Critical Realism – A way forward for integrating leadership theories across paradigms.

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Abstract

The number of leadership theories has grown rapidly over the past decade, and this expansion has some researchers calling for the development of more integrated approaches. However, while some frameworks have been proposed, these lack the ability to incorporate leadership perspectives stemming from different social science paradigms, such as positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory.

To address this issue, this thesis argues that the depth of critical realism's ontology, and its openness to multiple epistemological perspectives overcomes the key paradigmatic divisions within leadership inquiry and offers an alternative social paradigm that can accommodate both the empirical nature of positivist perspectives and the relational and meaning-making nature of interpretivism.

This theoretical study develops a multidimensional critical realist-inspired framework by combining Roy Bhaskar's critical realist philosophy of science with Margaret Archer's Morphogenetic realist social ontology to create a high-level ontological canvas on which to co-locate accounts of leadership from different research paradigms. This demonstrates the ability of a critical realist perspective to recognise the role of both positive and interpretive perspectives as evidence of possible underlying structures (material and ideational) of the social world and, more importantly, how the process of influencing the relation between these structures contributes to the attribution of leadership.

While this study shows that critical realism offers a valuable lens for integrating leadership theories, its philosophical complexity and lack of clear methodological guidance create barriers to its use by researchers. Further work is required to effectively communicate and demonstrate the benefits of critical realism to the study of leadership, which could include its practical application within an empirical context.

Acknowledgements

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I am also grateful to the Australasian Critical Realist Community of Practice for providing a safe space to expand my critical realist understanding and to be inspired by the innovative work of fellow critical realist researchers.

The final acknowledgment goes to my father, John, who from my earliest years, instilled in me the importance of education, hard work, and contribution—values I hope to have demonstrated and passed on to my children through the pursuit of this thesis. I trust these values will serve them well in an increasingly challenging world.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter One – Introduction

It is nearly 50 years since James MacGregor Burns famously declared that "if we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about *leadership",*(Burns, 1979, p. 1), calling for an intellectual resolution to the crisis of leadership. However, rather than moving towards a greater understanding of leadership, recent assessments (Alvesson, 2019; Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2010; Glyn & Raffaelli, 2010; Schedlitzki et al., 2023) point to a growing proliferation of seemingly competing, reframed or fragmented theories and increasingly critical perspectives. Counter to familiar narratives, which often give the impression that the development of modern leadership theory has taken a linear path from the "great man" theory of the early twentieth century through to the rise of the neo-charismatic school of the 1980 and 90's (Antonakis & Day, 2012; Lord et al., 2017), leadership research over this time has carved out several seemingly independent theoretical tracks, something that does not seem to be waning. Indicative of this trend is the third ten-yearly review undertaken by the editors of Leadership Quarterly, which saw the number of unique leadership theories addressed in the journal's published articles climb from 29 to 49 in just ten years (2010 – 2019) (Gardner et al., 2020). It could be argued that this expansion in how leadership is conceived better reflects the complexity of the phenomena and is an indicator of "growing theoretical vigour " (Gardner et al., 2010, p. 13), but alternatively, it could also signal expanding conceptual ambiguity and uncertainty about what is meant when we talk about leadership (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

In response to the number and variety of leadership theories, some academics have recommended adopting more integrated approaches to leadership studies (Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2020; Gardner et al., 2010; Marathe et al., 2017; Meuser et al., 2016) and encouraged future research to take a more multilevel, multicomponent, and interdisciplinary perspective to stem any unnecessary proliferation of leadership concepts. However, as suggested by Glyn and Raffaelli (2010) (drawing on Stinchcombe's *Mechanisms of Theory Development* (Stinchcombe, 2002)), any movement towards increased integration, or perhaps more realistically, consolidation of leadership theory, is reliant on devising means of commensuration in the form of common denominators in either construct, definition, or process (Glyn & Raffaelli, 2010, p. 362) on which the variety of leadership perspectives could be compared, contrasted and perhaps combined. Without any basis for comparison,

theoretical islands are formed with no means of bridging the divides between them. As a result, it becomes difficult to determine if we are dealing with complementary or substitute leadership theories or potentially addressing fundamentally different phenomena.

In an attempt to address this concern, researchers have proposed a variety of frameworks through which the potential to integrate leadership theory might be revealed and as a means of "gap-spotting" (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) opportunities for future research. For example, Avolio (2007) proposes that several essential elements of leadership, including cognition, behaviour and context, are necessary for building more integrative theories. At the same time, Hernandez et al. (2011) construct a two-dimensional taxonomy based on the source of leadership and how leadership is transmitted. Lord and Dinh (2012) opt to contrast levels on which leadership can be analysed against how leadership emerges at each of these levels, while Eberly et al. (2013) introduce a time construct to the Hernandez et al. (2011) model. Advancing technology has also provided the processing power necessary to undertake extensive concept mapping to identify "theoretical neighbourhoods" based on the degree and frequency of theory integration already attempted by some research (Meuser et al., 2016) or visualising the evolution of leadership studies based on bibliographic data (Zhao & Li, 2019; Zhu et al., 2019) contained within leadership literature.

But while approaches such as these may provide helpful organising schemas on to which leadership theories can be mapped or can identify that a relationship of some type exists, due to their predominantly positivist perspectives, they offer little explanation as to *how or why* specific leadership theories or constructs may be connected and omit significant leadership scholarship which is more interpretive or critical in nature. One factor contributing to this outcome could lie in a failure to recognise that underlying all scientific theory (including leadership) is a set of assumptions about the nature of the phenomena of interest and how they can be studied. These assumptions influence and constrain how any particular theory is shaped and, as pointed out by Alvesson and Spicer (2012) integrative approaches to leadership, which fail to recognise the impact that paradigmatical differences have on the way leadership is conceptualised, may only end up reinforcing the existing ambiguity about leadership, rather than moving towards greater clarity.

Historically, leadership scholarship has predominantly relied on positivist (Bryman et al., 2011) ideals of empiricism, objectivism, and the pursuit of universal laws (Bell et al., 2018;

Rost, 1993), or forms of interpretivism, which view the world as socially constructed mental models (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) in which knowledge is gained through the interpretation of meaning (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). These two extreme perspectives are often framed as each relying on a distinct set of interrelated metaphysical assumptions that come together to form distinct research positions (Burrell & Morgan, 2017) that are so fundamentally different as to be incommensurable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To commit to one set of assumptions is to oppose the other (Morgan, 2007). On these terms, the ability of leadership theories to talk across paradigmatical divides for the purposes of increased integration seems limited (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012), but I believe there is an alternative. I propose that advancement in leadership theory integration could benefit from adopting a "third way" in the form of a critical realist perspective, which offers an alternative paradigm to positivist or interpretivist-based leadership.

More specifically, I argue that critical realism offers an alternative approach to addressing the growing myriads of leadership theories and concepts by addressing their paradigmatical differences and returning to leadership's ontological roots as a starting point for commensuration. This requires an inquiry into both the way leadership is conceptualised and distinguished from other social phenomena and the need to account for the ways in which leadership manifests itself in the world (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1975) In some respect, this could be viewed as a return to Burns' call, by taking a step back from knowing *about* leadership and to reconsider instead what leadership *is* as a means of identifying some common ground. This entails taking up the role of under-labourer for leadership studies, a process Locke described as "clearing the ground a little and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge" (Locke, 1844).

Research questions and thesis

My thesis is that the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying positivist or interpretivist-based leadership theories are not equipped to support more integrative accounts of leadership. I do not presuppose that conceptions of leadership based on these paradigms are necessarily incorrect, nor that critical realism can provide *the* source of leadership truth. However, I do contend that, due to the layered structure of critical realism's ontology and openness to multiple epistemological perspectives, critical realism can accommodate both the empirical nature of positivist perspectives and the relational and meaning-making nature of interpretivism (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012), offering the potential to enrich our grasp of

leadership through overcoming fundamental limitations that plague the two main paradigms deployed to date.

Therefore, the primary research question driving this study is, "How can critical realism contribute to the development of more integrative accounts of leadership?"

This overarching question will address several sub-questions. The first two are theoretical in nature, laying the groundwork for applying a critical realist methodology to questions three and four.

1. What are the paradigmatical assumptions of positivism and interpretivism in social science?
2. What is critical realism, and what makes it different from more common research perspectives?
3. How have positivist or interpretivist paradigms influenced the way leadership is conceptualised?
4. What opportunities for integrating contemporary leadership theory can be found from adopting a critical reality ontology to analyse representative examples of that theory?

As mentioned earlier in this introduction, the span and volume of leadership research is vast. So, for the purpose of this thesis, there is a need to place some boundaries on the breadth and depth of leadership theory that will be drawn on while still responding to the thesis question(s). With this in mind, I have selected two articles that I treat as "representative" of positivist and interpretivist work in leadership studies. The selection process is explained in Chapter 5, where I expand on the thesis methodology and tools used to address research questions three and four. I also acknowledge that paradigms such as new materialism, which similarly seek to recognise both material and discursive dimensions of reality—though in different ways (Hekman, 2010) could be seen as adjacent to critical realism. However, this thesis will not explore this or other related paradigms to adhere to the word count limitations.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is developed in two parts. Part I (chapters two through five) is conceptual. It will provide the theoretical groundwork on which the empirical analysis of representative leadership articles will be completed as Part II (chapters six to ten).

Part I

Chapter Two is offered as a "terminology pitstop" designed to define and clarify my use of some of the common nomenclature pertaining to social science paradigms, as these are often used in multiple and sometimes conflicting ways, limiting the ability to compare these perspectives across various literature.

Following this stage setting, Chapter Three outlines a brief history of critical realism as a philosophy of science and defines the key critical realist concepts deployed in this study, comparing and contrasting them with those discussed in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four introduces the application of the critical realist philosophy of science to social theory. It provides an overview of Margaret Archer's Morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995) as an overarching meta-theory of social phenomena due to its ability to overcome several paradigmatical dualisms (e.g., objective | subjective, voluntarism | determinism, realism | relativism). As a result, I contend, it offers a critical realist canvas into which leadership theories from various paradigms can be co-located.

Chapter Five details a critical realist research methodology adapted from the Danermark et al. (2019) five stages of the explanatory research model. This methodology will be applied to analyse the selected leadership perspectives.

Part II

In Chapters Six through Eight, the research methodology outlined in Chapter Five is applied to the detailed analysis of two leadership articles. This process teases out the components of how leadership is conceptualised within these texts, looking for consistencies, contradictions, and unique perspectives within these accounts. Based on this analysis, I locate these ideas within the critical realist leadership canvas proposed in chapter four.

Finally, Chapter Nine will provide a summary of the thesis. It will discuss the challenges of applying critical realism to the study of leadership before highlighting the implications for future research, the limitations of this study, and summarising the findings of this inquiry.

PART I

Chapter Two – The nature of research paradigms

From the outset, reviewing and analysing research paradigms and their application across a range of leadership literature presents two initial challenges. The first is that while it is considered best practice for researchers to communicate the assumptions that underlie their scientific contributions (American Psychological Association, 2018, 2020; Levitt et al., 2017), this is often not done explicitly or with a level of detail sufficient to determine what is meant by the terms they have used. This absence or ambiguity requires readers to act as detectives, looking for hints or clues from within the text or methods that 'give away' the researcher's perspective. The second is that even when research assumptions are explicitly stated within a text, a lack of standard nomenclature makes it difficult to be sure if researchers who appear to share vocabulary also have shared meaning or if different terms are used to describe a common construct. It is not unusual for some research terms to be considered so well understood within a specific scientific community (Kuhn, 1962) that there is no need for detailed rehearsal, obscuring these basic assumptions from outsiders and leaving them to question whether they are comparing apples with apples, apples with bananas or maybe apples with bicycles? Fleetwood (2014) identified over forty different terms used to position literature within Organisational Studies, highlighting the difficulty of accurately deciphering or interpreting inquiry assumptions within a particular work and across a diverse body of literature like leadership.

With this in mind and desirous of not replicating these issues, this chapter puts forward some conceptual definitions necessary to form a strong foundation for the upcoming analysis and discussion of the potential of critical realism to provide a more integrative framework for leadership theory**.** Research paradigms are philosophical in nature, meaning they reflect sets of beliefs or truths that cannot, in themselves, be directly scientifically proven (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Given this, there are several interpretations of the term paradigm, multiple models or ways of constructing paradigmatic positions and a broad interpretation and application of paradigms themselves. To offer critical realism as a means of integration across leadership theory, I will focus my analysis on what could be defined as two perspectives positioned at opposite ends of inquiry paradigms, which I refer to as positivism and interpretivism. As such, it is important to clarify how I have interpreted these particular terms, acknowledging that this may differ from other perspectives and acknowledging the

variety of other perspectives that sit between these two extremes. I first provide a brief overview of the research paradigm as a concept and its importance to the scientific process. This will be followed by a description and analysis of specific paradigm options from several frameworks that themselves, seek to explain different paradigms. My choice to investigate multiple frameworks rather than just selecting one is two-fold. The first is to highlight the challenge of deciphering differing typographies. The second is to build a broader appreciation of the various assumptions that may be adopted to inform leadership theory.
This chapter concludes with a high-level summary of three possible ontological positions and their related paradigms.

What are paradigms, and why do they matter?

At its most general level, a paradigm is a way of looking at or thinking about something (Vocabulary.com, n.d.) or a set of basic beliefs (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The use of the term paradigm in relation to science was popularised as the result of Kuhn's highly influential book *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962), which proposed that the history of scientific discovery revealed periods of "development-by-accumulation" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 2) (labelled as normal science), punctuated by shifts in paradigm which informed jumps or leaps in scientific conception, replacing the views held by normal science with fundamentally different perspectives. Unfortunately, Kuhn's work does not use the term "paradigm" consistently, with a critique by Masterman (1970) highlighting more than 20 variations. Further analysis of various definitions of paradigm by Morgan (2007) identifies four key applications of the term which differ both in scope i.e. in the way they are constructed and how widely these beliefs are shared. At one extreme is *paradigm as a worldview,* an approach adopted by the later-discussed Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) model, which Morgan describes as "all-encompassing ways of experiencing and thinking about the world, including beliefs about morals, values, and aesthetics" (Morgan, 2007, p. 50). At the other extreme lies the concept of *paradigm as model examples,* which groups a set of beliefs around exempla of how specific research approaches should be undertaken. Between these two extremes lies paradigm as *shared beliefs within a research field* and the notion of paradigm as an *epistemological stance,* which was popularised by the work of Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (Morgan, 2007).

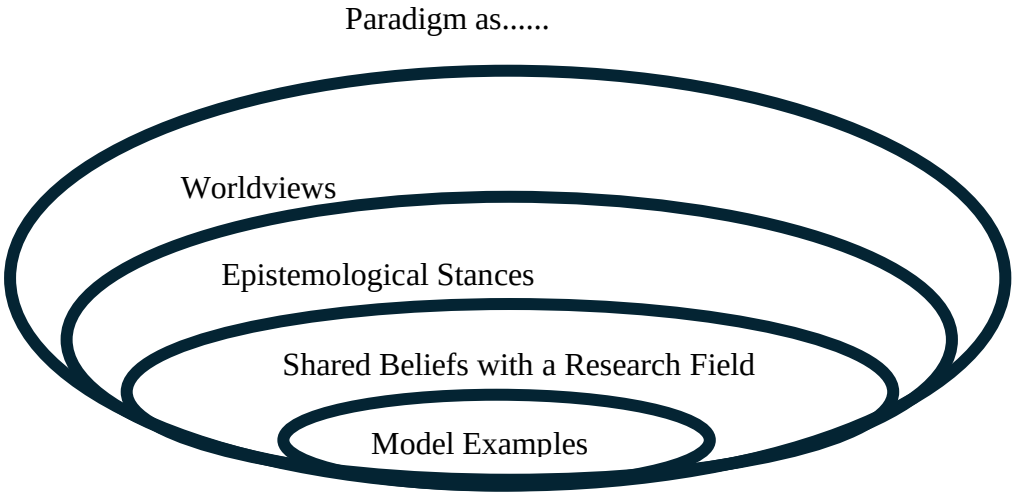

Figure 2.1: Levels of paradigm application –the author's depiction based on Morgan (2007)

Within each level of paradigm sits a range of different, often conflicting assumptions about the nature of the world and how knowledge about the world can be obtained. So, in the case of leadership, research could be undertaken under the assumption that it is a set of "specific qualities that all great leaders 'have'" (Haslam et al., 2024) and thus can be studied by observing these people's traits and actions. Alternatively, another set of assumptions could see leadership as a cultural idea or discourse, and therefore, the question then becomes how to interpret ideas about leadership. Underlying different perspectives of leadership are our assumptions about the value of scientific knowledge and a view of what scientists are trying to achieve when they undertake scientific activity. In its simplest terms, scientific research "sets out to find things", (Fryer, 2020, p. 8) but the differing assumptions or beliefs we hold about the nature of those things (ontology) impact what we believe there is to find and how we go about finding it. When we set out to "find leadership", what is it that we are looking for, and given our answer to this question, how can we best gain knowledge about it? The first of these two questions is ontological, while the latter is epistemological. According to Bell et al. (2018) the term ontology is derived from Greek and can be translated as "theory of being". On this basis, it represents a researcher's theory or belief about the nature of reality and what is considered real and, therefore, worthy of scientific study. A related but separate concept is epistemology, which can be translated as "theory of knowledge" and addresses questions about how we can gain knowledge about reality (Bell et al., 2018).

Given that this thesis addresses the call for a more integrated approach to leadership scholarship, conflicting assumptions about what leadership is and how we can best learn

about it present a fundamental barrier to developing a more consolidated perspective. It can result in the development of separate and independent islands of conception where instead of speaking to each other, separate schools of thought turn their conceptual conversations inward, talking only to themselves (Burrell & Morgan, 2017, p. 22).

Paradigm frameworks

Several frameworks have been developed in attempts to provide a cohesive taxonomy into which the paradigms underlying scientific endeavour can be mapped. Three prominent options are the Burrell and Morgan (2017) *Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory* model, first published in 1979, juxtaposing the paradigms of radical humanism, radical structuralism, interpretivism and functionalism; the Guba and Lincoln (1994) *Inquiry paradigms* framework which proposes four alternative paradigms - positivism, postpositivism, variations of critical theory, and constructionism; and lastly, the Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) *Analytical schema,* which differentiates logical positivism and postpositivism as modernist perspectives from their self-described postmodernist perspectives of constructionism and constructivism. These three descriptions alone bear witness to the variety in terminology, highlighting the need to clarify meanings and unpack these terms into their parts if we are to assess any commonality between them. It will also become evident that in their current forms, these frameworks cannot accurately represent critical realism. In fact, the Guba and Lincoln (1994) model completely misrepresents it (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016), so I will also outline a fourth option, proposed by Fleetwood (2014), which he believes is more aligned with critical realism's primary commitment to ontology and will provide the basis of this thesis' conception of positivist and interpretivist leadership theory.

Burrell and Morgan - Four paradigms for the analysis of the social theory model

The first paradigm framework examined is the Burrell and Morgan (2017) model, which is developed in two stages. The first stage marks the fundamental distinction between objectivist and subjectivist approaches to social science. It is constructed from competing perspectives on ontology, epistemology, human nature, and methodology. It is assumed that these four dimensions collectively represent the components of a "philosophy of science"(Burrell & Morgan, 2017, p. 1).

Ontology

In the Burrell and Morgan model, ontology is delineated as two polarities. The first is realism, where the social world is said to be external to and independent of an individual's understanding of it. Noting that there is a distinction between realism and critical realism, which will be explored later, the realist approach assumes the social world is made up of unchanging social structures that individuals are born into, which are not of their own creation. The social world thus exists outside of and independent of people's minds. The alternative ontological extreme is nominalism, which theorises that the social world is internal to the individual, a product of the human mind, which is then externalised in language, labels and symbols. It posits that there is no self-evident, objective version of social reality. Instead, reality is constituted by labels and concepts used to create and negotiate meaning and understanding of the world.

Epistemology

Burrell and Morgan differentiate between a positivist and anti-positivist epistemic approach. A positivist epistemology describes approaches to knowledge that seek to explain and predict the social world by looking for regularities between events. These regularities are hypothesised to form the basis of universal causal laws or relationships and are then verified or falsified by experimentation. As the name would suggest, anti-positivism, at its extreme, rejects the value of searching for external regularities and, on the back of a nominalist (discursive-based) ontology, embraces the belief of multiple realities, none of which are considered any more true than others. An anti-positivist stance assumes knowledge can only be gained by directly engaging with the individuals involved in the phenomena and, through this process of engagement, the researcher and their own interpretations become integral to the scientific process.

Human nature

The element of human nature is pitted as a debate between determinism and voluntarism, indicating differing assumptions about the level of freedom or agency a person might have in the social world. Under the former, the individual's actions are said to be determined by the situation or environment. At the subjectivist extreme, individuals are assumed to be masters of their own domain, free to choose what they do unhindered or limited by an external social world. This framework gives the impression that there is a need to subscribe to one or the other of these positions. However, as will be addressed later as part of the discussion of

Archers' Morphogenetic approach, some alternatives offer the possibility of overcoming this dualist perspective.

Methodology

Finally, Burrell and Morgan address methodology, which is framed as a debate between nomothetic and ideographic perspectives or, as summarised by Danermark et al. (2019), a debate between the general and the unique. Due to the relationship to a positivist epistemology, nomothetic methodological approaches attempt to study across multiple individuals and groups of people or situations to generate generalised statements or laws about a population. In contrast, ideography takes the opposite approach, opting to undertake a more in-depth understanding of a single case or situation that cannot be generalised in keeping with a relativist epistemology.

Nature of society

While the first stage of the model Burrell and Morgan (2017) distinguishes between the objectivist and subjectivist philosophical positions in terms of ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology, the authors develop these beliefs further by juxtaposing these concepts with what is posed as two competing perspectives about the nature of society. At one extreme is the 'sociology of regulation', where it is assumed that the nature of society is one of social cohesion and regulation, and therefore, that theory is concerned with questions about how and why social order is maintained. At the other extreme is the 'sociology of radical change', which starts from an assumption that structural conflict and change reflect the natural state of society. Theory aligned with this perspective seeks to address questions about change, conflict and contradiction within society.

Combining these two stages - subjective-objective and regulation-radical change - into a single model creates the basis for four socio-theoretical paradigms: functionalism, interpretivism, radical structuralism and radical humanism.

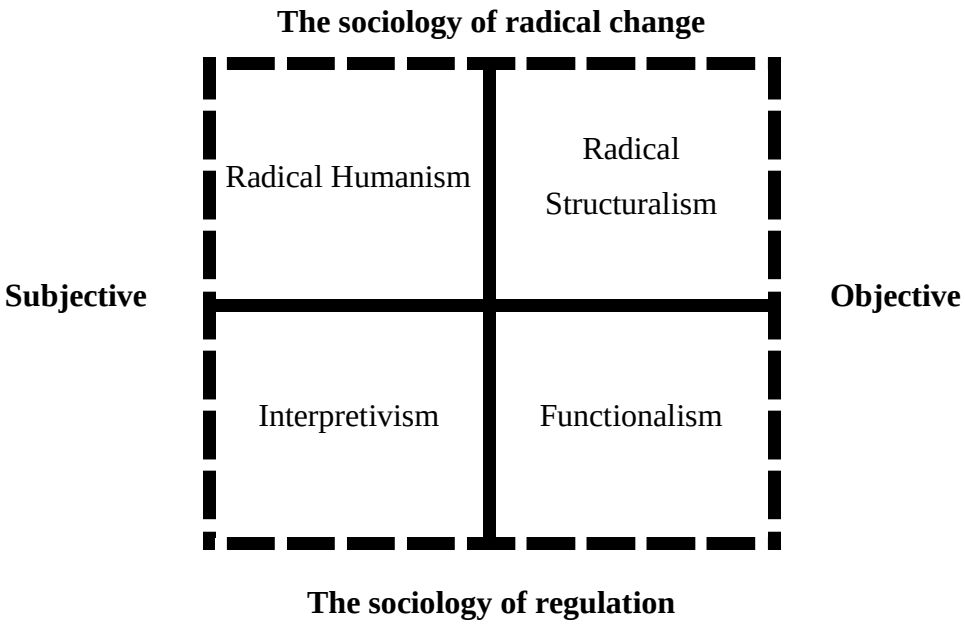

Figure 2.2: Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory taken from Burrell and Morgan (2017, p. 22)

Given that each of the underlying components of this framework has been laid out individually, it could be argued that bundling them together into four paradigms only obscures these underly assumptions and limits the ability to locate less extreme positions, such as critical realism, accurately. As a result, I have adapted the depiction of the Burrell and Morgan schema replicated above in an expanded table to retain visibility of all dimensions contributing to the definition of their four socio-theoretical paradigms.

