice is how leaders learn leadership in their own practice. As Zundel (2013) states, we live in a world where experiences, although practically based, often are abstractly theorised and lead to difficulties of reflection that often result in a disengaged position. This is why management learning should advocate an alternative approach to reflection, which emphasises learning as seeing and listening, without imposing pre-fixed interpretations (Zundel 2013: 122)

Perspectival reflexivity (Sutherland 2013) may reveal the potential in dilemmas, when this reflexivity is based on affective reflections, and leaders' bodies are touched by sensing in the aesthetic drama. The negative feeling of dilemmas will probably remain negative without the bodily-embedded learning, occurring when leaders reflect on their bodily sensations. The bodily-informed signs (Thrift 2008) actualise the potential through affective turns (Massumi 2002), which interact with experiences without restriction or ambiguity and then open to new perspectives in leadership.

The methods used to enhance different senses, thoughts and emotions when leaders are confronted with critical experiences are often cognitive. A study of the teaching delivered to entrepreneurs' documents that critical events could be central for changes in the identity and perception of an entrepreneurial role (Lindh and Thorgren, 2015). However, the learning methods in LIP have revealed a broad potential, when learning processes are based on sense-moving aesthetic performance. This potential opens up new insight but may also lead to vulnerability, as we saw in the three examples.

In the example 1 and 2, aesthetically based reflection developed the leaders' courage and capacity to handle dilemmas in practice, when the affective reflection opened their senses. In addition, the reflexivity seems to enhance potentials in the collective based setting, especially in example 2, through a positive and joyful atmosphere in the learning process. This impact is probably the reason why the learning methods in LIP entail actively handling of dilemmas.

### ***Dialectic view as an impact of conscious learning***

The dialectic view emerging through reflections seems to open leaders' potential for handling dilemmas, instead of leaving them stuck in the shadows of leadership. However, the essence of framing the processes as dialectic understanding, is neither pure bodily sensing, nor cognitive understanding, but a result of a higher consciousness that incorporates both (Kirkeby 2009). There is a grain of truth in Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'hyper-dialectic', because of its unlimited vision of the plurality of relationship and ambiguity (Kirkeby, 2009: 43). This is dialectic beyond logic, which, according to Kirkeby, seems to be an important non-linguistic experience, and then also an experience of aesthetic performance.

The learning methods in LIP seem to prevent dichotomies and double bind, and I infer that the empirical research experiences go 'beyond logic' (Collinson 2014). The dialectic view occurs when we frame processes as a learning design through the liminality and the audience wheel. Thus, these elements in a learning design seem to lead to a higher level of perception and create consciousness at a higher level (Kirkeby 2013).

Another way to express what I have emphasized in the discussion is enabling consciousness when the alma-event, like aesthetic performance seems to be, is combined with the proto-event, as learning processes could be (Kirkeby 2005), aiming creation of consciousness of a dialectic view in relation to aesthetic performance. Alma-event is the singular event, based on bodily sensing, an experience of the event that makes passage for other events, where proto-event is a phenomenon of sense ready for a conscious perception.

As such, aesthetic performance and learning design together may transcend the lonely standing aesthetic experience and transform it into a new condition through collective learning processes. This is also, what creates a new condition for transformation of leaders' practice, emerging when leaders learn to do aesthetic performance as a conscious learning process.

