Inside Reflexive Management Learning in the Workplace: An Ethnographic Study

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This thesis generates new insights and understandings of the concept of reflexive management learning (RML). To date, most scholarship has taken the form of prescriptive theory suggesting what RML should be and should mean for managers and organisations. In the main, however, RML remains empirically under-theorised and as a result rather detached from real world contexts and from the practitioners that would constitute its intended learning audience.

This thesis helps to rebalance the scholarly scales by presenting the results of a two-year reflexive insider's ethnographic study of RML in the Irish subsidiary of a services industry MNC. This heretofore unavailable methodological vantage point provides a novel perspective on RML which elucidates its highly contextualised character. The concern here has been to make managerial voice in RML clearer and more pronounced. Doing this highlights the need for more political reflexivity in RML theorising: defined as the adequate recognition of the complex role of context in RML and the accompanying need to direct this learning approach towards practice-based concerns which matter to the managers involved, without allowing its inherently critical character to be unduly censored by contact with the organisational status quo.

The key findings of this thesis report on how challenging RML is as told through the experiences of the managers involved. But these experiences also portray something which has been less prominent in previous empirical work: RML's promise-laden potential and despite the difficulties and risks involved, paradoxically even because of them, its ability to translate into reflexive action attempted beyond the learning space. These findings led to, and are articulated in this thesis through, a new theoretical framework for RML which also draws from the work of political theorist Hannah Arendt. Titled the 'Reflexive Space of Appearance', this new spatial and political theoretical framework provides RML with a much needed theory of action, or praxis, which can make new contributions to scholarship and practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In many ways, the researching and writing of a doctoral thesis is a lonely endeavour; in others, it is not false modesty to say that it is the work of many hands. It is my pleasure here to be able to recognise others who have contributed to this work.

I thank first of all my supervisor Dr. John Cullen for taking me on as a doctoral student and for guiding me through the five years it took to complete this thesis. John's even temperament and ready wit gave me the confidence to enjoy the process, whilst his subtly delivered, sage advice steered me well and kept me from digressing down many an unnecessary byroad. He has been a valued intellectual companion throughout this process and I couldn't have wished for better supervisory support.

I have others to thank in Maynooth's School of Business: namely, Professor Robert Galavan for the moral support he provided by attending my first ever conference paper presentation; Dr. Marian Crowley, Professor Brian Donnellan and Professor Anne Huff for sitting in on various doctoral panel reviews and providing a fledgling scholar with some much-needed and welcome feedback. I have learned a lot from our interactions and I am grateful for your time and support.

I am lucky too to have been the beneficiary of support and advice from scholars from other academic institutions. I thank Professor David Knights for attending my third, and final, PhD panel. I also thank Professor Knights, and Professor Peter Case, for inviting me to participate in their 2012 EGOS track.

This provided me with an invaluable experience which helped to shape and sharpen some of the arguments presented in this thesis.

I am also indebted to Professor Jim Stewart and Professor Jamie L. Callahan for inviting me to participate on their track at the CMS 2013 Conference in Manchester and further, for inviting me to contribute to the edited book which emerged from this. I also thank the many scholars who replied to e-mails from a Ph.D student who surely had more to gain from these exchanges than they did, but who replied nonetheless; and graciously and fulsomely at that. A special mention in this regard must go to Professor John Burgoyne who was particularly generous with his time and his wisdom in numerous enlightening e-mail exchanges.

The managers in this study deserve a special mention. I believe that despite the final authorial accountability I hold, that we have ultimately co-constructed much of this thesis together and I hope this comes across in what follows. This thesis is dedicated to my mother and my father who gave me such a rich start in life for which I will always be grateful. I also thank my brothers and my sister for their encouragement. To my sons Ryan, Zach, Alex and Etienne: I know it was hard on you, thanks for hanging in there - I can finally leave the loft now. The greatest debt of all is due is to Ingrid, who taught me what it really means to be reflexive and without whom this thesis would simply not exist.

INTRODUCTION

This short introductory chapter is structured as follows. First I briefly outline what reflexive management learning (hereafter RML) is and provide a personal statement as to why it was chosen as the topic of this thesis. I preview the research question and the methodology selected. The contribution this thesis makes is then briefly summarised and what I hope it may achieve is outlined. After this, a note on thesis structure is provided. This is done to help orient the reader as to the overall layout of the argument and to explain why certain structural choices were made. It also serves as a précis of each chapter.

The chapter ends with a short survey of the field of management learning overall, which serves as a prelude to this thesis. Although the focus of this thesis is RML specifically, this broader survey is conducted to provide an important backdrop to what follows. RML is a now considered a sub-field of management learning generally (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b); pitched as a complement, sometimes a corrective, to more traditional management learning approaches. Thus, a feel for the wider scholarly conversation (Huff, 1999) within which RML is situated is necessary before homing in on the main debate of interest. This survey is, of necessity, a brief one. For a more comprehensive review of the field of management learning, consult Armstrong and Fukami (2009a).

Before beginning proper, a note on this thesis' writing style is warranted. As is customary in interpretivist ethnographic writing (Ybema et al., 2009) and reflexive versions of this approach in particular (Aull Davies, 2008), and following general advice in Sword (2012), I do not demur in this thesis from employing the first person

singular 'I'. Not only does the methodology chosen require it, but it would seem at best incongruous and at worst disingenuous, if within an avowedly reflexive study (Cunliffe, 2003) the researcher was textually omitted from the action, so to speak. This thesis is not about me, but I am in it, and inextricably so. By the philosophical lights that have guided this research hiding from this fact would be unscientific (Packer, 2010). Further, it would not be conducive to producing a trustworthy text (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009). So, for the most part the first person singular form is adopted. Having said this, in an effort to avoid this potentially clouding arguments or getting in the way of the voices of others in this study which are invariably more important, here and there, a more passive and impersonal researcher voice is adopted.

RML, as will be explained in depth in the next chapter, refers to various forms or approaches to management learning, education and development which privilege the related ideas and practices of reflection and reflexivity in both individual and group variations, with plural points of emphasis and different (sometimes radically different) degrees of criticality involved. In this thesis, the term RML is deployed as an "umbrella construct" (Hirsch and Levin, 1999 in Taylor and Spicer, 2007, p.326) meant to refer to all theoretical and practical articulations of management learning, education and development which endorse and prioritise reflective and reflexive elements across a range of pedagogical settings and with a range of various ends in mind (Cotter and Cullen, 2012).

RML, to borrow a phrase from Cunha et al. (2014), is a "polymorphous process" (p.14). This makes an umbrella construct possible because conceptualisations of RML, although plural (Cunliffe, 2009b; Zundel, 2013) still have overlapping features;

"different but related aspects" which span across RML's critical, public, productive and organising dimensions (Vince and Reynolds, 2009, p.101). RML is not a recent development. It is almost three decades since scholars like Kolb (1984) and Schon (1983) began to promote the idea that reflection in professional settings could enable more reflective, experience-inspired learning and development. Going back even further, thinkers such as (Dewey, 1998) had lauded the learning value of reflection for education and critical forms of reflection have been on the wider intellectual scene since the time of the Frankfurt School (Jay, 1996), where the role of critical reflection was to emancipate individuals, allowing them to "realise that their form of consciousness is ideologically false" (Geuss, 1981, p.61). This digression is not irrelevant for such themes are still easily spied in much contemporary critical RML scholarship. However, the point here is that reflection and reflexivity are far from new. But in terms of management learning they are growing ideas (Vince and Reynolds, 2009) with increasing contemporary salience for organisations embedded in what social theorists have referred to as "reflexive modernity" (Beck et al., 2004); a time when the scope and the need for reflexive awareness and deliberation in all our lives has grown exponentially as we try to make our way in a "fast-changing social world" (Archer, 2007, p.5).

At an academic workshop I attended very early on in my studies, I had to give a short account of my research question. It was remarked to me there, by a more senior scholar, if RML wasn't a "fad"? The implication seemed to be was RML worth studying? Did it, as a topic for serious scholarly inquiry, have any significant intellectual staying power or might it instead be just a current management "fashion" (Abrahamson, 1996) which, like so many others, would "inevitably fade away?" (Jackson, 2001, p.ix).

I recall an awkward and slightly defensive answer. I also recall critically reflecting later on the remark itself and the internal questions it gave rise to - did I have the right topic? Was it a good area to research? Would anybody care about the research which was produced? As I began to read and understand more about RML, however, rather than being redirected away from the topic, I was rapidly and more enthusiastically drawn in.

Now, at the end of a long and intensely self, and critically reflexive intellectual journey, I would respond to that remark more assuredly. Not out of any newfound or hard-won epistemic confidence - if anything I still have as many, if not more, questions than answers about RML – but more out of a strong sense that RML matters. Far from being a fad, I argue that it resembles more a turn or a paradigm shift in relation to how managers are taught, how they learn, and what they are capable of doing with this in terms of change and action in the workplace.

What attracted me to RML to begin with stemmed from a combination of personal and professional factors. From a personal standpoint, my longstanding interest in philosophical, social and political theory meant I felt an affinity with the conceptual side of RML scholarship. RML theory is sourced from and sustained by a potpourri of plural philosophical views and traditions. This can make it difficult to sort out the various and often contested theoretical strands involved. But for the theoretically-minded individual this is also a colourful, interesting, challenging and in the end, fascinating affair. The professional factors leading to my interest in RML are more sober. As a practicing HRD manager with over fifteen years' experience I have commissioned, designed, facilitated and evaluated enough management learning programmes to know that there is much which can and should be done in order to

evolve and adapt thinking and practice around this most important, and yet so often most misunderstood and misdirected organisational activity.

My belief as a practitioner is that much of what is critiqued by scholars about this activity is for the most part accurate and well-founded. I also believe that much of the RML scholarship which is advanced to bolster such critiques and provide other, more reflexive and critical ways to re-describe and where necessary reform management learning practice, are also laudable and well-intentioned attempts to make a difference to how this activity is conceptualised and subsequently operated across a range of pedagogical settings. But when it comes to understanding RML itself, empirically informed responses have been harder to come by than the often predictable, reflex ideological critiques and normative theories which, whilst usually philosophically sophisticated, seem to lack enough interest in getting to what I believe to be the theoretical and practical heart of the matter: RML as praxis, or action with others, in their contexts of interest[1]. Thus my research proposition was to explore RML with managers in the workplace. The question which flowed from this was 'How do practicing managers respond to RML in the workplace?' A related sub-question was 'How does RML lead to the reflexive practice it is supposed to engender beyond the RML space?'

All of the above informed the decision to research RML ethnographically and from a social constructionist standpoint. Prior to coming across calls for such a methodology to be brought to bear on the topic (Raelin, 2008a), and related calls for studies which would explore RML in practice in organisations (Vince and Reynolds, 2009), I was

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[1] In this thesis, after Arendt (1998), the words praxis and action are used interchangeably.

persuaded by my literature review that an approach was needed which would be capable of foregrounding two aspects lacking in extant research: managerial voice and details of how the process of RML unfolded in empirical contexts. The ethnographic dimension of my methodology would allow the interactionist and processual aspects of RML to be articulated; the social constructionist stance would help to privilege the voice of research participants and the interpretive, "meaning-making" (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) work they did in responding to the approach. Both research design elements would be simultaneously complemented and complexified by an unavoidable concrete fact about my own stance within the methodology: my insiderness. Throughout the study this would be a constant source of opportunity and, at times, anxiety. How this relatively uncommon and innovative methodological mixture (Nind et al., 2013) was handled throughout the study will be comprehensively outlined in what follows.

The contribution to knowledge this thesis makes centres on the provision of a new theoretical framework for RML called the 'reflexive space of appearance'. Developed from the data generated with managers in this study and inspired by the work of the political theorist Hannah Arendt (especially Arendt, 1998), this new spatial and political conceptualisation of RML advances theory by providing a way of thinking about and practicing RML which enacts the three proposed interconnected aspects or dimensions of this learning approach: openness, difference and action, respectively. What this contribution amounts to is a theory of praxis or action for RML - remembering that praxis is the point. Praxis is meant here in the Arendtian sense of acting with others in a pluralistic learning space where politics and power are relationally perceived and practiced. This marks a shift in terms of how topics like critique, power, politics and praxis are typically conceptualised in many mainstream and critical approaches to RML.

This thesis argues that this shift is necessary if RML theory is to advance. It can also respond constructively to some of the questions and impasses which exist in extant RML scholarship, which will become clear as this thesis proceeds.

Chapter 1 explores the target literature of this thesis: current RML scholarship. This is a relatively small but rich corpus containing mostly normative but also some empirical research. This literature is examined and the review produces an integrative typology for RML which can help researchers and practitioners to arrange and make broad conceptual sense of the field. The review is also used to highlight where space exists for new research contributions, thus helping to situate the present study. The main review finding is that owing to the lack of empirical research on RML in organisations, and where this has occurred the use of methodologies which do not always foreground practitioner voice, or trace the process of RML as it actually unfolds through space and time in practice settings, RML theory has a well-defined normative identity but is under-developed in terms of understanding how RML is enacted in terms of power and political relations in context. The contribution of this thesis is to help to strengthen theory in this regard.

Chapter 2 focuses on the methodological choices which informed this thesis. A social constructionist paradigm was chosen in order to answer a question which hinges upon the interpretive work managers do in making meaning from RML in context. As the study operated a reflexive mode of inquiry (Cunliffe, 2003), the researcher was not removed from this process and thus, the embedded, reflexive ethnographic methods of data generation deployed (Aull Davies, 2008), and the abductive analysis (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) used to build theory from this, were all seen as forms of relational

co-acting (Gergen, 2009b) or co-constructing (Packer, 2010) with the managers in this study. In this chapter these processes are explained in detail. Particular focus is given to data analysis and a stand-alone section is devoted to showing how the reflexive space of appearance theory was crafted during this stage of the research process.

Chapter 3 is the first in a sequence of four chapters representing the "core" of this thesis (Dunleavy, 2003, p.49). This chapter foregrounds the new theory originated by this research: the reflexive space of appearance framework. This framework was inspired by Hannah Arendt's political theory and derived directly from the three meta-themes of openness, difference and action developed during data analysis. This new conceptual framework for RML is explained in light of the literature review conducted in Chapter 1. It is argued that the reflexive space of appearance theory speaks to many of the lacunae present in extant theorising; it does this particularly by contributing a theory which injects more political reflexivity into current scholarship, thus building on the work of scholars who recommend that RML theory and practice become more sensitive to contextual understandings of power and political relations.

Although the reflexive space of appearance framework was the creative intellectual result of the generation and subsequent analysis of empirical material, in this thesis it is structurally positioned here prior to the presentation of the empirical analysis which preceded theory construction, and from whence the framework originated. In the three chapters which follow, this empirical material is then reflected through the lens of the conceptual framework it helped to create. The reason for this structural choice – one of many which were experimented with – is to work textually and argumentatively in this thesis with what was judged to be the optimal "organising structure" for this 'tale of the

field' (Van Maanen, 1988, p.29). Leaning on advice found in Czarniawska (2004) regarding what she calls thesis "emplotment" (p.124), this meant choosing what was judged to be the most sincere and reflexive narrative structure which avoided an inferior, mechanical presentation of the case, in favour a more substantive one which might be more persuasive in terms of best illuminating this thesis' theoretical and practical contributions to knowledge.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis concentrate on the analysis of empirical material. These three chapters discuss and analyse data via the three interrelated dimensions of the reflexive space of appearance: space of honesty, space of critique and space of new beginnings, respectively. These analyses illuminate new insights into RML in practice; particularly RML as it relates to the themes of openness, difference and action - topics with significant contextual importance for the practicing managers in this study, which can also speak productively to the need to theorise RML in ways which are more attuned to politics and power relations in the workplace. Overall, what these three chapters communicate is that, although challenging for managers, RML is a surprisingly novel, developmental, and relationally satisfying, self and critically reflexive management learning space which has the power to produce new paradigms and to inspire action attempted beyond this space into managers' working lives.

Chapter 7 closes this thesis. It retreats from the midst of empirical analysis, winding back to the research proposition to evaluate findings and clarify contributions. This chapter concludes overall, that the reflexive space of appearance framework can make both theoretical contributions to scholarship and practical contributions to the way in which RML might be introduced and effectively operated in a workplace environment.

I claim that this is possible because the theory of RML provided is politically reflexive in a way which extant theory up until now has not been. This means that although still inherently critical, RML conceptualised as a reflexive space of appearance is non-ideological and thus empathic and non-judgemental. It does not try to make managers more reflexive; rather it seeks to generate reflexivity amongst them by acting reflexively with them in ways which can enable and (crucially) motivate them to think and potentially then act differently in relation to their management roles.

Political reflexivity makes RML more palatable to an inevitably plural practitioner audience, without diluting its critical potency. RML becomes an indeterminate learning space of possibility (Antonacopoulou, 2002) rather than one of putative conversion. The need to acknowledge and include the constraints and the opportunities afforded by local context (Boud, 2010; Cressey et al., 2006), and to cover issues which matter to the managers involved, is foregrounded without loss of critical edge. Sensing this, managers respond more reflexively to a mode of learning which is simultaneously challenging and productive. RML thus potentially has more purchase with those it would seek to influence and engage with - it becomes more praxical.

This introductory chapter closes with a short survey of the field of management learning as this pertains to RML and to the need to effectively situate this thesis within a broader research and practice context. The field of management learning (Armstrong and Fukami, 2009a; Perriton and Hodgson, 2013; Turnbull James and Denyer, 2009) overall is undergoing a "radical paradigm transition" says Delbecq (2009, p.xi). This wider shift can be linked to the growing interest in RML (Boud et al., 2006a; Cunliffe, 2009b; Paton et al., 2014; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) and further,

both can be connected to calls for innovation in management itself (Birkinshaw et al., 2008) which, according to scholars like Ghoshal (2005), Khurana (2007), and Mintzberg (2004) directly implies a need for new theories of how managers learn and should be developed. As Hill (2004) writes, because "the work of management has become more complicated and vexed" (p.124), in order to learn nowadays managers need to "take risks and experiment with new ways of being and doing things" (Hill, 2004, p.124).