Interpretivism	**Radical Humanism**		**Functionalism**	**Radical Structuralism**
Regulation	Change	**Nature of Society**	Regulation	Change
Subjectivist approach		**Philosophy**	*Objectivist approach*	
Nominalism		**Ontology**	Realism	
Anti-positivism		**Epistemology**	Positivism	
Voluntarism		**Human Nature**	Determinism	
Ideographic		**Methodology**	Nomothetic	

Figure 2.3: Adapted from: A scheme for analysing assumptions about the nature of social science (Burrell and Morgan, 2017, p. 3)

Guba and Lincoln - Inquiry paradigms

An alternative framework is proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), who also constructed four key research paradigms: positivism, postpositivism (credited with a critical realist ontology), a critical theory collective and constructivism. The authors define a paradigm as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator"(Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105), which can be differentiated based on a combination of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. Unlike the Burrell and Morgan model, there is no reference to beliefs about human nature or the nature of society, which, on the one hand, could be seen as a positive simplification, increasing the likelihood of developing shared views. On the other hand, the Guba and Lincoln model could be accused of ignoring these considerations, potentially increasing ambiguity. It is acknowledged that the later work of Guba and Lincoln (1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011) extended the explanation of each of these paradigms' positions with what was described as "selected practical issues", but rehearsing these elements is beyond the scope of this thesis. These only enhanced understanding of their four metaphysical positions rather than further differentiating them.

	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical Theory et.al.	Constructivism
ontology	naive realism	critical realism	historical realism	relativism
epistemology	dualist/objectivist	modified dualist/objectivist	transactional/subjectivist value mediated findings	transactional/subjectivist created findings
methodology	experimental/manipulative verification of hypothesis mainly quantitative	modified experimental/manipulative critical multiplism falsification of hypothesis may include qualitative	dialogic/dialectical	hermeneutical/dialectical

Figure 2.4: Guba and Lincoln's four metaphysical positions - adapted from Guba and Lincoln, (1994)

Positivism

As described by Guba and Lincoln, positivism shares the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of the Burrell and Morgan objectivist approach. However, it is silent on its assumption about the nature of society so that it could align with either the functionalist or radical structuralist approach. One significant improvement is Guba and Lincoln (1994) acknowledging multiple forms of realism, replacing the unqualified *realism* referred to in the Burrell and Morgan model above with the term "naive realism". This clarifies an underlying commitment to empiricism, in which only those things or events that can be observed via the senses are considered "real". In addition, from an epistemology perspective, positivism assumes an ability and necessity for the inquirers to separate

themselves from the phenomena under inquiry, which the authors describe as taking an objectivist position.

Post positivism

Guba and Lincoln describe post positivism as having a critical realist ontology, modified dualist/objectivist epistemology and a methodology that, while inclusive of qualitative approaches, uses modified experimental techniques to falsify rather than prove hypothesis. Of the models reviewed in this chapter, Guba and Lincoln is the only one that directly mentions critical realism. They define a critical realist ontology as one where "reality is assumed to exist but to be only imperfectly apprehendable because of basically flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the fundamentally intractable nature of phenomena" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). While elements of this explanation could be considered technically correct, the impression incorrectly given by the authors is that critical realism is just a modified version of positivism in which researchers are more reserved about their claims to truth. As I will elaborate further in this chapter, this depiction could not be further from the truth.

Critical theory et al.

Guba and Lincoln describe their decision to consolidate positions such as neo-Marxism, feminist studies, poststructuralism, and postmodernism as one based on a shared value-mediated epistemology. Unlike the authors' depiction of positivism and postpositivism, which assumes the scientific process to be value-neutral, critical paradigms are defined as recognising the influence the values of the investigator have on the inquiry process and, as a result, on the production of knowledge. The ontology of critical theory is defined here as historical realism, in which social, cultural, and political structures can be viewed as real in retrospect due to their ability to shape and constrain reality. Where these historical structures constrain people and society inappropriately, the role of the researcher is to critically highlight the falseness of these constructs with the intent of 'freeing' those bound by them. In this way, these paradigms reflect some of the radical nature of the Burrell and Morgan (2017) framework. Interestingly, for both this critical paradigm and the upcoming description of constructivism, Guba and Lincoln refer to the blurring of the distinction between ontology and epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), reflecting a position where what is known and what there is to be known become synonymous. This is a perspective that critical realism challenges, referring to it as an epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar, 1975), a concept that will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming chapters.

Constructivism

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the constructivist (or interpretivist (Lincoln et al., 2011)) paradigm is defined as subscribing to a relativist ontology. Accordingly, the social world is defined as existing in the form of intangible mental constructs, and, as such, there can be as many versions of reality as there are people, although it is possible for individuals to share mental constructs (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The social world depends on people for its form and content, implying a subjective epistemology where knowledge is created as part of the inquiry process. Methodologically, constructivism draws on hermeneutics and dialogue, where truth stems from a shared interpretation of phenomena.

Ospina and Uhl-Bien – Analytical schema

A third paradigm model is the Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) analytical schema. While this model shares many of the ideas already captured by the previous two representations, its typography offers additional clarity in two key areas. First, it makes reference to terms not used by earlier models, including modernism and postmodernism, as worldviews. Second, it offers a helpful distinction between social constructionism and constructivism.

Worldviews

Ospina and Uhl-Bien break their schema into three layers, first making a distinction between modernism and postmodernism as alternative worldviews, which they define as reflecting differences in the way researchers consider the idea of "truth" and how they attain it. Modernism is described as realist (unqualified), objective, concrete, and assuming a reality independent of human cognition, similar to Guba and Lincoln's positivist and post-positivist paradigms or the Burrell and Morgan objectivist approach. Alternatively, postmodernism is defined as seeing truth as a search for meaning. While an external reality may be acknowledged, the notion of scientific truth lies in interpreting what and how meaning is made of this reality. Shank (2002, as cited in Ospina and Uhl-Bien, 2012) describes modernism as a metaphorical window where the inquirer is separated from the world under study, and their role is to maintain a clear, independent view from which they can attempt to explain the relationships between the things and events they observe. Shank applies an alternative metaphor of a lantern to postmodernism, in which the role of science is to illuminate meaning that cannot be accessed with a modernist perspective. Reference is made to shining light into "dark corners" (Shank, 2002; pp. 10–11 as cited in Shank & Villella, 2004, p. 48), which also conveys elements of Burrell and Morgan (2017) radical change

stance and the Guba and Lincoln critical theory grouping. The idea of a lantern is also helpful in reflecting postmodernist assumptions about the relationship between the researcher and their subject where, in the act of holding up the lantern, both parties, the inquirer and the inquired, are standing in its light.

Epistemic stances

At the next level of the model, these modernist and postmodernist worldviews are broken down into four now increasingly familiar epistemic stances: logical positivism, postpositivism, constructionism and constructivism. While their accounts of logical positivism and post-positivism align strongly with Burrell and Morgan's notions of objectivism and Guba and Lincoln's notions of positivism and postpositivism discussed above, the distinction they draw between constructionism and constructivism is new to the discussion thus far and so is explained below.

According to Ospina and Uhl-Bien, while constructionism and constructivism can both be considered forms of interpretivism due to their shared belief that social reality is dependent on meaning, they differ in their beliefs about the existence of an objective world. Constructivism is said to fully embrace idealism, where the world is reduced to *only* individual meaning. This does not mean that a constructivist necessarily denies the existence of physical objects but, instead, holds that the truth about these objects can only be known based on the meaning individuals give to them. The object itself is not relevant to the inquiry. On these terms, a violin can equally be constructed as a musical instrument or a table tennis bat (Fleetwood, 2005) and "all that counts as real is human subjectivity" (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012, p. 16). This definition appears to align with the subjectivist approach described by Burrell and Morgan (2017) and the constructivist paradigm from Guba and Lincoln (1994). Alternatively, social constructionism is differentiated by its focus on inter-subjectivity, the process of constructing meaning in relation to or through the interaction of people. The authors claim that via this perspective, "reality is at the same time internal (subjective) and external (objective)" (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012, p. 17) in that some shared constructions become so embedded that they gain a level of externality due to a "forgetting" (Berger and Luckmann 1996, as cited in Gunderson, 2020 , p.130) of their humanly constructed origins. As a result, they are considered natural and fixed. This perspective suggests parallels between Ospina and Uhl-Bien's social constructionism and the historical realism of Guba and Lincoln's critical theory et al. As I will show, weak forms of social

constructionism on these terms also demonstrate some affinity with some of the assumptions of critical realism in that critical realism accepts that the social world is socially constructed and the natural world is socially (conceptually) mediated but what it does not accept is that concepts such as leadership only exists as an idea or concept.

Fleetwood – a third way

While the three models outlined above demonstrate some differences in how common research paradigms are defined, they also share a common trait. As Fleetwood (2014) points out, there is a tendency for paradigm taxonomies to start from a position that assumes only two primary *ontological* positions: realism versus nominalism (Burrell & Morgan, 2017); realism versus relativism; and modernist (objectivist) versus postmodernist (subjectivist) (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Fleetwood summarises this dualist thinking (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015; Danermark et al., 2019) as reflecting an ontological commitment to either empirical realism or idealism, where empirical realism holds that reality is limited to only those things and events that can be experienced through the senses. In contrast, idealism holds that the world (social or natural) cannot exist independent of its social construction or construal via discourse. The outcome is that neither of these positions allows for the inclusion of an accurate, critical realist perspective.

To address this concern, Fleetwood offers an alternative perspective with three *ontological* starting positions: empirical realism, idealism, and critical realism (Fleetwood, 2014).

Ontology	Empirical Realism	Critical Realism	Idealism
Definition	The social world is limited to observed, atomistic events	"stratified, emergent, and transformational entities, and relations and processes." (Fleetwood, 2014, p. 190)	The social world is limited to entities constituted entirely by discourse

Figure 2.5: Three ontological positions - Adapted from Fleetwood (2014)

Empirical realism draws its ontology from its epistemological commitments, which assume that the observation of regularity between events can derive truth about the world. This reflects the positivist, postpositivist, functionalist and radical structuralism paradigms previously discussed. Fleetwood defines idealism as a social reality made up exclusively of language, signs and symbols used to share meaning. Hence, our engagement with the world is reliant on communication and discourse. This position could be most closely associated with the previously covered paradigms of interpretivism, radical humanism and constructivism.

Both of these ontologies reduce reality to one core possibility: either reality has objective qualities that render our subjective impressions of it as having no meaningful value or impact, or, alternatively, there is nothing beyond or more stable than our subjective impressions.

A third and alternative option is a critical realist ontology which Fleetwood (2014, p. 191) describes as a reality that recognises that there are multiple different types of "real" things in the world, not *just events* and not *just discourse*. In a critical realist sense, however, the term' real' does not reflect the materiality, observability and measurability inherent in positivist positions. It refers to the realness of things (entities, relations and processes) based on their ability to have a causal influence on the world (Bhaskar, 1975). Some of these things we may observe, some we may describe in language, but others may not be observable or yet spoken of. These can still be theorised as real due to their causal impact. I intend to elaborate further on the specifics of critical realist ontology in the next chapter. However, the key point here is the inclusiveness (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016) and depth of a critical realist ontology compared to the reductionism of empirical realism and idealism.

Identifying positivist and interpretivist paradigms

Returning to the goal of clarifying the interpretation of positivism and interpretivism for this thesis, I have summarised the paradigms and terms identified in the above discussion into a table, aligning them with Fleetwood's three ontological positions. It is not my intent that this summary be taken as definitional but, instead, to capture the tendency for certain terms to reflect either a positivist or interpretivist paradigm as a result of an empirical realist or idealist ontology rather than a critical realist one.

Paradigm	Positivism	Critical Realism	Interpretivism
Ontology	Empirical Realism	"Stratified, emergent, and transformational entities, and relations and processes." (Fleetwood, 2014, p. 190)	Idealism
Related Paradigms	• Modernism • Objectivist • Functionalism • Radical Structuralism • Positivism/Postpostivism	• Social Constructionism • Critical Theory et al.	• Constructivism • Interpretivism • Subjectivist • Radical Humanism • Social Constructionism • Critical Theory et al.

Figure 2.6: Summary of ontologies and related paradigms

This does leave the question of where to place some critical approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and social constructionism as characterised by Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012). In this regard, Fleetwood suggests that critical perspectives are often defined in terms of a particular value perspective (i.e. feminism, historical power, culture), but this has little to do with claiming a unique ontological position and is more typically focused on challenging the normative epistemologies or approaches to knowledge. While it is less common for scholars who wish to advance these perspectives to take up a positivist position, they also do not have to accept idealism as their only alternative (Fleetwood, 2014). As alluded to in Ospina and Uhl-Bien's differentiation between constructivism (idealism) and social constructionism, the latter recognises the possibility of inter-subjective entities escaping their makers to form an external or objective reality. What is not made clear is the ontological status of these entities. Is it only in the form of an additional layer of discourse, or can it also emerge in other forms that have a causal impact on social reality? If it is the latter, then there is alignment with a critical realist ontology. As a result, I have placed these paradigms in both the critical realist and interpretivist columns.

Conclusion

In summary, the discussion and debate of the possible paradigms in social science have been limited by frameworks embedded with dualist and tightly bound perspectives. Taking a position on either the positivist or interpretivist side of the equation sets off restricted chains of corresponding paradigmatical commitments, incommensurable with one another (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and therefore providing no common ground on which a more integrative approach could be considered. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the work of Roy Bhaskar challenged this dualist approach by re-examining the philosophical assumptions of positivism and the impact these have had in both the natural and social sciences.

Chapter Three – Introduction to critical realism

> "For science, I will argue, is a social activity whose aim is the production of the knowledge of the kinds and ways of acting of independently existing and active things." (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 24)

Introduction

Now that some clarification of the common beliefs and assumptions made in non-critical realist research paradigms has been developed, it is possible to use this understanding as a launchpad towards a more detailed explanation of critical realism. Up to this point, I have been referring to critical realism as a paradigm (which, in some respects, it is), but first and foremost, critical realism is a philosophy of science (Gorski, 2013). As such, it concerns questions about the nature of reality, scientific knowledge and explanation, (American Psychological Association, 2023) and how answers to these questions affect how science is defined and practised. It can be viewed as a metaphysical theory (Cruickshank, 2003) or conception at the highest level of abstraction, underpinning a research paradigm. The development of critical realism as a philosophy of science is most commonly associated with the work of Roy Bhasker and was sparked by what Bhaskar perceived as a lack of connection between 1970s economic theory and the world that theory claimed to represent (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). Bhaskar believed this disconnect resulted from flaws in the fundamental assumptions underpinning the then-dominant positivist scientific paradigm, and so set about to critique the philosophical foundations on which this paradigm was based. As a result of this critique, Bhaskar proposed an alternative philosophy, initially called transcendental realism, but later renamed critical realism.

In Bhaskar's opinion, philosophy is one of underlabourer to science (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015, 2016), meaning that philosophical reasoning can be used to illuminate normally unconscious assumptions and underlying beliefs about ontology and the relationship these ontic assumptions have with the way knowledge about this reality can be gained. A philosophy of science does not set out to provide the answers to specific scientific questions but instead reflects on the general nature of the world under investigation. So, for example, instead of asking what the causes of leadership are, a philosophy of science might ask, what is the nature of causation? Philosophical assumptions influence which ontological and epistemological concepts, methodologies and techniques (Danermark et al., 2019) researchers use to add to knowledge. In this way, philosophy can act as a lens through which

scientists and researchers determine, implicitly or explicitly, what they hold to be real and worthy of scientific endeavour and the methods they choose to study and interpret their findings.

By accepting that there is a link between philosophy and science, I propose digging deeper into the critical realist philosophy of science and the paradigmatical commitments that flow from this perspective. This approach has two purposes: the first is to define the critical realist concepts used in this inquiry, and the second is to contrast critical realism with the alternative paradigms commonly applied to leadership research examined in the previous chapter.

I start this chapter with a brief overview of the development of Critical Realist philosophy, which is typically divided into three phases: basic critical realism (BCR), dialectical critical realism (DCR) and the philosophy of metaReality (MR) (Bhaskar, 2020). For this research, I will draw on concepts predominantly associated with BCR, so I will not be delving into the DCR and MR phases in detail. The Centre for Critical Realism defines BCR as the ideas developed across three central works: *A realist theory of science* (Bhaskar, 1975); *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015); and Margaret Archer's *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach* (Archer, 1995). This chapter will draw on the works mentioned above by Bhaskar, which form the metaphysical basis of critical realism, while Archer's *application* of Critical Realist concepts as a social meta-theory (Cruickshank, 2003) will be examined in Chapter Four.

The critical realist philosophy of science – basic critical realism

Bhaskar initially intended to develop a philosophy of social science but undertook this task in two parts**.** In his first text, *A realist theory of science* (Bhaskar, 1975), Bhaskar developed a critique of positivism, a paradigm commonly used in the natural sciences and which he associated with the underlying philosophies of classical empiricism and transcendental idealism[1] (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 24-25). Bhaskar claimed that both these philosophies focused

[1] It should be noted that transcendental idealism refers to the ideas of Emmanuel Kant which represent a moderate form of idealism (McQuillan, C. (nd). *German idealism*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved 30 August 2023 from https://iep.utm.edu/germidea/#H3 rather than what might be considered a more absolute interpretation of idealism by Fleetwood, referred to in the previous chapter.

only on epistemology, offering theories on how scientific knowledge could be achieved while avoiding matters of ontology (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). However, rather than escaping ontology, Bhaskar believed that both classical empiricism and transcendental idealism inadvertently projected a shared commitment to empirical realism (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 15), asserting the necessity (and in the case of classical empiricism, the sufficiency) of a constant conjunction of atomistic events for the attribution of scientific law (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). Not directly addressing ontology resulted in an implied Humean-ontology, where reality became limited or reduced to only those events experienced via the senses and where observed regularities between these events could go on to be claimed as scientific laws (Bhaskar, 1975). By his own account, Bhaskar's goal was to advocate for the need to be explicit about ontology and to use philosophical reasoning to develop a new (non-Humean) ontology that was independent of, i.e. not reduced to, epistemology or ways of knowing (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016).

While the setting of Bhaskar's initial analysis lay in the realm of natural science, his second published work, *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015), extended his argument for the importance of ontology in a non-Humean form into the social sciences. Given the reference to naturalism in the book title, one could mistakenly assume that Bhaskar intended to argue that the social world and the natural world could be studied in the same way. However, the real intent was to consider "to what extent can society be studied in the same way as nature?". (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015, p. 1) More specifically, Bhaskar built on his earlier work to demonstrate how the basic tenets of critical realism derived from a philosophical investigation of natural science could also be applied to resolve some of the conflicting or dualistic positions in the social sciences.

The most notable of these dualisms was the naturalist, anti-natural divide (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016), which in many respects underlies the debate between positivism and interpretivism outlined in Chapter Two. Naturalism is the belief that natural science's scientific assumptions and methods can equally be applied to the social sciences. Objections to naturalism pivoted on anti-naturalist belief in the inadequacy of Humean empiricism (positivism) to capture social reality's subjective and interpretive nature. This was a position that critical realism agreed with. However, given that Bhaskar had successfully argued that the ideas of empiricism did not even hold for the natural sciences, he undertook to re-

examine the possibility of naturalism under his newly proposed critical realist terms. He concluded that critical realism allowed for "qualified critical naturalism" (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 41) in which the social world could be investigated 'scientifically' but with the need to acknowledge the social world's unique nature (ontology) and the resulting implications for epistemology and methodology (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 60).

Combined, these two works represent the development of an alternative philosophy of science, which Bhaskar believed transcended science's positivist/interpretivist divide by recognising two distinct sides of scientific knowledge (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 21). On one side is the recognition of science as a social activity in which humans use prior conception and perception to produce knowledge about the natural and social worlds. As such, knowledge is both fallible and open to change. The other is the need to acknowledge that the knowledge we produce is always *of* something that exists whether we choose to study it or not. Bhaskar argued that if it was believed that science, represented by the activity of experimentation, was valuable and successful in increasing knowledge, then it also revealed an implicit ontological reality that objects of study are structured, differentiated and stratified (Danermark et al., 2019). The specific ways they are structured, differentiated and stratified depends on the nature of the phenomena under study.

These last three terms are frequently referenced in critical realist literature (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015, 2016; Hartwig, 2007) and not always in a consistent way, so they are worth clarifying. By 'structured', Bhaskar refers to the assumption that the world or phenomena under investigation must have some relatively enduring form or nature that allows science to investigate it (Hartwig, 2007, p. 440). This form does not need to be material, as in the natural sciences; it can also reflect social relations, ideas, or a combination of the three (See the section titled *the real-ity of things* below). If this were not so, the activities considered science would add no value, as the object of study would be nebulous, with no durability or stability. That being said, acknowledging the structured nature of the social world should not be interpreted as assuming that it does not change or has a fixed essence. Instead, when people act, they do so within structures that are not of their making and which "operate(s) independently of the intentions of the actions here and now"(Danermark et al., 2019, p. 5).

The term ‘differentiated’ acknowledges the inherent variability of the phenomena we experience as a result of the open nature of the world (Hartwig, 2007, p. 141). It is offered as a counter to positivism’s drive for universal laws and supports Bhaskar’s claim that scientific investigation is not about establishing relationships between experienced events but, instead, is about identifying and explaining the things that allow events to happen.

Finally, the term ‘stratified’ has several different applications but, in its most general form, recognises that the things or entities that make up the world (natural or social) have different properties or unique ways of acting, making them ontologically distinct from one another. Critical realism conceptualises these different entities as residing in different layers of reality (Hartwig, 2007, p. 117) (e.g. structure and agency). As a result, they must be identified and investigated scientifically in a way that recognises the assumptions about their specific nature to develop a more complete view of reality. They must also be understood for their potential to interact with one another to form entities in new strata through a process of emergence.

So far, I have referred to the critical realist philosophy in very general terms, but its more formal architecture can be summarised as follows.

1. There is a difference between ontology and epistemology, which Bhaskar refers to as science's intransitive and transitive dimensions.
2. There is an ontological distinction between what is experienced, what actually happens, and what causes things to happen. Bhaskar refers to these as the empirical, actual, and real domains of reality.
3. The real domain can be further stratified into ontologically distinct levels (e.g. structure, culture and agency) that interact with one another through a process of emergence.
4. The focus of scientific explanation or causation shifts from the experience of events, to the structures and mechanisms underlying these events and providing an explanation of these entities' powers and tendencies, which allow them to be causally efficacious.

I will now examine each of these components in more detail.

The intransitive and transitive dimensions

Bhaskar's development of critical realism reframes the distinction between ontology and epistemology as the intransitive and transitive objects of knowledge (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). This is done to strengthen his position that there is an independence between the world and our knowledge of the world and provide a philosophical framework that can account for competing and changing claims to scientific knowledge.

Bhaskar defines intransitive objects of knowledge as "science-independent objects of scientific discovery and investigation" (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 22). These are objects or phenomena that we want to learn about or explain, and exist whether humans study or perceive them or not. Note that using the term "science-independent" Bhaskar allows for independence between the subject and the object, the studier and the studied, which is generally accepted in the natural sciences, to also apply in the social domain. Unlike interpretive-based scientific paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), Bhaskar suggests that critical realism can maintain a claim of independence between the socially constructed nature of the social world we are investigating and the equally socially constructed act of scientific investigation on the basis of *existential intransitivity*. This is the idea that once something has come to exist in the world, its study cannot alter what it is and how it has occurred. As a result, there is always a distinction between our knowledge and what that knowledge is about (Bhaskar, 1975). On this basis, social phenomena like leadership can be considered an intransitive object of study despite its reliance on people for its existence. It is also important to note that while the word "intransitive" is suggestive of something static or unchanged, it should not be confused with thinking that intransitive objects are inert or unaffected by the world around them; instead, the term intransitive reflects a level of independence between being and knowing.

Comparatively, the definition of transitive objects of knowledge reflects Bhaskar's perspective of science as a social product (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 21), a human activity that produces knowledge *of* things (the intransitive). Bhaskar argues that scientific knowledge is not arrived at spontaneously or by mindless osmosis. Instead, scientists draw on prior concepts, framing, or references as a starting point or input into new or improved understanding. Scientists are trained, and science is shaped in social reality, meaning that an assumption made by positivism that it is possible to step outside of prior conceptions for the purposes of science (or for any other social activity, for that matter) (Danermark et al., 2019)

is not feasible. The things and ideas considered scientific facts are influenced by the way in which scientists theorise about the world (Danermark et al., 2019), and because of this, facts are subject to change and adaptation. What we know about things, our theories, ideas, data, and concepts are the transitive objects of knowledge.

Consider a historical example from the natural world to clarify these two concepts. In 1515, Nicolaus Copernicus controversially proposed an alternative idea that the planets revolved around the Sun rather than the prevailing "knowledge" of a stationary Earth at the centre of the universe (Riebeek, 2009). This example demonstrates how a change in conception made way for new scientific "facts". Our *knowledge* of the movement of the stars and planets changed, reflecting the transitive nature of knowledge. Meanwhile, the intransitive *object of knowledge*, the universe's motion, remained unchanged, being and acting as it always did, independent of science itself.