## **Perspectives**

1. A successful development of the aesthetic capacities in leadership can release the organisational potential, as we have seen two of the leaders do in the examples. This development presupposes aesthetic interventions based on conscious learning that will open leaders to a dialectic view on contradictory reactions to aesthetic performance (Collinson 2014).
2. To release the potentials in the organisation, in spite of apparently unaffordable dilemmas, leaders have to learn to 'play with' dilemmas and not be constrained by them. Aesthetic performance enables the experimental focus on leadership, and as such, the aesthetics both produce and release dilemmas.
3. An integrated learning design combined with aesthetic performance might be a way to tap potentials for handling dilemmas based on more consciousness of aesthetic performance. When leaders meet dilemmas with a dialectic view, it will rise even higher consciousness when the learning process includes both reflection and reflexivity (Sutherland 2013, Kirkeby 2013, and Merleau-Ponty 1968).
4. The findings presented and discussed in this article suggest further studies of leaders' aesthetic performance in organisational contexts, especially how the aesthetics can be integrated in the organisational practice in order to handle unavoidable dilemmas in organisations when leaders work with aesthetic performance. This underlines a demand for further studies of reflexivity, with a more thorough description of reflection practice (Cunliffe and Bell 2016).
5. To develop a learning design in relation to aesthetic performance, future critical studies of management learning might explore this theme. These studies could then move leaders beyond the logic of dilemmas unto creative handling of dilemmas without deadlocked theoretical views.
6. Critical studies should then include an 'inside-and-out perspective' (Ladkin 2010) on leaders' learning in practice, where leaders learn bodily embedded responses to events in their practice. Finally, leaders learning in practice could be one of the future studies within management learning, to explore methods that open for a new transformative learning approach.

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## **Postscript**

The ethical perspective of the aesthetics has been discussed throughout my empirical research, and this is why I find it necessary to mention that we should be aware of the aesthetics, not only as good and great, but also as a phenomenon that can lead to seduction and abuse of power in leadership.

Leaders have to be aware of their responsibility, which accompanies the aesthetic methods, and of the need to use aesthetics to create social sustainability in a world with both global and local challenges. I believe that leaders can change the world if they stand together with others, across traditional sectoral divides and grids, and across theory and practice, based on aesthetic leadership.

Aesthetic performance in leadership can give access to our bodies and has the potential to open our minds to implement sustainable changes. Art-based leadership gives us a way to go if we want to change the life of our organisations. To do so, we need courage to act in the present without knowing what will emerge. Nevertheless, we are unable to plan the future leadership, as it will become. Instead we, together with others, have to create and believe in the future as it occurs here and now without knowing what will appear:

*We have to be willing to move into the very uncomfortable place of uncertainty...Great ideas and interventions miraculously appear in the space of not knowing* (Margaret Wheatley's book 'Turning to one another' (2009:41).

## Appendix 1: Participants in LIP

Organisation	Participants
Dansk Sygeplejeråd (DSR) Danish Nurses Organization	4 Leaders (kreds- og professionschefer) 3 Human resource consultants and leaders
Energi Midt Energy Midt (ENEIIG)	7 Leaders (forretningschefer) 2 Human resource consultants and leaders
Fredensborg Kommune The Municipality of Fredensborg	4 Leaders (skoleleder, borgerservicechef, leder PPR of teamleder) 15 Leaders (Ældre- og handicap chefgruppe) 2 Human resource consultants and leaders
Gribskov Kommune The Municipality of Gribskov	4 Leaders (FO-leder, centerchef, teamleder, leder af døgninstitution) samt en direktør 7 Leaders (Nordstjerneskolens ledergruppe) 2 Human resource consultants and leaders
Lolland Kommune The Municipality of Lolland	4 Leaders (direktør, skolechef, dagtilbudschef og leder af børn og unge)
Region Syddanmark The Region of Southern Denmark	3 Leaders (afdelingssygeplejersker og teamleder)
Siemens Siemens Denmark	4 Leaders (funktions- og afdelingsledere) 1 Human resource consultant
Vejle Kommune The Municipality of Vejle	7 Leaders (afdelingsleder på skole, leder af bofællesskaber, afdelingsleder bosted, centerleder) 7 Leaders (De to gårde)
VUC The Adult Education and Continuing Training System	12 Leaders from VUC Hvidovre-Amager, VUC Storstrøm, VUC Fyn og VUC Thy-Mors (afdelingsledere, forstander, pædagogisk ledere, leder af studieadministration) 1 Consultant from VUC Videncenter og sekretariat
Aarhus Kommune (and COK) The Municipality of Aarhus	3 Leaders (skoleleder, ungdomsskoleleder, leder ældreplejen) 2 Human resource consultants and leaders