But traditional approaches to management learning are increasingly labelled as ineffective and pedagogically misguided (Mintzberg, 2004; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Snook et al., 2012). They are accused of having little or no actual influence on management practice or, where they do have an effect it is mainly negative (Ghoshal, 2005). Current approaches to management learning, say the editors of a recent handbook, have not "resulted in leaders who make good judgements" (Armstrong and Fukami, 2009a, p.7); a statement which implies a lack of reflexivity in mainstream pedagogies.

A host of scholars have called for fresh thinking on how management learning is conceived and operated, and to what ends (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Boje and Al Arkoubi, 2009; Cunliffe, 2002; Ghoshal, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Raelin, 2009a; Simons, 2013; Snook et al., 2012; Turnbull James and Denyer, 2009; Vince and Reynolds, 2009). These calls are not sounded in unison however (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005), but are more pluralistic and polyphonic (Ramsey, 2008). To the chagrin of some (for instance, O'Toole, 2009) management learning is a pluralistic field (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997; Mabey, 2013) where, to use

Bailey's metaphor (2004), any talk of mixed marriages between traditions is typically treated tentatively. As a result, management learning shows more than one 'face' to practitioner worlds (Lees, 1992).

In general, theories of management learning can be normatively traced along three intersecting lines: ethical, epistemological and pedagogical. To take ethical assumptions first: these underpin management learning but are not always made transparent (Snell, 1986). For example, Ghoshal (2005) has supplied an influential moral critique of what managers learn in business schools, and how they learn it. Others have echoed his critical reflections, citing the role unreflective pedagogies play (Antonacopoulou, 2006a; Gosling and Mintzberg, 2003; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002) in socialising managers into their roles by emphasising "narrowly rational and instrumentalist dimensions, at the expense of moral and aesthetic ones" (Gagliardi, 2006, p.6).

It isn't just mainstream approaches to management learning which have come under fire in this regard: Fenwick's critique (2005) of critical management learning (Contu, 2009; Willmott, 1997) proceeds from a similar stance. She states that ethics in practice is a "contested and open-ended" affair (Fenwick, 2005, p.45) and using management learning spaces as ideological stages from which to "emancipate or otherwise revolutionise the world" (Fenwick, 2005) creates its own ethical dilemmas. Perhaps because of such critiques, and others like it (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Clegg et al., 2006), some critical scholars now propose a more "affirmative" (Spicer et al., 2009) and reflexive "ethic of care" when engaging with practitioners (Spicer et al., 2009, p.545); one which would proceed in a spirit of mutual critical respect with managers (Wickert and Schaefer, 2014), working through more "relational and reflexive" pedagogies to

pragmatically convey critical messages to managers which may resonate with their particular working lives and situations (Bissett and Saunders, 2014).

It is mainly, however, orthodox as opposed to critical theories of management learning which are criticised for being too "calculating" and "heroic" (Mintzberg, 2004, p.10) rather than reflexive in character (Cunliffe, 2009a; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Gergen, 2009b; Hosking, 2011). This is often where calls to transition take a philosophical turn, introducing various ideas about how managers may become more philosophical leaders (Cunliffe, 2009a; Xing and Sims, 2012); practitioners who can learn to become more phenomenologically alive to themselves as free, reflexive agents in the world, coping more mindfully with all the difficult and tension-filled moral responsibilities which accompanies such awareness (Schipper, 1999; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009).

Management learning theory like this is developed in order to help "managers become more critical thinkers and moral practitioners" (Cunliffe, 2009b, p.408). The normative assumption here (which, ironically, is not always itself reflexively scrutinised) suggests that managers objectively need or desire such help. This rejuvenated impulse to ensure that management learning cultivates moral character (Cragg, 1997; Crossan et al., 2013) - though how this happens is contested (Fornaciari and Lund Dean, 2009; Trevino and McCabe, 1994; Weber, 1990) - is to be buttressed by the provision of new, more holistic theories of management learning which will enable managers to see their roles in something other than commercial terms alone (Sambrook and Willmott, 2014; Waddock and Lozano, 2012).

The increased attention to developing the "moral attributes" of managers (McLagan, 1998, p.174) can be attributed in part to the apparently steady flow of corporate scandals which typically implicate management and organisational scholarship generally (Clegg et al., 2007; Locke and Spender, 2011) and motivate those concerned with management learning in particular to call for the reform of development practices (Cunliffe, 2009a; Currie et al., 2010; Ghoshal, 2005; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002). It is often, then, the venal adventures of corporations and business figures which stimulate calls for transition in the field as scholars consider how to develop managers with better judgement and character (Armstrong and Fukami, 2009a, p.7; Crossan et al., 2013); practitioners who are willing and able to reflect autonomously (Starkey and Tempest, 2008) on managing and the purpose of management learning (Giacalone, 2007; Hay, 2008).

Here, special mention must be made of the 2007 global financial crisis (MacKenzie et al., 2012). This event still has significant scholarly resonance and remains, according to Chau et al. (2012), an "unavoidable topic for discussion" (p.2) which has provided particular pause for reflection on ethical issues (Currie et al., 2010; Euler and Feixas, 2013) and the role of management educators and HRD professionals in developing managers in more responsible ways (Burchell et al., 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2012). As will be shown, these are all goals which connect strongly with the various ethical aims of RML theorists.

Epistemological debates also feature in calls for the theory and practice of management learning to transition. Of particular significance here has been the ethnomethodologically (Garfinkel, 1984) inspired 'practice turn' in contemporary

management and organisation studies (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002; Miettinen et al., 2009; Simpson, 2009; Whittington, 2006) which has also influenced management learning theory (Raelin, 2009a; 2007). This has led to a renewed focus on the importance of "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1993), it's corporeal and embodied nature (Yakhlef, 2010), and how this is reflexively constructed in complex practice contexts (Schon, 1983; Tsoukas, 2005), over and above the scientific rationality which has dominated both theorising, and consequently educative practices, in the management and organisation sciences (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011).

From a practice paradigm, such ways of knowing (Moses and Knutsen, 2007) are to be privileged over more established, expert forms (Yanow, 2004). When epistemological perspectives do not take "local knowing and local knowledge" (Antweiler, 1998, p.469) into account in this way, the result can be reductive 'banking' models of learning which infantilise learners, leaving their critical faculties undeveloped (Freire, 1996). Thus paradoxically, reflexive management educators need to become "experts in not knowing" (Raab, 1997, p.161) exemplifying the reflexivity they would teach to practitioners (Antonacopoulou, 2010) by adopting the stance of reflexive interlocutors who foster two-way critical learning "through dialogue and debate" (Currie and Knights, 2003, p.32).

As the above implies, these ethical and epistemological debates require changed pedagogical practices, so calls to transition are made here too (Chia, 2009; Ramsey, 2014). These revolve around the idea that more attention be paid to the phronetic quality of managing (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Yanow, 2004), incorporating this into the theory and practice of how managers learn (Chia, 2009;

Śliwa and Cairns, 2009; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014a; 2014b). An applied phronesis approach (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012) pedagogically foregrounds managers' experiences (Boud and Miller, 1996a; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004; Kayes, 2004; 2002; Kolb, 1984; Mirvis, 2008; Seibert, 1996; Wood Daudelin, 1996). This in turn requires new management learning approaches which are philosophically founded upon a practical rationality which can better connect with managers' worlds and so, become more pedagogically and theoretically relevant to scholarship and practice (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011).

On this view, management learning becomes less a competitive game of expertise (see Simons, 2013) and more a reciprocal "learning practice" (Billett and Newton, 2010, p.52) between managers and educators (Paton et al., 2014; Ramsey, 2011), taking the form of a facilitated reflexive dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002; Raelin, 2013) including shared and deliberate reflection on (Raelin, 2009a), or within (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009), particular shared action contexts. In other words, management learning becomes *reflexive*. The next chapter explores this turn more comprehensively via a review of RML scholarship.

CHAPTER 1   LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter[2] examines the field of RML (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) via an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2005). This review involved first, identifying and carefully reading through the target literature. From this, the key conversations (Huff, 1999; Ravitch and Riggan, 2012) in the field were discerned and five paired thematic dimensions created to holistically characterise a sometimes converging, sometimes diverging, body of contemporary scholarship informed by various classical and interdisciplinary domains. These were then written up as a new typology proposing five forms of RML, described further below. This typology represents a contribution to knowledge which can help researchers to make holistic sense of a nascent, but growing research field. It may also aid practitioners wishing to operate RML in their organisations, as different forms of RML may be relevant in different circumstances.

Aside from how RML can be characterised in terms of the forms it takes, two main theoretical pictures can be drawn from a review of this scholarship: a normative and a descriptive one. The second section of this chapter is concerned with unpacking these. The descriptive picture issues from the handful of empirical studies of RML available to date; the normative one portrays the diversity of conceptual positions on RML, reflecting the varying ideological positions and practical aims of the theorists involved. The chapter closes with a third section which draws lessons from the review conducted and uses these to position this thesis.

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[2] A version of this chapter has previously been published in *Human Resource Development Review* (Cotter and Cullen, 2012).

Understanding RML

Reflexive approaches to management learning have some history (for example, Rigano and Edwards, 1998; Schipper, 1999) and are relatively well established (Vince and Reynolds, 2009). But recently interest in RML has grown (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013; Baron and Cayer, 2011; Closs and Antonello, 2011; Corlett, 2012; Cunliffe, 2002; Gray, 2007; Hibbert, 2013; Nesbit, 2012; Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Stead and Elliott, 2013; Van Woerkom, 2008; Zundel, 2013). This growth may be in part explained by the increased intensity (Hassard et al., 2009) and complexity of organisational life (Stacey, 2010) which has inevitably complicated managing itself (Storey and Salaman, 2009) as well as organisational and management learning (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2005). This has placed more reflexive demands on managers (Barge, 2004) creating in turn, the need for new forms of pedagogical support which can better recognise and support this development (Baron and Cayer, 2011; Closs and Antonello, 2011). This makes RML, as Perriton and Hodgson (2013) write, an "important feature" (p.148) of the contemporary management learning field.

Fundamental to understanding RML is appreciating the distinction between the interrelated, but differing concepts of reflection and reflexivity which are sometimes - but which according to some should not be (Thompson and Pascal, 2011) - used interchangeably. Linked with theorists such as Dewey (1998), Freire (1996) and Knowles et al. (2005), reflection is usually associated with a more cognitive approach to learning by both mainstream (Kolb and Kolb, 2009; Mintzberg, 2004; Schon, 1983) and critical scholars alike (Mezirow, 1998; Reynolds, 1998). Reflexivity, on the other hand, whilst it includes self-reflective aspects (Hibbert, 2013), is "more complex" (Cunliffe, 2009b, p.410); more concerned with "mapping [the] effects and consequences" of

relational practices rather than just introspectively understanding them (Keevers and Treleaven, 2011, p.5). Thus reflexivity goes beyond introspection or self-reflection alone and the representationalism which predominantly defines the latter notion (Gasche, 1986). As the sociologist Barry Sandywell says: "Reflexivity reminds reflection of the sociality of all world reference" Sandywell (2005, p.xiv). To be reflexive, then, is to be socially as well as self 'minded' and this involves turning inwards and outwards; it means to "act towards others as if they too are reflexive" (Saunders, 2014, p.212).

Thus, contrary to the solitary view of reflection as something done alone whilst thoughtfully distanced from the world (Rose, 2013), reflexivity is more processual, immediate, and immersed in situations at hand: it is "in the course of acting", as Shotter (1993) says, that we become aware of what is unfolding with others and we can use this to alter how we conduct ourselves in situations. We "take the attitude of the other towards [ourselves]" (Mead, 1977, p.196) in order to reflexively modify and adjust to social interactions by exercising "outsight" (Ibarra, 2015, p.57). This helps avoid the risks of introspection (James, 2000). Compared to reflection, reflexivity is a more interactional, empathic faculty (Marris, 1974) with more social and relational dimensions (French and Vince, 1999). This is apparent in the writings of those who theorise RML in this way (Cunliffe, 2009a; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009; Zundel, 2013) or who deliberately link the idea with specific philosophical traditions (Segal, 2010; Xing and Sims, 2012).

As mentioned already, however, it is important to note that reflection can be construed as "both a metacognitive mechanism *and* a social practice" (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003,

p.253, emphasis added) - not all theories of reflective learning can be assimilated into a simplistic cognitive mould (Kayes, 2002; Kolb and Kolb, 2009). But reductive "modernist" (Vickers, 2011, p.56) or Cartesian forms of reflection are disparaged by the proponents of reflexive approaches (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004; Zundel, 2013); rejected on epistemic grounds of excessive rationalism (Erlandson, 2006), limited theoretical foundations (Thompson and Pascal, 2011) or, more practically, because they "neutralise [reflection's] capacity to producing learning and change" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.81).

However, showing how porous the boundaries can be between both concepts, Cartesian metaphors can sometimes be spied in the writings of proponents of reflexivity, as, for example, when Xing and Sims (2012) speak of "the inner theatre of the manager" (p.15). Nonetheless, these proponents believe that RML is better conceived if it embraces ideas from social constructionism, phenomenology, existentialism and externalist epistemological stances. Influential for these scholars are theorists like Gergen (2009b), Heidegger (2010), Merleau-Ponty (2012), Shotter (1993) and the later Wittgenstein (2001). From this perspective, RML is a learning approach which would generate new awareness and action amongst managers from "within" their practices (Segal, 2010, p.388), meaning contextually and relationally, as well as introspectively.

How this is done and for what purpose depends on the theorist involved. All RML is inherently critical because reflexivity is an inherently critical concept (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Hardy et al., 2001; Holland, 1999). Some emphasise the ideological sense of this word (Brookfield, 2009; Reynolds, 1998; Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Welsh and Dehler, 2004) but criticality is not owned by critical theorists (Antonacopoulou, 1999b; Clegg et

al., 2006). It is a theme which cuts across all forms of RML, be they ethical (Cunliffe, 2009b), existential (Zundel, 2013), public (Raelin, 2001), organising (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince, 2002a), or productive (Boud et al., 2006b). From the literature, five general forms of RML can be identified. These are listed below in Table 1.0:

RML form	Main emphases	Example contributions
Decelerative - Latitudinal	Emphasises the time and space which must be given to managers to reflexively learn. RML, in effect, slows down a manager's world whilst simultaneously affording them the latitude to reflect alone and/or with others	Docherty et al. (2006); McGivern and Thompson (2004); Mintzberg (2004); Nicolini et al. (2004); Raelin (2002)
Collective - Commensurative	Emphasises the social, public, and organised elements of reflexive learning and promotes the need for this to be arranged (commensurated) in such a way as to lead to collective action	Raelin (2001); Reynolds and Vince (2004b); Vince (2002a)
Arousive – Agonistic	Emphasises the need to foment dialogue amongst managers, often in disruptive ways which is meant to stimulate reflection on potentially intransigent taken for granted beliefs, habits and assumptions	Cunliffe (2002); Gold et al. (2002); Welsh and Dehler (2004)
Confessional - Kenotic	Emphasises the attritional, therapeutic, even spiritual aspects of reflexive learning, which are supposed to help managers to empty or purge themselves prior to reflexive renewal	Ackers and Preston (1997); Perriton (2007); Swan and Bailey (2004)
Revisionist – Reformist	Emphasises the need for some form of moral or critical amelioration, even transformation, on the part of managers as they revise themselves in order to reform their management practice	Cavanaugh and Prasad (1996); Cunliffe (2009a); Raelin (2008a); Rosenberg (2010)

Table 1.0 Integrated typology of five forms of RML

These five forms of the approach overlap the different theories of RML available. These are discussed now in more depth, under the headings of normative and descriptive RML scholarship.

RML: normative and descriptive research pictures

Two pictures emerge from engagement with the literature on RML: a normative one, prescribing what RML should be according to its scholarly proponents, and a descriptive one, portraying what RML actually looks like when it is operated and researched empirically with managers. Normative RML theory is concerned with prescribing how the approach should work and to what ends it is to be deployed. The basic normative claim is that managing and organisations need to be ameliorated in various ways and that RML, more so than traditional forms of management learning – with their "instrumental fetish" (Bissett and Saunders, 2014, p.24) - can facilitate this. The aims of normative RML theorists may vary but they are not indiscriminate: RML is typically theorised as a means to some pre-conceived end (Zundel, 2013). The chord struck is praxical: normative RML theorists want to effect actual change in the world (Raelin, 2006); to empower managers "to explore new ways of being that, where appropriate, would generate different ways of acting" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.92).

As Antonacopoulou (2004a) says, RML, in theory at least, involves "a dynamic interaction between reflection and action with an intention to learn *and to change"* (p.47, emphasis added). What kind of change RML promotes depends on the theorist involved:; normative RML theories are pluralistic, as are the managers it would target. They have pluralistic learner desires (Boud, 1987) which may or may not comply with

those laid out for them by prescriptive RML, especially critical forms which are invariably more demanding (Fenwick, 2005).

RML "should be an integral part of management learning and management practice" says Cunliffe (2009b, p.417); it "should be an essential part of the day-to-day life of managers" echo Vince and Reynolds (2009, p.101), so it can engender practical reflexivity which refers not merely to attitudinal and behavioural change, but to a fundamental ontological shift in a managers "way of being" (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004, p.35); a fresh attunement to the world which may need to be preceded by a crisis or a breakdown of some kind (Segal, 2010; Zundel, 2013). The desired normative end is more ethical practitioners who will manage their organisations accordingly (Cunliffe, 2009b), ideally, recognising the need for this themselves via RML (Reed and Anthony, 1992).

