RELATIONAL LEADING

Practices for Dialogically Based Collaboration

Lone Hersted and Kenneth J. Gergen

Relational Leading

Practices for Dialogically based Collaboration

Table of Contents

PREFACE

It's often said that leadership is primarily a matter of communication skills. But what are communication skills? This may seem obvious, but it's not at all. In fact, the entire concept of communication has changed in recent years. No longer does good communication simply mean that a leader should listen carefully on the one hand, and communicate clearly and engagingly on the other. These are products of a linear view of communication—the movement of messages from one brain to another. This is a dead model. As progressively realized, communication is a process of mutually molding meaning—a process of continuous coordination. Our words are not containers of meaning sent from one mind to another; rather, our words acquire meaning as they are taken up in ongoing interchange. Like a game of football, no single person is in control of the outcomes. As the Russian theorist Valentin Voloshinov once put it, *"Meaning does not reside in the word or in the soul of the speaker or in the soul of the listener. Meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener..."* With this

shift to a participatory view of communication, we also move away from training leaders to be "good listeners," or "good speakers." The crucial ingredient of leading is skillful *participation in the process of coordinated action.*

In recent years, the interest in dialogue has grown by leaps and bounds. Scholarly treatises, books for practitioners, conferences, and workshops are emerging at a rapid pace. There are many reasons for this. Even in 1993, organizational doyen Edgar Schein wrote about the increasingly rapid change in the world, and the resulting need for rapid learning in organizations. For him, dialogue serves as the chief means for distributing and interpreting information in an organization. Interestingly Schein was writing before the communication explosion brought about by computers, the Internet, and cell phones. We are now floating in a wash of information, images, ideas, opinions and the like. Never before has there been such a need for open sharing, understanding, and adjusting in the organization. Successful dialogue is crucial. This same explosion in communication also brings with it unprecedented demands for collaboration. New and highly complex problems require linking many different kinds of knowledge; cooperation across cultural borders is increasingly necessary; work teams are needed to supply continuous innovation. Successful collaboration originates in dialogic process.

Yet, for all this emphasis on dialogue, how does one become skilled? This is no small question. Traditional practices of education are built around content as opposed to process, that is, communicating pre-formed knowledge as opposed to inviting one into the process of creating knowledge. For example, you learn principles of science, the history of your country, the chemical

elements, or an appreciation of poetry, novels, or the arts. Only in specialized settings are you drawn into the process or craft of doing or making. It is the difference between *knowing that* and *knowing how*, between description and action. In this respect, there are many thoughtful books on the nature of dialogue; they will not only inform you about dialogue, but provide advice for aspiring leaders. To be sure, such works can be helpful. But they do not take us far enough. For example, Cunliffe & Eriksen (2011) write, *Relational leaders are open to the present moment and to future possibilities, they engage in 'questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting' dialogue rather than dialogue that 'finalizes, materializes, explains, and kills causally, that drowns out another's voice…"* We think these authors are right on the mark, but in practice how exactly should we go about "questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing," and so on? There are certainly many ways to ask a question, for example, and not all of them invite cooperation. And, as well, when you engage in these activities, you have little control over what follows. What if your questions, for example, create hostility? How do you then reply? Here description and advice will fail; you must move creatively in the unfolding process—knowing how, doing and making.

It is precisely here that the idea for this book was born. We are both engaged in theories of dialogue, but how could we provide an entry into the process? And more specifically, how could this immersion in process expand the reader's potentials for action and for productive reflection? Our answer was to develop a series of ongoing dialogues, many of them drawn from our own common experiences. Some of the dialogues have also been tested and elaborated further at workshops, conferences, and classrooms

in which we have trained leaders, consultants, and students. Our present hope is that as you, the reader, are drawn into these dialogues—often playing the role of the leader—you will become increasingly aware of what's taking place. We will help by raising questions. Where in the conversation did things go wrong; how would you say things differently; how do you think others felt when this was said; and so on. In each case we are attempting to generate a consciousness of the process, an ability, not only to perform, but simultaneously to monitor the process—to conduct a private conversation about the public conversation. In each chapter we also include some central ideas about dialogue. These are intended to sharpen and enrich your understanding. Every dialogue is new; we never have precisely the same conversation twice. Thus, there are no perfect rules of conduct. However, it is possible to prepare for contingencies, to be sensitive to the nuances, and to think creatively as the process unfolds. Developing these skills is what the book is all about.