Participants in LIP: 81 leaders and 13 consultants

## Appendix 2: Actions<sup>6</sup> in LIP

Organisation	Participants
Dansk Sygeplejeråd (DSR) Danish Nurses Organization	10 individual settings 3 collective settings
Energi Midt Energy Midt (ENEIIG)	12 individual settings 4 collective settings
Fredensborg Kommune The Municipality of Fredensborg	10 individual settings 6 collective settings (2 of them with a permanent group)
Gribskov Kommune The Municipality of Gribskov	10 individual settings 5 collective settings (2 of them with a permanent group)
Lolland Kommune The Municipality of Lolland	3 collective settings
Region Syddanmark The Region of Southern Denmark	3 individual settings
Siemens Siemens Denmark	5 individual settings 2 collective settings (1 with a permanent group)
Vejle Kommune The Municipality of Vejle	9 individual settings 7 collective settings (6 with a permanent group)
VUC The Adult Education and Continuing Training System	16 collective settings (4 as introduction)
Aarhus Kommune (and COK) The Municipality of Aarhus	9 individual settings 5 collective settings + a session for 60 leaders (SPOT temadag)

Actions in LIP: 68 individual settings and 52 collective settings

<sup>6</sup> Documented actions (through coded data)

## Appendix 3: Coding overview<sup>7</sup> from LIP

1. Social drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unintentional routines and habits</li><li>• High or low energy</li></ul>
2. Aesthetic drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experiments in practice</li><li>• Playing with body, space and thought</li></ul>
3. Liminality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rituals</li><li>• 'Cheking in' and 'cheking out'</li></ul>
4. Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training and rehearsal</li><li>• Preparation, reflection, structures</li></ul>
5. Affective response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Movements and minor changes</li><li>• Collectiveness and relationship</li></ul>
6. Learning in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Human resource involvement</li><li>• From individual to collective processes</li></ul>

### 1. Social drama:

Busy, targeted, unlikeable, full of projections, bad habits, frustrations, complexity, disruptions, imbalance, control, boring, predictable, formal clothes, restless, crisis, disrespect, stress, anxiety, loss of energy

#### *Citations:*

- The social drama is like our everyday drama
- I feel when a room drains me of energy
- The social drama locks us
- The bad habits destroy us
- We need to be able to talk about the bad things in our everyday life
- We are derived and distracted, which leads to annoyance and frustration
- We will run in the same slots which creates negative moods
- Frightening that you do not do what you want to do
- And moreover you do not do what you think you do
- It's hard to break through when you want a dialogue with employees
- The employees stick to the "usual"
- PowerPoint presentations are boring and often people do not listen
- Formal clothes uniform leaders and destroy the joy in everyday life
- To be present is difficult for many people because they are impatient
- The concentration went down when the meeting was more formal

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<sup>7</sup> The coding overview is based on coded data from 10 organisations participating in LIP. The coded data from the organisations is a result of ethnographic developed fieldnotes from 68 individual and 52 collective settings. All of these data are available for the assessment of the thesis

- Initiatives are stopped because of opposition from the top management
- There is pressure from the outside and thus no rest to effect changes inside the organisation
- Some employees are laid back and do not want to document their practice
- There are a number of stepping stones we have to deal with
- We handle crises based on our personality

## 2. Aesthetic drama

Painting with water colors, body sensation, listening, artefacts, symbols like a smiley, and anchor or two hearts, retelling, body sculpture, drawing, a dance with a goat, a bonfire as a part of an Indian ceremony, drawing in silence, change rituals, stand up during meetings, micro movements, visual symbols, metaphors, taste and touch, candles, walk and talk, silence, playing with clay