For Zundel (2013), RML should be about enabling managers to "come to see the world in terms of who [they] are, and the projects [they] pursue for-the-sake of realising [their] possibilities of being" (p.121). This existential normative theme continues in Kaiser and Kaplan (2006), for whom RML should be authenticating and transcendent, allowing managers to "outgrow" their former selves (p.481). This development process is to be facilitated by the use of "existential questioning", allowing managers to "self-author" or write themselves into the world in more mindful ways so they can lead "from a place of authenticity and self-truth" (Eriksen, 2009, p.756). RML is about "opening minds and stirring souls" states Mirvis (2008, p.175), adding a quasi-spiritual tone to the debate. This is echoed in Waddock and Lozano (2012) for whom RML should be about enabling managers to lead with "heart and soul" (p.283). The epiphanic sense (Cullen,

2009) given to some theories of RML only amplifies this quasi-spiritual accent. RML is an experience within which managers should be 'struck' in order to learn, referring to the sudden realisation of something hitherto hidden or unperceived (Corlett, 2012; Cunliffe, 2002). It is deep development work which has the potential to bring managers "greater peace within themselves", according to Kaiser and Kaplan (2006, p.481). It should cultivate character, say Crossan et al. (2013) which can serve as a buffer when moral dilemmas arise at work.

Critical theories of RML propound that none of this will be achieved without a non-conformist pedagogical approach (Corley and Eades, 2004) which operates via a twin process of unveiling power relations (Trehan, 2007) and disrupting and challenging "existing [organisational] norms and practices" (Stead and Elliott, 2013, p.381). For critical scholars RML should raise political and social questions (Reynolds, 2011; Trehan, 2007). Moreover, it should do so in ways which may have emotional and relational implications which should not be ignored, but encouraged as part of the process (Vince, 2001) even as this creates anxieties which may be useful for learning (Vince, 2010). Critical RML would work towards more democratic workplaces, founded on and sustained by shared and transparent reflection (Raelin, 2001), and organised and collective rather than individualised forms of dialogue and deliberation (Raelin, 2012; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b). RML is thus normatively conceived as an emancipatory learning practice (Closs and Antonello, 2011; Raelin, 2008a; Welsh and Dehler, 2004), prescribed in order to help "social change to occur" (Raelin, 2008a, p.535).

It is not all breakdown, critique, and disruption. Some believe RML should have organisational or individual benefits which may not necessarily involve any undue psychological hardship or potentially material sacrifices, nor extend with any specific moral or ideological intent into the wider social sphere.

RML can and should marry critical and productive concerns say Boud et al. (2006b), and these must be seen in context rather than abstractly, or on any pre-determined terms (Boud, 2010). RML should be used to develop learning agility, suggest DeRue et al. (2012), which can enhance a manager's career prospects at a time when organisational uncertainty is generally high (Nesbit, 2012). At such times, RML provides a deep and engaging form of development (Karp, 2012) which should enable managers to solve the increasingly complex issues which arise within turbulent environments (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013, p.6) where enhanced reflexivity may even be a "requirement for mere survival" (Brooks, 1999, p.78).

The second, descriptive picture of RML emerges from the few empirical studies carried out to date. This will be portrayed in four ways: firstly, by looking at what is known about RML from studies with management students in educational settings; secondly, by looking at RML conducted with practicing managers in educational settings; thirdly by surveying RML conducted with managers in the workplace; and lastly, by looking at empirical studies of practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), or reflexivity in action beyond the learning space. This is relevant because RML itself is a form of reflexive practice and also because this thesis also aims to explore how, and if, RML generates practically reflexive managers who will act in this way following an RML intervention (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004).

RML with management students in educational settings

Crossan et al. (2013) employed an RML approach within an MBA programme as an elective module designed to develop leadership character. Their findings suggest reflexive learning methods can have a powerful personal effect on participants, adding that the approach was "extremely well received" (p.302). They cite reflective journal data (Bolton, 2010) from participants detailing the self-awareness fostered during the programme. They note, however, their inability to say whether these classroom effects would transfer over into other environments. Gutiérrez (2002) reported slightly more mixed results following his experiment with a critical RML approach involving graduate students. Although course evaluations were positive and students learned to "question their surroundings", acknowledge "the social construction of reality", and gain an increased "awareness of power relations" (p.546), by and large they did not demonstrate any great enthusiasm for reflexive change and seemed reluctant or unable to fully embrace the non-traditional pedagogical relations he was trying to instigate. As Gutierrez says, he "planted a seed" (p.547) which could only subsequently grow in a nurturing environment occupied by willing, as opposed to relatively docile critical subjects.

Currie and Knights (2003) also introduced a critical RML approach to MBA students (a mixture of full and part time). They report that many had an instrumental rather than advocate response to RML and felt apprehensive about its participatory methods, seeming to want to revert to more familiar didactic methods. However, they do mention a "minority" of students who were "not necessarily averse to critiquing management activity on social, moral or political grounds" (p.38).

RML with managers in educational settings

When RML is conducted with actual managers in educational settings once again accounts of relatively mixed success emerge. An RML approach can lead to improved learning says Rosier (2002), who found that having managers write reflective reports on case studies presented during MBA programmes led them to positively report on the experience. Managers commented that they did not usually have time for reflection in work (Raelin, 2002), but suggested that the experience of RML had made them more aware of the value of this learning approach and the need for it to continue when they returned to their organisations (Rosier, 2002).

Cunliffe's research (2009a) with managers during executive education programmes found that RML can increase managers' reflexive awareness. In her words, RML can 'strike' managers (Cunliffe, 2002) in ways which induce more relational and critically sensitive paradigms of managing and organising. Thus she proposes a link between the different perspective RML can provide and the way this "can also form the basis for leading organisations differently" (Cunliffe, 2009a, p.99). However, RML can be meaningful in such ways only if managers are willing to be vulnerable during the process, advises Eriksen (2009), who suggests – echoing Cressey et al. (2006) and Seibert and Daudelin (1999) - based on his use of RML with practicing managers during an MBA assignment, that such meaning ultimately has to be drawn from "the context of their day-to-day lives" (p.762).

Little vulnerability was evident in many of the managers in Sinclair's study of RML (2007). She reports mixed results: a 'hellish' time deploying a critical form of RML as part of a leadership and change module with executive MBA students and a decidedly

more positive one using the same approach with another MBA class, this time made up of both full and part-time students. The executive MBA cohort was older, more experienced, and held more senior positions; the other was a younger, less experienced and more heterogeneous group. Many of the executive MBA cohort offered only "hostility", "passive resistance" (p.465), and "long chilly silences" (p.466) in response to Sinclair's facilitative attempts.

The need for reflexive learning was ultimately rejected; perceived as lacking in both credibility and utility. The other group were more forthcoming and "started to 'see' themselves, their histories and their habits with new eyes" (p.463). The main difference between the responses to RML, according to Sinclair, was due primarily to the fact that for the former, resistant group, RML was mandatory whereas for the other it was elective. There may be something in the idea then that chosen RML is more effective than when it is forced, or perceived to be so (Hobbs, 2007).

Waddock and Lozano (2012) report findings similar to Sinclair's positive results. They report that participants on their RML programme underwent meaningful "changes in their lives, attitudes and work experiences" (p.281). They make it clear, however, that to sustain such reflexive change, organisations will need to change too, in order to support managers as they develop "a capacity for dialogue, independent thinking, and a commitment to understanding the complexity of situations" (Waddock and Lozano, 2012, p.281). RML, then, as Paton et al. (2014) report via their RML work with practicing managers in an academy setting, can help deconstruct a managers practice and be a "paradigm-shifting intervention" (p.18), but in order to sustain into a managers practice supportive organisational environments are vital (Hoyrup, 2004; Nicolini et al.,

2004). RML can make managers more reflexive then but this does not necessarily lead to consistent reflexive practitioners (Cunliffe, 2004) only to the potential that this may be more likely (Rigg and Trehan, 2004). Nothing is certain, and as Lawless et al. (2011) found, although some managers began to "develop a more complicated understanding of themselves and their organisations" (p.332), others engaged with RML more instrumentally to bolster their existing positions.

This rather arbitrary response is echoed in Gold et al. (2002) who discuss how their attempt at RML during an executive education programme did lead to more critical thinking, but not necessarily to more reflexive critical thinking and they had no "evidence to suggest that managers were questioning patriarchal or managerialist assumptions or their own position of authority" (p.385).

Even when RML does succeed in raising critically reflexive awareness (Cunliffe, 2004), giving managers a new way of understanding and reconceiving their practice worlds, this can create additional dilemmas of its own: for example why, and how to enact such learning on the job? This is covered by Adriansen and Knudsen (2013) who during their RML work with public service managers on a master's programme, realised that when it comes to putting RML into practice, practicing managers, in contrast with management students, will have more at risk by translating RML into action in the workplace. Barge (2004) makes this point even more forcefully following his research on RML as part of an executive education programme: it is one thing, he suggests, to become more reflexive in an RML classroom setting, but on the job any enacted, new reflexive realisations will inevitably be challenged "when managers engage other

organisational members who have an important stake in the situation, as opposed to fellow students in a classroom exercise" (p.73).

These are both reminders of the influence context inevitably exerts on reflexivity and reflexive learning (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Boud, 2010). Barge's work also contains an important lesson for researching and operating RML: namely, that RML and reflexivity in general, are relational and have strong "invitational" (p.83) qualities - others must reciprocate an agent's reflexive advances in order for these to be fully, that is, relationally enacted (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). This point will resonate strongly through later chapters of this thesis. A contribution is made which elaborates on how such reciprocity actually operates and what it means for those involved both during and beyond an RML intervention.

RML in the workplace

As already stated, workplace studies of RML are rare. One important example is Vince (2002a). This study is insightful about RML in a practice context. For example, Vince recounts how managers had a distinctly individualistic and acritical approach to RML, and also of how the issue of time was perceived as a barrier to reflexive learning. In his words, RML in the company studied was "understood as an individual responsibility, something the manager does when he, or she, has the time" (Vince, 2002a, p.66). Individualism, according to Vince, was the paradigmatic theme for how work itself was organised so it didn't surprise that this perspective also coloured how RML was conceived. He suggests how four organising practices of RML - peer consultancy groups, organisational role analysis groups, communities of practice, and group relations conferences respectively - could have been used to "break free" (p.66) from

the constraints of such limitations. But we learn that politics and power relations, aided by a historic lack of collective critical reflection within the organisation, worked against any chance that this would happen. Thus, RML was hampered by "managers who espouse collegiality, but are very controlling in practice" (Vince, 2002a, p.74) and by a climate in which "managers tend to create separate 'empires' within the company (to protect themselves) leading to poor or non-existent communication" across the organisation (Vince, 2002a, p.75).

These findings lead Vince to draw three conclusions: firstly, despite efforts to deploy RML in order to critically examine assumptions and surface power relations (Reynolds, 1998), in practice these power relations themselves can interact with RML interventions in ways which "serve to reinforce assumptions and power relations, and to limit democracy and learning" (Vince, 2002a, p.75). Secondly, owing to the prevalence of an individualised and "retrospective" view of reflection, amidst a general atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty about the future, there was a "considerable fear of failure mobilised by looking ahead" (Vince, 2002a, p.75). This meant that even informal forms of reflection-in-action (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009) were denied expression and overall there was little structural support for engaging in RML at the institutional level. Finally, Vince discusses how the initial enthusiasm generated around change, dissolved into cynicism as "the context of company power relations" (Vince, 2002a, p.75) deflated rather developed the belief that a changed culture was possible. Institutionalising "through reflexive practices…ways of organising that can maintain and develop the links between reflection and democracy" (p.76) thus became the biggest organisational challenge and could, if overcome, have eventually enabled the achievement of the stated goals for change.

Vince's elaborates further on this study in his book *'Rethinking Strategic Learning'* (Vince, 2004). Here, he assesses again the destructive impact of power relations and politics on RML. In the workplace studied, RML was pervaded by psychodynamic issues (Vince, 2002b) such as fear, anxiety, denial, and frustration on the part of both the managers and HRD practitioners charged with implementing cultural change and development. As a consequence, RML was a risky affair, filled with unpredictability and discomfort for those involved. The organisation as a whole, Vince argues, evinced a strange "paradox of development: [a] desire for learning [sitting] alongside the avoidance of learning" (Vince, 2004, p.157); a "paradox of reflection being promoted at one level and denied at the other" (Vince, 2004, p.116). Thus he posits a "reflexive relationship between collective experience and the politics that both construct and constrain learning" (p.32) and elsewhere he challenges HRD practitioners to take special responsibility for organising critical spaces for RML which may counteract this (Vince, 2005).

Another important empirical study of RML is provided by Nicolini et al. (2004). It reports research conducted over three years with middle managers of Britain's NHS, as part of a wider change initiative in that organisation. Their findings show that a hybrid model of RML - involving reflective action learning sets (Pedler and Burgoyne, 2008) and 'open space' conferences (Owen, 2008) - can be successfully established, but there were significant issues with enacting and sustaining them. These issues revolved around the following challenges: the time it took to set up such reflexive structures; the lack of a shared political will on the part of the "elusive top of the organisation" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.85) to supporting them; the tendency for group level RML sets "to generate

insulating forces that that would be counterproductive in addressing organisation -wide issues" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.102); and lastly, the realisation that the rhetoric of a stable and unified organisation was no match for the pluralistic reality on the ground which actually characterised and ultimately hindered how change, and reflection on change occurred.

In terms of how RML was received by the managers involved, again relatively mixed results are reported: some participants were "energised and empowered" by RML whilst "others acted out the prevailing dependency culture [and were] disoriented by the low level of direction and structure" that was pedagogically involved (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.90). The authors report that RML provided "profound and meaningful" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.92) learning experiences for managers although how, and in what ways, is not fully elaborated. RML was also challenging for those involved; the fact that it produced no material outputs, as such, induced feelings of guilt among participants who were presumably expectant of and more used to relatively tangible programme outcomes.

Nonetheless, the authors state that RML was effective in changing work practices and "revealed positive, deep and long-lasting effects" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.97). It could be inferred from this that RML translated into the practical managerial reflexivity it is supposed to generate, but if so, how and why this occurred, is not explained. Also, because the authors are more interested in highlighting the macro-structural issues with organising RML, the voices of the managers involved are all but silent in the study; for example, no extended interview excerpts are provided which would showcase managers' interpretations of RML, helping to provide a deeper understanding of the

meaning and significance it held for those involved (Taylor, 1980). But this important study does demonstrate that RML can be effective in small groups who may show reflexive leadership in this regard, even in the absence of top-down support. At the organisational level it reveals that things are more complex and challenging. Here, the absence of strong and dedicated senior leadership support is felt more keenly, and sustainable reflexive organisational structures become harder, if not impossible, to achieve.

Even at the small group, or set level of RML, the process can become challenging, as Rigg and Trehan (2008) found in their empirical study. They report minimal success delivering a critical form of RML to managers in a public service organisation. Their research focused on understanding what the real world effects of critical RML would be when it was done with managers in their own organisational context. Like Nicolini et al. (2004), their RML programme was influenced by action learning principles and was also conducted as part of a wider management and organisation development intervention aimed at supporting change and "raising…overall capacity and performance" (Rigg and Trehan, 2008, p.377). What they mainly found was a dissonance between the way RML operated and the expectations that different stakeholders had in relation to the programme, which were plural and in tension. RML in a work setting made for a very different learning dynamic than in an educational environment, the authors note; managers were sceptical about the value to them of engaging with the critical approach the authors introduced. The number of stakeholders involved in a commercial context and their diverse needs, interests and expectations as to what would be achieved by the programme also made things difficult, perhaps "just too difficult" (Rigg and Trehan, 2008, p.382), as they eventually concluded.

Studies like these highlight a paradox which can arise when operating RML in a workplace (Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince, 2004): RML - and this is especially, but not exclusively, true for critical forms of the approach (Reynolds, 1999b; 1998; Trehan and Rigg, 2005; Welsh and Dehler, 2004) - inevitably surfaces issues of power, politics and emotion in organisations (Vince, 2002b). These are normally tacit, but they are also usually seen as important to confront, if organisations want real and lasting systemic change (Weisbord and Janoff, 2005); that is, if they want to engage in strategic learning (Vince, 2004). Yet this call to change itself can often turn out to be mainly rhetorical. Organisations may espouse the need and the desire for change and development, but not actually practice it cohesively (Argyris, 1995), leading to cynicism amongst its members (Reichers et al., 1997).

The paradox is that RML is called upon to enable change work via collective managerial reflection. In theory this involves "getting the whole system in the room" (Weisbord and Janoff, 2005, p.1) to openly discuss and debate issues, including potentially sensitive ones like power and political organisational relations. In practice, however, RML may proceed without certain stakeholders being involved thus signalling that reflexive learning, and subsequently managerial reflexivity (Barge, 2004) and any change it is intended to generate, is intended for some, but not all managers in the hierarchy. This is an "inner contradiction" which "will have practical repercussions" for the adoption of RML more broadly, say Nicolini et al. (2004, p.99), and negative ramifications in terms of realising some of the productive organisational benefits RML can potentially deliver (Boud et al., 2006a). Because managers tend to be pragmatic about such things (Calori, 2000; Watson, 1994a) and accustomed to the political

subtleties involved (Jackall, 2010), as a result, no matter how interesting and potentially useful they found RML as a learning experience, it may not be seen as something worth actually experimenting with in their practice (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013), or else they may not see this as something they have to do because RML, as an actual driver of change, was meant only rhetorically to begin with (Nicolini et al., 2004).

Yet, given the right conditions, RML can support organisational learning and change. This is the key finding from Hoyrup's study (2004) of RML between managers and employees. He explains the connection between two forms of reflexive learning practice in a factory setting: an annual or biennial RML seminar, and more localised, reflective group meetings which occurred thereafter, convened by either management or an employee representative. As he writes, these latter meetings had a focus on collective learning and involved "sharing experiences and coordinating activities" (Hoyrup, 2004, p.453). The point emphasised by Hoyrup is that RML only helps organisation development if it takes place in optimal conditions; conditions where management support is forthcoming and trust exists between colleagues, allowing them to be effective reflexive interlocutors.

With some notable exceptions (for example, Fook, 2010), many contemporary theories of RML downplay individualism in favour of social forms of the approach (Vince and Reynolds, 2009) but reflecting alone as well as with others can also enhance learning, sometimes more effectively than can peer groups reflecting without a facilitator. This is just one of the findings arising from the dual empirical studies of RML reported in Seibert and Daudelin (1999). Other findings highlight the importance which context

plays in RML and the major role it has in shaping how managers reflect - a point which is stressed by Antonacopoulou (2004a) and (Boud, 2010). As the authors say:

"Managers do not engage in reflection for the sheer pleasure of reflecting; they do so in order to help them to learn how to respond to the performance demands they face. Moreover, managers are more inclined to reflect when certain conditions are present in their immediate work environment."