As authors, the two of us have a keen appreciation of dialogic practice, although coming from very different backgrounds. Born in Denmark, Lone Hersted was initially educated in the field of theater, as an actress and later on as a dramaturg, and this work has played an important role in developing the present book. As theater director Viola Spolin wrote, *The techniques of the theater are the techniques of communicating*. Lone then became an organizational consultant and a specialist in leadership and organizational development. After a period of carrying out research in both the public and the private sector, including working with family therapy, she decided to enter her current position as a lecturer and Ph.D fellow at the Institute of Learning and Philosophy at Aalborg

University (DK). Here, among other things, she investigates how role play and dialogue training can enhance collaboration and development in teams and entire organizations. Ken Gergen began his career in the U.S. as a social psychologist at Harvard University. He later became chair of the Psychology Department at Swarthmore College, in Pennsylvania, and is currently a Senior Research Professor there. Over time his concerns shifted to social theory and cultural commentary, and he now serves as the President of the Taos Institute, a non-profit organization bringing together social constructionist theory and professional practices. He has written extensively about communication, and such works as *An Invitation to Social Construction, the Saturated Self, and Relational Being*. His work with Mary Gergen, linking performance with social science, can be found in their book, *Playing with Purpose: Adventures in Performative Social Science*. In developing the present work, we found these differing trajectories came together in an exciting and productive way—theory, theater, communication, social process, organizational development, leadership, relational practice—a rich mixture we hope we can now share with our readers.

What are our hopes for this book? It is our special wish that the book can serve as an inspiration and preparation for leaders, consultants, and educators to participate, with care, in our everyday practices of communication. Such practices usually seem "just natural," the taken for granted ways we relate. But buried within the details are the seeds of success and failure—for organizational leaders, and relationships everywhere.

References

Cunliffe A., & M. Eriksen (2011). Relational leadership. *Human Relations* 2011, *64*: 14-25.

Schein, E. H. (1993). On dialogue, culture, and organizational learning. *Organizational Dynamics*, *22*, 27-37.

Spolin, V. (1972). *Improvisation for the theater: A handbook of teaching and directing techniques.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Voloshinov, V. (1929/1986). *Marxism and the philosophy of language,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press

1

RELATIONAL LEADING AND THE CHALLENGE OF DIALOGUE

Consider your typical day at work. What are you doing? How are you spending your time? Chances are very good that most of the time you are engaged in communicating. You are on the phone, in a meeting, on a conference call, chatting with colleagues, writing a letter, reading or sending email, composing or reading a report, and so on. In effect, you are participating in dialogue. Such dialogue is scarcely trivial; it is not "merely talking," "keeping up to date," or "disseminating information." You are participating in a complex process of relating, in words and deeds. On this process depends the future of the organization—its life or death.

Yet, you may say, "isn't dialogue just natural?" It's only making conversation, isn't it, just normal talk? And doesn't everyone know that it pays to be clear, and we should be sure others understand our ideas—and vice versa? But beyond that, no big deal! But consider again: aren't there some people with whom you really love to talk; being with them is a pleasure; work is easily accomplished? And aren't there others who are, well, a

bit difficult? Things never seem to go very smoothly. Where some of your colleagues fire your enthusiasm, others take the wind from your sails. Some are a bit unpolished in their dealings, even clumsy; others are shy and not very forthcoming; Still others seem altogether stuck on themselves—me, me, me—while their colleagues remain cool and distant. We all recognize these variations in how people engage in dialogue. And to be sure, your style will be judged by your colleagues—for good or ill. In this little book we hope to bring dialogue to life in a new way. We want to take a close look at the dynamics of everyday talk, and notice how small shifts in wording can often make huge differences in outcome. We want to bring into focus the ways in which we depend on each other for what it is we say and how effective we are. We wish to show how respect and distance, trust and alienation, feelings of well-being and of stress, friendship and enmity, concern and callousness are all achieved in the twists and turns of dialogue. The book is designed to engage you in series of dialogic challenges, inviting you to read, think, imagine, and create. If successful, you should emerge at the end as a different kind of leader, more skilled than ever in the daily demands of relating.