### *Citations:*

- When you stimulate your senses, you tune in in a different channel
- Fellowship becomes a platform for experiments
- The aesthetic drama intensifies body sensation
- Important to continue the aesthetic drama and remind yourself of 'playing with'
- The aesthetic helps to better reflection
- The body need to get reprogrammed
- You need to be able to sense to act in the aesthetic drama
- Breathing enhances concentration
- You might lose control if you senses too much
- From tenseness and a tearful voice to a voice that is light and bright
- I experienced a flow like a dance, where I had to be careful not to destroy the rhythm
- Metaphors better than many words
- Do not always mirror the other, he might be your enemy
- The energy comes back when you are playing and acknowledge the other
- I prefer to be in the aesthetic drama
- We need to do better priorities by playing the aesthetic drama
- We can use the aesthetic performance to handle the pressure from outside
- An exercise with clay created new insight better than a story telling
- Afraid of a break down if we are too open in the aesthetic performance
- The leader has to be included in the experiment
- We must start with basic skills and not with advanced music
- Find the child within myself
- To listen and to retell creates in itself something new
- Ask the employees to listen to PowerPoint presentation with their back
- The visual information is better than spreadsheet
- Bodily based trust encourage creativity and influences the quality of the products
- Colors make it funny to learn
- The collective movements lead to a good and continuous flow in the organisation

- Eye contact may be too intimate
- It is not enough with a smile on your face, you also need to have a smiling back
- To work in silence may have a great impact on the learning process
- We don't like too much feel and sense or spontaneous experiments
- The physical and bodily experiments are strange for many leaders
- Micro movements lead to better reflection
- We learn a lot when mirroring each other

### **3. Liminality**

Individual and collective grounding, breathing, screensaver, time out, changes of scene in everyday life, clearly bodily markation, collective meditation, shake hands, reorganize space, gives a flower, sing a song, dance

#### ***Citations:***

- It is important to delineate the boundary when you want to play
- You need energy to conduct a 'time out', an energy that comes from the body
- If she senses a dissonance she makes a stop
- Breaking bad habits requires liminality
- A ritual like *good morning* may not always indicate liminality
- Liminality has to be honestly meant
- Some people find it difficult to do transition as rituals with the body
- Difficult to work with the body if people only have a mental and analytic approach
- Liminality creates a new condition and makes it possible to use sensing in the event
- Despite positive experiences with breathing, it can be difficult to get legitimacy for aesthetic performance in a politically dominated culture
- To conduct a transition gives no sense, first after a while we get an understanding
- We feel a lightness like a beach ball
- The lightness creates new insight and make us observe things clearly
- To be able to sense we need to transfer to a new condition and get rid of things that lock us
- Liminality often leads to confidence in the group
- We need to be relaxed in cases of emergency
- Physical transition rituals may seem strange for employees
- Calmness is contagious, therefore it is important to start with a rite of passage
- Liminality has to be structured rituals
- We need courage to create physical transition exercises

### **4. Method**

Structured events, preparation of aesthetic performance, exercises in silence, change of furnishing in meeting rooms, experiments with stand up during a meeting, preparation in duos of leaders, play with Lego as a metaphor for a trip around the world, a physical movement between the social and the aesthetic drama, reflecting team, affective reflection, perspective reflection, a 'stop' in the processes instead of a break, training and rehearsal of aesthetic performance as preparation, informal dialogues, milestones.



### ***Citations***

- The physical exercises intensify observation
- The movements in circles, and around in the room create new energy
- Close physical contact with others is important in aesthetic performance
- The close contact gives you a feeling of membership of the group
- Use of bar stools during an interview created concentration
- HR consultants may mirror aesthetic performance and this way get involved
- We quickly became buddies and saw each other's jobs, and learned to observe without being biased
- Employees should gather strips for a master plan and it created high spirits and concentration
- We had to stand on the common drawing, where it makes the most sense
- A staff meeting in the wood created first skepticism, then lots of new energy and ideas for the future strategy
- Reflection provides better opportunity to listen
- When leaders visit the same spot again where they once have experimented they get affected
- Interventions should be micro movements, which have the strongest influence on behavior
- It is micro movements we have to learn, this is not a 'rabbit killer course'
- The rehearsal is an important part of the aesthetic performance
- The methods will always include a kind of personal development in relation to leadership
- Human resource people should always be integrated in learning in practice
- A new organisational learning method will make it possible to have open trustful reflections
- The organisation has to be included in learning in practice during new learning processes
- We need new relations in the organisation and thus we have to create learning communities
- I see the loops in the model (social and aesthetic drama) as symbols of the future leadership in our organisation and of the different professional skills, we have to get coordinated
- Body and mind has to work together in the aesthetic processes
- The aesthetic interventions do not always make sense from the beginning
- As leaders we have to orchestrate processes in the organisation
- An excuse for being busy is 'no go'
- Processes have to be planned and conducted when we implement them, thus it will give better opportunities to learn
- We have to structure reflections if we want to give time to learn
- A culture developing from an individual approach to a collective is new but necessary