(Seibert and Daudelin, 1999, p.142)

This resonates with the managerial pragmatism mentioned above and it also calls to mind Hoyrup's "optimal conditions" (2004, p.453). In addition, it underscores the importance of managers being sufficiently motivated to engage with RML (Antonacopoulou, 2004a). The importance of sufficient motivation is also raised by Rigano and Edwards (1998) who studied one practitioner's reflexive learning using a journal method (Bolton, 2010; Boud, 2001) initiated after an RML programme.

Again highlighting the crucial importance of context, they concluded that individuals must take responsibility for their own reflexive learning, but that this could be more or less supported beyond an RML intervention, by the organisational environments in which they operated, which may or may not counteract the "the inevitable waning of interest that occurs with time" (Rigano and Edwards, 1998, p.444).

This section ends by rounding up the key learnings from empirical studies of what is variously called "practical reflexivity" (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), "reflexive practice in action" (Maclean et al., 2012) or "practice-based reflexivity" (Segal, 2010).

38

These studies form part of my research proposition so reviewing this work is relevant. In any event, it is theoretically unwise to divide too strictly classroom RML from the informal reflexive learning (Marsick and Watkins, 2001) which accrues tacitly in managers' everyday work lives. The one feeds into and informs the other, and just as practical reflexivity can be seen as a form of reflexive learning within a manager's experience (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004) so too can formal RML interventions be construed as forms of practical reflexivity: RML itself is a form or an expression of practical reflexivity, and vice versa.

Reflexive practice in the workplace

Antonacopoulou's (2004a) study of reflexive practice in three retail banks is insightful in relation to how "the desires of learners" (Boud, 1987, p.231) interacts with the political dynamics of learning and changing in real life organisational contexts. She stresses the importance of learner commitment to reflexivity and draws attention to the complex political dynamics of reflexivity in practice. A focus on the politics of learning (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000) and change is important because RML interventions aim at developing and encouraging reflexivity so that reflexive practice becomes a "habit of mind" (Bateson, 2000, p.75) for managers; a pragmatic attitude entailing a willingness to reflexively engage with others (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009) which can lead to new ways of being and acting in organisational life (Nicolini et al., 2004). Thus, understanding what induces and sustains managerial reflexivity in context, or conversely what may stymie it, is essential because "reflexive practice is as much driven by personal as it is contextual factors [and it is insufficient alone to just] provide space for reflexivity to happen in the context of HR/OD policies and practices" (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.59).

What might sustain a manager's interest in practicing their role more reflexively after an RML programme? In their empirical study of managerial reflexivity, Maclean et al. (2012) found that career ambition could be an important factor. The managers in their study, who had realised significant career success by "joining the elite" (p.18) ranks of their chosen industries, tended to be those possessing finely honed reflexive capabilities. According to the authors, these enabled them to see the world from different perspectives, allowing greater scope for recognising opportunities which could then be capitalised on by re-making "themselves through their own re-constructive efforts" (p.18). Paraphrasing Archer (2007), this is practical reflexivity as the power to make our way through the world, pursuing our goals by navigating the fundamental plurality of human relations (Arendt, 1998).

A similar effect is described in studies of consciousness-raising RML experiences (Brooks, 1992; Mirvis, 2008) which document how managers shift their reflexive focus from "Who I am", to "Who do I want to be?" (Mirvis, 2008, p.178) in order to accomplish specific practical goals. This spur to agential awareness, or the reflexive capacity to perceive opportunities, demonstrate the self-efficacy to believe that potentialities can be realised (McDaniel and DiBella-McCarthy, 2012) and then to act on them, often requires an emotive spark to act as a reflexive "catalyst" which will then "lead people to choose to reflect or force them to reflect" (Swan and Bailey, 2004, p.120). A catalytic experience like this may take the form of a breakdown in a manager's normal way of being, instantiating a new, more reflexive paradigm that subsequently reframes their practice (Segal, 2010; Zundel, 2013). Reflexivity then may be either a conscious choice or something unsought by a manager which nonetheless

'strikes' them (Corlett, 2012; Cunliffe, 2002) in novel ways, motivating them to alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Or it may be something they suddenly remember which they had "forgotten in their busy work lives" (Mirvis, 2008, p.178). In this case, what is recollected is a manager's reflexive ability to act within, and thus to influence, situations they may be motivated or perhaps compelled to change.

Either way, practical reflexivity has an "emergent, relational and political character", as Keevers and Treleaven (2011, p.518) found in their empirical study of reflexive practice in a counselling organisation. Their metaphor of "diffraction" highlights how reflexivity can "be directed other than back at itself, it can spread outwards bend around corners, and can be other than self-referential" (p.14). The question for them then becomes what organisations might do to try to ensure that reflexive practices cohere in the workplace rather than "cancel each other out" (Keevers and Treleaven, 2011, p.14) and what organising conditions can be set up and sustained for reflection to become an habitual part of managerial work routines (Seibert, 1996).

This is also a concern for Brooks (1999) who studied the critical reflexivity of managers in a telephone company undergoing during a period of transformative change. Noting that political and power relations often obstructed the potential productive value which critical reflexivity could have had in this context, she concludes with a call "to understand how we can encourage learning systems that promote rather than discourage informal critical reflection" (Brooks, 1999, p.78). Linking "self to culture" (Brooks, 1992, p.335) in this way is critical during times of organisational change and ambiguity when reflexive learning takes on more salience (Bjerlov and Docherty, 2006) and

reflexive practice becomes an integral factor in leading and directing workplace learning (Matsuo, 2012).

Research lessons and space for new contributions

Several lessons can be extracted from this literature review and used to position the research presented in this thesis. This will be done following advice found in Shotter (1993), Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) and Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) who recommend that rather than simply pointing out gaps in a body of research literature, new inquirers should instead try to open up space for their contributions by problematising the ways in which a topic is currently theorised, challenging some of the "received wisdom" (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011, p.39) in the field. It is also acknowledged that different readings of the literature on RML are possible and accordingly, what follows is a "reflexive interpretation" (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, p.272) aimed at providing support for the research proposition presented.

But this interpretation is not entirely arbitrary: because, like Vince (2002a), this thesis is concerned with exploring what RML means to managers, and how this is affected by the contextual dynamics of "situated practice" (Tsoukas, 2005, p.3), the interpretation offered in this section follows scholars who are specifically calling for more contextualised studies of RML (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Swan and Bailey, 2004; Vince and Reynolds, 2009), especially in terms of its public and organising aspects (Raelin, 2001; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b). RML is mostly still an "unknown quantity" in organisations (Perriton, 2004, p.139) and there are many calls for this empirical deficit to be tackled by new contextually sensitive research on the topic (Nesbit, 2012; Van Woerkom, 2010; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009).

Studies of RML in organisational contexts are scarce (Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Welsh and Dehler, 2004). RML itself is "much-saluted [but] rarely allowed to penetrate organisational values" (Fenwick, 2001, p.5). More is known about its normative status than how it fares in actual work contexts (Van Woerkom and Croon, 2008) where it will inevitably operate "through" rather than "on" practitioners (Boud, 2010, p.30), taking plural and complex forms when enacted with managers in their "concrete contexts of work" (Tsoukas, 2005, p.3). The current imbalance which exists between prescriptive and descriptive knowledge of RML only underlines this assertion. The normative aspirations of RML theory are clear enough but more opaque is how these are received by practitioners where they work (Rigg and Trehan, 2008). Location, or place, is important to learning and knowledge creation (Nonaka and Konno, 1998); organisational contexts are distinct and unique, and this matters in terms of both RML itself (Boud, 2010; Vince, 2012) and in terms of researching RML.

As shown via the literature review above, most of what is known empirically about RML is known from research carried out in educational settings, either with students with no management experience, or with practicing managers who are experiencing RML away from the organisational contexts which may have a significant bearing on how they would have otherwise responded (Boud, 2010; Vince, 2011). The result is a relatively partial theoretical picture because "context factors" matter greatly to management learning (Antonacopoulou, 2006b, p.466) and to RML especially (Boud, 2010). Within organisations, during RML conducted as "in-house development" (Perriton, 2004, p.139), the dynamics involved will be contingent and situational (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Rigg and Trehan, 2008), based on different and more complex foundations than those found in formal educational settings.

For example, given that critical issues such as politics and power relations are purposefully surfaced and deliberated upon, rather than "detached" from learning interventions like RML (Vince, 2012, p.216), it will be a recognisably more political and emotive (Vince, 2002a) phenomenon in workplace contexts because the material risks and existential stakes involved are bound to be higher (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013). Also, current normative and empirical theories of RML often come with problematic a priori assumptions about the need for and value of the approach for managers and organisations. For example, in much of the literature RML is conceptualised as a self-evident good in itself but, as Perriton has challenged (2004), RML has really "not earned its special status" (p.139). This might be taken to mean that RML theory has yet to demonstrate what, if any, purchase it has with practicing managers, something this thesis sets out to explore and theoretically elaborate on.

It can also be the case that managers are said to need RML even if they are not aware of this (for example Welsh and Dehler, 2004) and when reading the conclusions drawn from the few empirical studies available, it is common enough to see managers implicitly cast in reductive, dichotomous moulds as either RML adopters or RML sceptics, depending on whether they accepted or resisted the method. But this implies the at least questionable assumption just mentioned: that RML is a good in itself and managers should respond in kind: if they don't, something is 'wrong'. Likewise, organisations, although their complexity and the paradoxes they contain regarding RML are usually acknowledged (Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince, 2004), nonetheless often seem to be being ultimately evaluated as either RML friendly or RML resistant depending on the extent to which they had, or were willing to create the structures (Nicolini et al.,

2004) or optimal conditions (Hoyrup, 2004) under which RML might thrive. But in complex organisational realities (Tsoukas, 2005), and with a socially complex learning approach (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007) like RML, things are bound to be more complicated than can be captured by such dualistic evaluations (Stacey, 2010), implied or otherwise. Thus current theory requires more contextual sensitisation in order to draw out new subtleties and nuances from which RML theory might develop.

The various interpretive schemas (Daft and Weick, 1984) which will simultaneously operate during RML in context will portray a multitude of plural perspectives and evaluations as to its potential relevance and worth (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997). It seems reasonable to assume that managers will not be simply for or against RML, but rather that diverse and complex interpretations will ensue which necessitate a more politically reflexive approach to theorising (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000). But to date, the finely detailed and pluralistic shades of this many-sided picture of RML in practice have yet to be fully drawn and so, calls are sounded for methodologies that may supply such richness (Raelin and Coghlan, 2006; Raelin, 2008a). There is space, then, for new conceptualisations of RML derived from fresh research stances and methodologies (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013) which can take into account the work-based nuances and complexities (Barley and Kunda, 2001) of researching and operating RML in practice.

There is also space to develop, and if relevant challenge (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013), normative conceptualisations of RML by asking - beyond abstract, prescriptive reasoning - why managers should embrace the approach, or why organisations should invest the significant time and effort it would take to create and sustain the institutional

structures needed to support it. In this regard, as Boud (2010) has said, RML is almost universally presumed to be a 'good' thing to do, yet "with relatively few exceptions [it has] not [been] the subject of critical attention and empirical investigation" (Boud, 2010, p.26). As a result, it seems important to study whether RML can actually have any "meaningful purpose" (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.53) for managers and to this end, as two leading RML scholars propose "there is considerable potential for development" in the field (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b, p.11). This potential can be realised via additional empirical research which will respond to the "responsibility" upon new researchers to "find examples of [RML] at work" (Vince and Reynolds, 2009, p.101).

What specifically should researchers who take up such calls be looking for? Beyond broad agreement that more empirical studies of RML are required, researchers do not always spell out specifically what the areas of attention should be. With some critical perspective, however, potentially fruitful research trails can be traced within the literature and the remainder of this section is occupied by this task. Given the emphasis placed above on context in RML, and the fact that this thesis is primarily about workplace RML, what follows will speak mainly to work studies of RML. Accordingly, the discussion will be framed using the useful list of "issues for further attention" supplied by Docherty et al. (2006, pp. 193-206). The directions offered by these authors are particularly important because they refer directly to RML in practice contexts, which is the main focus of this thesis. They call for empirical research which will explore RML as productive and collective reflection and learning in organisations, saying there is still "considerable work still to be done" in this regard (Docherty et al., 2006, p.202). They propose that this work involves asking whose concern is RML; how

can it be promoted, developed and maintained in work environments; when is it relevant; and finally, what form does it take in different contexts?

Fleshing these questions out a little more: whose concern RML is refers to the fact that owing to increasingly reflexive nature of contemporary society itself (Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 2004), the reflexive imperative this creates (Archer, 2012) and the subsequent impact this has had on employment, learning, and career issues generally (Edwards, 1998), there is an increased focused on making management learning more reflexive (Jarvis, 2010). But are managers and the organisations they work in ready for this? Evidently not, as the findings of workplace RML studies have, by and large, demonstrated (Nicolini et al., 2004; Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Vince, 2002a). This suggests that a richer understanding of how managers respond to RML in their place of work is theoretically important and further, that such an understanding should be gleaned from within a suitably reflexive and relational research methodology (Cunliffe, 2003) which will allow managers to "fully speak for themselves" (Gergen, 2009b, p.237).

Workplace studies demonstrate that RML can work at the action learning group level but is far more challenging at larger, organisational strata (Nicolini et al., 2004). We could hear more, however, about how this set level success with RML was pedagogically achieved. Why was RML successful? What precisely did it mean to the managers involved? Why did it make the impact it did? These questions are given less focus than others so we hear more about the results of RML rather than how it was processually enacted and how and why it was interpreted in certain ways. Why do some managers accept and others resist RML programmes? We know that this occurs (Rigg

and Trehan, 2008; Sinclair, 2007), but we know less about why and how it does, and we know less about the potential range of registers in between the poles of acceptance and resistance - what about, for example, indifference? What could that mean? It is important to map more comprehensively the diverse responses to, and interpretations of RML in situated contexts (Docherty et al., 2006) in order to achieve a "greater appreciation of the underlying dynamics" (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.61) of RML and reflexive practice in organisational settings.

To this could be added the need for richer understanding of how learner desires (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Boud, 1987) affect how RML operates in context, and how these interact with any organisational intent behind such interventions. That a crisis or a 'breakdown' (Koschmann et al., 1998; Zundel, 2013) is required in order to trigger reflexive learning (Docherty et al., 2006) is a common theme threaded through the literature. RML is said to act almost quasi-epiphanically on managers, 'striking' them as if in sudden moments of enlightenment (Corlett, 2012; Cunliffe, 2002). But what if this does not occur? Trying to induce critical epiphanies, as some RML research seems to propose (for example Brookfield, 2009; Raelin, 2008a) is to run the risk of ethical dubiousness (Fenwick, 2005; Perriton, 2004) and can lead to negative and frustrating pedagogical experiences (Sinclair, 2007). Does this mean RML is only for those managers who are in some way existentially ripe for epiphany? This cannot be the case because it would prohibit the vast majority of RML theory's would-be practical audience. Neither can it be the case if normative ideas of RML are to be given their due, because it would hold the potential normative efficacy of RML theory hostage to a fairly random contingency: that of only working for managers who were somehow waiting for it to happen to them in an almost soteriological way. A fateful approach like

this does not seem conducive with a praxical learning intervention like RML which would aim more at the rule rather than the exception (Cunliffe, 2009b; Vince and Reynolds, 2009).

Managers are less likely to be awaiting RML than they are to be relatively fixed within the more or less accepted and reified (Berger and Luckmann, 1991) social and traditional learning practices of the unique organisational realities they inhabit. From an agential perspective, managers will be historically conditioned by the particular cultural environments which surround and affect them, and vice versa (Tsoukas, 2005), working from pre-established "meaning schemes" (Mezirow, 1997, p.7) which RML would challenge. Given this, Cunliffe's passing comment (2009b) that managers and organisations overall must be persuaded to engage with RML is apposite but needs more empirical exploration. How persuasion could remain ethical within such a challenging and relatively dissuasive model of learning as RML also requires elucidation.

It should also be considered that although RML theory is moving away from individualised conceptions of the approach (Hoyrup and Elkjaer, 2006; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b), in practice the individual and social dimensions of RML inevitably need to be aligned (Fook, 2010; Marsick, 1988). This is easier said than done (Antonacopoulou, 2006b): theorising RML as a collective or public phenomenon (Raelin, 2001) does not necessarily de-individualise this activity (Fook, 2010) or homogenise managers in any special, or lasting and definitive way. Indeed, how managers interactively affect one other, both during RML and after, is an important gap in terms of our current understanding of how this learning approach proceeds in practice

scenarios where RML and reflexivity in general are not solo activities, but intrinsically relational processes which require reciprocity for full enactment.

This reciprocity can be rendered impossible if one or more parties in the relation do not reflexively engage, or when the authority structures which influence reflexivity in practice, whether during or after RML interventions, are asymmetrical and this is allowed to predominate and so, reduce reflexive engagement between agents (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). The willingness to reflexively reciprocate will likely be guided by pragmatic or what Watson (1994a) refers to as 'strategic exchange' concerns "shaped in particular organisational environments" (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009, p.21). Therefore, difficulties such as this need to be empirically better understood and theorised. For example how, and why, would one manager reciprocate reflexively with another in the way that RML and reflexive practice more generally demands? Further, why, and in what way would they experiment with this if it posed material risks (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013)?

This creates space for new understandings of the structural challenges associated with organising RML. For Docherty et al. (2006), what is needed here is a better understanding of how RML can be encouraged and sustained in work environments. Politics and power relations are commonly found to act against this from happening (Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince, 2002a) yet these phenomena are sometimes rather amorphously referred to as opposed to specified in detail, and could do with richer illustration. As empirical phenomena they will not be without paradox and complexity, but from current theory we often hear less about this and more about the sheer fact that they stymied RML in some way or another. Thus the retrospective effects of power

relations on RML seem to be stressed, more so than the temporal and dynamic ways (Antonacopoulou, 2004a) in which power relations actually worked processually through RML in practice at the time, serving to help or hinder its effective operation. Reflexivity itself is a spatiotemporal concept (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002) and thus RML is a "temporally evolving" phenomenon (Langley and Tsoukas, 2012, p.2). More understanding of how RML 'becomes' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) is required. Unlike the process approach of organisational studies (Helin et al., 2014) however, this need not mean a primarily objectivist research focus (Cunliffe, 2010).