As an example from the social domain, the relatively recent interest in the study of followership as part of the leadership phenomena does not imply that "followers" or the act of followership, however these may be defined, did not exist before its study, as these matters are presumed to be intransitive. The study of followership did not bring it into being, nor is the study of followership likely to make an immediate change in its nature. As noted by Sayer (2000, p. 10), in critical realism, "social scientists are cast in the modest role of construing rather than 'constructing' the social world." The relation between the transitive and intransitive is also not fixed but relative to the nature of the study. So, for example, the fact that this thesis places leadership theory at the centre of its investigation designates the theory as the intransitive object of its scientific inquiry and the thesis output as the transitive.

The empirical, actual and real domains

Bhaskar used philosophical reasoning, which started from the positivist premise that scientific experimentation was a valid means of gaining knowledge, and asked - what must the world be like for scientific experimentation to be capable of producing credible knowledge (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016)? He argued that for scientific experimentation to make sense, the world must be considered an open system stratified into three ontologically distinct but overlapping domains. Bhaskar defined these domains as the empirical (what is experienced), the actual (events or actions that occur) and the real (underlying causal structures of things or entities that act to produce events) (Danermark et al., 2019). He

suggests that these domains are normally out of phase with one another (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 13) but that the process of scientific experimentation brings them into phase to access knowledge of the world. In other words, Bhaskar positions the practice of experimentation as an ”active intervention in reality” (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 24), where scientists could be viewed as deploying their prior knowledge and expertise to create sequences of events that do not typically occur with any regularity outside of a laboratory environment. If they did, there would be no need to perform an experiment in the first place. While creating a closed environment may be possible for some natural sciences, critical realism recognises that the nature of the social world is inherently open and that attempts to create closed experimental conditions in that context can influence or negate the intended object or phenomenon under investigation. As a result, critical realist social science is explanatory rather than predictive (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015, 2016).

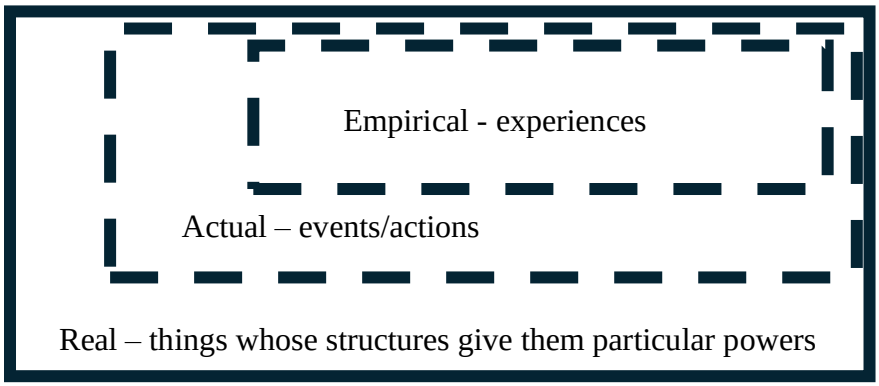

Figure 3.1: Critical realist domains of reality based on Bhaskar (1975)

The domains are depicted as nested to reflect that due to the openness of the social world, events and experiences may not necessarily be the same. The powers of some mechanisms and structures may not, or may not always, be actualised as events when they counteract one another. It should also be noted that the concept of the real domain often needs clarification. On the one hand, it is typically defined as the underlying structures and mechanisms that enable events to occur (or not to occur). While this is true, the nesting of the actual and empirical domains within the real domain also acknowledges the *reality* of the events and our experiences of the world. Bhaskar explains it this way: “Structures and mechanisms then are real and distinct from the patterns of events that they generate; just as events are real and distinct from the experiences in which they are apprehended” (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 56). Together, all three domains reflect social reality, i.e., they are real but qualitatively different

in form. As a result, they represent a vertical or ontological depth that some other paradigmatic perspectives do not acknowledge.

Stratification and emergence

According to Bhaskar, the concept of stratification in critical realism can be applied in three ways (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). The first is reflected in the above distinction between the domains of the actual and the real, where critical realist science looks at the mechanisms and structures of the entities or things that lie beneath what is experienced as events as a means of scientific explanation. A second conception of stratification extends the first by recognising that the search for underlying causes can be seen as an ongoing and iterative process, at each turn moving below the current level of explanation for a finer level of detail. i.e., if we can explain event A as the result of X and Y, how can we explain X and Y?

A third form of stratification is the special case called emergence (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). In this notion of stratification, rather than viewing the relationship between different things or entities as a simple mathematical equation where 1 + 1 = 2, sometimes things at higher levels or strata cannot be described as the sum of their parts. This occurs when the mechanisms at one level of reality combine to generate an entity with powers that, while reliant on the contributing mechanisms, cannot be reduced to them. The classic example is that of hydrogen and oxygen, which individually have the power to fuel combustion but, when combined to form water, have the power to extinguish a flame (Sayer, 2010) . Elder-Vass (2005, p. 316) simply defines emergence as "operating when a whole has properties or powers that are not possessed by its parts." Although this new entity relies on underlying mechanisms for its existence, it holds its own powers, which can act up to a high stratum and can act back on the stratum below. i.e. Y is reliant on A, B and C to exist, but Y does not equal A, B, and C, and, further, Y has the ability to act back on A, B, and C.

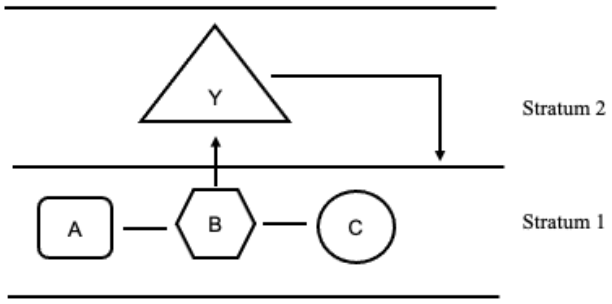

Figure 3.2: The author's depiction of stratification as a form of emergence

As will be described in more detail in the following chapter, the concepts of stratification and emergence can be applied to the fundamental components of the social world: people and society. So, while it can be said that society cannot exist without people (Fleetwood, 2005), the properties that societal structures possess are distinctly different from those of the people despite their dependence on human activity for their continuing existence (Archer, 1995). Society has emerged from the actions of people.

To put this concept in the context of leadership, consider investigating the impact leadership has on team engagement. In the absence of emergence, a team could be conceptualised as the sum of its members, and, as a result, team engagement is the sum of individual engagement. However, what could also be considered is the concept of the team as an entity that has emerged from its members and has different powers and properties from the individuals involved. The question then becomes whether engagement is even a property or power that a team entity can have, and if so, how best could this be conceptualised?

Redefining causality and laws

The depiction of the world as stratified into three domains of reality has significant ramifications for how critical realism defines causality, laws and the practice of science itself. Under these terms, the concept of causality moves from "events to structures that generate them" (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 30). This is because the concept of universal laws, per a positivist prescription, can only be achieved in a closed environment. However, outside these conditions, reality operates as an open system with no necessary regularity between events. As a result, Bhaskar proposes that the concept of a law must be redefined as identifying the powers or tendencies of things which, within a specific context or situation, may or may not be activated (in the domain of the actual) and may or may not be observed (in the domain of the empirical). Laws of this nature are said to be operating transfactually, meaning they are assumed to be operating in both open and closed systems (Bhaskar, 1975, p. xviii) and become statements about the tendency of things to act in a certain way, which has no necessary relationship to their actuality or empirical observation.

The real-ity of things – back to ontology

When critical realists talk of a thing (entity, object or phenomenon) as being real, what is meant is that it has causal powers or the ability to act in specific ways that affect something

else. In critical realist terms, things are said to be 'real' if they have a causal effect, i.e. "affects behaviour; makes a difference"(Fleetwood, 2005). So, for example, while the tooth fairy may not be real in an everyday sense, ideas about the tooth fairy have the power to cause small children to place their teeth under their pillow in the hopes of a reward. The idea of the tooth fairy is real. According to Fleetwood, there are at least four different modes of reality or types of real things in the world, and it is essential to acknowledge and differentiate between them. There are physical things (e.g. mountains, water, planets – things of the natural world that would continue to exist even in the absence of humans); social things, such as relations and roles and organisations; ideal things (theories, beliefs, ideas, meanings, opinions, discourses etc); and artefactual things (e.g. a computer), which combine the materiality with meaning.

The concept of "a thing" can be thought of as a dotted line or delineation marker around a group of properties that are intrinsic to it; i.e. that makes it one particular thing and not another (Fleetwood, 2009). If two things have different properties, then it would be reasonable to believe they are different things. Defining the properties of a thing often goes hand-in-hand with the powers associated with those properties. Fleetwood (2009, p. 347) draws on a simplified definition provided by Andrew Collier, who defines powers as "designating what something does or can do". This later potentiality of powers is an important quality related to Bhaskar's claim for the real, the actual and the empirical domains. Just because the power of a thing is not observed (in the empirical domain) does not mean it does not exist.

Entities with their powers may exist unexercised, such as an employer with the power to make an employee redundant despite having yet to exercise this power. Powers may also be exercised but not actualised (instigating an event in the actual domain), such as the power of an employer to dismiss an employee, which is countered by a legal requirement to allow employees to improve performance. Taking this one step further, critical realism also recognises the power of the absence of a thing. It is open to the idea of social phenomena or ideas being conceptualised or explained in part or in full by what is missing (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015, 2016). For example, leadership could be conceived as only occurring in the context of an absence of certainty, and the role or purpose of leadership (however it happens) is to address this absence.

Locating critical realism as a paradigm

Now that I have explored critical realism as a philosophy, it is possible to start locating it as a research paradigm, especially in contrast to the ideas of positivism and interpretivism explored in the previous chapter, starting with ontology and epistemology. As a paradigm, critical realism is regularly described as subscribing to a trinity of ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). At face value, this could be interpreted as cherry-picking elements from both the positivist and interpretivist schools, but this is not the case. Bhaskar's philosophical under-labouring transcends the positivist/ interpretivist divide, making critical realism challenging to place within the frameworks proposed by Burrell and Morgan (2017), Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012), but this is also why critical realism is ideally placed to provide a more integrative framework for leadership.

At first glance, critical realism appears to share a realist ontology with positivist and post-positivist paradigms, but what critical realism considers real is not only a "regular succession of events" (Sayer, 2000, p. 14). The real that critical realism acknowledges includes experiences, the events of the world, but also the underlying, often unobservable entities whose structures and powers (and sometimes their absence (Danermark et al., 2019)) contain the potential for events to occur. Unlike positivism, these entities are deemed real based on their ability to have a causal impact on the world, rather than just their observability. The causality or power of these underlying structures is not *necessarily* linked to their actualisation in the form of events or behaviours. Instead, under critical realist terms, a causal law is redefined as the *tendency* of entities to act in a particular way due to their particular structure and powers.

Alternatively, critical realism appears to share the epistemological relativism of interpretivism, but this is also on differing terms. For critical realism, the term epistemological relativism recognises that all knowledge is contextual, fallible and influenced by our prior knowledge and can have both transitive and intransitive qualities. However, while it is accepted that the social world includes thought and discourse, it is not exhausted by it (Fleetwood, 2005). Instead, social reality also includes causal entities with a material and independent existence that may differ from our subjective understanding of them. So, while both critical realism and interpretivism are interested in how individuals or groups construct meaning and sense out of their experiences, critical realism acknowledges these

differing epistemological standpoints are of an independent reality regardless of our concepts or discourse about them and also hold causal power. Linking the positions of ontological realism and epistemological relativity together is the critical realist notion of judgemental rationality. This is the idea that if it is assumed that there is both an independent reality and multiple and fallible ways of knowing, to avoid a collapse into relativism, it must also be possible to judge or assess which theories offer a better explanation than others (Danermark et al., 2019). In other words, the critical realist belief that there is independence between the object of study and our knowledge of it, the intransitive and transitive, offers an ontological basis for evaluating alternative theories and concepts for the accuracy of their explanatory power.

A note on critical realism and social constructionism

The previous chapter noted that Fleetwood's model indicated a possible congruence between critical realism and social constructionism depending on the nature of the latter's ontological assumptions. Fleetwood suggests that some varieties of social constructionism and critical theory are unnecessarily laden with "anti-realist baggage" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 9) which, in rejecting positivism, appear to demand a commitment to idealism. Still, as he explains, this is not the only option.

It is common among proponents of critical realism to distinguish between what they refer to as strong and weak social constructionism (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006; Elder-Vass, 2012). Critical realism accepts a weak form of social constructionism based on the necessity of human interpretation when constructing theoretical ideas and social objects of study. This level of social constructionism is aligned with the earlier concepts of the transitive domain of knowledge and the above-mentioned concept of epistemological relativism. It also recognises the ontological role that the interpretation of ideas and language play in social phenomena. What critical realism does not subscribe to is strong or radical constructionism whereby social phenomena are reduced to *just* or *only* ideas, beliefs or ways of thinking. According to Bhaskar and Danermark (2006), the implications of a strong social constructivist perspective is the conflation of the intransitive dimension of a phenomenon with the transitive understanding of it. i.e. leadership does not have a reality independent of our knowledge of it, or that the reality of leadership is reduced to people's concepts or understanding of it. The former suggests that there is "nothing to investigate prior to the constitutive social scientific investigation", (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006, p. 284) while the latter suggests that social

phenomena such as leadership are only concerned with cultural entities and mechanisms Bhaskar and Danermark (2006).

Conclusion

This chapter has covered the ontological and epistemological implications of a critical realist philosophy of science. However, to consider paradigmatic elements such as Burrell and Morgan's interest in human nature and the nature of society, Bhaskar's philosophical groundwork needs to be supplemented with a compatible realist ontology for social phenomena. For this thesis, I will draw on Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory to do that.

Chapter Four - The morphogenetic approach as an explanatory framework for leadership

Now that I have laid out the fundamentals of a critical realist philosophy of science and how it addresses the paradigmatic considerations of ontology and epistemology, I can apply these ideas further by considering their influence on the conception of a social phenomenon like leadership.

As defined by Bhaskar and outlined in the previous chapter, critical realism provides a philosophical foundation for a stratified and emergent ontology independent of epistemology. However, as Roy Bhaskar regularly reminds his readers, the role of philosophy is that of "under-labourer" or "midwife" (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 10; Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015, p. 16; 2016, p. 1) to science, merely clearing a path for the journey that science must take alone. The work of Margaret Archer echoes this idea and develops it further by highlighting the need for what she calls an *explanatory method* as an essential link between ontology and social theory (Archer, 1995). In other words, any proposed social theory must be consistent with its ontological assumptions (i.e., the assumed nature of reality) and offer an explanation of how this reality works.

Up to this point, I have established a critical realist ontological footing in contrast to positivist and interpretivist positions and located an integration of leadership theory as our desired destination; what remains is a realist-based explanatory model or framework capable of bridging the gap between these two points. For this task, I am drawing on Margaret Archer's Morphogenetic approach. This model offers a realist-based explanation in which social phenomena can be framed as the interplay between social structure, culture, and agency, resulting in the phenomena's replication (morphostasis) or transformation (morphogenesis) over time. Archer draws on the critical realist ontological assumptions of stratification and emergence, where social structure, culture and agency are all considered emergent from people's interactions and operate in their own strata of reality over different timeframes. While each entity type relies on human activity to maintain or transform its existence (Danermark et al., 2019), Archer claims they cannot be understood or explained based on this activity alone. Current structures, beliefs, and behaviours have been shaped and influenced by the actions of the past and as emergent entities, they hold powers and potentials capable of conditioning people's future actions. This conception of structure, culture and

agency should not be considered a reification of these entities but, instead, an acknowledgement that some social interactions create conditions with enduring powers and properties that cannot be accounted for by the actions of the contemporary agents (Mutch, 2009).

Archers' Morphogenetic model offers an alternative to the competing traditional sociological explanatory models of individualism versus collectivism and the more recent offering of Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration (Archer, 1995). Archer rejects these models based on the notion of conflation, a label she applies where an explanatory model attempts to explain one qualitatively different entity in terms of another or compress different entities into one (Archer, 1995). For example, Archer describes methodological individualism, where society is conceptualised as the sum of collective actions of individuals, as an example of upward conflation. Under this conception, individual agency becomes the basis on which all phenomena must be explained, and drawing on structural concepts such as collectives or positions within individualistically anchored theory would not be permitted. Collectivism moves in the opposite direction and is termed by Archer as downward conflation, where individuals are conceived as merely acting out a pre-formed role handed down by society. Explanation under these terms views individuals as prisoners to their context, and hence, any explanation of social phenomena, like leadership, must be provided in structured terms alone.

A third possibility, Structuration Theory, is defined by Archer as central conflation (Archer, 1995) where social phenomena are explained by viewing structure and agency as "two sides of the same coin": integral and inseparable (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 76). While this model signals a positive move towards acknowledging a relationship between structure and agency rather than either/or, Gidden's theory expresses this relation as a duality in which structure is simultaneously the process and outcome of people's interactions (Archer, 1982). Archer argues that structuration theory melds the concept of structure and agency together such that any explanation of social reality is limited to the currently observed social practices, rather than acknowledging that structure and agency each have unique and distinguishable properties and that investigation into their interplay over time offers increased explanatory power of social phenomena in different contexts.

Methodologically, Archer's Morphogenetic model relies on the concept of analytical dualism (Archer, 1995), which holds that to analyse the social world, structure must exist in advance

of any activity and that the outcome of the activity is the elaboration of those structures (Archer, 1995). The Morphogenetic model attempts to re-position the previously competing notions of structure OR agency by acknowledging that society would not exist without the actions of people AND that people's actions are shaped (made possible or not possible) (Danermark et al., 2019) by already existing societal structures. In everyday life, these two elements weave together continuously, obscuring the relations between the inputs, the interactions, and the outcomes of activity. However, analytical dualism provides an analytical method by which the unique strands are teased apart, creating the opportunity to identify and independently analyse social entities and their subsequent interplay. The general morphogenetic approach is represented diagrammatically (Figure 4.1) as a three-phase cycle in which structure and agency operate over different time frames (T1 – T4).

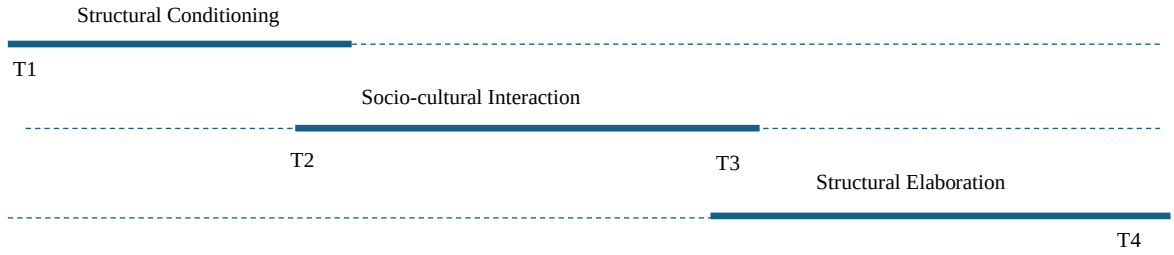

Figure 4.1: Adapted from the basic morphogenetic/static cycle with its three phases (Archer, 1995, p. 157)

At time T1, the structures are already in existence, their powers established, and the structural conditions under which the upcoming cycle will commence are already in place. Archer describes T1 as an objective existence (i.e. not of the current agents' own making) that conditions the strategies and actions that agents can take (Archer, 1995). This could be thought of as a perpetual game of Monopoly that has been abandoned by its current players and is waiting for a new cohort to join and roll the dice. The rules of the game, the player positions, and their state of affairs in terms of assets and liabilities have already been distributed. The new players do not get a chance to start the game again or negotiate which of the previous player's hands they will inherit. Structure at T1 has established the context in which new players will find themselves, conditioning but not determining (Archer et al., 2013) their future actions and interests (Danermark et al., 2019). The board is pre-set for each player to make good of what they have in relation to the concerns and projects, which have also been shaped but not determined by structural forces. In the typical game of Monopoly, players would expect to adhere to a single set of rules and assume that each player had the same starting position at the beginning of the game, creating an equal playing field. Still, the

social game of Monopoly is not so even-handed. It has various starting points, some more favourable than others, and rules favouring some but not all. As a result, by T2, some players will be incentivised to maintain the status quo because it works to their advantage, while others will be looking to change the structures to improve their position as the T2 -T3 phase plays out. The conditions set out in T1 may also obscure the availability of actions from some players or create an opportunity cost to a particular course of action, which is so great that the price of action or inaction makes it unfeasible. In summary, the influence of structure is through the shaping of the situations that people find themselves in, and therefore conditioning (but not determining) different possible actions depending on their inherited (objective) positions (Archer, 1995).

At T2 – T3, the game action begins, and this is the phase where structure and agency come together. This is the site of interaction where players, while conditioned as part of T1, can act with agency, that is, with intentionality and reflection to achieve their individual or group goals (Archer, 1995). By doing so, they not only impact back on their initial structured conditions but also hold the potential to transform the very agency from which they have initially acted.

Following the T2-T3 interaction is T4, the structural elaboration phase from which the morphogenetic model's name is derived. The outcome of the interaction phase can be described as morphostasis, where the T1 structures are maintained. Alternatively, T4 can reflect structural morphogenesis, a structural change or reorganisation compared to the T1 starting position. Whatever the outcome, the T4 structures now assume the starting point (T1) for the next round of play.

The above description of the Morphogenetic approach provides a general overview of the model that Archer has applied in the context of three distinctive but related social entities: structure, culture and agency, and it is these that I will now provide a more detailed description of before bringing the three elements together in a single model. I will also introduce Archer's conception of reflexivity, which she defines as the critical mediator between structure and agency and, therefore, essential to explaining what actions people take and why. As I argue, introducing reflexivity is also the means by which both the objective and subjective realities of social phenomena like leadership can be accounted for

ontologically, providing space for both positivist and interpretivist paradigms to be co-located with a single paradigm.

The scope and detail of Archer's development and explanation of the Morphogenetic approach are vast and a full rehearsal beyond the scope of this thesis. I intend to introduce only the concepts of Archer's Morphogenetic model to the extent required to develop a realist-based leadership framework that will be used as the map into which alternative paradigms can be integrated.

What is structure?

In social science, the term structure has been used in various ways. Within leadership theory, talk of structure has been applied to many concepts, including organisation, power, authority, control, linguistics, team, task, traits, gender, hierarchy, etc. (Schedlitzki et al., 2023). Through the lens of critical realism, a structure is generally defined as "*a set of internally related objects"* (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 42 emphasis original). However, in relation to the morphogenetic model, the term structure is broken down into two distinct general forms: materially based social structures and ideally based cultural structures, each operating in their own strata of reality. To avoid confusion between generalised references to structure and these specific forms, Archer differentiates between them as SEPs (Structural Emergent Properties) and CEPs (Cultural Emergent Properties). As emergent, both SEPs and CEPs share the necessity of being relatively enduring, being irreducible to the people and activities that created or maintained them, and having the potential to act back on their component parts (i.e., people) due to their unique causal powers. As a result, SEPs and CEPS are conceptualised independently and prior to the current people and their social interaction (Archer, 1995) so in the morphogenetic model, they are located in the conditioning phase between T1 and T2. Where SEPs and CEPs differ is in their content (i.e. the type of thing they are) and the nature of their relations (Archer, 1995). Before I explore SEPs and CEPs in more detail, it is important to expand on the different types of relations indispensable to critical realist analysis.

As was highlighted in Chapter Three, critical realism prioritises ontology. As a result, it places a primacy on considering the nature of the object(s) under study as the starting point for developing theories with increased explanatory power. This means recognising and moving beyond what Danermark et al. (2019) refers to as formal relations in which objects

(entities or things) are categorised or grouped in a way that does not capture the elements essential to the particular study. Alternatively, through the process of abstraction, critical realist scholars aim to uncover what they define as the substantial internal relations of an object or phenomenon, highlighting the essential and necessary attributes and relations that make it what it is. For example, the rental market could be defined in part by an internal relation between landlords and renters. Without a landlord, you are not a renter; without a renter, you could not be defined as a landlord. These roles are internally related as they mutually constitute one another. Internal relations can be divided further into symmetric and asymmetric forms. Again, drawing from Danermark et al. (2019, p. 42), the relationship between landlords and houses could be defined as internal and asymmetric, as property ownership is essential to the role of landlord. However, houses do not require landlords for their existence.