The book is composed of nine chapters. To begin we explore why dialogue is so essential to the success of an organization. As we will explore, it is within dialogue that the basic understandings—the logics and the values—that are essential to the functioning of the organization depend. We will also take a look at the conditions faced by organizations today, conditions that demand a re-thinking of the organization and the crucial place of dialogue within it. With these ideas in place, you will also begin to see the practice of leading in entirely new ways. We call this new

approach *relational leading.* It is important to explore its dimensions. What new skills are required for the leader today, what are the potentials, what are the hurdles? This new understanding of leadership coexists with major shifts in world conditions. In this context we shall explore why, in the present day global context, the demands for effective dialogue are greatly intensified.

In the next chapter we shall further develop the background for the dialogic challenges. Here we introduce concepts that will prove invaluable in thinking about the dialogic process and will prepare you for the learning experiences ahead. In the seven chapters that follow we will thrust you headlong into some of the major dialogic challenges confronted in today's organization. We focus, for example, on the challenges of creating organizational culture, leading teams, handling change, reducing conflict, grappling with emotions, stimulating creativity, combating organizational stasis, and coaching your employees. These challenges all require sensitive, flexible, and creative movements in dialogue. And, through reflective immersion in actual cases, your skills of relational leading are sharpened.

The book is written for leaders, change agents and other practitioners wishing to learn and develop their relational and dialogical skills, and thus contribute to the larger missions in which they are engaged.

Dialogue and World Construction

Why do we place such great importance on dialogue? After all, business schools rarely take up the topic. They don't spend much time on dialogue because, as it is traditionally held, it is reasoning and facts that count. After all, if we observe closely and think

carefully about what is before us, isn't this the basis for organizational success? If we take careful account of things like markets, products, profits, personnel, research, outcomes, and the like, we can develop rational plans. And with rational plans in place, we can assess our success in achieving our goals. If we are failing to achieve our goals, we may examine what we are doing wrong, and make corrections. On this account, dialogue may be important, but only as a way of communicating about our thinking and the relevant facts.

To be sure, this is the traditional wisdom for achieving organizational success. However, developments of recent decades not only demonstrate the flaws in such assumptions, they suggest that the continuing application of such assumptions may actually be harmful to the organization. Most important, these developments indicate that dialogue is not simply an after-the-fact process for sharing information; it is a process on which the very life of the organization depends. How is this so? Let's take what seems to be an ordinary fact: One of your employees, Thomas, is not doing his job. He has little to say at team meetings, and he seems lethargic in carrying out his assignments. If the organization is to function successfully, it makes sense to replace Thomas with someone else. But consider again: You talk to one of Thomas' colleagues and he tells you that he is a great friend to his team-mates. He comes by their offices, gives them support, and talks with them about the organization and their private lives. He is a valuable asset. Then you talk to an employee who works for Thomas, and she tells you that he is really a dedicated worker, so much so that he has a hard time meeting the deadlines that he sets up. You also talk to Thomas, and find that he has real doubts in the way top

management has defined the job of the team, but that he doesn't speak his mind for fear of seeming negative. So, now you find that your so-called "fact" is better viewed as an "interpretation;" it is just one point of view among many.

"OK," you say, "but human behavior is often ambiguous. We often have to fall back on interpretations. Let's take economics. Here we have 'hard facts!'" Or do we? When the former Soviet Union was dismantled, and Russia became a nation state, top economists were called in to help plan the economic policies that would yield a successful future. They examined reams of evidence, applied the latest economic theories, and used highly sophisticated mathematical models to chart the future. However, two characteristics of the process became paramount: first, there was enormous disagreement among economists as to the most promising policies; and second, the policies that were finally put into place were major failures. In effect, economic facts are no less based on interpretations than facts about human behavior.