It can mean a more relationally responsive one (Cunliffe, 2008) which in this thesis means emphasising the interpretive work managers do which contributes to the reality RML has insofar as this is intersubjectively or relationally constructed between managers themselves (Gergen, 2009b), and indeed the researcher as a reflexive instrument within this hermeneutic procedure (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Neyland, 2008). This leads to a second, related observation on existing RML research: politics and power relations also seem, in the main, to be negatively treated as cultural effects from relational practices which create rather than obviate exigencies pertaining to the successful operation of RML. It is less common to see them theorised in a more constructive form. As power relations pervade organisational life in myriad and circuitous ways (Clegg, 2002), and learning in organisations is itself an intrinsically political affair (Coopey, 1995; Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000), there is space for conceptualisations of power and politics in RML that do not seem to assume that these are only barriers to be overcome if the approach is to be successful.

This chapter has reviewed the current literature on RML. Linking back to the broader survey of management learning provided in the introductory chapter, it has shown how RML overall is presented as an improved way for managers to learn and develop. Improved ethically because it may help managers to become more moral practitioners; improved epistemologically because it is more aligned with how management itself is practiced and known by managers in organisational contexts; and lastly, improved pedagogically because it surfaces underlying power and political relations which may stymie effective individual, team and organisational learning and change.

But there are problems with such conceptual visions and RML in practice is deeply challenging. The results from empirical studies are at best ambiguous. Whether RML is a good thing or not and whether it can, or should, be provided with a more permanent, structural residence within organisations remain open questions (Docherty et al., 2006). More work-based studies of RML are required which will give voice to the interpretive work managers do that assigns value and meaning to RML in context (Mishler, 1979) and to the related idea of practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004) or reflexive practice (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Maclean et al., 2012). The next chapter turns to how RML was studied in this thesis in order to answer such research calls. It outlines the methodological choices made, why these were chosen, and how they operated.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology chosen for this study and the philosophical assumptions which informed this choice. The research design is explained as a reflexive insider organisational ethnography. This unique perspective on RML in practice exploits heretofore unavailable opportunities for theory development. The centrality of contextual factors when studying RML is discussed and the methodological implications of this are unpacked. The research site is introduced and the methods used to generate and analyse empirical data are explained. Consistent with the research question, which seeks to explore the meaning of RML for managers, an interpretivist research design (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Yanow, 2006b) was chosen. This design is explained in terms of the relevant research strategy, stance, and paradigm deployed (Blaikie, 2007). The insider dimension of this methodology warrants special attention, which is provided. The chapter closes by explaining how ethical issues were anticipated and subsequently managed. Research limitations are not covered in this chapter but are discussed in the concluding chapter, prefacing a section on future research avenues.

Methodological choices

There are many ways to know the social world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Knutsen, 2012) and different, often competing routes of inquiry are open to researchers (Blaikie, 2007; Westwood and Clegg, 2003). Choosing one is a matter of doing justice to the topic in question (Tsoukas, 2005), achieving a theoretically serviceable fit between research design and the stated aims of a study (Grunow, 1995; Royer and Zarlowski, 2001). Personal and pragmatic reasons may also be factored in when crafting a research

design (Cunliffe, 2010; Watson, 1994b). A researcher's own methodological predilections (Rosen, 1991), or the opportunities afforded by chance or circumstance (for example, access to research sites or key individuals) may also contribute (Cresswell, 2014). As Miles and Huberman (1994) say, the process is "more a craft than a slavish adherence to methodological rules…no study conforms exactly to a standard methodology" (p.5). What is paramount is that methodological choices hang together coherently in relation to the research question (Bryman, 2012; Cresswell, 2014; Cunliffe, 2010; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Huff, 2009). The various dimensions of these methodological choices as they applied to the current study will now be covered in turn. First, the central importance of context is discussed.

Context and RML

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on RML and presented a case for further empirical research; specifically, research on how RML operates in workplace contexts (Boud, 2010; Docherty et al., 2006; Vince and Reynolds, 2009). Calls for more situated studies of RML stem from the nascent character of current theory, which is still evolving (Cressey et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 2009; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) and which to date has been mostly prescriptive (Van Woerkom and Croon, 2008). There is a need therefore to explore RML in depth with managers within their own organisational environments (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Jordan, 2010; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009) where contextual factors will play a crucial, even decisive role (Groysberg, 2010) in how learning is perceived and practiced (Antonacopoulou, 2006b) and where learning itself takes on decidedly fluid and emergent forms (Gherardi, 2000).

Workplaces are the complex (Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011) and pluralistic learning 'arenas' (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997) where RML unfolds within unique time space coordinates which will have a bearing on how it is enacted by those involved (Schatzki, 2010), including those facilitating and studying the process. As Vince (2010) says, organisations are "complex emotional and political contexts" (p.S38). Context matters to social research generally (Flyvbjerg, 2001) and relatedly, "contextual specificity" matters to RML (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.48) which requires "contextual appropriateness" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.87). Context matters because the "situational relevance and meaning" of social phenomena shifts from place to place in a way which prescriptive theory can never fully capture (Clegg, 1998, p.44). Ultimately, RML will proceed differently in different contexts, and "the particularities of individual and setting" (Mishler, 1991, p.viii) are as, if not more important than any generic similarities that may exist across research settings.

Context is meant in this thesis to refer to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call the "full scale influence field in which phenomena occur (p.39). It includes elements such as "organisational structure, information, communication, and control processes, which impact on the way individuals learn" Antonacopoulou (2006b, p.456). It takes into account the social and systemic aspects of organising and learning (Gherardi, 1999; Gherardi et al.; 1998) and how this shapes, and in turn is shaped by, how agents interact with each other and with the complex organisational ecologies they are reflexively embedded in (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Tsoukas, 2005; Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011). Importantly for the theoretical contribution outlined in later chapters, context is also meant to encompass the spatial and political aspects of learning in organisations

(Coopey, 1995; Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000; Kemmis, 1985; Vince and Martin, 1993; Vince, 2011).

Positivist research designs would relegate the importance of context (for example, Erez and Grant, 2013) in favour of the more elevated search for "invariable and universal laws" (Hassard, 1995, p.6) - "general relationships on which the sun never sets" (Donaldson, 1996, p.146). In this interpretivist research design (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012), and following scholars like Antonacopoulou (2006b), Finn et al. (2010), Gagnon and Collinson (2014), Halford and Leonard (2006), Hotho et al. (2014), Johns (2006), Lakomski (2004), and Thomas Al-Maskati (1997), context is treated as a vital, complex, and always shifting influence on organisational life and on reflexive learning practices in particular (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Boud, 2010; Seibert and Daudelin, 1999).

Methodologically, then, context is considered in this design not as one type of variable or "factor to be isolated and analysed" separately to what is being studied, but as a shaping influence on all thought and action taking place in social settings (Damon, 1996, p.461). As Gherardi (2012a) writes, "work contexts are more than simple containers of work activity" (p.14); they are both constituted and constitutive (Giddens, 1986): human actors shape context reflexively as they in turn are influenced by the contexts they are enmeshed in, which (crucially) includes other reflexive agents (Shotter, 1984). Thus context is the field, or 'habitus' which influences reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and which conversely reflexivity itself can influence (Maclean et al., 2012), or de-reify (Sandywell, 2005). Reflexivity, if "invoked"

(Maclean et al., 2012, p.397), can serve as a reminder that social contexts are naturalisations with multiple meanings: it is how they came to be so - their 'becoming' rather than 'being-realism' (Chia, 1996) - and how they may potentially change, which can often be most important to understand (Czarniawska, 2003).

Context is not all-powerful, of course, and there is always "space for agency" (Hotho et al., 2014, p.74). As already stated, context and reflexivity are mutually constitutive (Giddens, 1986; Shotter, 1984); they shape each other within constant "waves" (Antonacopoulou, 2012, p.55) or flows (Royrik, 2011) of spatiotemporal movement (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002). Reflexivity, as consciousness itself (Luhmann, 2013), is thus a restless and "interminable process" (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002, p.861).

This is important for the present research design. Because context shapes the meaning assigned to social phenomena by the actors involved (Descombes, 2014; Mishler, 1979), this will also be true for RML in context, and the meaning and significance assigned by managers to this activity under the specific conditions in which it occurs; conditions which will affect its operation (Leon'tev, 1978). Context, or place (Nonaka and Konno, 1998), affects how managers think (Thomas Al-Maskati, 1997) so it strongly influences knowing and learning (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) or indeed non-learning, insofar as the aims of RML may be frustrated by the relational and political dynamics involved in real workplace environments (Antonacopoulou, 2004a). The call for contextually sensitive studies of RML mirrors a wider concern in management learning scholarship regarding the need to better

understand the situated, and social learning practices of managers (Fox, 2009). It also leads logically to work-centric (Barley and Kunda, 2001), 'real world research' designs (Robson, 2011); particularly anthropocentric (Case, 2003), insider (Raelin, 2008a), and interactionist (Thomas Al-Maskati, 1997) ones, which can contribute to knowledge of how RML happens in different environments, helping to develop extant theory in novel directions.

With context methodologically foregrounded other research design dimensions will now be explicated. This will be done using the framework found in Blaikie (2007) which provides a way to frame the research strategy, stance and paradigm chosen for this study. Through this framework, the ontological and epistemological "presuppositions" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.40) or assumptions underpinning the methodological choices made and how they operated (Nicolini, 2009) are explained. Using a single reliable framework helps avoid the potential for methodological confusion stemming from the "blurred genres" and ideological debates which persist in organisation and management theory and research (Cunliffe, 2010, p.20). Other frameworks could also have been used, for example Cresswell (2014). Blaikie's was chosen for its comprehensiveness and clarity of structure.

Research strategy

A research strategy is "a procedure or logic for generating new knowledge" (Blaikie, 2007, p.8). There are four kinds to choose from: inductive, deductive, retroductive and abductive. These are the styles, or forms of reasoning (Huff, 2009) which aid theory

building. For this study an abductive research strategy was chosen. Abduction is becoming increasingly popular in management and organisation research (Hansen, 2008). For Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), it represents a more realistic and flexible logic, more suited to the non-linear way in which empirical research typically proceeds. Abduction involves aspects of both induction and deduction but "adds new, specific elements" to both (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, p.4). Perri and Bellamy (2012) refer to it as reverse deduction; Silverman (2010) calls it a middle ground between induction and deduction.

For Boisot and McKelvey (2011), abduction complements both of these approaches because of its unique ability to deal with patterns of events and phenomena which are "novel…nonlinear and non-repeatable" (p.127). Abduction is sometimes referred to as 'inference to the best explanation' (Lipton, 2004), differing from induction or deduction in terms of its openness to the introduction of novelty and surprise in data analysis and theory development (Costas, 2012; Turner, 2009). Abduction thus entails the imaginative operation of discovering surprises during a research study and following up on them; it is a "creative inferential process" (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014, p.5).

Abduction was chosen as the research strategy for this study for all of these reasons, and because it allows an approach to theory development as an engaged practice (Van De Ven, 2007) pointed towards "possibilities" rather than certainties (Zundel and Kokkalis, 2010, p.1221). It also aligns with the social constructionist research paradigm (Blaikie, 2007, Cunliffe, 2010) adopted and is a good fit with ethnographic methods (Agar, 2010;

2006; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Abductive research strategies also match case study approaches well (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Hammersley, 2007; Thomas, 2011b).

Researcher stance

A researcher's stance describes "both the kind of relationship they wish to have with the people they are researching and the kind of role they will take" within the study (Blaikie, 2007, p.11). Two obvious stances are outsider or insider perspectives (Sherif, 2001), although some believe this dichotomy is better conceptualised as a continuum containing different and often overlapping dimensions (for example, Mercer, 2007). My researcher stance is pre-given: because I work as HRD manager in the organisation under study, I am an insider by default. Such stances are "relatively uncommon" (Bell and Thorpe, 2013, p.100) and methodologically speaking, under-theorised (Mercer, 2007; Taylor, 2011). Like any researcher stance, insider positions come with pros and cons: on the one hand, they brings definite, even unique advantages (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007); in particular, argue Van Marrewijk et al. (2010), insiders "have an advantage as ethnographers" (p.225). On the other, they introduce difficulties not faced by other approaches. As Vickers (1968, p.19) points out, there are "inescapable limitations" as well as advantages to insider stances and these have to be managed well (Van Heugten, 2004). Even though the advantages may outweigh the drawbacks (Alvesson, 2009), these should not simply be assumed without properly considering the methodological and ethical dilemmas which can lay "hidden" (Labaree, 2002, p.109) and must continually be reflexively monitored. As with outsider stances (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013), "insider research is not faultless" (Taylor, 2011, p.6) and it must be operated reflexively.

Some of the advantages of being an insider include the practically full and easy access granted to research settings, and the "different perspective" this enables (Adler and Adler, 1978, p.82). Insiders have pre-existing local knowledge of the culture involved (Geertz, 1993) and can often rely on pre-established trust and credibility with research participants (Lofland et al., 1994). Thomas (2011a) calls such advantages a "ready-made strength" (p.76) of insider research, based on a notion of familiarity which is paradoxically both the greatest strength and weakness of such stances (Edwards, 2002). Though relatively rare, insider stances are increasingly being called for in management and organisational research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Watson, 2011). This is in line with the rise in requests for more situated knowledge to be generated from inside organisations (Bamberger and Pratt, 2010; Barley and Kunda, 2001; Raelin, 2008a).

A perceived risk of insider research is the danger to objectivity. For example, Patton (1999) states that an insider's "closeness makes their objectivity suspect" (p. 1204). Yet, the overall social scientific "commitment to objectivism is now in doubt" (Denzin, 1996, p.134). Moreover, within an interpretivist research design (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Yanow, 2006b) any quest for objectivity - as a kind of 'view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986) - is abandoned (Watson, 1987). But this is not done to usher in any crude opposing relativism which would take its place (Packer, 2010). Rather, the notion of objectivity is rethought (Megill, 1997) as one of intersubjective authenticity: a "relationally reflexive" (Hibbert et al., 2014) epistemological attitude which understands the researcher as inextricably linked with the "meaning-focused processes" they are studying (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.40), as embedded human parts of the social settings they observe (Lofland et al., 1994).

This is not to brush aside the challenges of insider research. Perhaps the main one is the special character of prejudices and biases which insiders carry into their research projects (Alvesson, 2009; Ybema et al., 2009). The scientific worry here is that closeness becomes closedness: the insider is too familiar with what they are studying and so they are potentially shut off to novelty and surprise during inquiry, and the mundane and the ordinary – often the source of rich and complex findings (Emerson et al., 1995) - go unnoticed. This is where a reflexive stance is critical. The insider researcher must undertake "reflexive exploration" (Young, 1991, p.3), continuously looking inward and outward to produce a research account which takes stock of their own biography and the embedded nature of their role as both researcher and actor in the study (Haynes, 2006). One of the main ways this was facilitated in the present study was by keeping a reflexive work journal (Dalton, 1964; 1959; Kenny, 2012; Watson, 1994a). This is elaborated on more below in the section on data generation.

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm describes a research project's wider philosophical lens, encompassing the ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpin it (Blaikie, 2007). Adopting a philosophical paradigm is important: as Bell and Thorpe (2013) write, "philosophically speaking, you have to 'be something'" (p.62). Ontological and epistemological assumptions must be in harmony in a research design (Cunliffe, 2010; Holloway and Todres, 2003; Huff, 2009; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006c). The ontological lens adopted for this study is an idealist one. Specifically, a middle ground, agnostic idealism which takes social reality to consist of "what human beings make or construct [together] the shared interpretations that social actors produce as they go about their everyday lives" (Blaikie, 2007, pp 16-17). Ontologically, this

implies a form of pluralism in which there are "multiple *correct* ways to parse our world" (Mitchell, 2009, p.13, emphasis in the original). In line with this paradigm, and following theorists such as Czarniawska (2003) and Hosking (2011), the primary interest is in how managers constructed the meaning of RML in context as an "endogenous accomplishment" (Cunliffe, 2003, p.983).

Epistemologically this required a social constructionist position (Cunliffe, 2008; Czarniawska, 2003; Gergen, 2009a) in which knowing is a relational activity (Gergen, 2009b) and knowledge is "the product of the intersubjective, meaning-giving activity of human beings in their everyday lives" (Blaikie, 2007, p.23). Of the many forms of social constructionism available (Sismondo, 1993) an interpretivist mode was chosen, matching those articulated in Haverland and Yanow (2011), Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2009), Yanow (2006b) and Ybema et al. (2009), among others. This is a mode which draws on the classic statement of social constructionism found in Berger and Luckmann (1991) where language plays a key constitutive role (Shotter, 1993) and talking with people (Soss, 2006) about how they construct their worlds of work and imbue them with meaning (Duguid, 2006) leads to theoretical insight. It also honours the close intellectual links which exist between social constructionism and the long-standing interpretivist strand of thinking within the social sciences generally (Moses and Knutsen, 2007).