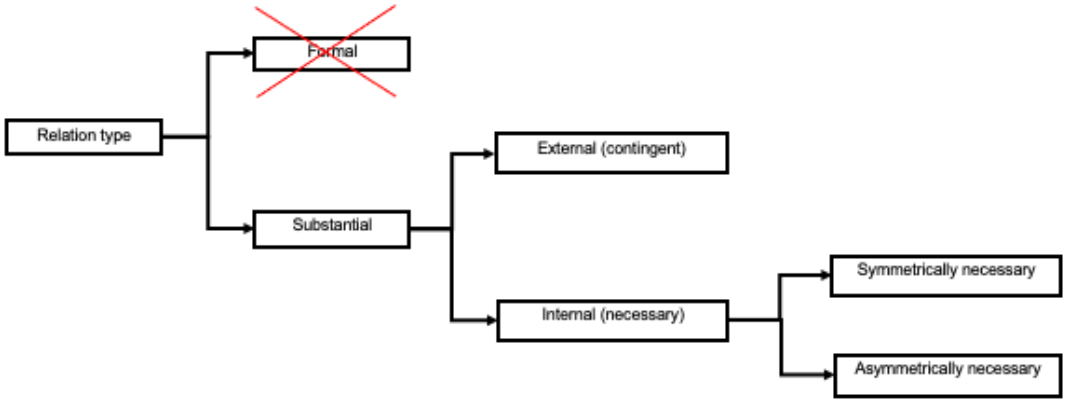

Figure 4.2: Different types of relations; adapted from Danermark et al. (2019, p. 42)

In contrast, a substantial external or contingent relation can be said to exist when both objects or entities can exist on their own (Sayer, 2010) with no dependence on the other for their existence. For example, it could be argued that the concept of motherhood is external to the conception of leadership. One does not require the other for its constitution.

However, defining a substantial relationship as either internal or external is not a reflection of its inherent importance to the phenomena being studied. This can only be determined by the question at hand. So, returning to the example above, while motherhood relation could be

considered external to leadership, it could also be regarded as significant to an analysis of motherhood's impact on obtaining and maintaining leadership positions.

Finally, it is important to note that when critical realists speak of essential and necessary relations, this does not imply a belief in fixed or unchanging essences. Internal relations can change, so while the existence of a relation may remain, the nature of that relation may evolve. This idea can be captured by the concept of marriage, where the existence of a relationship between husband and wife (or now, in fact, any two people) is maintained, but the nature of that relation has changed over time (Sayer, 2010).

Structural emergent properties (SEPs)

What differentiates a SEP from its cultural counterpart is its "*primary* dependence upon material resources," which can be physical or human Archer (1995, p. 175 emphasis original). This means that should leadership or some of its components be conceptualised as a SEP, the nature of the relation would be founded on a material advantage of one group or individual over another (e.g. access to resources or information), and the properties of this relation, however defined, would subsequently provide people or groups with particular powers, obligations (Archer, 2000) and reasons, in the form of vested interests, to act in particular ways. The definition of a SEP relies on identifying the necessary and internal relations that make it uniquely what it is and that are essential to its existence. As outlined previously, this means looking beyond the formal relations as they might present themselves in the actual and empirical domains to the underlying substantial SEPs.

For example, much leadership scholarship implicitly conceptualises leadership, or lack of leadership, as necessarily contained within the relation between a manager and a subordinate. It could be argued that the relation of one role reporting to another is not essential to leadership because a leadership relationship can exist without a reporting relationship. Instead, the manager | subordinate relation might be better described as substantial but external to leadership. This does not mean that the reporting relation does not influence leadership but instead acknowledges that the two can exist independently of one another (Archer, 1995). The question can then be asked: What is the essential leadership relation, and how might this be supported or enabled by a manager/subordinate reporting relation? It could be argued that the manager-subordinate relation enables leadership by creating organisational hierarchies and roles (SEPs), which grants those in managerial roles access to

information or resources that are not available to all, creating a material advantage over subordinate roles. As a result, the manager appears to lead while the subordinate follows. Under this conception, leadership's necessary relation could be redescribed as existing only where one person or group has access to information and resources held by another in order to achieve an outcome. Without this relation, leadership cannot exist.

Cultural emergent properties (CEPs)

Alternatively, the term culture encapsulates the world of ideas, a concept that Fleetwood (2004b, p. 30) fleshes out, suggesting it includes "discourse, language, genres, tropes, styles, signs, symbols and semiotised entities, ideas, beliefs, meanings, understandings, explanations, opinions, concepts, representations, models, theories". Archer defines culture as "taken to refer to all intelligibilia, that is to any item which has the dispositional capacity of being understood by someone." (Archer, 2011, p. 70). She suggests that within this cultural repository lies a subset of propositions that can be assessed based on their logical relation to one another, allowing for the conception of an emergent cultural system independent of and prior to any current activity. This is granted on the assumption that some thoughts, ideas, theories, or belief escape their makers, entering a library of what can be assessed logically as complementary, contradictory or unrelated to one another.

For example, competing ideas about leadership could exist. On the one hand, there could be the belief or discourse that "leadership should be distributed and shared throughout the organisation". This could be considered logically contradictory to the premise that "Only managers need leadership training". If the first statement is accepted as true, then the second statement cannot logically also be claimed to be true. However, this relationship does not reflect whether any individual or group currently supports either statement or whether any actions or practices are being taken based on these beliefs.

Later in this chapter, I will outline in more detail the Morphogenetic models' process of structural conditioning. However, for now, I want to highlight that the significance of conceptualising the SEPs and CEPs as part of the analysis of leadership lies in their role of establishing the *a prior* situation or context which conditions but does not determine the leadership interaction which can subsequently take place between T2 and T3. Both SEPs and CEPs are the outcomes of previous interaction, and from a critical realist perspective, provide objective and external reasons and incentives in the form of situational logics (Archer, 1995)

for the people or collectives here and now to act in specific ways depending on how and how they are positioned at T2.

Within Archer's morphogenetic model, situational logics are formed based on what is referred to as second-order emergent properties (Archer, 1995). These properties reflect the relationship between different SEPs or CEPs by identifying whether they are necessary or contingent on one another and whether they are complementary or incompatible. Complementary and incompatibility meaning they can "help or hinder one another's operation whether they are necessary or only contingently related" (Archer, 1995, p. 216) The resulting 2x2 matrix suggests four different situation logics which could be seen as guiding strategies for people or groups at T2 based on the premise of retaining or gaining their vested interests and avoiding missing out on opportunities that would benefit their situation.

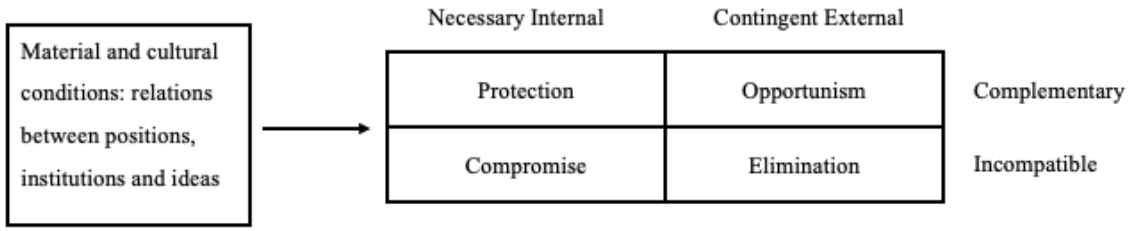

Figure 4.3: 2x2 Situational logic matrix adapted from Archer (1995, p. 218)

This should not be interpreted as critical realism denying the power of agency (there is always the power to respond in other ways) but rather as recognising the power and influence of SEPs and CEPs as two pieces of the puzzle that must be examined to explain leadership within a particular context.

It is also important to note that while SEPs and CEPs can be identified and analysed independently of one another, this does not imply that they conceptualise two separate realities. SEPS and CEPS are the respective structural and cultural properties that have emerged from the same context of interest. SEPs and CEPs can also emerge at varying social levels, including institutional, organisational, teams, and roles. Again, the nature of the relationship between structures at different social levels (i.e., whether they are necessary or contingent, complementary or incompatible) needs to be assessed as part of any structural analysis and explanation.

What is agency?

The third piece of the social puzzle is that of agency. The realist perspective of agency seeks to recognise that while the social world people encounter in the forms of SEPs and CEPs has conditioning influences over their current actions, people also have their own personal emergent powers (PEPs), which can impact this same-said world. To this end, Archer proposes a stratified model of 'people'(Archer, 1995, p. 254) or agency (Archer, 2016a). Archer clarifies that the Morphogenetic approach does not use social agency as a synonym for person or human. Instead, it explicitly differentiates between three levels of social agency: the Person, the Agent and the Actor (Archer, 1995), each associated with its own emergent powers. The importance of this perspective lies in recognising that there are actions that can be undertaken as a Person, actions that can be taken as an Agent, and actions that can be taken as an Actor and that these actions will be "different things in different settings, involving different powers, different interests and different reasons" (Archer, 1995, p. 253) . According to Archer, whether we consider a social phenomenon in terms of the Person, the Agent or the Actor depends on what we are attempting to explain. In the case of leadership, there may be possible contributions from each level of social agency. Still, without this stratified conception, the potential influence of each and their interplay is obscured.

A stratified model of agency

At the root of the stratified model of agency is the concept of personhood, which has two essential and unique powers for the purposes of this thesis. Archer defines the first as a sense of self, a human capacity to recognise oneself as separate from others and society and as continuous, i.e. the same being over time. Archer claims that social reality could not exist without this sense-of-self as there is a need for an entity on which any social expectation can impinge. The second power of personhood is reflexivity (Archer, 2016c), meaning the ability to consider multiple, sometimes conflicting positions, roles and interests (not necessarily accurately), how these might relate to the concerns a particular person deems important, and how best to respond. The act of reflection is not infallible, as it is certainly possible for people to misdiagnose their situation (Archer, 2003) and act accordingly. It also does not require a person to be fully aware of the conditions which shape their perspectives. According to Archer, unacknowledged structural conditions can still influence motivation for a particular course of action just by shaping the situation they find themselves (Archer, 2016b).

Together, a sense-of-self and reflexivity support the building of identity as a particular person, which develops over time as each person considers and determines the concerns that are most important to them in relation to three key domains of life: the natural domain, which is concerned with physical well-being, the practical domain which is concerned with performative skill, and the social domain which is concerned with self-worth (Archer & Brock, 2017)(Archer, 2016c). According to Archer, it is impossible to avoid addressing and acting in each area of concern in some way. Still, it is the ongoing balance that each person strikes and the particular concerns they prioritise that ultimately develops their personal and social identity and provides the "activity-potential" (Archer, 1995, p. 256) for particular projects or courses of action.

The importance of reflexivity is twofold: first, it provides a mechanism for explaining the different courses of action that similarly situated agents may take as a result of differing concerns, and second, reflexivity's role is seen as the mediating process through which people's subjective reasons for action are constructed. As a result, reflexivity acts as a source of subjective causal power (Archer, 2016b, 2016c), which must be considered alongside its structural counterparts (SEPs and CEPs).

The next stratum is that of the Agent. Archer utilises the term social Agent in a collective sense to refer to a group of people similarly positioned or situated within the sociocultural system (Archer, 1995). Agents can be structural (e.g. positioned materially based on birth, role, etc) or cultural (e.g. born into a particular religion) and while there is no necessary relationship between structural and cultural Agents, they are often conflated as a result of structural power being used to pursue a cultural agenda or the use of particular cultural beliefs as a means of legitimising structural advantage.

Agents can be further typified as either corporate or primary Agents. Corporate Agents refer to collectives or groups that have established a level of intentionality and a goal and have communicated a strategic intent of maintaining or transforming their current situations. As a result, the activity of corporate Agents is one of the main drivers in the elaboration of SEPs and CEPs, including influencing the roles that are available for Actors to take up. Primary Agents, on the other hand, lack both organisation and intent. As a result, they lack a say but not an influence on elaborating SEPs and CEPs (Archer, 1995), continuing to impact and

interact with structures but in a reactive way rather than with a response that implies a level of collective determination.

The third level is the emergence of the social Actor, an individualistic concept in contrast to the collective nature of social Agents outlined above. Social Actors are defined by Archer (1995, p. 295) as "role incumbents and roles themselves have emergent properties which cannot be reduced to characteristics of their occupants." So, for example, for a person promoted to the role of manager, there are structural and cultural properties that accompany the role, pre-dating the current occupant's tenure. However, these are not synonymous with the way they subjectively choose to portray or "act" the role. While the rules and ways of acting within a particular role pre-exist, there remains the possibility of the current Actor elaborating the role over time based on their actions.

Linking persons, agents, and actors

Archer describes the relationship between Persons, Agents, and Actors in genealogical terms where Persons are said to parent the Agent, which in turn parent the Actor (Archer, 1995). This should not be interpreted as the Person, Agent and Actor being different people but rather as providing the ability to analytically distinguish between the properties and power that emerge at each level (Archer, 1995). This analogy also gives the relation a linear feel, but in reality, the emergent nature of the relationship becomes iterative, as is depicted below in Figure 4.4.

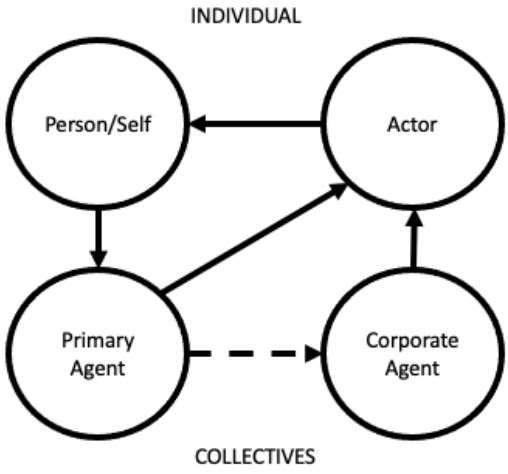

Figure 4.4: Author's depiction of the stratified model of agency based on Archer (2003, p. 124)

Archer proposes that at birth, we are Persons who are immediately placed and acquire the properties of primary Agents in the form of the social structures into which we are born. Archer argues that it is crucial that the associated "privileges and underprivilege are regarded as properties that people acquire involuntaristically and not as the roles that they occupy by choice" (Archer, 1995, p. 277). As a result, the kind of Agent people start life as significantly influences what type of Actor they can later choose to become. Options are never determined, but the cost of accessing particular roles differs depending on the social starting position as a primary Agent. Over time, people may acquire corporate Agency with its associated vested interests and ability to actively elaborate SEPs and CEPs, which in turn may change the roles available in the future (T3 – T4).

From a leadership perspective, differentiating between primary Agents, corporate Agents, and Actors provides an opportunity to consider the impact of initial social positioning as a primary Agent, such as gender, race, etc., on access to and enactment of leadership as a corporate Agent within specific contexts. It also provides the opportunity for leadership scholarship to consider whether leadership is individual property or grounded in being included in particular collectives.

Bringing it together - the mediating process.

Now that the three parts of the Morphogenetic approach have been described, it is possible to conceptualise how they interact across a particular cycle of interest, resulting in the actions and behaviours that might be observed as part of a more traditional approach to studying leadership. As a reminder, the Morphogenetic approach is broken up into three phases: social conditioning (T1–T2), socio-cultural interaction (T2-T3) and social elaboration (T3–T4). Drawing on the work of Brönnimann (2022) I have juxtaposed these phases with Bhaskar's real, actual and empirical domains, creating a canvas that represents a generic critical realist framework to explore social phenomena like leadership.

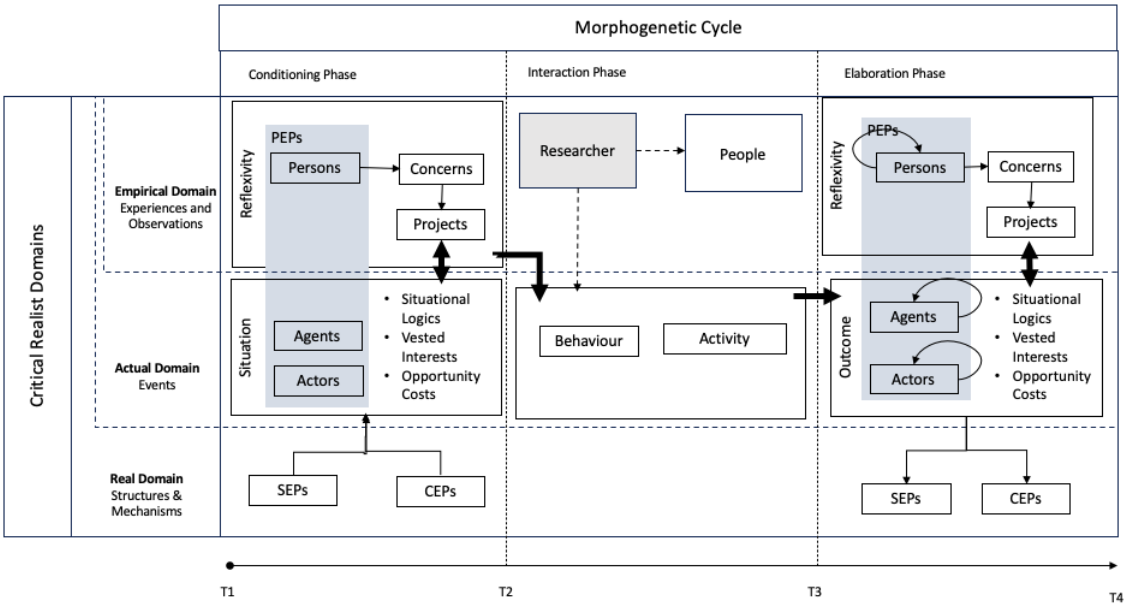

Figure 4.5: A Critical Realist Leadership Canvas (adapted from (Brönnimann, 2022)

The conditioning phase

At the beginning of any analytical cycle, SEPs and CEPs are located in the real domain and the conditioning phase of the Morphogenetic cycle. Here, they act as objective structural influences by "*shaping the situations"* people find themselves in (Archer, 1995, p. 196 emphasis original) and locating them as Agents (primary and corporate) and Actors with vested interests and opportunity costs. The relationship between SEPs and CEPs offers strategic guidance of protection, compromise, opportunism or elimination.

However, for the properties and powers of SEPs and CEPs to influence or impact subsequent interaction requires introducing what Archer refers to as the only effective causal force in social phenomena: people (Archer, 1995, p. 199). SEPs and CEPs can exist unexercised in the real domain or unactualised or unobserved in the actual domain, remaining potential sources of enablement or containment until activated by people with particular concerns and projects. So, when discussing structure and culture as enabling or constraining, it is essential to note that these are not attributes of the situation itself. Structural and cultural properties only enable and constrain in relation to people in their particular positions and respective projects. It is congruence or incongruence between the objective situation and the projects that people want to undertake that determines whether enablement or constraint exists.

As a result, this means that when Archer talks of conditioning, it is essential to recognise that this is not a one-way process. i.e., structure and culture determining the conditions of action. Conditioning, as defined here, brings together two types of powers: structure (SEPs and CEPs) and people's personal powers to reflect and respond in relation to their concerns and projects (Archer, 1995, 2016a). Denying the influence of material or ideational entities suggests that agents are capable of achieving any outcome they choose, regardless of the situation. Alternatively, not referring to the projects of people removes their reason for taking action (Archer, 1995, p. 199) This is where I return to the concept of reflexivity, in which individuals and groups have the power to consider the relation between the situation and their projects and *subjectively* weigh up the vested interests and costs and to determine the course of action to be taken. In other words, a person's subjective interpretation of a situation is an essential component of social phenomena. This is not a concession to what I have previously called interpretivism. From a critical realist position, real is defined as anything with a potential causal effect. As such, Archer's explanation of the conditioning phase as the interplay between the objective situation and subjective reflexivity means that both can and must be given ontological status.

Archer's morphogenetic model recognises that SEPs and CEPs are objectively impinging forces but also that these structures are met with people's subjective interpretation and creative response (Archer, 2016b). People in similar situations can debate or consider possible actions and come up with different answers. So, while there may be general tendencies in the interaction (behaviours and activities) that take place in a particular situation, this is in no way guaranteed.

The interaction phase

The interaction phase (T2 -T3) is the location of the more familiar behaviours, activities and observations that form the basis of positivist and interpretivist science. As part of this thesis, I am not suggesting that the interaction or action phase of Archer's model is not an essential part of explaining leadership; however, I am arguing that leadership interaction can be better explained by extending the frame of reference to include the prior material and cultural structures and analysing how these structures mediate agency. According to Archer, the SEPs and CEPs of the real domain should not be conflated with the patterns or practices observed in the actual and empirical domains (Archer, 1995). As an open system, observing leadership interaction at the empirical level represents the actualisation of multiple interacting SEPs, CEPs, and PEPs, so restricting inquiry to only the interaction offers restricted explanatory

power. Interpretivist perspectives may be inclined to ask the agents involved about the SEPS and CEPs that impact them. However, this also has restricted explanatory power, only revealing the components that agents have formed some awareness of and agents' interpretation of structures can sometimes be inaccurate. That being said, agents' interpretations (rightly or wrongly) do reveal their consciously acknowledged reasons for their actions, providing the basis for the subjective ontology.

I have located both the researcher and the subjects of leadership enquiry in the empirical domain, but as I will later demonstrate, the relationship between the empirical and actual domain and the relationship between the researcher and the subject differs depending on whether a positivist, interpretivist or critical realist paradigm is observed.

The elaboration phase

The T3 – T4 elaboration phase represents the result of interaction, which can be one of change (morphogenesis) or maintenance (morphostasis), impacting SEPs and CEPs and their second-order relations and creating a new starting position for the next round of analysis. It is also important to note that people and their PEPs are also impacted by social interaction. Archer refers to this as the double morphogenesis of structure and agency where "as it reshapes structure, agency is ineluctably reshaping itself" (Archer, 1995, p. 298).

For this paper, the overall nature of the outcome of a morphogenic cycle is not of primary importance. However, I suggest that an outcome of change or stability does represent an attribute against which projects of people and corporate Agents may judge leadership as effective or ineffective. There will be situations when effective leadership is attributed to stability, whereas in other situations, effective leadership is associated with structural change. Ironically, a manager or person in a leadership role could also be asked to deliver both simultaneously but at different levels of an organisation, contributing to the perceived illusiveness of leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003).

Conclusion

Now that I have finished combining the Critical Realist domains and Morphogenetic model into a single canvas, the difficulty of accurately locating critical realism in paradigm frameworks such as those outlined in Chapter Two starts to become apparent.

Referencing back to the Burrell and Morgan framework, the Morphogenetic approach does not align with either volunteerism (upward conflation) or determinism (downward conflation) as it transcends this either/or dichotomy to recognise the need to investigate the interplay between the structure and agency. The Morphogenetic model could also be interpreted as allowing the nature of society to be either one of regulation or of radical change. As stated by Archer (1995, p. 5), "the 'morpho' element is an acknowledgement that society has no pre-set form or preferred state; the 'genetic' part is a recognition that it takes its shape, from and is formed by agents, originating from the intended and unintended consequences of their activities",

Structural and cultural relations exist prior to the individuals and groups that enter into them, but it is also these individuals or groups that reproduce or transform them. Current behaviour and interaction result from the interplay between SEPs, CEPs and PEPs and reflect the outcomes of people's subjective interpretations, compromise and ingenuity. As a result, rather than seeing objectivity and subjectivity as dualling scientific notions, critical realism recognises the necessity of both, granting them both ontological status based on their causal powers. As described here, the morphogenetic model highlights and reinforces the notion of leadership as operating in an open and stratified system. As a result, while a structural analysis can provide a useful starting point for explanation, it cannot predict or pre-determine how any future leadership cycles may proceed.

Having outlined the ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical realism and introduced how these have been adapted to propose an overarching theory of structure and agency in the form of Archer's morphogenetic model, we can now explore the methodological implications that arise from a critical realist philosophy of science.

Chapter Five - Critical realism and its implications for research methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline how the critical realist leadership canvas will be used to analyse and co-locate leadership theory grounded in both positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The importance of applying research methodologies and methods that are in-keeping or consistent with the specific scientific paradigm of a study has been well documented (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kuhn, 1962; Lincoln et al., 2011) As part of the so-called paradigm wars (Bryman, 2008), a debate was often framed around an incompatibility between quantitative and qualitative research methods, but as outlined in Chapter Two, this qualitative/quantitative divide was usually a reflection of the differing underlying assumptions about the nature of social reality typically associated with positivism and the various forms of interpretivism (Bryman, 2008).

From a critical realist viewpoint, ontological assumptions act as the primary regulators of the concepts that can legitimately be included or excluded in scientific explanations (Archer, 1995), and these, in turn, have implications for the appropriate choice of methodology and methods. This means that undertaking critical realist research is not a commitment to a prescriptive methodological toolset but, instead, challenges researchers to consider the specific object or phenomena of their study and use methods coherent with its nature and support going beyond what can be observed empirically (Danermark et al., 2019). This does not exclude the value of more traditional scientific approaches as there is still room for quantitative tools in critical realist study (Hastings, 2023). In fact, critical realism is often referred to as requiring methodological pluralism in order to investigate phenomena across the empirical, actual and real domains (Cruickshank, 2003; Fleetwood, 2004a) However, this does mean that critical realism involves the integration of modes of inference other than deduction and induction that are typically used as a means of testing the connections between empirical events (Danermark et al., 2019) or to generalise interpretive findings to access the possible structures and mechanisms that are located in the real domain, as these reflect the ultimate objects of critical realist science. The most important of these techniques or methods are abduction and retroduction.

To explain the methodological implications of a critical realist approach, this chapter outlines the overall research design for this study, drawing on a five-step methodological framework

proposed by Danermark et al. (2019) to undertake an analysis of two leadership texts. As part of this outline, I also provide an overview of abstraction, the concept inherent in developing scientific theory irrespective of paradigm, and an introduction to abductive and retroductive inference, which are central to critical realist research methodology (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014).