Now consider the big picture: Whatever exists does not require any particular label. What you call the "door" to your room could also be called a "hole" or an "escape." You could even call it "William" or "Sarah." All the names are optional. Of course you are comfortable calling it a door because you have done so for years and everyone agrees with you. But what if they did not agree with you; what if there were many different groups, and each had its own way of talking about what you call a door. At this point you would have to conclude that your "door" is not a fact in the world, but a conventional form of description. It is one way of talking about the world among many, and it makes sense to you because most of your acquaintances share your conventions.

More generally, this is to say that we *socially construct* our worlds—together we come to describe, explain, and to know the world as this as opposed to that. This view of socially constructed worlds represents a major transformation in contemporary understanding. Traditionally we have placed a premium on *the truth*, as if there is some set of words that is uniquely suited to represent the world as it is. This view continues to be shared in both science and society. From a constructionist perspective, however, the world comes to be what it is for us by virtue of our relationships. Whatever exists, simply exists. But the moment we begin to describe or explain, we are taking part in a cultural tradition—one tradition among many. Or more to the point: Our words are products of preceding dialogues now offered up to the unfolding dialogue of the moment.

As social constructionist scholarship also makes clear, we do more than socially construct the world of facts—or what we take to be real. We also come to understandings about what is rational and what is valuable or moral. Most of us find it both reasonable and moral, for example, that people can lay claim to private ownership. We think it is a good idea if people can own their places of living; we believe they will take pride in their living spaces and contribute to stable communities as a result. And, we believe it is morally wrong to steal another's possessions. Yet, there are very elaborated philosophies that do not believe private ownership contributes to the common good, and there are many people who find it totally agreeable to make a living through robbery. It all depends on the company you keep. As we see, from a social constructionist view, dialogue about what is real, rational, and good is essential in creating those common understandings

by which we lead our lives. Without dialogue we have nothing to rely on in the way of understanding, we have no reasons for our actions, and there is little in the sense of right and wrong, good and bad. In effect, to be organized at all depends on collectively coordinating words and actions. If participants are not roughly "on the same page" in terms of their fundamental understandings of the real, rational, and good, then there is no organization.

Creating organization is one thing, but the pivotal significance of dialogue does not end there. Consider some additional challenges that confront almost every organization:

- There are disagreements that lie unspoken. Members of an organization may demonstrate public agreement when they are together. However, many are skeptical of what is said in public; they have private ideas, special motives, and values that run counter to the public agreements. These hidden views and values may subtly undermine organizational functioning.

- Agreements are seldom shared all the way across an organization. The kinds of agreements that may seem reasonable at the highest levels of the organization may not be shared throughout the ranks. Those hired for research and development may have quite different ideas about the organization than those in marketing, human resources, or operations. If the organization is distributed geographically, those in one region may have quite different views of reality and quite different values from those in other regions.

- If participants have strong and enthusiastic agreements, the organization may be strangled. There is little room for new insights, shifts in perspective, and appreciation of information that unsettles these agreements.

Further, endless periods of "business as usual" rob the organization of excitement and the thrill of new ideas and challenges. When organizational change is essential, entirely new demands for dialogue must be confronted. For one, there may be a high demand for new and creative ideas. And, as we shall later see, creativity is primarily the outcome of relational process. Further, when new plans are in motion, it is essential to generate "buy-in" throughout the organization. However, commitment to the realities, rationalities, and values of the past may stand in the way.

- Organizations exist within larger social environments, and synchrony with these environments is essential to the wellbeing of the organization. Failing to take into consideration the views and values of the world outside, and failing to generate outside esteem for what the organization is doing, will ultimately mean hard knocks for the organization.

As you can see, the challenge of dialogue is continuous, and skills in coordination are critical to the organization's future. Further, the demand for these skills is more acute today than ever before. Let's explore:

Dialogue and the Communication Explosion

The challenges of dialogue have always been present in organizational life. However, only recently have we become aware of the complexity and importance of these challenges. This new consciousness is not only due to the emergence of social construction. Rather, for most leaders the origins lie in the experiences of daily life, and most particularly, experiences resulting from the explosion in communication. In the past century we have witnessed a

major transformation in communication technologies. In earlier decades we greeted the arrival of the automobile, telephone, radio, and mass publishing. Then came television and jet transportation, which subsequently gave way to the arrival of the Internet, email, sophisticated search engines, mobile phones, and more. In effect, today's world is characterized by a massive, global-wide movement of people, ideas, information, incitements, warnings, and expressions of value. This means that in today's organizations we are increasingly influenced by:

- Diversity in gender, religion, and ethnicity of the workforce, all of which gives rise to differences in constructed worlds.