A social constructionist research paradigm demands by definition a reflexive orientation (Cunliffe, 2003). If social reality is taken to be a human co-construction (Gergen, 2009b), the researcher - as a human being who carries their humanity into the research

process (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006b) – cannot stand outside of this paradigm, even though within it they play a different research role than others. Thus, proceeding on the basis that social reality is a shared accomplishment, and that knowledge of this is achieved between people as a matter of intersubjective discourse (Cunliffe, 2008; Shotter, 1993), means considering one's whole research identity reflexively and acting accordingly (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

In this study, my researcher subjectivity was not detached. Rather, to paraphrase Denzin (1996, p.146), it was entangled with the lives of the managers studied, as my own experience mingled with theirs and became a closely woven and inextricable part of the research process. This does not mean that my experience was methodologically privileged and so, foregrounded within the design (Alvesson, 2009). Being a reflexive part of the research and being the primary focus are two distinct things. I did not foreground my own experiences and interpretations because the research question was about what RML meant for the managers involved, not for me, even if my own interpretations inevitably filtered through the process and even though (as an insider, and a colleague of those involved) I was a manager in the study too. This is another way of saying that the methodology was an "at-home" variety (Alvesson, 2009, p.159), but it wasn't auto-ethnographic (Atkinson, 2006; Cullen, 2011; Wall, 2008). In my researcher role I could record, reflect, and report on my own experiences without turning too inward and without projecting this in my research praxis (Lather, 1986), or in the written text, in ways which would have undermined rather than supported the research goal (Aull Davies, 2008, p.26; Van Marrewijk and Yanow, 2010).

Being reflexively ethnographic

This study operated based on ethnographic principles and methods (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) which align well with the research strategy, stance and paradigm adopted (Argryis, 1999; Rosen, 1991; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009; Ybema et al., 2009). Although examples are still limited in number (Wadham and Warren, 2013) the use of ethnographic approaches in management and organisational research is rising (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, Neyland, 2008) and the positive case for conducting them has been made clear, for example by Linstead (1997).

Ethnographic approaches allow a 'way of seeing' (Wolcott, 2008) which can trace the movement of organisational phenomena as they happen (Schatzki, 2006). This ability to 'zoom in and out' (Nicolini, 2009), tracing the dynamics of human action in context (Juarrero, 2002) or "social life as a process" (Emerson et al., 1995, p.14), makes workplace ethnographies valuable and contributes to their increasing popularity (Cefkin, 2009; Moeran, 2007; Smith, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009). Scholars are recommending that more be conducted (Alvesson, 2009; Watson, 2011; Zickar and Carter, 2010), and specifically in relation to RML (Raelin, 2013; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). The present methodology responds to these calls and contributes a novel research design which can supply the type of practice-based theorising requested by scholars (Raelin, 2008a).

Ethnographic studies try to understand a research site from an emic, or insider's perspective (Brewer, 2004; Burgess, 1984; Morey and Luthans, 1984). This is done in order to understand and elucidate the processes which make up human action and the way meanings are assigned to events and phenomena by people acting together in

shared organisational contexts (Evered and Reis Louis, 1981). To be ethnographic is to carry out "observation and interpretation" (Schutz, 1975, p.197) of people interacting in their familiar social settings (Lofland et al., 1994); to be "in situ" watching how social reality is constructed by them (Czarniawska, 2003, p.134) and to be immersed in (Jordan and Dalal, 2006) and alongside these intersubjective practices as they unfold (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Moeran, 2009; Schatzki, 2006) in salient ways between agents who have a shared stake in their outcome (Goffman, 1971).

Playing to the strengths of the ethnographic approach (Watson, 2011), the methodological implication of this for the present study is that RML was researched (and later theorised) as a moving and complex emergent process (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) or spatial practice, (Lefebvre, 1991; Taylor and Spicer, 2007) with no fixed or capturable essence (Bergson, 2014; Linstead and Mullarkey, 2003); one which unfolded in a simultaneously abstract and concrete learning space which contained constraints but which crucially also remained "radically open and full of endless possibilities" (Antonacopoulou, 2002, p.11), a feature which had reflexive learning implications for the managers participating (Rowe, 2013).

What makes this a reflexive organisational ethnography (Aull Davies, 2008)? Reflexivity in ethnographic discourse can be controversial. For example, in the way in which some tread the line between relativism and realism (Watson, 1987); in relation to the "crisis" of ethnographic representation (Packer, 2010, p.208); or in the way reflexive ethnographic accounts can have a "loaded character" (Hammersley, 1992, p.142) which seems to prejudge results in favour of researchers' pre-existing normative theoretical

assumptions. Nonetheless, all ethnographic approaches are reflexive in some way because ethnography itself is an inherently reflexive process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). At least, that is, as long as it is conceived in an ontologically non-dualistic way, which recognises and acts on the basis that the researcher "is always an element *within* the social situations they write about" (Packer, 2010, p.241, emphasis in the original). Therefore, it is my insider status within this study which requires reflexivity as an imperative (Case, 2007). Like Anteby (2013), my researcher subjectivity "far from being avoided, [was] openly embraced" (p.154), though not, as has already been mentioned, in an overly self-regarding or confessional way (Behar, 1997; Van Maanen, 1988). Methodological reflexivity in the present study meant understanding, accepting and monitoring how I jointly constructed meaning with research participants as data was generated and analysed (Packer, 2010).

The research site: Worldlife Plc.

Consistent with an ethnographic approach, data was gathered during prolonged engagement in the research site (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The site was Worldlife Plc., the Irish subsidiary of a global corporation called Worldlife International[3]. Worldlife operates in the services industry sector employing over six hundred people in Ireland, of which ninety-four are managers. Table 2.0 below breaks down this management population by hierarchical level:

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[3] These are both pseudonyms.

Management Level	No. of managers
Management Board	6
Senior Managers	15
Middle Managers	43
Supervisors	30

Table 2.0 Worldlife management population by hierarchical levels

Worldlife was an appropriate place to research RML for a number of reasons: firstly, it satisfied Vince and Reynold's general criteria (2009) for new studies to explore RML empirically within real organisational settings. Secondly, it presented an experienced practicing manager population for research, as opposed to the student samples often used. Thirdly, although it is a relatively stable, successful, and more or less unified entity, Worldlife is nevertheless an organisation which, like many other modern corporations (Hassard et al., 2009), is experiencing change across a range of various dimensions. This in turn is slowly having an effect on how managing is perceived within the company and consequently, managers themselves are being forced to reconsider their roles in less traditional and rational, and now more complex and paradoxical ways (Storey and Salaman, 2009). Given that RML, as discussed in chapter one, is widely theorised as a potentially potent and effective pedagogical response to developments like these, Worldlife represented a relevant context in which to explore how this occurs.

Much of the change impressed upon Worldlife was initiated by the 2007 global financial crisis. The resulting global market contraction and the knock-on effects for both Ireland's economy overall and thus, Worldlife's specific industry sector, resulted in a highly uncertain and volatile competitive landscape. As pressure on profit margins intensified this in turn gave rise to a renewed focus on the controlling of operating expenses. This was given added emphasis by Worldlife's parent company who insisted upon a disciplined approach to expense control in order to ensure the future sustainability of the business. The centrepiece of the cost reduction programme which arose from this was a voluntary employee redundancy programme. Other measures included a raft of pension reforms and the temporary application of a wage freeze. Although overall manager and employee engagement levels remained high during this turbulent period, it was nonetheless an anxious, uncertain, and challenging time. This was the broader backdrop against which my research began. Fieldwork started in 2010 and ended approximately two years later in 2012.

The Worldlife Reflexive Manager in Practice Programme

Data generation centred on a bespoke RML programme called the 'Reflexive Manager in Practice' programme (hereafter RMP). This two-day intervention was launched with the aim of offering support to managers during organisational change, providing them with a shared reflexive learning space (Antonacopoulou, 2002; Vince, 2011) in which they might learn in a time of crisis (Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer, 2013) by reflecting collectively under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity (Bjerlov and Docherty, 2006). The Worldlife HRD team were the "animators" of this learning intervention (Boud and Miller, 1996a, p.15). The programme was proactively conceived and

reflexively designed (Appendix A) to introduce managers to the shared concepts of reflexivity, reflexive learning, and practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), in the hope that they would gain in a critical and holistically productive sense (Cressey et al., 2006) from these ideas and find support in getting together to publicly reflect (Raelin, 2001). Like Vince (2002a), the Worldlife HRD team involved wanted to organise reflection for managers so they could reflect on the "whole organisation" (Vince, 2002a, p.74), thus the social rather than individual nature of reflection was emphasised.

RML is rightly theorised as a challenging way to learn, but this is not the whole story. Less emphasised are RML's potentially positive − as opposed to negative (Swan and Bailey, 2004) - therapeutic aspects. RML can be a powerful way for managers to come together in a reflective classroom (Mintzberg, 2004) which offers space for more meaningful, hermeneutic learning support than traditional 'banking' models supply (Freire, 1996). Managers need time and space to reflect, yet they are rarely afforded this (Raelin, 2002). The purpose of the RMP was to carve out this space in Worldlife so managers could enter into it during a time in the organisation when external and internal pressures justified the need for a more reflexive learning methodology.

As mentioned, the RMP had a strong public dimension (Raelin, 2001; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) and significant space was factored in for dialogic interaction (Berkovich, 2014; Cunliffe, 2002). The content of the programme was derived mainly from participant experience (Boud and Miller, 1996b; Kayes, 2004; Kolb, 1984, Wood Daudelin, 1996), although consistent with the emphasis on

reflexivity, this was done from a constructionist rather than a cognitivist perspective (Holman et al., 1997). Reflexive rather than didactic methods of facilitation learning were deployed (Gray, 2007; Raelin, 2006; Wildemeersch and Stroobants, 2009) as these are more appropriate in terms of balancing the ethos of care and reflexive criticality which the programme intended to express (Nicholson, 2011; Vince, 2011).

Three different methods were used to generate data, each offering unique analytical advantages (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In addition, the RMP's co-facilitator was included as a research participant, becoming a valuable supplementary interviewee (Alvesson, 2011) with whom the researcher could operate "combined critical reflection" (Knights et al., 2010, p.103) on the experience. The three methods mentioned were: participant observation, interviews, and reflexive work journaling. These are discussed in turn below as witnessing, talking, and reflecting, respectively. The reason for these particular articulations is to underscore the social constructionist aspect of this research design, thus strengthening the links between the methods deployed and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study (Cunliffe, 2010). Practically, it refers to the fact that data were less collected, or gathered up by the researcher - as though they were somehow 'given' by the research site - but more accessed and generated during the study, a process which intertwined with data analysis (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006a).

Witnessing everyday life at Worldlife

Participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, Johnson et al., 2006, Moeran, 2009) took two forms: the general field observation of 'everyday life' (Ybema et al., 2009) at Worldlife, and the more focused observation of how the RMP happened from within the eight programmes conducted. As already stated, the second form of observation benefited from three different observer roles (Russ-Eft, 2009) or 'ways of seeing' (Wolcott, 2008). The researcher was lead facilitator for two programmes, co-facilitator for three, and interested observer for three more. The word 'interested' is used to acknowledge that, as an insider, I could never have been completely neutral in Worldlife, nor was complete neutrality required. Like Watson (1994a) and Young (1991), I was more an "observant participator" who could at most achieve "involved detachment" (Moeran, 2009, p.148).

Active participant observation like this enhances the quality of ethnographic data because the researcher gains an internalised understanding of the social processes studied. This kind of full immersion (Nelson, 1972) or 'complete membership' as Adler and Adler (1978) call it, can also aid the reflexive development of the researcher themselves (Evans-Pritchard, 1976) as observers come to realise they are "part of the situation studied" (Powdermaker, 1966, pp.286-287) and their own background and tacit assumptions inevitably make their way into notes on what is observed: being aware of this is important (Wolfinger, 2002). As I observed Worldlife now through different lenses, I came to know myself, the organisation, and its people differently. Indeed many times, especially in the early stages of fieldwork, by constantly "thinking through what [I] was doing" (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.497) as data was generated, I had to shed or

revise certain personal opinions and prejudices which only came to light as the research progressed and was reflected on. To a significant extent, then, fieldwork reflexively "transformed" me in the way that Evans-Pritchard (1976, p.245) suggests it can, helping to make me a more critically reflexive practitioner (Cunliffe, 2004) and researcher (Cunliffe, 2003).

Following guidance in Emerson et al. (1995), and similar to Delbridge's approach (1998), field observations were taken down as jottings, then later fleshed out manually as field notes. This allowed for reflection on what was written and thus, for interpretive analytic memos to be written (Emerson et al., 1995, Saldana, 2009, Trent and Cho, 2014). During approximately two years of fieldwork, seven hundred pages of field notes were accumulated, covering a plethora of situations, interactions, events and even non-events, because, as Wolfinger (2002) says, sometimes the things that "didn't happen" (p.92) are as important in understanding a social setting as those that did. Volume-wise, field notes consisted of four hundred pages recorded in A4 sized pads, and three hundred from A5 sized ones. People, and the scenes they enacted, were observed and listened to and "detailed descriptions of [their] interactions" taken so as to understand how life at Worldlife happened (Emerson et al., 1995, p.34). Witnessing in this way was important because talking with people alone is not a complete way to explore and try to understand meaning-making in context (Alvesson, 2009, Silverman, 2011, Watson, 1994a). This tying together of witnessing, as well as talking with social actors, is both a staple and a strength of ethnographic approaches (Moeran, 2009).

Talking with Worldlife managers

Semi-structured then unstructured interviews were conducted with thirty-three Worldlife managers. These were carried out in a social constructionist manner (Cassell, 2005). This means they were treated as two-way conversations (Mishler, 1991) with interlocutors who were encouraged to see them this way too; a deliberate methodological move which supported the practice of interviewing as a dialogical space between interlocutors who would ultimately jointly produce the meaning which resulted (Mishler, 1991; Packer, 2010), even as the focus of interview conversation's was fixed on understanding the informant's perspective. The interview purpose was to try to understand RML, and its desired consequent reflexive practice (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Cunliffe, 2009b; Maclean et al., 2012; Pässilä et al., 2015), or practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), from each manager's perspective; to listen to what RML meant to them, why this was, and how this meaning was articulated (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Interviews lasted approximately one hour. The first occurred no later than two weeks after the programme to capture an immediate response. The second took place after an interval of no more than three months after the RMP to capture a more developed response. The first interview was semi-structured so as to capture in a relatively formatted, but still informal and flexible way, how managers recounted their RML experience close to the event itself. Prior to the second, this time unstructured interview, time was left for the programme to settle and for managers to perhaps gather examples of reflexive practice which could then be discussed. Managers from all hierarchical levels who attended the RMP were interviewed. Overall, the sample had a

convenient character (Cresswell, 2014); it was only necessary to speak with managers who were relevant in terms of answering the research question (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In theory, this included any manager who attended the RMP. But to make sure RML responses were generated with "numerous and highly knowledgeable informants who view the focal phenomenon from diverse perspectives" (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p.28), achieving hierarchical spread and capturing a varied tenure picture seemed prudent so these were two of the main informal sampling criteria applied. Table 3.0 below provides details on the interview sample:

Level	No.	% of level	Avg. tenure	Max/ Min
Senior Managers	6	40%	20 years	36 / 5 years
Middle Managers	17	39.5%	19.6 years	36 / 10 years
Supervisors	10	33.3%	17.5 years	36 / 6 years

Table. 3.0 Interview sample: breakdown by level and tenure

The average management tenure at Worldlife overall is fifteen years, with a maximum tenure figure of thirty-six years and a minimum of three. Twenty-eight percent of this study's sample were female, a similar breakdown to the thirty-four per cent of Worldlife's management population overall who are female. Interviewee enlistment began at the forty-five minute briefings held one week prior to each RMP. The main purpose of these briefings was to introduce and explain the RMP, but the opportunity was also used to present the accompanying research project to prospective participants.

At this juncture, five participants volunteered to join the study (three senior managers and two middle managers). The remaining twenty-eight interviewees were selected after their respective RMP programmes ended, using the two informal criteria mentioned above. In addition, I targeted managers I knew reasonably well and who I thought based on my own experience would be interesting to learn from. I also deliberately sought to talk with managers I did not know so well. The logic here was that speaking with these managers would help me, at least in some minimal sense, to be a 'stranger' in the study (Agar, 1996), thus helping to counterbalance my insider's familiarity with the site and the people. Managers were first targeted using a generic template e-mail communication, sent to them directly (Appendix B). Everyone who was asked accepted and when they did a second, more formal communication was sent with details of the study, including the ethical consent form (Appendix C). Interviews were conducted in meeting room locations onsite at Worldlife in order to preserve "the crucial element of context" (Mikecz, 2012, p.488). All interviews were recorded using a digital audio device. Transcription processes are described below in the section on data analysis.

Reflecting on myself

Reflexivity is now part of the "methodological mainstream" in social research (Williams and Vogt, 2011, p.3) and management research is no different (Bell and Thorpe, 2013). The third means of accessing and generating data was the writing of a reflexive journal. This was where my own reflections on the research experience were recorded (Mahoney, 2007). This sort of personal journaling is common in ethnographic fieldwork (Dalton, 1964; 1959; Kenny, 2012; Watson, 1994a). Writing reflexively brings unique analytical value (Bolton, 2010), making inquirers attentive to their own

"life [histories]" and how these weave with the methodological fabric of the study (Hibbert et al., 2014, p.286). The reflexive journals I kept constituted my own personal epistemological contribution to the study (Bateson, 1980); my subjectivity was part of the epistemological action, so to speak, so within reason and in accordance with the aims of the study, it was embraced (Cunliffe, 2010; Packer, 2010; Polanyi, 1974). Reflexive journal entries interspersed with field notes as my own researcher voice became entangled with the voices of others in the study (Bridges-Rhoads and Van Cleave, 2014). Reflexive entries were recorded in the same pads used to write field notes in order to create this desired mesh. These reflexive entries were written in a more relaxed and personal tone to signal the "reflexive work" being done (Bridges-Rhoads and Van Cleave, 2014, p.645) and to mark them out from the "low inference descriptors" (Seale, 1999, p.475) which denoted observational field notes proper. To make the necessary textual distinction, following Emerson et al. (1995), reflexive entries, like analytic memos (Saldana, 2009), were marked out in parentheses to show them as distinct from observation field notes.

Analysing empirical data

In interpretive research the accessing, generating, and analysis of data often run together (Okley, 1994, Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006a). It is a "dynamic process" that cannot be reduced to discrete stages or "particular techniques" (Bryman and Burgess, 1994, p.2). Instead, it tends to match the "complex interaction between the research problem, the researcher and those who are researched" (Burgess, 1984, p.6). Demonstrating this, analytic memos were written alongside field notes as these were recorded (Emerson et al., 1995). During interviews too, a raw element of analysis was inevitably involved

because interviews proceeding from a social constructionist paradigm "engage in dialogue with participants and thus actively contribute to knowledge production" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p.431). Reflexive journal entries also involved an overlapping mode of simultaneously accessing, generating and analysing data, because these entries were used to gain "analytical understandings" (Mahoney, 2007, p.579) of the researcher's own thoughts and feelings as the project progressed. There was still, however, a more focused and rigorous phase of analysis undertaken once all data was generated. This is described next.