Research methodology

The design of this study draws on a critical realist explanatory research model proposed by Danermark et al. (2019) as its guiding methodology. Using this framework, I have analysed two scientific papers representative of positivist and interpretivist paradigms applied to leadership research. I intend to locate them within Chapter Four's critical realist leadership canvas and explore how this process can facilitate a more integrative leadership perspective.

The stages of explanatory research defined by Danermark et al. (2019) are descriptions, analytical resolution, abduction, retroduction, comparison and contextualisation, and these represent a progression from a concrete or observable dataset (which in this case comprises the tangible words on the page) through an iterative process of conceptual abstraction followed by a return to the concrete, in which I explore the possibility of more integrative meta-framework of leadership. Steps one through four have been completed for each paper individually, while step five has attempted to combine the individual analyses into one single integrated view. Together, this synthesis can be defined as the transitive object of science (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016), an output not immune to influence from prior thinking and theory about leadership or my subjective interpretation of this scholarship and motivation for undertaking this thesis. From a critical realist perspective, the models and conclusions drawn reflect the transitive domain and, therefore, must be examined through the application of judgemental rationality, a process by which a researcher needs to reflect on the logic of their analysis and its ability to explain or better explain reality when compared with alternative propositions. (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021)

I will now outline the purpose and approach in each step of the Danermark et al. explanatory research methodology,

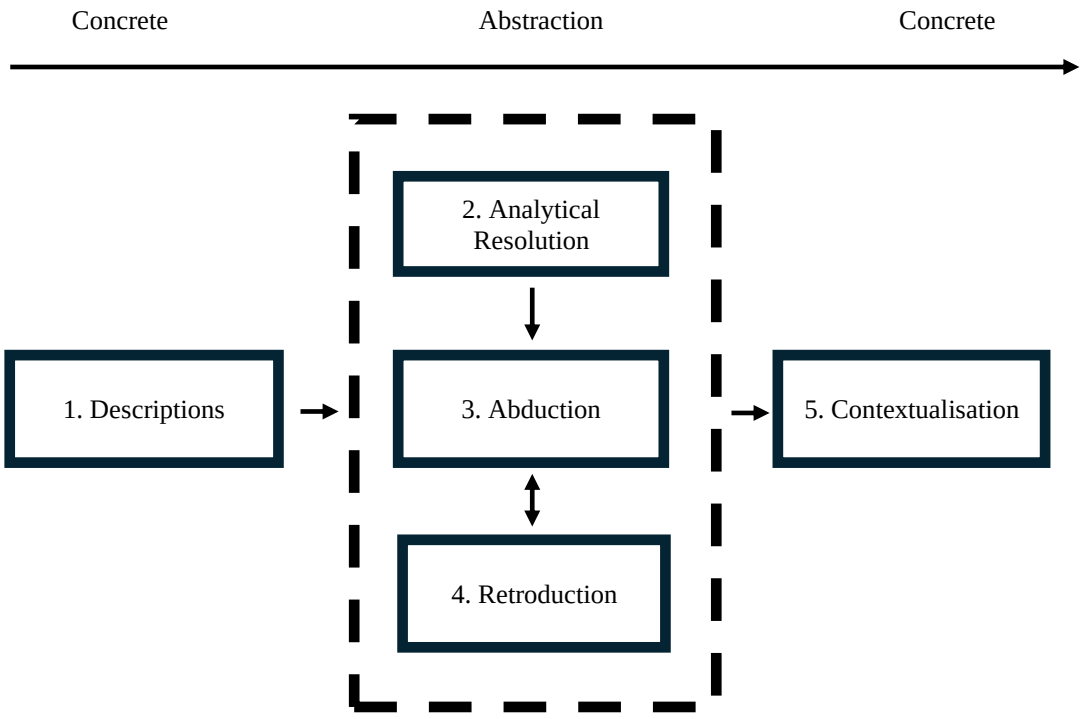

Figure 5.1 - The stages in explanatory research based on critical realism (Danermark et al., 2019) adapted from (Raduescu & Vessey, 2008)

The framework's first stage is *descriptions,* which intends to capture the events or describe the phenomena under investigation. My descriptive analysis takes the form of a brief overview of each paper's purpose and my interpretation of the leadership theory referenced within each text. It attempts to locate the stated or assumed research paradigm and reflect on the related assumptions' impact on the authors' conception of leadership.

Stage two calls for *analytical resolution,* which Danermark et al. (2019, p. 109) describe as the process of "distinguishing the various components, aspects or dimension and level of analysis" to be applied to a particular study through the process of abstraction. This could be thought of as defining or designating what the researcher assumes are the important structures, entities or pieces of the puzzle they are trying to solve and how they might be related to one another. The process of abstraction can also valuably reveal (usually indirectly) what is deemed unimportant or irrelevant.

Social phenomena like leadership are complex due to the open nature of society. Unlike scientific investigation of the natural world, the value of lab experimentation or controlled

research conditions is limited or counterproductive as it is likely to interfere with and influence the very phenomena under investigation (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). Therefore, abstraction is central to analysing any social phenomena and identifying and defining the elements relevant to the problem. In some ways, abstraction could be considered social science's answer to the laboratory experiment, where abstraction is the singling-out in thought of the aspects of the phenomena believed to be necessary to its explanation.

The goal of abstraction is to conceptually differentiate between the necessary and incidental components or elements of the phenomena and to avoid dissecting or combining these elements in ways that misrepresent or obscure the attribution of causal powers. Given that this thesis draws on existing leadership research as its primary input, I have used this stage to clarify my interpretation of the abstractions applied by the original author(s) within each paper, with the intent that the author's theoretical assumptions about the nature of leadership can be more clearly examined. Therefore, this stage provides the opportunity to address sub-question 3, which asks how positivist or interpretivist paradigms have influenced how leadership is conceptualised.

The third stage, *abductive inference*, allows for redescribing each paper's conception of leadership in critical realist terms. Abduction is a process in which the researcher attempts to move from individual events or phenomena to capture the more generalised structures underlying what has been observed. This demands a redescription or recontextualisation (Danermark et al., 2019) of the phenomena, often in terms of a broad theory or framework, providing new insight into the event. This process is analogous to the researcher donning various glasses, each allowing her to see phenomena in a different light and illuminate insight that might not have previously been 'seen'. In this stage, I have relocated the theories' parts described in stage two into the critical realist canvas developed in Chapter 4, allowing them to be located within a critical realist social ontology. This process was completed from two perspectives, first locating each component horizontally across the temporal framework of the morphogenetic model as either relating to conditioning, interaction, or elaboration. Then secondly, followed by a vertical placement, where the experience of leadership is differentiated from the events or actions of leadership and identifying any initial SEPs or CEPs

The fourth stage of the explanatory research methodology is *retroduction* (Danermark et al., 2019). Retroduction is defined as a thought process that supports the identification of the theorised structures and mechanisms in the real domain. Sayer (2010) describes it as moving beyond recognising that an entity or object might produce an event to understanding what about that entity enables it to do so. As entities in the real domain may not be directly observable, it is the role of the critical realist researcher to look beyond the empirical evidence to ask, "What must be to make X possible?"

In its most general form, I have asked – what must the world be like for leadership X, reconceptualised in the critical realist leadership canvas, to be possible? This line of questioning has been further developed based on prompts suggested by Sayer (2010, p. 62) who proposes simple questioning such as: "What does the existence of this object (in this form) presuppose? Can it exist on its own as such? If not, what else must be present? What is it about the object that makes it do such and such?"

The final stage of the Danermark model is c*ontextualisation*, which is the process of evaluating the explanatory powers of the different underlying mechanisms (Danermark et al., 2019). For this stage, I have combined the analysis of the individual texts completed in stages three and four into a single view and attempted to demonstrate how conceptions of leadership drawn from differing paradigms could be co-located and potentially connected. This process allowed for the commonalities between theories and highlighted theoretical gaps that could be addressed by future leadership scholarship.

Data selection

The overall nature of this research is intensive (Sayer, 2000), meaning that I will only be looking at two leadership texts to explore the value a critical realist perspective can bring to integrating leadership theory rather than attempting to provide an all-inclusive model of leadership. I have drawn on the work of Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) as a means of identifying two leadership scholars, who, based on their contributions to the publication *Advancing relational leadership research: A dialogue among perspectives*, are recognised as taking either a positivist or interpretivist perspective on leadership. The first is John Antonakis, Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the University of Lausanne, and the second is Dian Marie Hosking, Professor at the School of Governance at Utrecht University. I have made the perhaps bold assumption that their respective published research can be

considered “representative” of paradigmatical assumptions' influence on the way leadership is conceptualised. Subsequently, I selected one paper published by each author since 2000 as a concrete representation of their paradigmatical commitments at work. The author and paper publication details are set out below in Figure 5.2.

Authors(s)	Year	Title	Publication	Paradigm
Antonakis, J., & House, R. J. (2014).	2014	Instrumental leadership: Measurement and extension of transformational–transactional leadership theory.	*The Leadership Quarterly*	Positivist
Hosking, D. M.	2007	Not leaders, not followers: A post-modern discourse of leadership processes.	*Follower-centred perspectives on leadership: A tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl*	Interpretivist - constructionist

Figure 5.2: Leadership papers analysed

Conclusion

This chapter draws Part I of this thesis to a close. Over the past six chapters, I have attempted to address the first two sub-questions outlined in Chapter One. Chapter Two addressed the paradigmatical assumptions of positivism and interpretivism in social science with reference to three widely referenced research paradigm frameworks. These frameworks typically qualify different perspectives as contrasting and non-commensurate, an approach that does not provide a natural fit for the philosophical ideas of critical realism, which attempts to move from an “ either-or perspective” to a “both-and” view (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 7). I also introduced the Fleetwood model, which instead starts with three ontological positions: empirical realism, idealism, and critical realism (Fleetwood, 2014). This approach opens up the possibility of rejecting empirical realism but without the need to accept idealism as the only alternative ontological position.

In Chapters Three and Four, I addressed sub-question two by introducing the basic critical realist philosophy of science. This included the concepts of ontological structure, differentiation and stratification and outlined the impact of these ideas on the critical realism approaches to the practice of science compared to positivism and interpretivism. The ontological assumptions of critical realism were then applied within Margaret Archer’s

Morphogenesis model to build a critical realist canvas against which leadership from differing paradigm perspectives could be further explored.

PART II

Part II of this thesis starts with the critical realist analysis of two leadership perspectives which Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) locate at the opposite ends of the paradigm spectrum. The first is a positivist study by Antonakis and House (2014) that looks to extend Full-Range Leadership theory by adding elements of instrumental leadership to the model. The second is a work by Hosking (2007) that suggests that the process of leadership is locally understood and socially constructed through a process of discourse. As a result, no definition or theory of leadership is offered. Instead, Hosking sets out metatheory on relational discourse and the potential for leadership to manifest as "inclusive, locally grown, multi-logical processes" (Hosking, 2007, p. 23).

As a reminder, the analysis of each paper will be completed individually using the first four stages of the Danermark et al. (2019) explanatory research model before drawing the analysis together into a single contextualising view to explore the possibility of integrating differing leadership perspectives.

Chapter Six - A critical realist analysis of "*Instrumental leadership: Measurement and extension of transformational–transactional leadership theory*" by John Antonakis and Robert House, published in 2014

Stage 1 of Danermark's explanatory research model - Descriptions

Study purpose

The premise of this study by Antonakis and House (2014)is that Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT - transformational, transactional, laissez-faire leadership styles), initially developed by Bass (1985), excludes strategic and task monitoring activities, which are claimed to also be significant leadership functions. These additional elements are referred to by Antonakis and House (2014) (A&H) as Instrumental Leadership (IL). As a result, the authors challenge the validity of previous FRLT studies, suggesting that this earlier research may have overestimated the statistical relationship between interpersonal leadership behaviours and leadership effectiveness as a result of omitting or not adjusting for IL. To address this concern, the authors define and construct a quantitative measure for IL and demonstrate how this measure could be deployed alongside the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), currently the most dominant measure of the FRLT model (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Their intent is to propose a "fuller full-range model" (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 748).

Study theory - Full-range leadership theory

FRLT attempts to provide a universal account of leadership based on leadership styles categorised as either transformational, transactional or laissez-faire. Transformational leadership is defined as charismatic and inspiring leadership in which followers are supported to act for a higher purpose. This contrasts with transactional leadership, which is more contractual in nature and reflects an exchange between the leader and followers. Finally, laissez-faire leadership completes the model and can be described as a lack or absence of leadership (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

The FRLT model is commonly associated with the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) tool. The MLQ assumes that leadership effectiveness outcomes can be predicted based on raters' (self or others) attribution or observation of nine broad leadership behaviour types. Consistent with an established approach in FRLT studies, A&H (2014) regard transformational leadership as defined by five factors – idealised-influence (attributed),

idealised-influence (behaviour), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Alternatively, transactional leadership is defined by the factors of contingent reward, management-by-exception (active) and management-by-exception (passive). The ninth leadership behaviour is laissez-faire. While previous studies have suggested that these factors are predictive of a wide variety of leadership outcomes, Antonakis and House focus on the outcomes of follower satisfaction and rated leader effectiveness, both of which are measured based on their attribution by followers.

Study theory - Instrumental leadership theory

As noted above, A&H agree that while effective leadership is linked to interpersonal behaviours, they also believe that leadership also requires "the application of leader expert knowledge on monitoring of the environment and of performance and the implementation of strategic and tactical solutions" (2014, p. 749). A&H's conception of IL is based on four behavioural factors – environmental monitoring, strategy formulation, goal-path facilitation and outcome monitoring, which together represent a leader's ability to exert influence at the organisational or structural level rather than the level of person-to-person relations that are central to FRLT. A summary of the IL factors and indicators suggested by A&H is provided in Figure 6.1 below.

Dimension	**Factor**	**Factor Summary**	**Indicators**
Strategic Leadership	Environmental Monitoring	• Scanning internal/external environments • Knowing organisational strengths and weakness • Identifying opportunities	• Understands the constraints of our organization • Senses what needs to be changed in our organization
	Strategy formulation & implementation	• Developing policies/goals/objectives	• Ensures that his/her vision is understood in specific terms • Translates the mission into specific goals.

Follower Work Facilitation	Goal-path facilitation	• Giving direction/support/resources • Removing obstacles • Providing path–goal clarifications	• Removes obstacles to my goal attainment • Ensures that I have sufficient resources to reach my goals
	Outcome monitoring	• Providing performance-enhancing feedback	• Assists me to learn from my mistakes • Provides me with constructive feedback about my mistakes

Figure 6.1: Factors and Indicators of Instrumental Leadership adapted from Antonakis and House, (2014)

The authors suggest that measuring only the interpersonal components of leadership captured by FRLT without acknowledging that leadership also requires expertise, such as setting strategy and monitoring outcomes, may result in omitted variable bias, an overestimation of the causal effect of interpersonal actions on leadership outcomes. They speculate that this bias occurs due to followers internalising some activities or behaviours as prototypical of effective leadership and, through a process labelled cognitive classification (Antonakis & House, 2014 citing Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), develop a general belief about a leader's effectiveness as good or bad. This subsequently biases followers' rating of behaviours as they attempt to reconcile their overall impression of the leader with what is being measured. For example, a person in a leadership role may use industry knowledge and expertise to determine a strategic path that contributes to the organisation's effectiveness. When asked to rate the effectiveness of this leader utilising only the elements found in the MLQ tool, followers who have no place to attribute this excluded leadership activity are likely to over-rate measured factors, such as charisma, to maintain consistency between their overall leadership impression and their rating.

Key study conclusions

Antonakis and House conclude that the influence of the IL construct is more significant than either transformational or contingent reward behaviour styles in predicting the outcome of perceived leadership effectiveness and is of equal significance to the prediction of follower satisfaction. In addition, they suggest that their study shows that when indicators of IL are assessed alongside the MLQ, the impact of transformational leadership on measuring leadership outcomes is significantly weakened.

Study research paradigm

Antonakis is considered the most objectivist of the leadership researchers in Ospina and Uhl-Bien's analysis of leadership perspectives (2012, p. xxxiii), which categorises his paradigm as modernist post-positivism. Antonakis and House (2014) do not explicitly refer to their research paradigm within this paper, but do identify the work as taking a functional perspective in which the role or function of leadership is one of goal setting and attainment (Fleishman et al., 1991, p. 257) within an organisational context. Drawing on systems theory (Fleishman et al., 1991), the concept of functional leadership falls within Burrell and Morgan's functional paradigm, which they describe as having a "concern for providing explanations of the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration, solidarity, need satisfaction and actuality" (Burrell & Morgan, 2017, p. 26). Antonakis and House refer to Morgeson et al. (2010, p. 8) who, citing McGrath (1962, p.5), propose that functional leadership is "to do, or get done, whatever is not being adequately handled for group needs".

A positivist paradigm is also demonstrated by the paper's primary foci of developing measures of leadership (IL and FRLT) with the intent of confirming the correlation between types of leader behaviour and positive leadership outcomes, both as a form of prediction and as a means to support future leader selection and development. This is a definitive demonstration of a commitment to empirical realism (as described earlier in Chapter 2) where the world is reduced to observation of regularity between events, which can then be generalised and considered universal; leadership behaviour A causes leadership outcome X. The study's language and application of the hypothetico-deductive model commonly applied to empirical realist perspectives (Yucel, 2018) clearly indicates a positivist epistemology (Burrell & Morgan, 2017), as exemplified by one of the studies five stated hypothesise quoted below:

"H5. Leader effectiveness (H5a) and satisfaction (H5b) with the leader will be predicted by instrumental leadership beyond the effects accounted for by the full range factors." (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 752)

Stage 2 of Danermark's explanatory research model - Analytical resolution

The purpose of the second stage of Danermark's explanatory research model is to abstract the components or entities deemed significant to the particular study and conceptualise their nature and how they might be related. As a reminder, the nature of relations used to conceptualise any particular social phenomenon is paramount in critical realism as it captures the explicit ontological assumptions made about the object of scientific interest and subsequently influences the epistemological and methodological options utilised as part of a study. Critical realist perspectives attempt to move beyond formal relations, which are often merely categories or groupings that appear at the empirical level of analysis and may not accurately represent the relationships in a way substantive to the intended investigation. Substantial relations can be described as either internal/necessary, meaning that the entities are mutually constituting and cannot exist independently of one another or alternatively as an external or contingent relation that exists but with no dependence between particular elements for their constitution. (For a more detailed description of these terms, see Chapter Four, page 39). To address question 3 of this thesis, the abstraction process is attempted under the original authors' paradigmatic terms to explore the impact of the underlying paradigm assumptions on the resulting leadership theory.

My analytical resolution of Fuller-FRLT depicted here in Figure 6.2 is based on the narrative description provided by Antonakis and House (2014, p. 751) (see appendix A), in which it is suggested that effective leaders undertake a series of environmental monitoring and strategy formulation activities before engaging with followers to determine the tasks, resources, ongoing monitoring and support they require to achieve organisational strategies. It is conceptualised that through this process, instrumental leadership behaviours improve follower task performance and increase follower self-efficacy, in turn mediating follower satisfaction with the leader and followers' perception of leader effectiveness. The following analysis is broken into two parts, the first focusing on the behavioural factors included in the Fuller-FRLT model and the second on the entities involved.

As depicted in Figure 6.2 below, A&H place the factors of instrumental leadership alongside the original elements of the FRLT model, demonstrating their conception that following the introduction of IL, transformational and transactional leadership behaviours continue to contribute to the leadership outcomes but not to the same extent as they did prior to IL's inclusion. However, the exact relationship between IL and FRLT behaviours is not made explicit. House and Antonakis describe them as "complementary" (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 751) however, the generality of this statement, combined with the statistical methods utilised in the study, essentially places the relational workings of the individual model dimensions inside a black box. This observation is not new. In a damning critique of transformational-charismatic leadership theory, Van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) highlight the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the way in which the dimensions of transformational leadership combine - and this observation could also be extended to the Fuller-FRLT model. Statistically, the Antonakis and House model assumes a linear relation between the Fuller FRLT factors where the individual factors making up the likes of transformational or instrumental leadership are weighted by their co-efficient and added together (i.e. "Average transformational = linear combination of the coefficients of the transformational factors" (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 762). While this may indicate the overall relative importance of each factor in predicting leadership outcomes, it does not explain how the behavioural factors interact with one another, and there is no explanation of the structures and mechanisms underlying the Fuller-FRLT factors or their interplay.

It leaves open questions such as whether an effective leader (or effective leadership) must demonstrate all of the qualities of the FRLT and IL models or whether a lack in one area could be made up for in another. It also raises questions about the possibility of conflict between IL and FRLT, where what is required for organisational success (captured as part of IL) is incompatible with interpersonal leadership objectives. In this case, how would effective leadership be defined?

Alternatively, a critical realist analysis would want to question whether relations assumed by A&H in the Fuller – FRLT model are merely formal or are substantial and whether the SEPs and CEPs associated with IL activities are internally or externally related to each other or the original factors of the FRLT model. This means questioning whether the underlying material and ideational structures can exist independently of one another and how definitions of

effective leadership might differ, depending on whether IL and transformation leadership are complementary or incompatible within a particular organisational context.

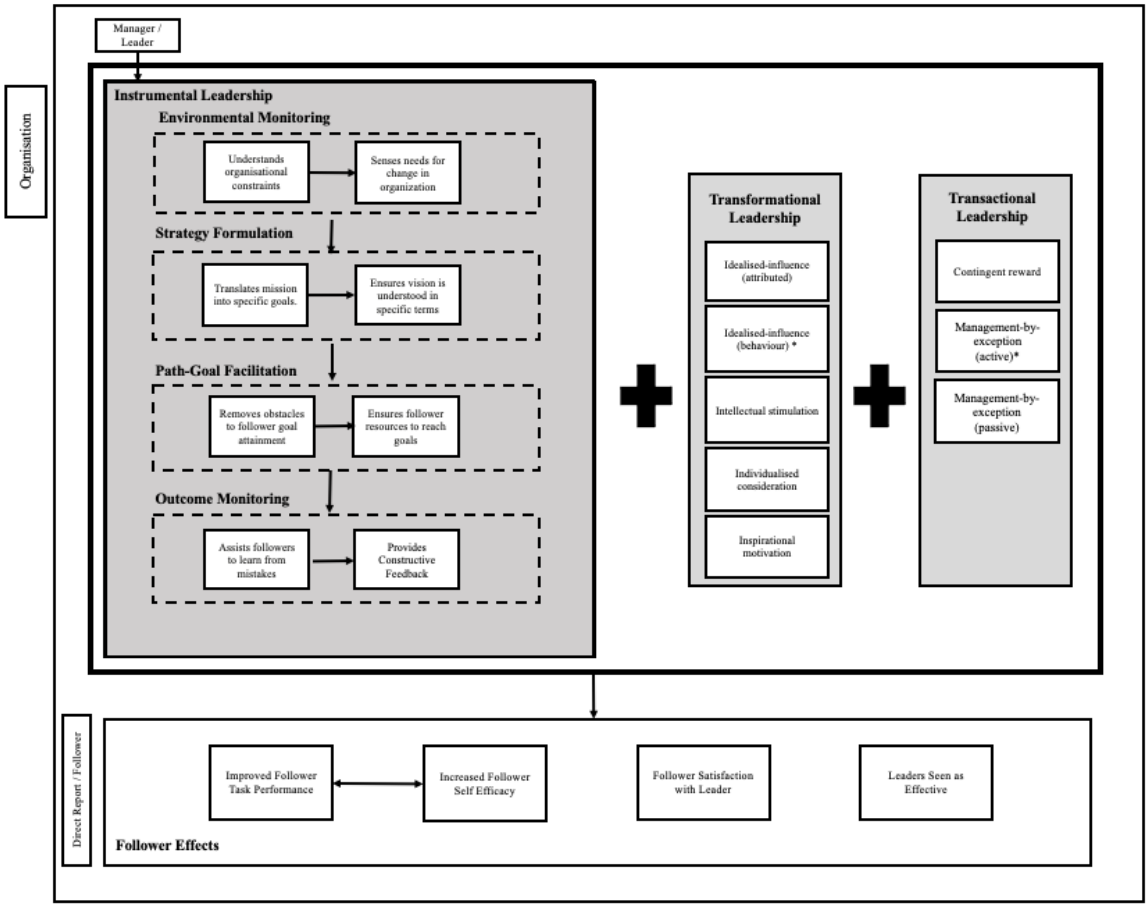

Figure 6.2: Author's interpretation of the Fuller Full-Range Leadership model based on the description provided in (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 751)

From an entity perspective, the Fuller FRLT model's functional underpinning assumes a single source of leadership (Morgeson et al., 2010) in the form of an individual actor as a result of their formal organisational role. As described by Fleishman et al. (1991, p. 258) "leadership is a property of individuals occupying functional social roles". However, while the manager/leader and their behaviour are central to the Fuller-FRLT model, these behaviours cannot stand alone. Implicit in the study's conception of leadership are two relations, which are treated as internal and necessary. The first is the assumption of a substantial internal connection between managers and leadership, and the second is a substantial internal relationship between leadership and direct reports. The former leaves no opportunity to consider that the measured leadership outcomes could be attributed to sources other than a manager's behaviours, while the second, demonstrated by the use of follower

satisfaction and perception of leader effectiveness as the dependent variables, suggests that leadership could not exist without followers.