- The increasing amount of information and the development of interactive digital communication forms (for instance blogs), rapid sharing of information from many sources, and often with differing implications for action.

- The quicksilver development of products or services that may threaten or challenge one's organization.

- The global expansion of organizational functioning, opening new markets or venues of application.

- The awareness of opportunities for creating useful or profitable alliances.

- The rise in educational level of the populations.

- The spreading value of democracy in the workplace, which favors workforce input into organizational decisions.

- The public's increased knowledge of the organization's activities, and the resulting vulnerability of the organization to public opinion.

- The potential for rapid development of grass-roots movements that may oppose the organization's activities.
- The government's increased knowledge of the organization's activities, and the resulting potential for interference.
- The increasing use of electronic control systems within the organization.

In each of these eleven cases, the need for skilled dialogue is urgent. How is the diverse workforce to be united, for example, or, how can the organization make decisions in ambiguous and ever changing circumstances, maximize creative responses to changing demands, deal with public criticism, respond to workers' demands for rights, and so on? Navigating in this hyper complex society and these ever changing conditions is challenging. Required are capacities for generating and engaging in multi-perspective reflection, dialogue that is at once open and focused, improvised and organized, creative and conserving. But how is one to speak, what is to be said, what if there are disagreements, and what if the answer to such questions is not the same from one moment to the next? It is to just such issues that this book attends.

Organizing: From Mechanics to Confluence

We inherit from the past many traditions, and we rely on these traditions to guide our way through life. The same may be said of our organizations. We inherit ideas about how organizations ideally function, along with visions of good leadership. However, the question we must now confront is whether our traditional understandings of the well-functioning organization and the effective leader are wise guides for the future. As we have just seen, the

emerging challenges to the traditional organization are enormous. The demands they make on dialogic skills are multiple. Can our major traditions adequately deal with these challenges? We don't think so. As we see it, some of the major traditions that currently guide organizational life are not only counter-productive; in the long run they may even be fatal. Let us first re-consider some central assumptions about well-functioning organizations. Then we turn to our traditional views of leadership.

The primary conception of the organization to emerge in the 20th century was that of the machine. That is, like a machine the well-functioning organization:

- is composed of separate parts, each of which has a specific function (e.g. operations, marketing, finance, human resources).
- employs individuals to fulfill specific requirements in these functional domains.
- attempts to maximize the relationship between inputs and outputs (i.e. to achieve profit, efficiency, economy, etc.)
- is subject to rational and empirical assessment to insure optimal functioning.

Under certain conditions this mechanical view of the organization can function very well. This is especially so if environmental conditions are stable, and the workforce homogeneous. Life is predictable, and rational planning can be effective. But now consider the emerging conditions of the 21st century: Increasing diversity of work forces, ever expanding loads of mixed information, innovations burgeoning from all corners of the globe, environmental demands in flux, and so on. Under these conditions the mechanical organization is severely compromised. The

functional divisions are continuously challenged by ever shifting demands and opportunities; employees must rapidly integrate new functions into their workload, competing views of what is rational and optimal are continuously challenged, and so on.

The potentials for effective dialogue are also reduced by the traditional organization. Division into separate parts favors communication within functional areas, but discourages cross-functional knowledge exchange. Because they are individually assessed, employees may be highly guarded in terms of what information and opinions they are willing to share. The centering of decision-making in upper management generates ignorance, alienation, and suspicion within the lower ranks.