There were three types of data sets to code: field notes, interviews and reflexive work journal entries. All were coded using the same bespoke coding strategy (Saldana, 2014) which found it sufficient to apply one method of descriptive coding to the data (Saldana, 2009). The exact mechanics of this coding strategy are described in full, further below. This strategy was chosen in order to simplify coding and to acknowledge its many interpretive limitations (Mishler, 1991, Packer, 2010). Whilst codes were of course semantically relevant to the data they described, and thus part of the interpretive process, the coding procedure as a whole was viewed more as a practical, data structuring step, with the substantive interpretive work accomplished by the writing of accompanying analytic memos used to develop ideas from the data (Burgess, 1984). In line with how abductive data analysis works, these memos constituted creative inferences (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) interpretively applied based on the "felt meaning that comes from abductive reasoning", which inevitably reads meaning both from and into the data (Taylor et al., 2002). This, however, was not a case of "anything goes" interpretation (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014, p.122): abduction is imaginative but it is also relatively constrained and interpretively disciplined by what it refers to,

both in terms of the data itself and the 'resistance' this offers and, to a lesser extent, the conceptual literature the researcher wishes to converse theoretically with (Huff, 1999; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014).

A reflexive balance between empirical facts and the need for narrative innovation in terms of developing concepts from these (Abolafia, 2010; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014), was struck by the methodological commitment to remaining relatively faithful to the "lived experiences" (Fotaki, 2013, p.1258) of managers, thus attending analytically to the need to display fidelity to local interpretations, seeking to empower research participants (Mishler, 1991) whilst also making a scientific contribution to the relevant "epistemic community" (Ybema et al., 2009, p.10). It was also helped by the knowledge that analyses would be openly shared with participants during the planned member review process. The "ethno-data" collected in this study was "oriented to representing the native participant's reality" (Stablein, 1999, p.265), making fidelity an epistemological principle. At member review, any potentially unwarranted abductions could be calibrated and kept "economical" (Mayo, 1996, p.433) via this shared interpretive act of "democratic co-operation" (Johnson and Duberley, 2003, p.1295) with research participants. Managers would play the role of 'ordinary theorists' (Calori, 2000) brought in to guide and enrich data analysis, just as they had done during data access and generation.

As already mentioned, interview transcripts, observational field notes, and reflexive memos were analysed using the same coding strategy (Saldana, 2014). This meant that codes could originate from any data set and subsequently be applied across them, as

relevant. This enabled an efficient and consistent analytic approach and, more importantly, it allowed discrete data sets to be interpreted as a holistic body of empirical evidence pertaining to the research question (Ollerenshaw and Cresswell, 2002; Packer, 2010), which is consistent with an abductive research strategy (Taylor et al., 2002). Regarding transcription, only question-relevant sections of the data were transcribed (Bryman and Bell, 2011), and interview data was manually transcribed. There is no scholarly consensus regarding transcription but instead, "considerable variety" in terms of approach (Roulston et al., 2003), and contesting arguments about how this should proceed (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Unless one is operating a socio-linguistic approach such as discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992), which requires a strictly systematic interview account (Hammersley, 2010), transcribing interviews in full is not mandatory. Gibbs (2007) says that analysing interviews directly from audio is a good way to keep focused on the wider semantic picture, a technique Alvesson (2011) refers to as keeping the "major content" in scope (p.59). Siding with this logic, field notes, interview and reflexive journal data were "thematically transcribed" Alvesson (2011, p.58) in order to capture only content relevant to the research question (for a similar analytical decision in a related study, see Barge, 2004).

Codes were applied manually; no software packages were utilised. Although they do offer advantages such as speed and co-ordination (Agar, 1991), the use of computer programmes is considered optional (McLellan et al., 2003; Saldana, 2009). In fact, these may detract researchers from full reflexive engagement with their data (Morison and Moir, 1998). Maintaining analytical intimacy with the data was primary so in keeping with the craftsman-like approach (Sennett, 2009) taken to the study overall, the decision was made to code and transcribe data manually. Like most coding strategies, the

approach adopted was bespoke (Saldana, 2014), with practical advice taken from sources like Emerson et al. (1995), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Saldana (2009). Initially a draft coding strategy was "experimented" with (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.65). This was tried out on six interviews (from three managers) and two sets of early field note and reflexive entry data (comprising over one hundred written-up A4 landscaped pages). A coding review was then conducted to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the process (Saldana, 2009).

Adjustments were made based on this review, mainly to do with ensuring codes accounted well enough for "what I saw and heard" in the field and during interviews (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.58) and that the procedure itself stuck "close to the data as originally recorded" Wolcott (1994, p.10), with minimal filtering in between (Saldana, 2009). As coding continued, a "coding manual" (Bryman, 2012, p.248; Mishler, 1991) or "codebook" (Saldana, 2009) was created so that codes developed during analysis they could be applied consistently across all data sets, and that afterwards a central documented record and repository existed for the perusal of all codes used in the study. Creating the codebook was an iterative process (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). It began as a nine page spreadsheet containing over one hundred codes. Eventually this was whittled down to a more manageable and analytically serviceable set of sixty codes which could be fitted onto one A3 sheet containing categorisations pertaining to descriptors and examples with location details referencing back to original data sources.

Member review

Given the social constructionist paradigm chosen and the nature of the research question itself, built into this research design was some sharing of interpretive duties with managers (Bishop, 2008). This was done in order to actually express the "methodological commitment to 'getting it right' from the perspective of situational actors' lived experiences" (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p.105). This procedure is variously referred to as member checking (Amis and Silk, 2008; Cunliffe, 2010; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009), respondent validation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) participant validation (Rossman and Rallis, 2012) or member review (Locke and Ramakrishna Velamuri, 2009). It involves a researcher presenting their analytic efforts to participants for review and evaluation, even critique and argument (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). Member checking is not necessarily about trying to ensure the accuracy or correspondence quality of data findings (Cunliffe, 2010). Nor does it seek to mirror the "the journalistic practice of 'fact' or 'quote-checking'" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009, p.62). This would make it look like a realist sifting for 'true' meaning which is not required in an interpretivist design (Blaikie, 2007), where the pursuit of this kind of representationalist closure is viewed as futile (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Rather, the purpose of member review is to evaluate nascent analyses or "propositions" (Vince, 2004, p.66) with research participants as findings and theoretical ideas are fed back to them for review (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This can help strengthen a study's internal validity (Leitch et al., 2010); specifically, it can help to provide both interpretive and theoretical validity (Maxwell, 1992) as participants are invited into a

dialogue about the interpretations made by the researcher, as well as the theory, or theories, which are being drawn from these.

Member review also enhances the credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Rossman and Rallis, 2012) and trustworthiness of the final written research account (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009). Another purpose is to reconnect with research participants who have already co-constructed meaning collaboratively with the researcher during interviews conceived and carried out as intersubjective conversational exchanges (Bishop, 2008; Kvale, 1983; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Packer, 2010; Shotter, 2010). In this sense the "give-and-take of talk" (Mishler, 1991, p.x) principle operated during interviews, extends interpretively into the analysis of these interactions. This makes member checking an ethical as much as analytical research step (Alvesson, 2011; Cho and Trent, 2006; Locke and Ramakrishna Velamuri, 2009) where a researcher seeks to continually learn from research participants and tangibly enact the reflexive acknowledgement that people "are inviting us to view the world we share with them" (Packer, 2010, p.119).

Member review worked as follows. After the second interview, when the relevant analysis was undertaken and could thus be displayed to the individual involved, participants were invited by e-mail to an hour-long member review consultation (Appendix D). A copy of the analysed interviews was brought along to the review. I also took my field note journal so I could write up the interaction both during and after it took place. An informal introduction was given at the start of each session which covered two things: first, the ethical parameters of the study (see below) were restated;

then, the purpose of the member review was explained. After this, using the analytical materials as a guide, participants were walked through the nascent analyses.

As these were presented managers were asked to provide input. They were actively encouraged to challenge, disagree, or ask for textual evidence to support findings. The extent to which they engaged with actual co-analysis at this step varied. Some were highly engaged and took the invitation to probe and question wholeheartedly. Even if interpretations remained relatively unchanged, they did become more nuanced rather than transformed by this process. Others were less interpretively engaged and more interested in listening to what I thought. Here, it was more typical that affirmations were received regarding the interpretations presented, and the conversation centred more on elaborating existing inputs, sometimes with fresh examples being provided.

Overall during member review, participants seemed to appreciate being kept involved in the study. All were genuinely interested in the findings, and said as much. From a reflexive standpoint, member review helped me to "minimise [the] power imbalance" between myself and participants, whether arising from hierarchical considerations, or from the fact that I would ultimately have editorial control over the final written research account (Costley et al., 2010). Whilst the member reviews took some time to complete and added to an already heavy analytical workload, they were a vitally important means of enacting the co-constructed character of this study (Mishler, 1991; Packer, 2010) and of operating the reflexive and transparent quality intended by the research design (Kvale, 1988; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009). This commitment to a reflexive research approach (Cunliffe, 2003) went beyond an individualistic

understanding of this idea, into the expression of a "relationally reflexive research practice" (Hibbert et al., 2014, p.283) which provided epistemological benefits, and also afforded the practical opportunity to reinforce my ongoing responsibility to monitoring ethical themes such as consent and anonymity (Tilley and Gormley, 2007) as the project progressed. Thus, member reviews were also a key part of the wider ethical component of this study, which is discussed next.

Ethical considerations

Ethical concerns are integral to any research endeavour (Bryman, 2012; Cresswell, 2014). They are perhaps especially relevant to those studying their own organisations because, as Young (1991) says, "the 'insider' has no means of retreating across some geographic boundary, or vanishing…back into academia" (p.8). The insider does not exit fieldwork in the way outsiders do (Michailova et al., 2013); they will still be part of the organisation when the research has ended and any potential risks involved with this, for all concerned, must necessarily factor into their thinking (Labaree, 2002).

Ethical tensions appear in all research projects (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) but insiders must reflect on them with extra diligence (Costley et al., 2010). These types of studies can be more "conflict-ridden" (Tietze, 2012, p.54). To play down such tensions would work against the credibility and trustworthiness of the research account (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009). Just as every research context is different and has its own "quirks, tricks [and] surprises" (Fine, 1996, p.233), the ethical dimensions involved will also be relatively idiosyncratic (Thorpe, 2014).

In practice, ethical issues are rarely straightforward but instead are "complex and nuanced" (Pritchard, 2002, p.8) with "several areas of grey involved" (Burgess, 1984, p.200). In this context, my position as an insider in Worldlife and further, as a HRD manager with hierarchical seniority over some research participants, has to be reflexively acknowledged (Tietze, 2012). Although there are no universally right answers when it comes to research ethics (Burgess, 1984), and perhaps when it comes to insider stances in particular (Taylor, 2011), the ways in which ethical issues were perceived and handled, needs to be addressed as transparently as possible (Case, 2003; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). This is what is attempted in this section.

According to Nind et al. (2013), research ethics is ultimately about reflexivity; "ethical reflexivity", Bell and Thorpe (2013) write, goes "to the heart of what it means to be a management researcher" (p.95). Reflexivity can be challenging for an insider (Leigh, 2014). It is fraught with dilemmas (Mercer, 2007) arising from the potentially conflictual character of the positionality involved (Turgo, 2012). Some of these dilemmas include: how to be critical where this is warranted, but be so without endangering anyone involved or putting the organisation itself at risk? And how to preserve anonymity and confidentiality when the research is insider-led and the chances may be higher that the company and informants themselves could potentially be more easily identifiable (Costley et al., 2010)? To help handle such issues, consent was secured using a specific template form: one version for the organisation (Appendix E) another for the individuals involved (Appendix F). In line with the relevant guidelines and formal criteria, institutional approval for the study was also sought, and granted, from the research ethics committee of the awarding university. Before enlisting participants, consent was first sought and secured at the organisational level. This was

granted through Worldlife's HR Director. The research was explained to this person. The purpose of the study and the features of the research design were presented, and the consent form was discussed. What it contained and why, and how consent would operate throughout the study, was explained. Consent as an ongoing rather than a once-off affair was stressed by the researcher who explained how this would work in practice. Also discussed was how consent would be sought from the managers involved and how they, along with the organisation, would be protected. It was emphasised that the main concern was to ensure that Worldlife and the participants taking part in the study would not be harmed in any way by the research. Anonymity and confidentiality were explained, and how these would be safeguarded using techniques such as pseudonyms, composite character portrayal (Watson, 1994a) and gender disguising (Edwards, 2002).

Participant consent worked slightly differently. In terms of taking field notes during the RMP, at the briefings conducted one week prior to each programme, everyone attending was informed that this would be done as part of a research study attached to the intervention. It was also explained that organisational consent had been granted and groups were assured that any field notes which made their way into the thesis text would be properly anonymised and confidentiality provided. On the first morning of each RMP programme itself, this ethical declaration was restated and the group were again asked for their general consent in this regard. After some general queries about how anonymity and confidentiality would operate, consent was granted at each juncture. From time to time, field notes were even read out to groups during the programmes as they were being 'jotted' down (Emerson et al., 1995).

This was done either to clarify something someone had said, or to make potentially useful and immediate learning connections during a reflexive group discussion, in the process demonstrating the transparency of the research approach to managers. That this was an accepted practice also speaks positively to the way in which consent was perceived and operated with the managers involved, demonstrating the general "climate of trust" (Israel, 2015, p.2) which existed around the study. As already mentioned above, the majority of participants were enlisted after their respective RMP programmes and five volunteered after an RMP briefing. When a manager agreed to be interviewed after the first informal contact, a second more formal template communication was e-mailed. This second communication contained the participant consent form so they could familiarise themselves with this document. At the interview itself, I produced two hard copies of this form. There, I explained consent in person and asked the individual again if they were still happy to go ahead. When they agreed, two copies of the consent form were signed: one for them, the other for my own records. At the start of the second interview with participants, to demonstrate that consent was an ongoing responsibility throughout the study (Tilley and Gormley, 2007) the consent agreement was restated there. Finally, participants were offered copies of the transcribed interviews and/or a digital copy of our conversations. Nobody availed of these options.

Given my hierarchical position in Worldlife I was conscious of the need to try to recognise any potentially interfering power dynamics present when interviewing participants (Alvesson et al., 2008). I acknowledged this with interviewees, openly admitting that I was an "implicated participant" (Hardy and Clegg, 1999, p.383) in the study who 'outranked' some of them. Disclosing this at least served to place the topic between us so it could then be reflexively handled. Where hierarchical differences

existed, interviewees were asked to try their best to set these aside and to talk freely and answer questions as frankly as they could. This was how any risk of dominance arising from asymmetrical hierarchical positions was handled (Kvale, 2006). The potential danger being guarded against was that managers more junior to the researcher might be evasive or choose to dilute their responses, telling only part of what they thought, or possibly even prevaricating when it came to issues which may be perceived as too risqué to discuss. Although it is impossible to tell for certain whether this did or did not occur, it certainly didn't seem as though interviewees were being particularly evasive or disingenuous during interviews: in fact, if anything the opposite ensued. Such was the trust they displayed, managers often provided data that could not be used simply because it was too sensitive; the only ethical choice available then was to leave it out of the study altogether (McLellan et al., 2003), going "beyond anonymity" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, p.149) by removing details that could have compromised the individuals involved, or Worldlife itself, in negative and potentially harmful ways.

Fortunately, the vast majority of this type of data (of which there was little to begin with) had little or no significant bearing on the research question so consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that no real theoretical loss was suffered. It is only mentioned here in order to make the point that if managers were willing to disclose in this way, and volunteer of their own volition data on sensitive topics, it seems reasonable to assume that they were being honest during interviews. As an insider I felt I had the trust of participants: as Evans-Pritchard (1976) says, "why should anyone lie to you when there is trust between you? And if there is not, you might as well go home" (p.247). Based on my experiences in this study, I believe that despite the real difficulties involved, Edwards (2002) may be right when he suggests that insider approaches are

more "charade-proof" (p.74) than other forms of research. Both sides seem less likely to prevaricate or to gloss over questions and responses because of the "rich shared history" (Edwards, 2002, p.73) and 'local knowledge' (Geertz, 1993) they have in common. Whilst this undoubtedly opens up new epistemological and ethical challenges, it would simultaneously seem to practically preclude any undue levels of disingenuousness which would be all-too easily identified as such by those involved. Perhaps demonstrating this, on many occasions during an interview a manager would pause prior to revealing something they perceived to be sensitive or controversial, saying to the researcher: "This *is* confidential, right?" To which I always replied "Yes, yes it is".

This chapter has outlined the methodology of this study, the choices which informed it and the mechanics of how this design was operated. The next chapter foregrounds the main theoretical contribution of this thesis, constructed mainly from the methodology described above: the theory of RML as a 'reflexive space of appearance'.

CHAPTER 3   RML AS A REFLEXIVE SPACE OF APPEARANCE

This chapter[4] is conceptual. It presents a new theoretical framework for RML called the 'reflexive space of appearance' (mainly referred to hereafter as RSOA). This framework constitutes the central original theoretical contribution of this thesis. Although this theory was constructed following the analysis of empirical material, it is foregrounded here in order to set up the three empirical chapters which follow. The reasons for this decision are provided below. The chapter is structured as follows. First, how the theory was crafted (Watson, 1994b) is discussed. This is done because reflexive research requires transparency about how a theory was developed (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007); how the researcher's own intellectual and interpretive predilections came into play (Watson, 1994b) and were disciplined (Weick, 1999) during this stage must be outlined. This is not always made transparent by researchers (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) but to paraphrase Watson (1994a), revealing one's methodological hand in this way enhances the trustworthiness of an interpretivist research account (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009), which is the aim of this section.