In addition, A&H's development of the Fuller-FRLT model takes place within the context of a multinational private sector company, an influencing factor whose impact, I suggest, is not sufficiently acknowledged in the design of the study and discussion of the findings. While the specific nature of the organisation is not necessarily important (at face value, I believe the model could also apply to a charity or governmental organisation), the fact remains that the Fuller-FRLT is set within an organisational context, and IL activities are conceptualised as being in response to organisational concerns. In other words, the organisation is a substantial internal entity in the Fuller-FRLT as leadership, as described here, could not exist without it.

Reflecting the above discussion, I have simplified Figure 6.2 to better reflect the impact of a positivist approach to the Fuller-FRLT.

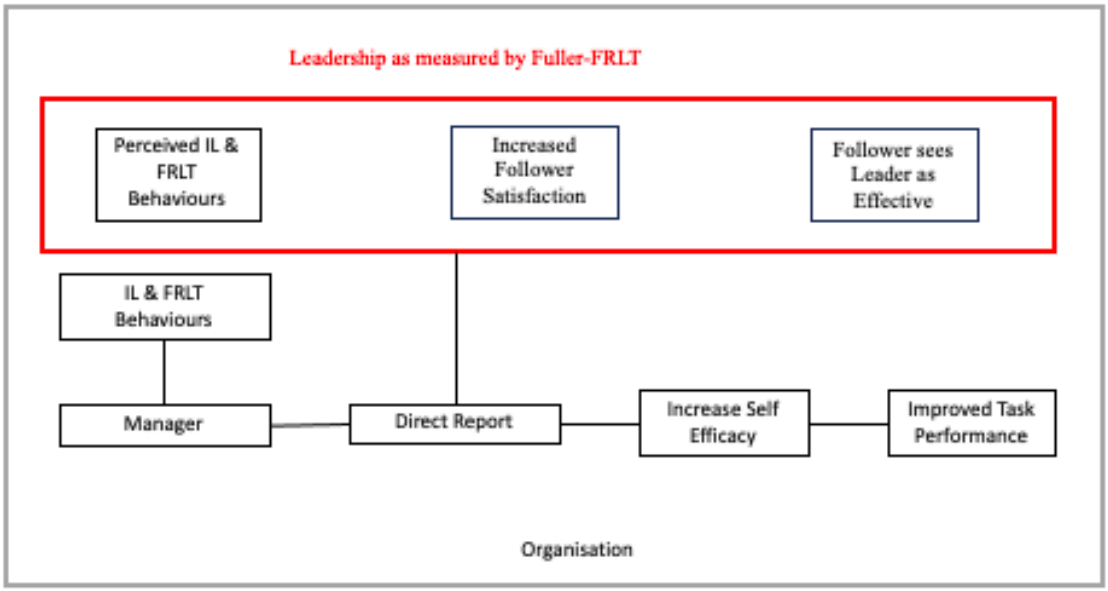

Figure 6.3: Author's simplified abstraction of Antonakis and House's Fuller-FRLT (2014)

Abstracting the model in this way highlights that the narrative provided by Antonakis and House does not correspond to what is measured empirically in the study. The authors claim that "mechanisms and motivational effects of the "fuller" model explain diverse pathways to performance" (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 765), but I suggest that as a result of applying a positivist approach, the Fuller-FRLT model fails to explain anything. Instead, the authors have identified a regularity between followers' observation (perception) of certain behaviours

and their perception of satisfaction and leader effectiveness of their manager, but without offering a full explanation of the model's underlying mechanisms and without acknowledging the possibility that followers' perception of a manager's behaviour and measures of follower satisfaction and perceived leader effectiveness has no necessary connection to the manager's IL & FRLT behaviours themselves. In other words, the manager/leader's behaviours could be defined as externally related to leadership as described in the Fuller-FRLT, meaning that while in a particular context, a manager's behaviours may influence the Fuller-FRLT outcomes, there is no necessary constituting relationship between them. Moreover, without a detailed explanation of the relations and interplay between models entities and activities within a broader organisational context, the causes of leadership remain unclear.

Stage 3 of Danermark's explanatory research model - Abduction

The process of abduction allows for the reimagining of Antonakis and House's Fuller FRLT within the bounds of the critical realist-informed canvas developed in Chapter Four. It locate the elements identified in Stage Two, Figure 6.3, horizontally within Archer's Morphogenetic model and vertically in Bhaskar's domains of reality.

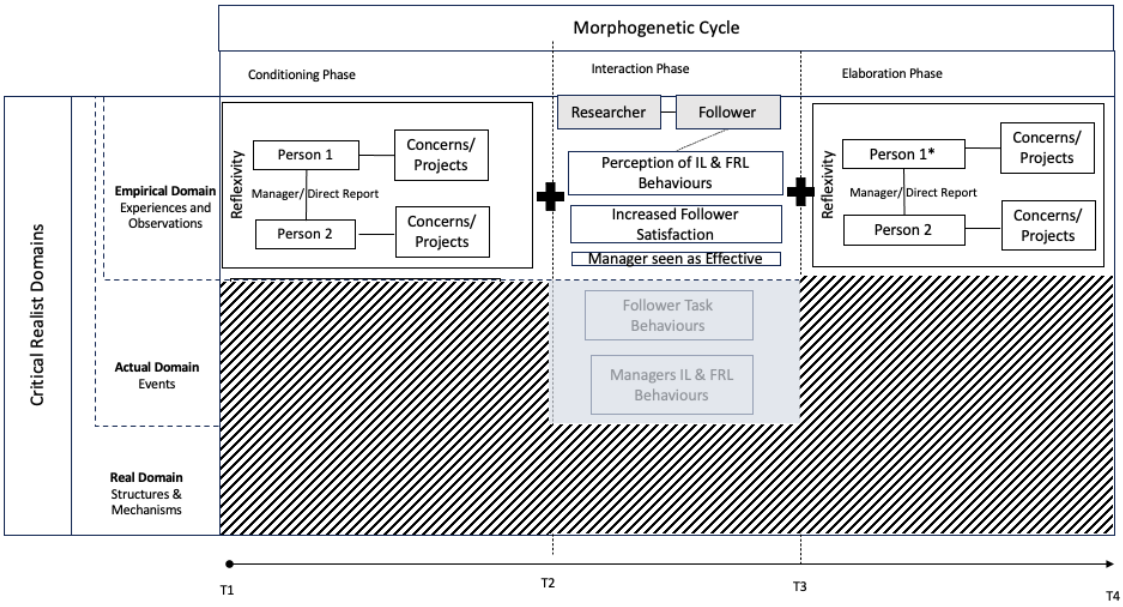

Figure 6.4: The author's depiction of the Fuller Full-Range Leadership Model within the critical realist canvas

Starting with the T1-T2 conditioning phase, leadership under the Fuller FRLT model (see Figure 6.4 above) is depicted in the empirical domain by the existence of two individuals

connected by could be considered either a formal rather than substantial relation with regards to leadership or perhaps substantial but external to leadership. The relation is described as one person reporting to the other, such that they are connected vertically within an organisational hierarchy. However A&H are not explicit about the nature of the relation between these two positions. Under positivist thinking, this relation is taken as fixed and universal, removing the need to consider its internal and necessary elements (what makes it what it is in relation to leadership?) and if the nature of the relation might differ depending on the underlying context. For example, the reporting relation between a junior staff member and her immediate supervisor will differ from that between a CEO and her CFO. Both are formal relations between a Manager and their Direct report, but the substantial relations may differ significantly.

While the study acknowledges the existence of organisational and extra-organisational SEPS and CEPs such as prior leadership training, language and county, referring to them as fixed effects, it treats them as contingent and external and with no significance to the model's conception of leadership. The authors' statistical control for the contextual components effectively attempts to close an inherently open system, stating that "Because we gathered the data from a wide array of cultural and other contexts, we had to control for these differences (Lee, Little, & Preacher, 2011); that is, there may be heterogeneity in responses caused by contextual effects, which might affect model parameters" (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 758). As a result, the underlying structures of the T1 – T2 phase, which creates the situational context conditioning activity, have been excluded (indicated by the grey diagonal shading), so they are not available to contribute to the Fuller-FRLT model explanation of leadership.

Isolating the empirical domain from the actual and real domains also removes the distinction between the levels of Persons, Agents, and Actors, meaning there is no basis for exploring the motivation of each to interact in particular ways. This creates the effect of leadership being conceptualised as if it were exclusively an interaction between individual people who are each drawing only on their personal concerns and projects as motivation for their actions and perception, rather than also being influenced in the context of an organisation, with conditioning effects arising from the organisation's structure and culture for both managers and employees.

In the interaction phase (T2 – T3), the positivist paradigm assumes that what is perceived by Person 1 (the direct report) is an accurate and universal reflection of actual events. This perspective effectively collapses the actual and empirical domains (indicated by the greying out of actual behaviours and activities), creating a flat and undifferentiated ontology that does not allow for the possibility that one set of actual leadership behaviours and events may be perceived differently by different people. The researcher is also assumed to be able to provide an entirely objective and, hence, singular observation of events.

In addition, while A&H made some attempt at ex-post (Kock et al., 2021) data collection to control for common source bias, the practice of collecting ratings of cause and effect at the same time and from the same source as part of the study method effectively blurs the temporal order of activity and the outcome, and this has been reflected in the canvas by depicting the leaders and followers action as co-occurring with the model's measures of leadership effectiveness. As a result, it is uncertain which leadership behaviours are being rated and over which period, challenging the assumption of causal linkages within the Fuller-FRLT model.

Finally, in the elaboration phase (T3 – T4), I have noted a change from Person 1 to Person 1* to reflect the Fuller-FRLT model's functional leadership perspective, where the role of leadership is to mould and support the follower to do what they could not do for themselves. The outcome of effective leadership is seen as a change in the followers in terms of task effectiveness, self-efficacy, and satisfaction.

Note that while the elements of the Fuller-FRLT model have been depicted across the three phases of the leadership canvas, they are done so without formal links to one another. This reflects a positivist perspective that relies on repeated observation of actions and responses as sufficient to propose a causal relationship. However, this is done without investigating the mechanisms and structures that explain how, when and why. I liken this to a recipe that provides a list of ingredients for a particular dish without any quantities or instructions and assumes that culinary excellence will ensue if all the ingredients are placed together in a bowl.

Stage 4 of Danermark's explanatory research model - Retroduction

Retroduction is defined by Danermark et al. (2019) as advancing from what is empirically observed to conceptualising the structures and conditions for the events or phenomena under study. This can be asked as a series of questions such as "What does the existence of this object (in this form) presuppose? Can it exist on its own as such? If not, what else must be present? What is it about the object that makes it do such and such?" Therefore, the purpose of this stage is not to suggest that A&H's conception of leadership is incorrect but, rather, to examine the components of the critical realist leadership canvas that the Fuller-FRLT model does not utilise and consider what the existence of leadership in this form may pre-suppose and what questions does a positivist paradigm leave unanswered?

To support this analysis, Figure 6.5 below reveals the combination of Figure 6.4 with the remainder of the critical realist leadership canvas. The analysis focuses on three key observations. The first is the prospect of reincorporating the contextual components removed as part of the A&H paper to understand the development and interplay between the organisational material and ideational structure (SEPs and CEPs) and the various sources of agency for Actors, Agents and People (i.e. recognising the influence of roles, positions and personal concerns on leadership behaviours and their perception). The second is the opportunity to introduce a temporal component, where specific leader actions and their impact on follower behaviours and perception are exposed across time, rather than relying on the regularity of observed events. Finally, it considers the possibility of better-explaining the observed Fuller-FRLT behaviours by exploring the PEPs, CEPs, and SEPs from which that behaviour originated and considering the situational relations necessary to leadership.

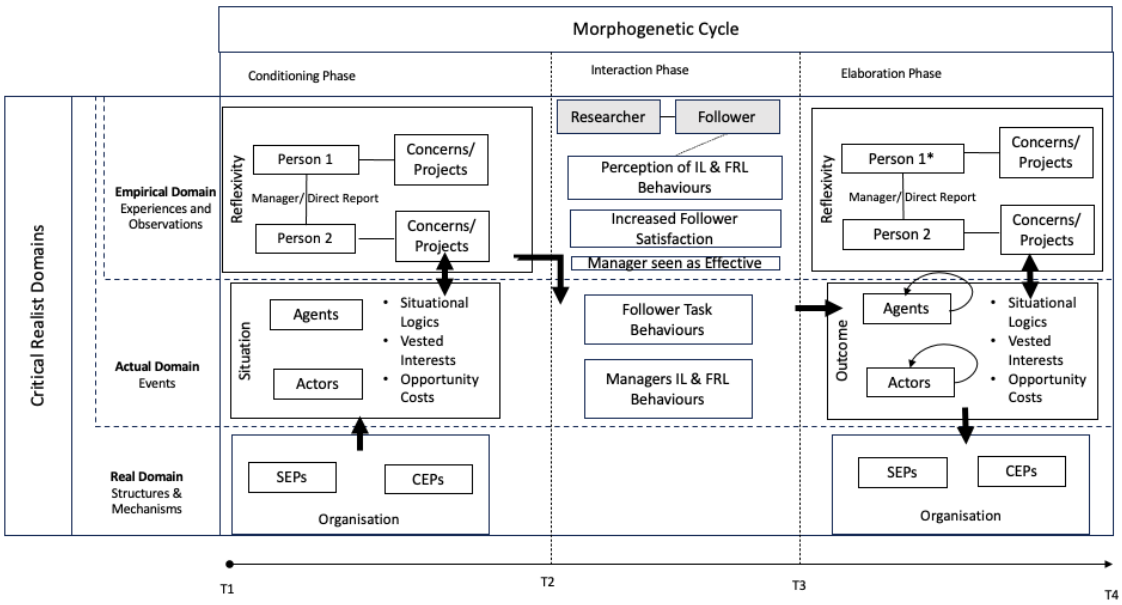

Figure 6.5: The author's depiction of the extended Fuller Full-Range Leadership Model within the critical realist canvas

The Fuller-FRLT model, through a positivist lens, assumes that leadership is an inherently uni-directional, individual phenomenon based on the strategic and work facilitation abilities and interpersonal style of a person in a manager role to support people in direct report relations to meet organisational objectives. Positivism's flat ontology means that leader actions are seen as being undertaken by a consolidated and single entity that conceptually cannot differentiate between unique powers and motivations that can be attributed to either Person, Actor or Agent. However, its redescription in the critical realist leadership canvas uncovers the opportunity to recognise the stratified nature of agency, and so separately consider the Actors and Agents involved, their relations and vested interests, and how these may result in a variety of situational logics which could explain both leadership actions and their perception as effective leadership in specific contexts or situations. This is not an opportunity lost on A&H, who recognise that their current analysis is prone to measuring "person-wholes" rather than "person-parts"(House et al., 2002, p. 765) but without a stratified and differentiated ontology like that provided by critical realism, A&H have no vertical or horizontal framework in which to differentiate between the parts.

A&H draw on Morgenson's definition of functional leadership (to do, or get done, whatever is not being adequately handled for group needs), but this does not specify who enacts

leadership or how leadership is achieved. A&H give no consideration to the potential of structural or informal sources of leadership (i.e. outside of the manager/employee relation). This highlights a second opportunity to treat Fuller-FRLT leadership behaviours as one of many conditioning mechanisms influencing leadership outcomes by moving it back to the T1-T2 phase. Not only could this establish a stronger temporal link between specific leadership behaviours and leadership outcome measures, but it could also provide an opportunity to examine Fuller-FRLT leadership behaviours' interaction with other structural mechanisms (SEPs and CEP) involved in shaping and conditioning the situation followers experience.

Finally, some manager roles (potentially more senior) could also be conceptualised as corporate Agents of the organisation, positioning these agents with motivation and powers that allow them to shape the organisational context for primary Agents (direct reports). These roles and positioned agents will be constituted as a set of SEPs and CEPs with multiple and competing vested interests and situational logics, independent of personal concerns and projects. As such, it will be the relative strength and interplay between roles, positions, and people that will become significant in fully explaining the resulting leadership behaviours and perceptions. This raises a question about the possibility of those in leadership positions having a vested interest in maintaining the structural conditions from which their initial agency originates. This could explain the views of Ackroyd (2003), who proposes that a generally high level of structural stability exists within organisations despite also providing the context and potential for internally contested perspectives between corporate Agents. Drawing on Archer's situational logic matrix described in Chapter Four, which outlines the strategic logic resulting from various relations between material and ideational structures, this tendency toward internal stability could imply that leadership relations must draw on either the situational logic of protection or compromise. Further investigation could reveal when and how these logics manifest themselves in behaviour and practice, potentially accounting for different forms of leadership (e.g. hierarchical versus distributed) or followership.

Conclusion

The overall impact of a positivist paradigm on the Fuller-FRLT is a reduction in explanatory power, due to contraction in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the Critical Realist canvas. Instead, it is assumed that leadership can be measured at a point in time and extracted from any contextual influence. The undifferentiated conception of the Fuller- FRLT

dimensions and the model's lack of connection between leadership behaviours and outcomes emphasises what Antonakis and House acknowledge as measuring "person-wholes" (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 764), in which leadership attribution becomes an all or nothing measure with no ontological basis on which to consider the possible differences that might arise depending on whether leadership is defined in terms of Persons, Agents or Actors.

From Antonakis and House's perspective, leadership is a relation between individuals that can be defined uniformly, but only when examined separately from structural and cultural influences. However, given that the practice of leadership takes place within a structural and cultural context, questions need to be asked about the usefulness of this conception of leadership when applied to real-world applications.

Chapter Seven - A critical realist analysis of *"Not leaders, not followers: A post-modern discourse of leadership processes"* by Dian Hosking, published in 2007

Stage 1 of Danermark's explanatory research model - Descriptions

Study purpose

The work by Hosking analysed here is sourced from *Follower-centred perspectives on leadership: A tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl* (Uhl-Bien et al., 2009). In her chapter, Hosking outlines her intent to argue for a post-modern view that conceives leadership as a phenomenon constructed in a relational process, particular to a specific local, cultural, and historical context. Hosking's supporting discussion on post-modern social constructionism, while not specific to leadership, offers an alternative to what she describes as social constructionism in modernist terms. The chapter then explains how the post-modern social constructionist paradigm could be applied to leadership training and development.

Study theory - Post-modern leadership construction

According to Hosking, post-modernism conceptualises the way that leadership is brought into existence as an "empty process" (Hosking, 2007, p. 15), meaning it can only be described at a level of abstraction that proposes a general process of relating while leaving the specific leadership content open to local construction. In some respects, this approach could be considered an alternative explanatory model to Archer's morphogenetic approach, as it proposes a general model of social mechanics that can then be applied to a specific social phenomenon, such as leadership.

Hosking claims that understanding leadership as constructed-in-process "side-steps" (Hosking, 2007, p. 5) talk of leaders and followers. This means that while social concepts such as agents, actors, roles, positions, structures and attributes exist, they are not assumed to be defined entities *a priori* but only gain meaning or realness as part of the relating process. Subsequently, the study of leadership entails reflecting on how participants construct relations as leadership or otherwise and considering why some relations are accepted while others are not.

Hosking also suggests that a post-modern understanding of relational processes allows for the construction of multiple realities rather than assuming the existence of universal beliefs or

assumptions about what constitutes leadership. While this could be interpreted as a move towards relativism and the individual subjectivity of constructivism (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012), Hosking tempers this by suggesting that the possible realities that can be constructed are influenced and limited by the existing "local-relational realities and relations" (Hosking, 2007, p. 5) or "local culture" (Hosking, 2007, p. 23).

Finally, Hosking proposes that taking a post-modern worldview can open up alternative ways of relating as it does not assume the necessity of a subject-object relation (Hosking, 2007) or dualistic epistemology, an assumption embedded in the positivist and post-positivist scientific process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For Hosking, the subject-object relation of these traditions is based on the belief that there is an independence between the self and other and, as a result, an inherent "power-over" relation rather than "power-with" (Hosking, 2007, p. 16). (i.e. the researcher as the knower and the researched to be known, or the leader who uses their power to control or direct the follower.) She does not deny that subject-object constructions are a common outcome of the relating process and highlights the difficulty of contesting established subject-object constructions, arguing that attempts to change the nature of these relationships can instead result in perpetuating the subject-object relation if undertaken by a knowing, influencing self.

Study theory - The post-modern relating process

Hosking stresses that her use of the term 'relational' differs from modernist perspectives in that it does not imply a process between two predefined individuals or an interpersonal relationship. Instead, it is the ongoing construction, primarily through the use of language, of what is considered "real and good" (Gergen, 1994 as cited in Hosking, 2007, p. 9). As a result of this definition, Hosking suggests a need to find an alternative way of describing the process of relating without the need to refer to pre-made or assumed entities. To this end, she draws on the concepts of act and supplement, (Gergen, 1994 as cited in Hosking, 2007), or text and context (Dachler & Hosking, 1995 as cited in Hosking, 2007). For this analysis, I have chosen to utilise Gergen's terminology.

According to Hosking, the process of relating is said to include any element that facilitates communication, including language, objects, and events (Hosking, 2007). Hosking describes the relating process as a series of actions and responses between which relations are locally negotiated and understood to create and reshape reality. As a result, an individual action (an

act) has no inherent meaning of its own (Gergen, 2010). Only when an act is supplemented or responded to is meaning constructed as a specific relation. For a comparison, consider the Antonakis and House (2014) Fuller-FRLT model in Chapter Six, where giving performance-enhancing feedback is conceptualised as an act of leadership. Under Hosking's post-modern perspective, this act only gains this designation in relation to how it is supplemented. In other words, the "identity [as leadership or as a leader or follower]….is a by-product of an ongoing relational process" (Gergen, 2010, p. 6 brackets added). The process of relating goes on as each supplementary action subsequently assumes the position of the act, which is then available for future supplementation.

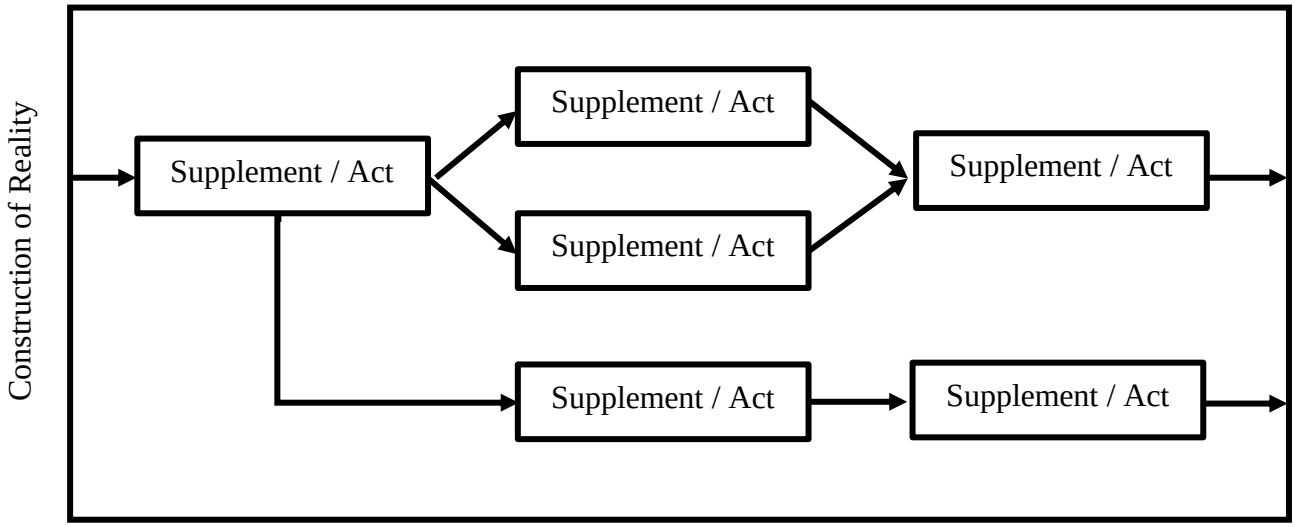

Figure 7.1: Authors depiction of Hosking's post-modern social construction process of act/supplement

According to Hosking, the construction of social reality relies on multiple acts and supplement relations, some of which will be unstated (i.e. tacit). Moreover, while the way in which acts are supplemented is theoretically always contestable, only some responses are often possible. Hosking claims this results from some responses becoming embedded as "culture, local realities or local rationalities" (Hosking, 2007, p. 13).