Required, then, is a new vision of the organization, one that is maximally geared to the contemporary global context, and maximally sensitive to the challenges of effective dialogue. In our view, it is helpful here to shift from a mechanical metaphor—with its emphasis on fixed parts—to a more hydraulic view of the organization, one that emphasizes continuous movement or flow. We are particularly attracted to the concept of *confluence*, that is, of a *flowing with*. It is essential that the organization flow with the currents of its surrounds; it is essential that those within the organization flow with each other. On this view we don't empha-size separations—the organization as opposed to its environment, this functional group as separated from that, or this employee as independent of another. Rather, we are drawn to confluences, to relational coordination, to conjoining, and the resulting movement in the currents of which the organization is a part. Successful dia-logue—the flowing together of multiple voices —is the essence of confluence.

Let us be a little more concrete: If the contemporary organization is to thrive, it is essential that information, ideas, opinions, and values move freely across the borders that otherwise separates the organization from its context. At all levels and in all areas of the organization, there must be open dialogue with those outside. This same freedom of movement should characterize relationships within the organization. It is essential that there are opportunities and contexts for open dialogue on a 360-degree basis. And in providing goods or services to the broader world, it is essential that the same kinds of dialogue are sustained. With a continuous flow of information, ideas, opinions and values the organization becomes flexible in its capabilities, able to adjust and re-adjust as conditions change, open to new ideas, and effective in the collaborative process of creating. The participants move dialogically *with* each other and move *with* the broader world.

Relational Leading

The vital organization today is one in which continuous coordination—both internally and with the world outside is essential. Or more pointedly, it is an organization in which dialogues run smoothly, information and opinions are freely exchanged, there is mutual respect and appreciation, and the outcomes are satisfying. Yet, when the goal of confluence is uppermost, we must also rethink the process of leadership. Here, too, our old traditions are declining in usefulness, and new visions are needed. Our major tradition of leadership has ancient origins. Perhaps the earliest form of large-scale organization was military in nature; large numbers of men were mobilized under conditions of do or die. We commonly view this form of organization as a pyramid. The plans

of action are developed at the pinnacle of the structure, orders are passed downward through the various functional units (e.g. infantry, supplies, medical), and large numbers of people execute the orders. Failure to follow orders can yield execution. Information relevant to the success of the plans is conveyed upward through the pyramid.

The metaphor of the pyramid continues to inform much organizational practice today. Often referred to as "command and control," the view dominated the organizational sphere for much of the 20th century. In its worst form, the "do as I say, or else…" mentality approximates management by terror. However, recent decades have been marked by growing discontent with this structure. And this is not only because the structure is inflexible, as just discussed. Problems were increasingly noticeable in the form of leadership that it invited. Regardless of the level of the organization a leader occupied, the command and control organization encourages:

- *Impersonal relations*. Command and control structures create a population of the obedient. For the leader in such organizations, this population is distanced. The leader thinks about "what *they* should do," as opposed, for example, to "what *we* should do." To remove this distance—in the form of friendship—is to reduce one's capacity to give orders. Empathy with those under one's control is limited; they live and work at a distance.

- *Limited communication*. With impersonal relations prevailing, there are also limits on communication. Each individual in the hierarchy has certain functions to perform, and communication tends to be limited to these functions. One receives directives from above, and provides them feedback. Other communication is often

viewed as a "process cost" to the organization. It just takes time and attention away from what really matters.

- *Distrust*. With impersonal, non-empathic, and limited communication, the seeds are planted for distrust. Members of the organization significantly limit their relationship with each other. Such distrust is accelerated by the competitive nature of the hierarchy. Everyone is out for him or herself, and understands that fundamentally, all one's colleagues are potential threats to one's wellbeing. No one can be trusted.

- *Lack of creative engagement*. If one is primarily taking orders from above, and his or her work will be used to improve the status of those above, there is little incentive for active and creative participation in the organization. It is much less threatening to one's future simply to perform as required.

As many believe, the command and control organization is a thing of the past, and along with it, the conception of the leader as one who commands, controls and decides for all. And, to rephrase the above, the vital organization today is dependent on continuous coordination—both internally and with the world outside. When dialogues run smoothly, information and opinions are freely exchanged, and there is mutual respect and appreciation, effective action is facilitated.