### **5. Affective responses**

More energy, warmth, relations, new drive, sensing in the presence, positive energy, magic moments, mirroring other's moods, closeness, listening more than hearing, sensing more than feeling, joyful moods, vulnerability, hope, dynamic ambience, inspiration

### *Citations*

- Nobody can change what he wants if he is alone
- I get affected of the picture you have painted and see a bird
- I felt a drive from inside when we were painting to music
- When you are close to others you get affected and sense the collective
- I sense heat from the others' backs when we are together and related
- We had the sensing of something nice and warm and started to have lunch together
- Instead of the lack of energy we now felt a boost of energy after we moved to another room
- We are affected of the calm way she performs
- Everybody is affected of his honesty and openness during the session
- When I use my body it gives more energy during meetings and I feel a trustful atmosphere
- Leaders felt enthusiasm when they walked around 'the world' and talked about the model they had built
- We just gave each other more room and listened
- Interruptions may also boost our energy, as it make us more creative
- When leaders focus too much on control the energy decreases
- Play with clay affected the leaders to be both sad and happy
- The experiment walking in the woods created courage and redemption
- We have to be aware of our feeling thus they should not be dominating
- An affective reflection make it possible to feel the bad mood of the other
- We need to meet other people physical to create good leadership
- I don't like our 'hugging' culture, it does not affect me in a nice way
- I get affected of the other's relaxed body
- During the affective reflection I felt a pain in my stomach, while she was telling her story
- I often feel an intense atmosphere during the aesthetic performances
- Suddenly I see the light, the pattern were changed in our daily life

## **6. Learning in practice**

Learning as collective, structured learning processes, building on trust, the learning process is the target, a learning journey, a new image of the present and the future, learning based on aesthetic performance, a metaphor as a rowboat where leaders are sailing together

### *Citations*

- Organisational learning is a result of learning communities that first emerges when leaders are experimenting with their own practice
- When leaders create something new in a group we call it becoming, as the leaders now relate to each other and understand themselves through other people
- We need to be pioneers if we want to change our practice
- We have to give up the idea of the need to reach a certain goal
- The future is now, stop thinking too much about the future, just do what you need to do
- In this learning process, we went from frustration to courage and curiosity
- The leader now talks about the small islands he visits and leaves again as a member of a collective, not any longer as a solely existence

- We are in the same boat, thus we need to do experiments in common in order to learn
  - The journey itself is the goal of the learning process
  - I experienced stress in my department, however this situation removed when we started do aesthetic experiments in the group of employees and reflected on what we had learned
  - We need to continue with duos of leaders who mirror each other and have dialogues
  - The time we use now to build good relationships will be valuable in the future
  - We need continue to involve each other and to be open and brave in order to handle leadership in the future
  - Leaders have to use their hearts, not as feelings, but a consciousness about personal values
  - If we want to change our organisations we have to use our bodies and create capacity to listen, sense and inspire others to changes
  - From being together as lonely people we have to learn to work as a collective
  - We are reaching out for each other and are sensing each other
  - We have experienced that we can get the best help from our colleagues, thus we have learned that together we can transform our practice, when we work with joyful experiments
  - I am able to be open to the other in the group and get others involved in my leadership
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