Study research paradigm

While locating the likes of Antonakis and House within the positivist paradigm is relatively straightforward, the same cannot be said for Hosking and her post-modern discourse on the leadership process. She is located by Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) as the most subjective of the leadership researchers included in their analysis, and they describe her as taking a post-modern worldview and a constructionist epistemic stance. However, Hosking claims that

post-modern social constructionism does not view epistemology as objective or subjective or ontology as realist or relativist (Hosking, 2007, p. 8). In fact Hosking (2007, p. 8 citing Korzybski, 1933), describes the post-modern position as providing "another map about another territory." In other words, Hosking's perspective looks to step outside the very frameworks employed by this thesis, which conceive the notion of science as a distinct practice that can examined separately (although not without mediation) from an object of interest. Interestingly, it is this standpoint that could have contributed to the post-modernism term having fallen out of favour with some academics, as the terminology has come to refer to a wide range of issues and meanings, rendering it, according to some authors, effectively meaningless (Alvesson, 1995). Hosking's self-description aside, I have attempted to locate Hosking on the Burrell and Morgan, and Guba and Lincoln frameworks outlined in Chapter Two before considering where Hosking's view of post-modernism may sit within the Fleetwood three ontology model.

Using the Burrell and Morgan model, Hosking's perspective most comfortably aligns with the assumptions of interpretivism, demonstrating consistency with a nominalist (or at least an anti-realist) ontology and an anti-positivist epistemology. As a result of the assumption that relations are built in-process and theoretically contestable, Hosking's paradigm also leans towards a voluntaristic view of human nature but within limited local structural and cultural parameters. Her view also demonstrates a focus on ideographic methodologies to align with the assumption of localised construction of reality. Hosking's work does not appear to focus on radical critique or revolutionary change central to radical humanism but, rather, on understanding and interpreting social practices and the subjective meanings that individuals attach to them (Hosking, 2007, p. 11).

Hosking's post-modern paradigm offers an alternative to the Guba and Lincoln (1994) definitions of positivism and post-positivism and is distinct from what she describes as modernist forms of social constructionism. From her perspective, while these views reflect an acceptance that knowledge is socially constructed, this only translates into the embrace of an increased level of epistemic reservation based on the understanding that these constructions are fluid and fallible. However, a social constructionist epistemology does not go far enough for Hosking. In the modernist form, Hosking highlights that the role of language remains one that maps concepts to the objects of study in an unmediated way (i.e. independent, literal and value-free), providing the mechanism to mirror an external world. Meanwhile, according to

Hosking, what makes post-modern constructionism, as described in her paper, different is that it "makes no distinction between ontology and epistemology" (Hosking, 2007, p. 9). Discourse, language, and communication do not represent or reflect reality; they create or are reality. In other words, knowing and being are considered the same thing, and possible realities can be "*made real*" (Hosking, 2007, p. 10 emphasis original) through the process of relating. This refutation of ontology with epistemology aligns with the blurring between ontology and epistemology described by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as central to both Critical Theory et al. and the Constructivism paradigm.

As noted earlier, Hosking also claims that modernism privileges the discourse of science over the discourse of its object of study, in this case, leadership. This implies that any *a-priori* attempt to conceptualise leadership as part of studying it could be seen as an act of power-over others. For Hosking, post-modern science is "positioned alongside (in equal/symmetric relation with)" (Hosking, 2007, p. 8) other social practices such as leadership. The process of relating and communicating then becomes the common foundation for the construction or conception of individuals and the construction of science, leadership or any other social phenomena.

Earlier in Chapter Two, it was noted that Fleetwood offered that ontological idealism, where the social world is limited to entities constituted entirely by discourse, was not the only option for those opposed to an empirical realist-informed stance. Where a perspective was open to the realness of entities other than only those of ideal form, an alignment with the principles of critical realism remains a possibility. As will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, Hosking paints a confusing ontological picture, leaving it unclear as to whether her in-process perspective is aligned with Fleetwood's idealist ontology, where the social world is limited to entities constituted entirely by discourse (ideas), or whether it is open to the reality of emergence in the form of SEPs, CEPs and PEPs as understood by critical realism, which views them as independent and relatively stable, with powers outside the bounds of the relating process. I will explore both options as I work through stages three and four of this analysis.

Stage 2 of Danermark's explanatory research model - Analytical resolution

As a continuing reminder, the purpose of the second stage of Danermark's explanatory research model is to abstract the components or entities deemed significant to the particular

area of study and conceptualise their nature and how they might be related. Critical realist perspectives attempt to move beyond formal relations, which are often merely categories or groupings that appear at the empirical level of analysis and may not accurately represent the relationships in a way substantive to the intended investigation. Substantial relations can be described as either internal/necessary, meaning that the entities are mutually constituting and cannot exist independently of one another or alternatively, as an external or contingent relation that exists but with no dependence between particular elements for their constitution. (For a more detailed description of these terms, see Chapter Four, page 39). To address question 3 of this thesis, the abstraction process is attempted under the original author's paradigmatic terms so as to explore the impact of the paradigm assumptions on the resulting leadership theory.

As described above, the concepts and ideas of post-modern constructionism make the process of abstraction challenging, as the detail of any specific acts and supplements constituting leadership cannot, by definition, be captured outside of a particular context. Post-modern construction "*starts* with process" (Hosking, 2007, p. 9 emphasis original), not people (persons, agents, or actors), and the process of constructing leaders, non-leaders or leadership depends on if and how a particular act is supplemented. It could be said that through action and reaction, participants construct and reconstruct social reality at every turn.

On this basis, I have abstracted the notions of act and supplement as internally related in that both are necessary to construct, through communication, any particular meaning to social interaction. In critical realist terms, this would also imply that act and supplement cannot be separated (i.e. they are internally related) from the social structures and entities they instantiate. What is not clear at this stage of the analysis is the nature of structures and the mechanisms these structures use to provide motivations and reasons for supplementing acts in one particular way rather than another.

For example, consider the act of a meeting participant instructing other participants to stand up. This is an act that could be supplemented in numerous ways. It could be followed or ignored, and depending on the context, either combination of act and supplement could be interpreted as leadership and not-leadership. So, while the act has no inherent meaning without the supplement, it still needs to be determined where a particular meaning is drawn from. Hosking suggests that meaning is guided by local culture and rationalities but is not

explicit about the mechanism or source of causation that would explain how or on what basis meaning is negotiated and understood within a particular locale. Instead, she outlines in general terms that social processes can continue to develop regularity or consistency as a result of "taken-for-grantedness", which "develops and feeds back into the process" (Hosking, 2007, p. 13) and refers to this as culture, local realities or local rationalities. What is not made clear is the form this taken-for-grantedness takes, i.e. what kind of thing it is. Its form could be taken as interpretive subjective mental models as in constructivism (Uhl-Bien, 2006), or conceptualised as what critical realism would define as emerging cultural structural forces.

Stage Three of this analysis will explore these two options in more detail. However, for the purposes of abstraction based on Hosking's terms, I have situated the relating process of act and supplement within a local cultural context to reflect the postmodern construction of leadership as simultaneously reliant on participants, acts, supplement, and local culture to create and recreate entities such as leader or follower.,

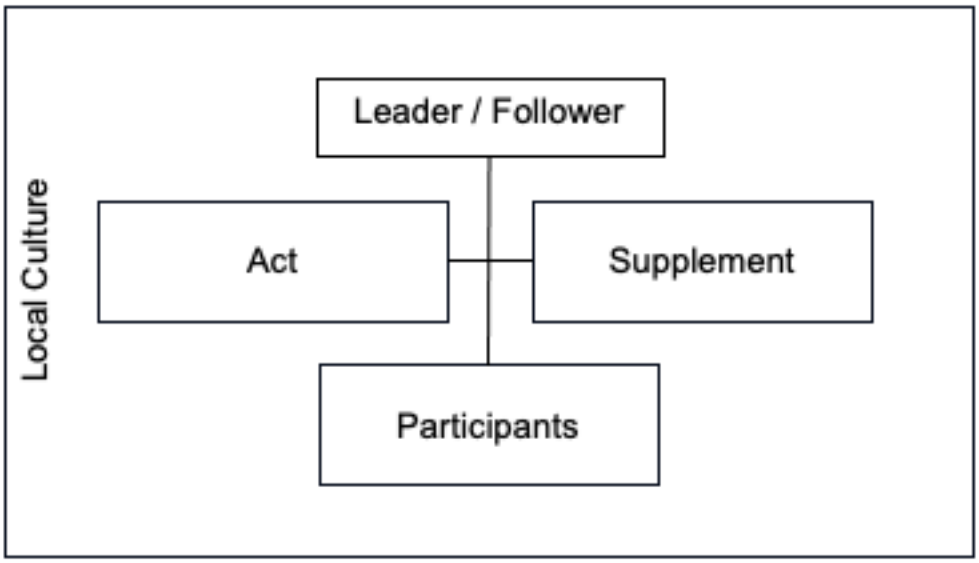

Figure 7.2: Act and supplement are abstracted as internally related within a particular local culture

As I will discuss further in the upcoming abduction, this tightly bound and in-process conception of leadership has possible implications for reimagining Hosking's post-modern leadership in terms of the critical realist leadership canvas.

Stage 3 of Danermark's explanatory research model – Abduction

The process of abduction allows for the reimagining of Hosking's conception of leadership within the bounds of the critical realist-informed canvas developed in Chapter Four, It locates the abstracted elements identified in Stage Two above both horizontally within Archer's morphogenetic model and vertically in Bhaskar's domains of reality.

The high or meta-level conception of leadership offered by Hosking presents a number of options for abducting a post-modern social constructionist perspective of leadership, depending on the breadth of ideas included in the analysis. Applying a narrow view, Hosking's primary focus throughout the paper is on the process of relating, which, when applied to the critical realist canvas, would suggest a concentration of interest in T2 -T3 or the interaction phase on the morphogenetic cycle. For Hosking, social entities such as leader and follower *only* exist in the process, which could be interpreted as a lack of temporal distinction between structure and agency, as Archer's model assumes. Without this distinction, structure and agency exist simultaneously in process, indicating a level of boundedness more closely aligned with Gidden's structuration theory (Archer, 1982) than Archer's morphogenetic model.

However, in focusing on the in-process component of Hosking's perspective, the possibility of examining social structure's a-priori independent existence and influence is lost. Instead, if structure is only instantiated as part of action, this could be described as an example of central conflation, a concept touched upon earlier in Chapter Four, where structure and agency are mutually constituted, and structures are seen as having a virtual existence until actors draw on them (Archer, 1995). On this basis, the post-modern leadership process could only be located horizontally within the Interaction Phase (T2 – T3), reflecting a perpetual present tense. As noted by Archer (1982, p. 457) in structuration-based theory, "'Structuration' itself is ever a process and never a product".

Alternatively, applying a broader reading of Hosking's discourse on post-modern constructionism suggests the potential for closer alignment with the ideas of critical realism as outlined in this paper. Hosking's reference to the process of relating as taking place within a local cultural and historical context (Hosking, 2007, p. 13) suggests that her perspective acknowledges what has been defined previously as the T1- T2 conditioning phase of the morphogenetic model. Local-culture is defined by Hosking as ideas and practises that are

taken for granted as natural and so could be considered as acting as what critical realism might describe as conditioning CEPs that enable or constrain agency and the range of supplements seemingly possible.

Additionally, Hosking's definition of local-historical refers to the changing possibilities of leadership. So, while a current process of relating might be considered leadership "here and now" (Hosking, 2007, p. 14), the phenomena referred to as leadership remains contestable, sitting in contrast to the timeless quality assumed by positivist/modernist perspectives. Again, this demonstrates some alignment with Archer's morphogenetic model in which the interaction or relating process in the T2-T3 phase results in either replication or change in social phenomena such as leadership in the T3- T4 elaboration phase.

Diving deeper into individual components of the leadership canvas, Hosking refers to cultural structures, especially those related to the use of language, as being constitutive of reality rather than merely representative of social reality. However, a noted omission from her discourse is an explicit reference to what has been defined in Chapter Four as SEPs or material structures. It may be that the intent of Hosking's broad definition of relating as "written and spoken language, as well the relating of nonverbal actions, things, and events" (Hosking, 2007, p. 11) is to include material structural entities. However, critical realism is wary of perspectives that do not recognise the qualitative difference between the nature of SEPs and CEPs. According to Reed (2005, p. 1627) not making this distinction collapses their "competing pressures and tensions" both ontologically and analytically, reducing the ability to explain the courses of action taken by Agents and Actors within a particular context. While there is a relation between material and ideological structures, Archer's morphogenetic model assumes that there is no necessity for the vested interests of material structures and situational logic of ideas to be aligned. As a result, it is necessary to investigate SEPs and CEPs separately before considering how the causal powers of each may interact. Material conditions and powers are likely to "shape the discursive construction" (Reed (2005, p. 1629) of leadership within any particular setting, so their independent analysis may make a valuable contribution to Hosking's suggestion to reflect on the way "particular constructions gain authority whilst other possibilities are un-realised or suppressed" (Hosking, 2007, p. 11). To reiterate, this is not to suggest that critical realism does not recognise the constitutive role of language, but rather, it looks to include discourse as one of many interacting structures that condition but do not determine the social world.

When considering the vertical dimensions of the leadership canvas, Hosking (2007, p. 9) suggests that post-modern social constructionism makes no distinction between notions of ontology and epistemology as defined in Chapter Two, as this is seen as reflective of the subject-object assumptions underlying modernism. Through a critical realist lens, this would be interpreted as not discriminating between the intransitive and transitive objects of science, a stance that would blur the distinctions made between the empirical, actual and real domains on the critical realist leadership canvas. So, while I am not suggesting that the definition of relating provided by Hosking denies the existence of the entities that critical realism would typically associate with each of the domains, in the post-modern conception, these are conflated and inseparable within the relating process (i.e. "knowledge and action are now joined"(Hosking, 2007, p. 14)), and their reality constituted and structured by language either explicitly or tacitly.

To reflect the above discussion within the bounds of the leadership canvas, I have elected to reflect the broader view of Hosking's perspective as an approach that demonstrates the earlier discussion regarding the potential overlap between critical realism and some other non-positivist perspectives. The process of relating is still situated as act and supplement within the T2 – T3 interaction phase, but this process is set within an existing cultural context in which it is acknowledged that language use, norms and rules act as a structuring force for how the process of relating carries on. Entities such as Actors, Agents, People and Structures theoretically exist, but it is participants' discourse or language about them that is seen as making them real and, as a result, having a causal effect. (This is indicated by the greying out of the T1-T2 phase and the T3-T4 phase.) Therefore, the practice of leadership can have different meanings "depending on the wider context of assumptions to which they are related." (Hosking, 2007, p. 28)

I have also removed the critical realist distinction between the three domains of reality to reflect Hosking's postmodern assumption that there is no distinction between ontology and epistemology. The intent is to attempt to reflect Hosking's position that language is not seen as way of representing reality but is a "key process in which relating 'goes on' and in so doing, constructs people-world realities and relations " (Hosking, 2007, p. 9). Under these terms, the three critical realist domains draw their distinction as a result of their linguistic

construction and not as a result of external qualities, independent of our discourse about them.

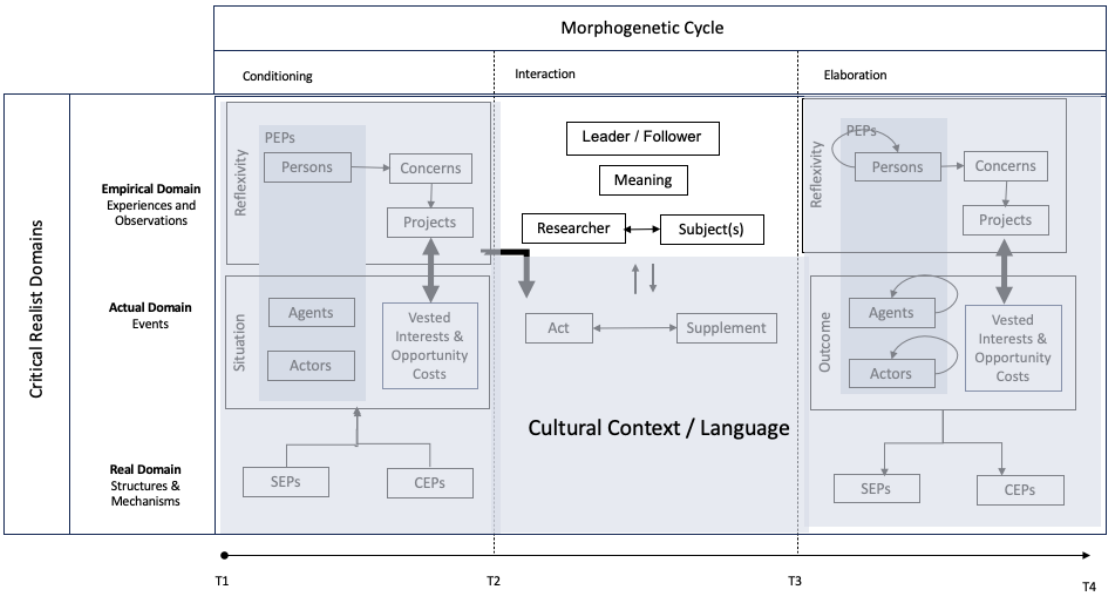

Figure 7.3: The author's depiction of the post-modern relating process within the critical realist canvas

Stage 4 of Danermark's explanatory research model – Retroduction

Retroduction is defined by Danermark et al. (2019) as advancing from what is empirically observed to conceptualising the structures and conditions for the events or phenomena under study. Therefore, the purpose of this stage is not to suggest that Hosking's conception of leadership is incorrect but, rather, to examine the components of the critical realist leadership canvas that her post-modernist perspective may not utilise to consider what the existence of leadership in this form may presuppose and what questions it may leave unanswered.

The post-modern proposition that social phenomena are relational and socially constructed is not considered controversial in critical realist thought. What differentiates critical realist perspectives from Hosking's post-modern socially constructed leadership is the adherence to the previously described concepts of stratification and emergence, which also allows for the inclusion of SEPs, PEPs and CEPs acting independently of our discourse about them, as a means of better explaining social phenomena. Rather than exploring leadership only as a process of relating through language, critical realism also allows the elements of culture, structure and agency a related but relatively independent existence and for their structure and

mechanisms to operate and influence the process of relating in a variety of ways across different time frames. So, while language makes an important contribution to the social world, it is not seen as the only component of social reality. Hosking challenges her readers to reconceive the moment-by-moment relating process through which leadership occurs; however, from a critical realist perspective, SEPs, CEPs and PEPs must be allowed an existence independent of participants' explicit or implicit acknowledgement via their "discursive work."(Reed, 2005, p. 1629)

Under these terms, the 'act' component of Hosking's post-modern perspective could now be re-described as the T1 – T2 'situation' formed by SEPs and CEPs from historical interactions. As a result, the cultural and structural mechanisms conditioning the current discourse or meaning of leadership could be identified and examined separately from the resulting interaction (supplementation). The reflexive powers or subjectivity of participants, identified as critical in social constructionism, is maintained but now, due to the stratified model of agency, can be examined alongside the vested interests of either agents or actors to provide a better explain why and how some leadership discourse in the form of consistent acts and supplements, prevail.

The morphogenetic model also allows for a clearer distinction between culture, representing the world of ideas, and SEPs, which reflect powers and motivations for action tied to a person's or group's material advantage over another. As mentioned earlier, a differentiation between structure and culture is not made explicitly in Hosking's model, where they are intertwined under the umbrella of discourse. Not only are they different types of things, but it is also an investigation of their interplay that could address the earlier questions about how particular discourses can dominate others

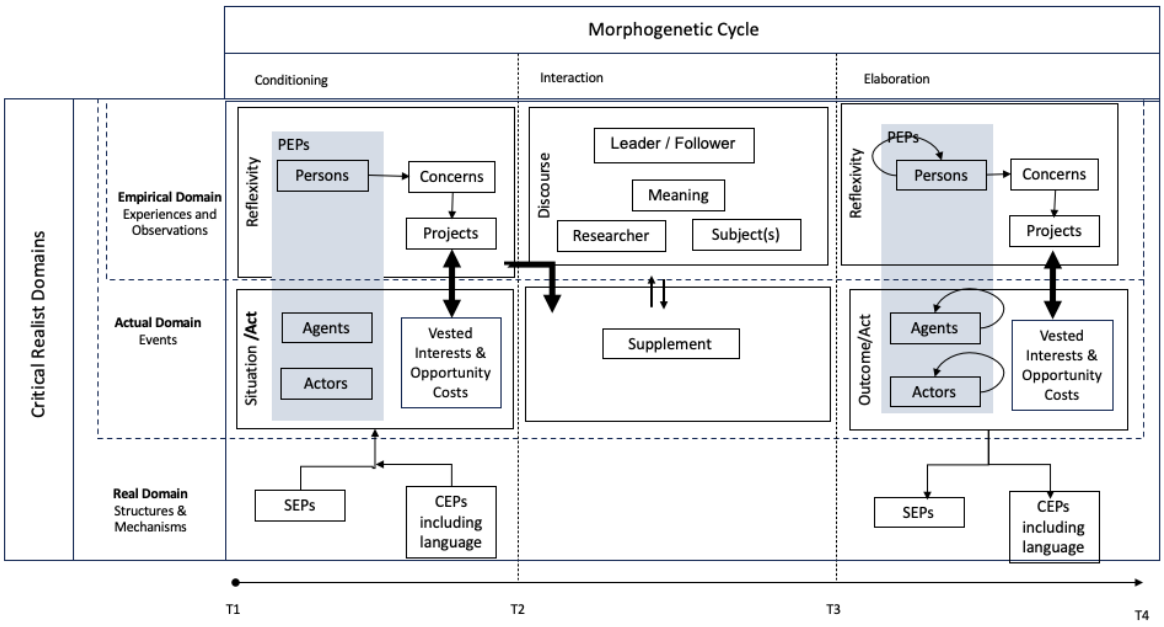

Figure 7.4: The author's depiction of the extended post-modern relating process within the critical realist canvas

Conclusion

In summary, Hosking challenges her readers to consider the possibilities of both multiple realities of leadership and the stickiness of some acts and supplements, concepts that resonate strongly with the ideas of critical realism. However, her focus on culture and the role of language as constructive rather than representative (they could be either) constrains the analysis of leadership to only these elements. Alternatively, taking a critical realist view via the leadership canvas provides a framework where act and supplement can be analytically separated and the interaction of the conditioning structures (SEPs, CEPs, and PEPs) explored to identify and explain the possible and potential supplements. Under these terms, the conditioning role of language can be explored alongside the influences of other social structures that maintain independent causal powers regardless of how we speak about them.

Chapter Eight – Stage 5 of Danermark's explanatory research model - Contextualisation

Introduction

Now that I have independently examined two differing leadership perspectives drawn from alternative paradigm perspectives, the process of contextualisation will draw together how they might be co-located on a single canvas. This chapter addresses sub-question four, which asks what opportunities for integrating contemporary leadership theory can be found from adopting a critical reality ontology. This process allows any commonalities between theories to be identified, demonstrates how differing paradigm perspectives reveal different facets of the leadership phenomenon rather than the competing perspectives, and highlights theoretical gaps that could be addressed by future leadership scholarship.

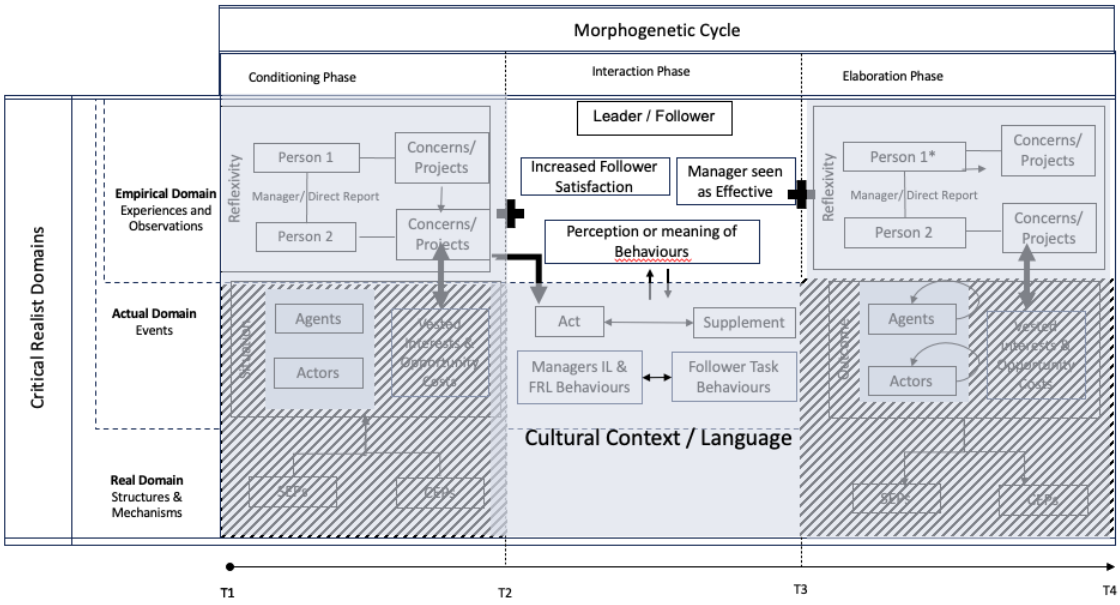

Figure 8.1: Overlay of Antonakis & House and Hosking abductions into a single canvas

Contextualisation

By overlaying the abduction canvases from Chapters Six and Seven, it is noted that common to both leadership texts is the idea that leadership is related to action and how this action is experienced; however, both Antonakis and House and Hosking interpret the relationship between action and experience differently. In the Antonakis and House positivist account, leadership is assumed to be a universally recognisable suite of individual behaviours and skillsets (actions), believed to have a causal relationship with leadership outcomes, so long as

any contextual variability is statistically accounted for. The positivist assumption that the phenomenon of leadership has an objective existence means that what is experienced in the empirical domain is treated as a mirror of the actual domain. Subjectivity, then, either on the part of those being observed or those observing, is something to be minimised as part of the scientific process. In other words, action and experience of action are considered congruent *ceteris paribus*.