What sort of leadership is envisioned here? Nothing less than a radical conception is demanded. For centuries we have viewed leadership as a quality or characteristic of the individual. There are good leaders and bad leaders, and we can distinguish the qualities that separate the former from the latter. In earlier centuries there was a tendency to view leaders in terms of charismatic personality;

there remain echoes of this concept even today. In the 20th century the focus shifted to qualities of good managers. And today, literally thousands of books on leadership list the characteristics of the good leader.

However, in light of all that we have said, it is clear that in the emerging era we must replace the concept of individual leadership with that of *relational leading*. The term "leadership" is largely tied to the view of the individual leader, while "relational leading" refers to the ability of persons in relationship to move with engagement and efficacy into the future. In this sense, relational leading is an activity, not a personal attribute. It is within relational processes that meaning is born, sustained, and transformed. And it is also the impoverished relational process that brings about conflict, alienation, and dysfunctional organizations. The challenge, then, is to enrich and enhance relational process. Increasingly, we find scholars and practitioners championing more relational conceptions of leadership. In these writings the emphases are clear. Needed are effective practices of collaboration, empowerment, horizontal decision-making, information sharing, networking, continuous learning, appreciation, and connectivity. The successful organization of the future must embrace processes of productive and animated interchange among the participants. Ideally, relational leading should take place throughout an organization. In this sense, leading is not a matter only for those in the top echelons. Effective participation in practices of sharing, supporting, appreciating, and so on should take place at all levels of the organization. However, individuals occupying positions of authority do have a heightened responsibility. This is true not only because they serve as models for those in the lower ranks of the

organization, but because they can often set in motion the kinds of relational practices most needed. They can teach and invite forms of interchange from which the organization is nourished and from which new potentials are created.

Let us return finally and more directly to the issue of dialogue. As we proposed, dialogue is at the center of organizational life. Depending on the quality of dialogue, the organization lives or dies. And, the significance and challenge of smooth and open dialogue is more important today than ever before. In relational leading the dialogic process is the central concern. Relational leading first involves a consciousness of the relational process and how it functions. Here it is useful to have a grasp of current concepts and theoretical ideas. Of equal importance, however, is know-how, the skill of relating from moment to moment in on-going and ever changing dialogue. Understanding without practical ability is empty; practical ability without conceptual understanding is limited. With these thoughts in mind, let us lay out the structure of the book.

The Coming Chapters

Throughout this book, we shall be working on two related levels, the one theoretical and the other practical. Grasping key concepts in understanding the nature of dialogue is essential for insightful reflection on the process. However, just as reading a book on how to play golf or tennis doesn't make you a skilled player, reflection on dialogue is insufficient for relational leadership in action. Thus, in the spirit of innovation, we devote major space to practical participation. Specifically, we present dialogic scenarios in which the reader is invited to play out the role of a participant—typically

the leader. After immersion in these conversations, the reader is invited into reflection. Where did the conversation go well, or go wrong; what words or phrases were effective, and what could have been said differently? These deliberations will be vitally enriched by the reader's grasp of the conceptual resources. In effect, the concepts and practices will work in tandem, with the hope that it is precisely this movement from action to reflection and return that prepares the way for skilled leadership.

In the next chapter we will have much more to say about the nature of dialogue. This chapter is most important in terms of conceptual understanding. Then, each chapter will focus in turn on specific areas in which dialogue is crucial -including the building of organizational culture, leading teams, organizational change, dealing with conflict, emotional relationships, creativity in groups, and coaching. Our hope is that the voyage to follow will be enlightening, engaging, and even fun.

For Further Reading

Drath, W. (2001). *The deep blue sea: Rethinking the source of leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Gergen, K.J. (2009). *An invitation to social construction*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Hornstrup, C., Loehr-Petersen, J., Madsen, J. G., Johansen, T., & Jensen, A. V. (2012). *Developing relational leadership: Resources for developing reflexive organizational practices*. Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute Publications.

Raelin, J.A. (2003). *Creating leaderful organizations*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Spillane, J.P., & Diamond, J.B. (2007). *Distributed leadership in practice*. New York: Columbia Teachers College Press.

Uhl-Bien, M., & Ospina, S.M. (Eds.) (2012). *Advancing relational leadership research*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Weick, K.E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.