Alternatively, Hosking's postmodern social constructionist perspective, which also draws on action and experience, focuses on leadership as a relational process where social entities such as leader and follower exist as part of a perpetual negotiation of meaning through discourse by those participating within a particular context. Language is used to create and recreate meaning, which opens up the potential to what Hosking refers to as leadership having "multiple realities" based on "local-cultural-historical processes"(Hosking, 2007, p. 29). The difference here is that instead of meaning or subjectivity being an element that needs to be minimised or removed, meaning and the process of negotiating it (either individual or shared) becomes *the* object of interest of leadership scholarship. As a result, events or actions taking place in the actual domain have no inherent leadership quality of their own; instead, it is the meaning they are given within a particular context that becomes of interest. Like the positivist perspective, what is experienced is essential to leadership, but not because it is assumed to accurately represent an objective reality like in positivism, but rather that the meaning negotiated by those participating within the bounds of the existing local discourse *is* reality. In this case, subjectivity contributes to the ontological basis for studying leadership.

However, the critical realist distinction between the actual and the empirical domains provides the opportunity to validate or challenge both the Antonakis and House positivist and Hosking's post-modern assumptions by considering the possibility of difference between the actual behaviours of managers and their report's attribution of leadership effectiveness. A critical realist perspective could ask how and when various behaviours are experienced in a consistent way or, alternatively, why consistent leadership behaviours are experienced differently. In addition, a critical realist investigation could include the post-modern perspective of the conditioning role of language as providing one of the possible structures promoting this consistency or differentiation between the two domains and extend this to include other forms of social entity.

Another observed commonality of the two perspectives investigated is their implicit assumption that the leadership phenomenon demonstrates some degree of uniformity and stability in actions and interpretation. Through the positivist lens, this is attributed to the assumed universal nature of leadership actions and outcomes, while through a post-modern lens, it can be observed as the development of local leadership culture or discourse. Regardless of the scope and timing of this stability, this poses the question of why and when this stability occurs. From a critical realist perspective, it could be described as leadership tending towards morphostasis within a morphogenetic cycle and, regardless of the underlying paradigm, offers an element of leadership that warrants further investigation.

According to Archer's morphogenetic model, an outcome of morphostasis has typically been associated with the strategy of correcting contradictions between necessarily related SEPs CEPs and PEPs or protecting those that are complementary to one another (Archer, 1995). This observation could hint towards these two situational logics as being necessary to leadership or, more definitively, that leadership could be redescribed as the process and/or outcome of correcting and/or protecting relationships between structures, ideas or people within a particular context. It is noted that this observation makes no judgement as to leadership's morality or good intent. The correction or protection of relations can be equally achieved within a gang environment as within a children's charity and makes no assumption about the practises deployed to achieve this end. It also does not imply that the underlying structures being corrected or protected remain constant. The context of leadership is subject to internal change (elaboration as a result of previous interaction) and external environmental changes, so it is not the specific nature of the structures and mechanisms that make up a leadership context that may be important; instead, it is the nature of the relationship between them.

In addition, another consideration of the leadership process can be applied due to critical realism recognising the reality of a state of absence (Thorpe, 2020). Critical realism's definition of the term "real" is a mechanism or state of being that has a causal effect. In the case of leadership, I suggest that it is the absence of morphostatic tending relations that creates the need or possibility for leadership to occur. The call for more leadership is the call to address this absence, and further investigation could be undertaken as to how this is achieved within particular contexts and situations, perhaps identifying an alignment with the

various styles or forms of leadership (e.g. servant, transformational, etc.) commonly referred to in modern leadership texts.

The final observation noted from Figure 8.1 is that both paradigm perspectives have either no or only a limited ability to ontologically accommodate the structural context that critical realism sees as representing the reality of an open system in which leadership takes place (T1 – T2 and T3 -T4) prior and post the interaction phase. Antonakis and House's positivist approach excludes the T1-T2 phase completely, and its commitment to empiricism and observation does not allow for the underlying social structures to be viewed as real. Alternatively, Hosking does address the reality of conditioning and elaborating powers but only in the form of language or under the broad description of discourse. Critical realism can extend this perspective further by accommodating both the powers of discourse and of other types of social structure.

Now, we are at a stage where the benefits of critical realism, in the form of the leadership canvas, can be more clearly identified as providing an ontological framework to explore and explain a more complete and complex understanding of the leadership process. Critical realism recognises both the positivist and interpretivist perspectives as providing different sources of evidence of the pre-existing, underlying structures and mechanisms within a particular context or situation. On this basis, the opportunity for the critical realist leadership researcher is to explore the T1- T2 situation and to explain how prior relations (SEPs, CEPs and PEPs) condition and influence (but do not determine) the current actions of people and how, through the process of reflexivity and meaning-making (subjectivity), people attribute reasons for actions, either their own of others. In addition, this perspective could be carried forward into the domain of leadership development, where an equal emphasis could be placed on understanding and developing the structural conditions that influence and condition leadership alongside the development of individual people.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to consider the opportunities for integrating contemporary leadership theory by adopting a critical reality ontology. By overlaying the canvases drawn from alternative leadership perspectives (Antonakis and House, and Hosking), it was demonstrated that the study of leadership through the lens of critical realism is not only inclusive of the ontological elements of positivism and interpretivism but also extends the

frame of reference to the pre-existing structures (material and cultural) that shape leadership situations. In addition, critical realist philosophy and Archer's morphogenetic model provided the ontological building blocks on which to reconsider and be more explicit about what we mean by leadership. In this way, the nature of the relations and structures that establish the conditions in which leadership is required and how it is perceived can be explored independently of how the process or practices of leadership manifest in any particular context.

Chapter Nine– Thesis Conclusion

> "through its commitment to stratification and emergence critical realism is entirely capable of incorporating epistemological insights from ….. competing positions without accepting their ontological flaws." (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018, p. 212)

Introduction

The overarching question this thesis asks is how critical realism could contribute to developing more integrative accounts of leadership. This chapter offers a concluding summary of my investigation into the opportunities offered by critical realism, highlighting the findings my analysis has helped to surface and reflecting on the potential of a critical realist perspective to align leadership concepts across paradigms typically positioned as mutually exclusive. I also provide a commentary on the challenges of critical realism. Finally, I address the limitations of this research and offer brief recommendations for future study.

Overview

I commenced my investigation by exploring the paradigmatical assumptions underpinning positivism and interpretivism, aiming to provide a solid foundation for their comparison with the critical realist perspective. In Chapter Two, my analysis highlighted the range and variability of paradigm terminology by evaluating three frameworks used to compare differing research traditions in social science. This included Burrell and Morgan (2017) *Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory* model, the Guba and Lincoln (1994) *Inquiry paradigms* framework, and the Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) *Analytical schema*. While I identified there was general agreement across the models when describing positivism's objective and empirical realist commitments, a variety of paradigms were positioned as alternatives, including interpretivism, constructivism, social constructionism, radical humanism and critical theory. Common across these later perspectives is a recognition of the subjective component of social life; however, the extent and impact of subjectivity on ontological and epistemological assumptions varied. At the extreme of constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012) or radical humanism (Burrell & Morgan, 2017), social and natural science took on an idealist ontology where reality exists in the form of mental constructs, and meaning and reality are created solely through discourse (i.e. language labels and symbols). At its logical extreme, this led to an acceptance of multiple realities

(relativism), none of which can be considered more true than any other. Some critical realists also referred to this as strong social constructionism (Sayer, 2010). More moderate positions of social constructionism (Burrell & Morgan, 2017) and critical theory et al. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) recognise the potential for structures and ideas to escape the minds of individuals and act objectively to shape and constrain social reality.

I highlighted, however, that Fleetwood offered another option by suggesting that a critical realist ontology, which he defined as stratified, emergent, and evolving (Fleetwood, 2014), could provide an alternative to the two ontological extremes of empirical realism and idealism. Earlier frameworks of Burrell and Morgan (2017), Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) were dualistic, seeking to pigeonhole paradigms as either objectivist or subjectivist, realist or relativist, modern or post-modern. Meanwhile, Fleetwood proposed that critical realism provided a third starting position in which the question of ontology could only be answered by addressing the nature of the phenomena under study.

In Chapter Three, my analysis examined the commitments of critical realism as a philosophy of science (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2015) and later as an explanatory method (Archer, 1995, 2016a), This allowed the distinctive elements of critical realism to be laid out, including a distinction between what Bhaskar terms the transitive and intransitive objects of science, a concept that differentiates between knowledge and what that knowledge is about. Bhaskar also introduces the concept of the domains of reality as the empirical (what is experienced), the actual (events or actions that occur), and the real (underlying causal structures of things or entities that act to produce events). Critical realism recognises the differentiated nature of what exists in each of the domains and, as a result, as a paradigm, can provide vertical depth to the study of leadership. i.e. it can include both the regularity of events (positivism) and subjective meaning-making (idealism) rather than reducing leadership to one or the other.

My analysis also addressed critical realism's distinctive concept of what it holds to be real. Much confusion about critical realism stems from using the term 'real' and the word's unqualified association with positivism (i.e. positivism as having a realist ontology (Burrell & Morgan, 2017)). Determining something as real under positivist terms requires repeated observation of atomic events, which is defined as empirical realism. However, when critical realism refers to the realness of something, it references the ability of a thing (entity) to act or

have a causal effect. This definition extends the notion of real to include material objects, social structures, ideas (discourse) and artefacts that combine materiality with meaning. It also does not require things to be empirically observed to recognise their real-ness. Critical realism understands that social phenomena operate within open systems, and as a result, what is observed is the outcome of multiple underlying counteracting structures and mechanisms. As a result, the nature of causality cannot be determined or explained from observation alone.

In Chapter Four, I showed how Archer draws on the philosophical components of critical realism developed by Bhaskar to offer the morphogenetic model as an explanatory method for social science. This model recognises structure and agency as not only emergent entities operating on different strata of reality, hence maintaining the concept of stratification mentioned previously, but also introduces a temporal component that recognises that all action is conditioned by pre-existing structure, and structure is the result of previous action. This perspective contributes the horizontal dimensions to the leadership canvas, allowing the process of leadership to be separated into three time periods: conditioning (T1 – T2), interaction (T2- T3) and elaboration (T3 -T4).

Chapter Five described the thesis methodology, which drew on the Danermark et al. (2019) exploratory research model. This framework is described in five stages and is designed to assist scholars to move beyond empiricism, either in the form of observation of events or perception, to the identification and validation of the underlying structure and mechanisms that structure and condition social phenomena. I outlined my intent to examine the text of two leadership researchers operating from alternative paradigm perspectives as a means of exploring how critical realism may provide opportunities for their integration.

In Chapter Six, I addressed Antonakis and House's positivist perspective of the Fuller-FRLT, which resulted in a view of leadership as having a universal and predictable nature. However, this was only once contextual variability was removed. This process attempted to statistically create a closed system, an approach I concluded removed elements inherent to leadership. My analysis, therefore, identified core limitations in the usefulness of A&H's approach as it did not reflect the reality of leadership as being enacted and experienced in an open system.

In Chapter Seven, I examined Hosking's postmodern social construction perspective, which sought to question modernist assumptions by proposing that leadership (and all other social

phenomena) could be described as an empty process of relating and where identifying entities as leader or follower only existed in a process shaped by local discourse and culture. My investigation highlighted that Hosking's perspective had a number of synergies with critical realism, depending on the scope of the analysis. A narrow focus on the process of relating aligned her paradigm more closely with interpretivism as defined in this thesis, drawing on an ontology of idealism and limiting the social world to entities constituted entirely by discourse. Alternatively, a broader view recognised Hosking's acknowledgement of the independent, *a-prior* existence of conditioning cultural structures (i.e. external to the process of relating).

Finally, in Chapter Eight, I explored the opportunities critical realism can provide for integrating contemporary leadership theory, consistent with stage 5 of the Danemark et al. framework. Here, my analysis highlighted the role of action and experience of these actions as central to both positivist and interpretivist views, but in different ways. For positivism, leadership was reduced to observation of events wherein the empirical and actual domains were assumed to be identical. Whereas for Hosking, it was the process of giving meaning to action (in the form of act and supplement), which was of scientific interest.

In both cases, leadership obtained an intransitive nature or level of stability (although for different periods). However, my analysis exposed that neither paradigm could offer an ontological basis on which to fully examine the pre-existing mechanisms and structures other than language (Hosking) that could account for the morphostasis of the leadership process. In contrast, critical realism's commitment to stratification and emergence in the form of Archer's morphogenetic model provides the ontological building blocks to explain why and when stability might occur through the interplay of SEPs, CEPs and PEPs, while also leaving the question of how (the expression of leadership) might differ depending on the relational context.

The cumulative and overarching contribution of my analysis is to have demonstrated that critical realism can not only integrate leadership concepts across various paradigms but also add to any paradigm's explanatory power by exploring the structures and mechanisms underlying leadership actions and how they are experienced. This is important because leadership studies as a field, is paradigmatically diverse but also fragmented. Limited efforts have been made in recent years to connect insights developed from within different

paradigms, but doing so could help advance the field as a whole, and the approach developed here offers insights into how this could be done. The thesis also makes a methodological contribution, demonstrating an approach to operationalising critical realist concepts and methods that can help guide others seeking to deploy this approach. This is important because applying critical realism, not only in the leadership field, presents several challenges.

Summary of findings

Thesis Question: How can critical realism contribute to the development of more integrative accounts of leadership?	
1. What are the paradigmatical assumptions of positivism and interpretivism in social science?	• Positivism is based on an ontology of empirical realism, while interpretivism is based on an ontology of idealism. • The assumptions of positivism and interpretivism are regularly depicted as dualistic and incommensurate in social science paradigm taxologies. • While there is some agreement on the differences in assumption between research paradigms, there is also a lack of clarity especially between anti-positive perspectives.
2. What is critical realism, and what makes it different from more common research perspectives?	• Critical realism offers an alternative ontology to those assumed by positivism or interpretivism. • Critical realism is described as having a stratified, emergent and differentiated ontology.

	• Critical realism assumes that there difference between the transitive and intransitive objects of science, and that the social world can be viewed as three domains of reality (empirical, actual and real) • The empirical and actual domains accommodate both the objective and subject elements of positivism and interpretivism, while the real domain includes the unobservable structures and mechanisms that create the conditions for events to occur. • Critical realism provides the basis for Archer's Morphogenetic approach, a model which allows for the separate examination of the structure and agency over time, a process referred to as analytical dualism. • It is the interaction of structures (SEPs CEPs and PEPs which condition but do not define social interaction.
3. How have positivist or interpretivist paradigms influenced the way leadership is conceptualised?	• A&H's positivist assumptions resulted in a conception of leadership in which it was assumed that an individual's leadership actions (leader or follower) could be extracted from the context in which they occur.

	• This approach could not explain why, when or how the relationship between leadership actions and leadership outcomes occurred as it lacked the ontological framework to account for subjectivity or unobservable structures and mechanism which critical realism sees as essential to social phenomenon. • Hoskings interpretivist approach displayed a number of synergies with the assumptions of critical realism including recognition of conditioning nature of language. • However Hosking's post-modern social constructionist assumptions failed to explicitly recognise influence of social entities other than culture expressed via language (discourse)
4. What opportunities for integrating contemporary leadership theory can be found from adopting a critical reality ontology to analyse representative examples of that theory?	• The identified commonalities between positivist and intepretitivist perspectives including a shared interest in action and perception, and recognition of leadership as having various degrees to stability. • A critical realist ontology allowed for the reframing of paradigmatical differences as representing different strata of the leadership experience.

	• Positivist and interpretivist perspectives can be seen as providing evidence for and insight into the underlying structures and mechanisms influencing the conception and actions of leadership. • The critical realist methodology of abstraction, abduction and retroduction allowed for the ontology leadership assumed by positivism and interpretivism to be challenged by clarifying the nature of it underlying relations.

Challenges and reflections

One of the key challenges of critical realism regularly cited in the literature and reinforced by my own experience is making the translation from critical realism as a philosophy of science to the methodological practicalities of undertaking critical realist research (Didier et al., 2023; McAvoy & Butler, 2018; Weizenegger, 2023). Bhaskar maintained that while his work provided philosophical support for critical realism, the methods deployed by philosophy differed from that of science and, as a result, recommended that critical realist scientific methods should be developed in a way appropriate to the subject matter and question at hand (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). This process is still in its infancy, given the relative newness of critical realism compared to positivism or interpretivism.

While there are some general frameworks guiding applied critical realist studies (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011; Weizenegger, 2023), such as the Danermark et al. (2019) methodology used in this analysis or Bhaskar's models of scientific discovery and development (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016), there remains a lack of explicitly critical realist methods for researchers to draw upon. This makes it challenging to move beyond established statistical or interpretive techniques to confidently propose and evaluate the underlying generative mechanisms

defined as the objects of critical realist science. Critical realism's primary focus on ontology has, in some respects, left the questions of epistemology and research methods lagging behind (Didier et al., 2023).

There have been some recent attempts to adapt qualitative methods to the commitments of critical realism, including thematic analysis (Fryer, 2022; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021), case studies (Wynn & Williams, 2012), autoethnography (Kempster & Stewart, 2010), grounded theory (Kempster & Parry, 2011), data analysis (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011), and interviews (Brönnimann, 2022). However, these approaches remain light in relation to the processes of abduction and retroduction, where the researcher is asked to consider the underlying or pre-existing conditions (SEPs, CEPs, and PEPs) necessary for a phenomenon to present itself in a particular way. Support for undertaking this type of analysis is often reduced to a list of questions to be posed by the researcher, such as "What does the existence of this object (in this form) presuppose? Can it exist on its own as such? If not, what else must be present? What is it about the object that makes it do such and such?" (Sayer, 2010, p. 62). Analysis by Bygstad and Munkvold (2011) quotes Bunge (2004, p. 201), who suggests that recognising mechanisms possibly underlying events and experiences is not a method or technique but, rather, an art. In these terms, it is easy to see how critical realist analysis may be challenged by entrenched benchmarks of sound science, such as validity for positivism or trustworthiness for interpretivism (Bell et al., 2018).

Another critique of critical realism offered by Øgland (2017) suggests that assumptions made by those championing critical realism as an alternative to the beliefs and assumptions undertaken by positivist or interpretivist science could be interpreted as "caricatures" (Øgland, 2017, p. 3) that do not represent the actual assumptions and beliefs of modern proponents of either paradigm. As a result, critical realist arguments against positivism or interpretivism lose their relevancy as they are seen as countering a theoretical rather than an actual perspective. The analysis undertaken in this thesis would suggest that this is a fair critique. While both Antonakis and House, and Hosking were selected based on the assumption that they would represent leadership research at opposite ends of the paradigmatic spectrum, it would be fair to say that they do not reflect positivism or interpretivism in their ideal forms. As I suggested earlier, a closer inspection of Hosking's view of leadership revealed close alignment with many critical realist ideas. That being said, the ambiguity identified in both their paradigmatic foundations does support critical realism's

call for the proactive examination and communication of any assumptions, especially ontological ones, as a necessary part of the scientific process.

Finally, if one of the intended outcomes of leadership research is journal publication, the acceptance of critical realist methodologies by editors and reviewers who may be more familiar with and comfortable with positivist or interpretivist arenas could act as a barrier. For example, Kempster and Parry's analysis (2011) reflects on the publication process experienced by Kempster (2006), in which the critical realist assumptions underlying the investigation into leadership development were played down, focusing on the more widely accepted methodology of grounded theory to maximise the chance of publication.

From a personal perspective, the most challenging element of applying critical realism to the study of leadership lies in critical realism's philosophical basis. Much of Bhaskar's writing, and, to a lesser extent, Archer's, is founded on an immanent critique of earlier philosophical and sociological theories. I am not the first to recognise the assumed level of knowledge inherent in both the language and references of these writers. This requires researchers like myself without a prior grounding in philosophy or sociology to establish sufficient background understanding before we can appreciate the nuance of the discussion (Banfield & Maisuria, 2023). Not only that but, as Deetz (1996) notes, members of the dominant group tend to grow blind spots, while those in the less dominant group must learn the two systems (theirs and the dominant one) to survive. This was certainly my experience - not only in terms of needing to develop an understanding of the historical origins of critical realism but also, due to its critical nature, needing to engage with both positivism and forms of interpretivism to understand critical realism's counter position.

Thesis limitations

This work's primary limitation relates to the breadth and depth to which I considered differing paradigms and their application to leadership within the context of the leadership canvas. While a qualitative approach to research does not demand large sample sizes to be considered as making a valid contribution to knowledge, being limited to just two differing perspectives means that it cannot be regarded as a comprehensive study of the integration opportunities extended by critical realism. Rather, it serves as a test case that illustrates the potential of such an approach. My choice of papers could also have represented more extreme paradigm perspectives. However, the benefit of drawing on the work of Ospina and Uhl-Bien

(2012) lay in the fact that researchers had personally identified themselves as operating within the stated paradigms.

Using the Danermark et al. methodology was also challenging. It is presented as a step-by-step process with individual components; however, in my experience, moving through stages two to four as independent steps revealed a considerable crossover between them, especially between stage 3 – abduction and stage 4 - retroduction. Other critical realist practitioners have also noted this (Hastings, 2023). This may have been exacerbated by my use of leadership text as the intransitive object of study rather than a more conventional contextual empirical study. Further exposition of Danermark's approach would be useful in guiding critical realist researchers.

Future opportunities

The scope and word count limitations of a Master's thesis mean that there were a number of ideas that could not be explored here. Still, I believe I could further develop the analysis of leadership through a critical realist paradigm. This includes continued refinement of the leadership canvas, especially in relation to the ideas of Grint and Smolovic (2016) whose work reflects on the differing conceptions of leadership, including person, result, position, purpose and process; all concepts that could align with the zones of the canvas developed here and where the canvas could as a unifying framework. An in-depth analysis of a single leadership concept utilising the leadership canvas could also be undertaken. Finally, undertaking a more traditional empirical analysis of leadership within a particular context could support the concrete validation of the ideas developed as part of this thesis.

Overall conclusion

Critical realism's benefits as a paradigm for the study of leadership lie in its ability to expand the breadth and depth of how leadership is understood at both the ontological and epistemological levels. Recognising the empirical, actual and real domains provides the study of leadership with vertical depth in which positivist and interpretive approaches can be co-located, acting as evidence and impetus for the critical realist researcher to dig below what is experienced as events or ideas. Further, Archer's Morphogenetic model allows for a stratified and emergent model of structure and agency, and the concept of analytical dualism provides a method to understand these concepts separately before examining their interplay.

Rather than a framework where different theories of leadership are dropped like independent and incommensurable pinpoints on a two-by-two matrix (cf. Burrell & Morgan, 2017), the critical realist model proposed here provides an ontological framework that recognises both the subjective and objective components of social reality.

By applying this, existing leadership concepts can be co-located and contribute to increasing our understanding of leadership, both as an individual phenomenon but also as part of being shaped by emerging social forms and mechanisms. In some respects, this framework allows for the reframing of paradigmatical differences as representing different strata of the leadership experience. Critical realism thus moves away from reductionist science approaches by providing an overall picture of the terrain and allowing for research from differing paradigms to contribute different pieces of the leadership puzzle in an integrated way.

Appendix A – Extract from Instrumental leadership: Measurement and extension of transformational–transactional leadership theory (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 751).

"Leaders must know the capabilities of their organization and identify their potential by constant scanning of the internal and external environment (environmental monitoring). They design appropriate strategies and communicate specific objectives (strategy formulation) by packaging them in affect- and morally-laden ways, and getting intrinsic "buy-in" from followers (transformational leadership). Leaders must identify the tasks followers have to accomplish and provide appropriate resources (path–goal facilitation), monitor follower performance and give constructive feedback (outcome monitoring) while paying attention to individual needs and intellectually stimulating and inspiring followers (transformational leadership). Leaders must also use extrinsic motivational means by providing rewards and sanctions contingent on follower performance (transactional leadership). As mentioned before, instrumental leaders are thus key to task effectiveness. They should also have followers who are satisfied because such leaders give clear performance milestones, constructive oriented feedback, and path– goal clarifications. Instrumental leaders ensure that followers perform well, which has important motivation effects and helps to reinforce the self-concept and this in terms of increasing self-efficacy belief."

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