After this, as the theory is a new spatial conceptualisation of RML, to frame it within its proper context a section suggesting the interconnected ideas of space, place and RML is provided. Next, as the theory borrows from the work of political theorist Hannah Arendt, a section is devoted to introducing her work and describing its relevance and fitness for use here. Specifically, Arendt's theory of the public realm (Arendt, 1998) is unpacked as this served as the theoretical inspiration for the RSOA concept.

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[4] A version of this chapter has previously been published in *Human Resource Development International* (Cotter, 2013).

In both of these sections, following Taylor and Spicer (2007), the target literature of this thesis is sometimes left temporarily in order to draw from other "social science analyses notionally 'outside' the field" (p.326). This is done in order to facilitate reflexive and imaginative thinking about the topic under study (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2014; Weick, 1999). Finally, with this backdrop sufficiently sketched, the framework itself is proposed. Previewing how it will be used in the coming chapters to illuminate empirical material, three sections are dedicated to explaining each of the three dimensions, or aspects, of the RSOA model. The chapter closes with a summary which segues into the aforementioned empirical parts of this thesis.

Crafting the RSOA framework

According to Mills (2000), theorising is "part of the practice of a craft" (p.224). In this spirit – matching the craftsman-like approach (Sennett, 2009) adopted for this study as a whole (Bell and Thorpe, 2013; Cunliffe, 2010; Prasad, 2005; Watson, 1994b) – this section outlines the approach taken to the construction of the RSOA framework. The theory generated from this study flowed from the abductive research paradigm chosen (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). This meant that the process of theorising (Weick, 1995) was a recursive one which moved back and forth between empirical and theoretical material (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). On the one hand, then, theory construction was empirically based. On the other it was theoretically attentive; informed by the target RML literature and creatively inspired by a pre-existing theoretical idea borrowed and blended from another field because of its conceptual resonance with both the topic itself and the empirical phenomena under study (Oswick et al., 2011).

The conscious process of theory construction proper began as the main phase of data analysis (as described in the previous chapter) neared completion. This is important to note: as referred to in the introductory chapter, the framework was not chosen or constructed in advance of the study, to be used in order to gather and analyse data, for example, in the way Ravitch and Riggan (2012) discuss. Rather it is the abductively created (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) theoretical result of this study. This is the reason why the framework is presented here before rather than after the empirical chapters to follow. It is hoped that by choosing this particular "emplotment" strategy (Czarniawska, 2004, p.124) two argumentative benefits may be realised: first, the framework will be brought to life and understood 'in-action' using empirical data which can provide evidential warrant for its utility (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2010; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014; Watson, 1994b); second, the empirical data which helped to create the theory will be illuminated reflexively in the light of this theory itself.

Although the process of theory construction cannot be codified as such (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) the practical steps taken to build the RSOA framework can be outlined. The Worldlife RMP was about many things and multiple interpretations or "semiotic operations" (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014, p.32) were possible from the wealth of data generated. But as the focused data analysis phase of this research closed out, three overarching themes took form and seemed to compel how theorising would proceed. These were: openness, difference, and action. Whilst these themes were checked, calibrated and refined by multiple re-readings of the data and the analyses attached to them, my parallel reading of Hannah Arendt provided an important "trans-disciplinary perspective" (Cornelissen and Durand, 2014, p.1018) which stimulated the creativity (Mintzberg, 2007), or "disciplined imagination" Weick (1989) required for

theory generation. Being disciplined (Weick, 1989) and reflexive (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009) at this stage refers to the need to stay close to the phenomena being theorised whilst trying to stimulate creative tension between data and the ideation process. As Gordon (1993) says, data never speak for themselves but must be made to "work together" with theory (p.627) - "the two *inter*act" (Merton, 1948, emphasis in the original). Or rather they are brought into interaction by the researcher, thus the crafting process Watson (1994b) speaks of which involves "imagination, flair, creativity and an aesthetic sense" (p.S78). Being disciplined also means that whilst abduction involves an imaginative reading of empirical material, it is not the case that 'anything goes': theorising is necessarily constrained by what can plausibly be interpreted from and subsequently said about the data being worked with (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). This plausibility will be argued for in upcoming empirical chapters, as the RSOA theorisation is substantiated by interview, reflexive journal, and field note excerpts (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014).

As already mentioned, my parallel reading of Hannah Arendt alongside the RML literature and analyses of empirical material, inspired what ultimately became the RSOA framework. The threefold dynamic involved was that, first and foremost, data left strong and distinct "empirical impressions" (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, p.1269) which both resisted and afforded certain avenues of interpretation (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) and thus, theorisation (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2010; Weick, 1995). These were then used to question and problematise (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011) the extant literature on RML which I took to be 'talking back' to the data, working in conversation (Huff, 1999) with the relevant scholarly community in an effort to

dialectically progress (Vermeulen, 2005) RML theory. Finally, as initial impressions were recursively moulded by both these steps – which consisted of reading and re-reading material, thinking, writing notes and "engaging in mind games" (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2010, p.28) - they were also further fashioned by my reading of Arendt.

I started reading Arendt's work during the closing stages of data analysis. In fact, all interviews and practically all relevant field notes were analysed by the time I became interested in and started to study Arendt's writings. Discovering Arendt proved to be a theoretically serendipitous (Merton, 1948) find; a fortunate "accidental factor" (Merton and Barber, 2004, p.20) which immediately resonated with the meta-themes referred to above as Arendt's theoretical ideas of disclosing, plurality and natality matched respectively the three meta-themes of openness, difference and action developed during data analysis. Realising this link sparked and enabled a new line of theorising which could now profitably extend from the 'abductive moment' of this study. This refers to the fact that abductive reasoning, and thus abductive analysis, is predicted on "surprising observations" (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014, p.19) the reasons for which are then guessed at by the researcher (Walton, 2005), leading to an original conceptualisation which can help to describe, understand and explain the phenomena observed.

In the case of this study the abductive moment can be characterised as follows: grounded in the research question, the surprising observation was that Worldlife managers responded in both strikingly similar and often strikingly divergent ways to the RMP. The 'breakdown' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007) represented by this observation

was the paradox involved – how could reflexive learning mean both the same and different things simultaneously for participating managers? Neither did this contradictory observation chime so well with much of the normative literature on RML in which managers were supposed (in theory) to be more or less aligned solidaristically through RML, especially, but not exclusively, RML in its more collectivist and critical forms.

The "abductive move" (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014, p.63) then made was to state the problem differently: what ties divergent interpretations of the RMP together, making it a similar experience for those attending? The final part of the abduction – motivated by my reading of Arendt and by the literature on RML; in particular two important articles dealing with the idea of space and management learning generally, namely Antonacopoulou (2002) and (Vince, 2011) - was to propose that if RML was conceived of as a neutral but reflexive space, then convergent and divergent experiences and interpretations could co-exist, indeed, they would be made possible by how this space was now constituted and characterised. In short, if RML was theorised as a shared and common learning space of potential and possibility Antonacopoulou (2002), yet one which was populated by different, in fact unique individuals – a fact which this space could cope with without losing this sense of commonality and togetherness - it would be one plausible way of understanding and explaining the similarities and differences articulated throughout all of the empirical material which showed up and culminated in the overarching themes mentioned; themes resonant with Arendtian ideas which they could then be theoretically "blended" with (Oswick et al., 2011).

Working through various permutations of this abduction and proceeding through numerous iterative formulations of the model it suggested, finding a mass of supporting material in the data and analyses previously performed, eventually a final version was settled on: the RSOA framework presented and discussed below.

It is important to note that this process included a step where rival explanations for phenomena (Miles and Huberman, 1994) were created and considered. Accepting that multiple interpretations of the data were possible (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) made this step a reflexive research responsibility (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). For example, at one stage an alternative Foucauldian 'reflexive powers' model of RML was worked up in order to ask reflexively "can I construct/make sense of this material in another way?" (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, p.1270). This was later discarded as it seemed to shoehorn data too egregiously into shape in a way which the more amenable and apposite Arendtian mould did not. Put differently, the rival Foucauldian model felt like a grafting manoeuvre, the Arendtian approach more a crafting one which is more desirable (Oswick et al., 2011). Demonstrating the relationally reflexive approach taken to theorising (Hibbert et al., 2014), and taking managers' "active role as contributors to the theorising process" (Michailova et al., 2013, p.145) seriously, the iterations of the framework referred to above were presented to them during the member review process described in the previous chapter. The iterative (Mintzberg, 2007; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) and reflexive process of theory construction (Weick, 1999) followed in this thesis and explained in outline above, is represented in its most basic schematic form below in Figure 1.0:
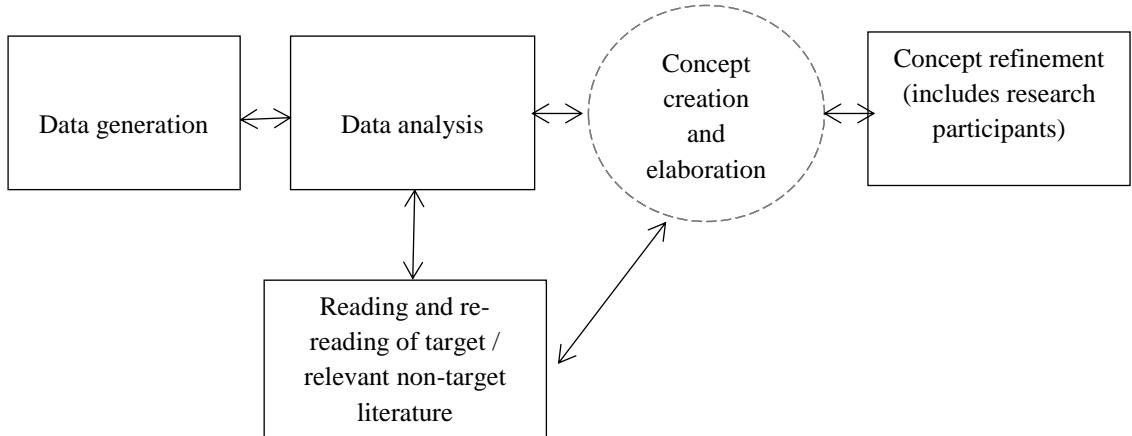
Figure 1.0 Crafting the RSOA framework

"Theory generation is the qualitative creation of new theory which results in testable research propositions" say Bluhm et al. (2011, p.1870). Following on from this point, the RSOA could conceivably be applied in other empirical studies either (or potentially both) as a conceptual framework, this time within which to generate and analyse data on RML, or as a practical approach to the design and operation of other workplace RML programmes. I return to this topic in chapter seven, in the section on future research avenues. Next, before being explicated, the framework itself is contextualised by a discussion on the general links between spatial and platial concepts and RML.

Thinking space, place and RML

There are many ways to conceptualise space (Hubbard et al., 2004b); "space means very different things" (Crang and Thrift, 2000, p.2). In this thesis, it is meant less in any strictly physical sense and more in terms of how it helps to generate social phenomena and how space itself is relationally brought into being (Hubbard et al., 2004b).

98

Following Thrift (2009), this thesis utilises a relational idea of space "as undergoing continual construction as a result of the agency of things encountering each other in more or less organised circulations" (p.86). This includes how spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) help to construct identities (Dale and Burrell, 2008), or map subjectivities (Pile and Thrift, 1995) in ways which are affected by the places, or organisational contexts in which these spaces appear and are facilitated.

This is not to deny the importance of "concrete spatial and material reality" (Clegg and Kornberger, 2006, p.9) which plays an important agential role in social situations (Hall, 1990; Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986; Van Marrewijk, 2009) and which can have important, and innovative learning implications (Lancione and Clegg, 2014). Space signals meaning (Yanow, 2006a). For example, in the way seating might be arranged for learning programmes (Vince, 2011); how the architecture of work spaces is designed to achieve certain psychological effects (Augustin, 2009); or how, seen through the lens of actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), buildings can be thought of as "active participants" in social contexts (Gastelaars, 2010). But space is "invention" as well as "inventory" (Perec, 1999, p.13). Organisations are complex conceptual as well as material spaces (Axelrod and Cohen, 2000) and the same is true of management learning spaces (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). To account for this, whilst space is recognised materially, it is mainly treated here as an immaterial (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012), abstract (Cresswell, 2004), embodied (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Thrift, 1996) and experiential idea (Tuan, 2011) which, nonetheless, is not mere "ideological meditation" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.40). Thus, the potentialities and "multiple connections and possibilities" (Antonacopoulou, 2002, p.8) of space are accentuated rather than its materiality, as such.

Place is also a relevant concept. For Cresswell (2004), place is space made familiar or meaningful by people - space is "turned into place" (p.2). Place is conceptually distinct from space, yet how this distinction is theoretically specified is disputed (Hubbard et al., 2004a). Sometimes place and space are used synonymously (for example Brown and Humphreys, 2006); place "can be thought of as a shared space" (Nonaka and Konno, 1998, p.40). In practice, managers themselves may not perceive them differently (Ford and Harding, 2004). To handle this diversity scholars have created "umbrella concepts" such as "organisational spaces" in order to house space, place and other related terms under a common terminological banner (Taylor and Spicer, 2007, p.326). Place, however, is generally thought of as more particular and bounded than space (Casey, 1997). It is ontologically prior to place. As Heidegger (1993) said, space is "always provided for already within the stay of mortals" (p.351); "before space there is no retreat to something else" (Heidegger, 1973, p.4). For Heidegger, space is "something that has been freed…within a boundary" (Elden, 2001, p.89), more a "process of emergence" than production, as conceptualised from Lefebvre's Marxist perspective (Lefebvre, 1991, p.122). Place can refer to a boundary then, and in the present study this will mean a specific organisational context and its "multiple nature" (Halford and Leonard, 2006, p.660).

Place is more everyday (Lefebvre, 1991) and so, less abstract than space though still entwined with it (Dale and Burrell, 2008). But as usual dualisms are misleading. The meaning of space and place "merges" and "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan, 2011, p.6). Accordingly, this thesis argues that RML is *simultaneously both a space and a place*, referring respectively to the abstract and actual dimensions of RML as a particular kind

of politically situated (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, Vince, 2011) learning space (Antonacopoulou, 2002); specifically, an ephemeral and ideational reflexive space of appearance, but one which happens in real work places (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986); a contextual fact which will inevitably supply contingencies affecting its operation (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Boud, 2010; Vince, 2011). But these locations, which are paradoxically both restrictive and supportive (Vince, 2011), can also hold hidden promise as expandable agential arenas (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997) like RML allow managers to contribute in more reflexively productive ways to organisational life (Cressey et al., 2006). Therefore, bringing the concepts of space and place together in the way Dale and Burrell (2008) recommend, "without the sharp dichotomy between them" (p.6) is expedient, and in this thesis they are handled as concepts which although they "require each other for definition" (Tuan, 2011, p.6), may be prised apart when theoretically necessary (Unwin, 2000).

Time too is inextricably bound together with space (Schatzki, 2010; Unwin, 2000). Space can hardly be thought about "shorn of its relation to time" (Crang and Thrift, 2000, p.1). The temporal aspects of reflexivity (Aboulafia, 1986; Sandywell, 2005) are such that time necessarily forms part of the spatial theoretical framework for RML which is the focus of this chapter. The importance of time has already been recognised in the typology of RML offered in chapter one which theorises RML in its 'decelerative-latitudinal' form, thus acknowledging how "time and reflexivity are connnected" (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002, p.857). It is also implied methodologically in chapter two where the intention to study RML as a process using an ethnographic approach, recognises time as an important concern (Langley and Tsoukas, 2012).

The conceptual and practical implications for RML arising from the spatial and "platial" (Elden, 2000, p.412) connections made above are potentially significant. They have not yet been fully explored empirically, leading scholars like Docherty et al. (2006) to remark that "we need new ways of theorising spaces for reflection" (p.203). If the spatial ordering of organisational contexts constitutes historically prefigured and prefiguring "regimes of subjection" which inscribe the "possibilities of agency" (Sandywell, 2005, p.277), RML could be imagined (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007) as a metaphorical skeleton key which might unlock this understanding for any manager sufficiently motivated to think beyond their current reflexive horizon (Antonacopoulou, 2004a). This need not be labelled 'emancipatory' as critical RML scholars would have it (for example Raelin, 2008a; Welsh and Dehler, 2004), but can be seen instead as a form of constructive and creative escapism (Tuan, 1998) encouraged by a view of RML as a "heterotopic" (Beyes and Michels, 2011, p.521) space of experimentation (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013; Nicolini et al., 2004) where "new emotions [and] different attitudes and perceptions about the self and the learning process" (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.61) are encountered, and "new possibilities for action" created (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004, p.41).

This is the potential promise of a spatial theory of RML – that it will allow "fresh actions to occur" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.73), although these will be shaped by a host of contextual factors which must be taken into account (Boud, 2010; Seibert and Daudelin, 1999; Vince and Reynolds, 2009). As Frost (2010) says, RML does not occur in a "social vacuum [and] it is a mistake if reflection overemphasises the *free space* available for human choice and agency" (p.23, emphasis added). Antonacopoulou (2004a) makes a similar point:

"…reflexivity is not simply a matter of personal choice…it too is bounded by the context in which it takes place. [This] contextual specificity does not only colour the meanings of reflexivity. It also shapes whether and how individually and collectively people reflect on their practices and on their reflections"

(p.48)

Quotes like these point to the reason why RML is treated here as constituting both a space and a place simultaneously, following a general characterisation of place as the complex organisational contexts which managers' are reflexively embedded in (Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011) and which shape their ways of being in "everyday unreflexive" ways, and space as "potentiality (the way we could be)" (Hirsch, 1995). In theory this is not far from the way in which Maclean et al. (2012) theorise habitus and reflexivity: the former, as Bourdieu said "implies a sense of one's place" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.19) and is a mode of being – specifically a "scheme of perception, thought and action" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.14) - which is structurally inculcated but which crucially is also malleable and may be shaped in turn by reflexive agents who can reflexively make "room for manoeuvre" (Maclean et al., 2012, p.6) in the social settings they inhabit.

Space in general is an idea which organisation and management theory needs to rediscover (Clegg and Kornberger, 2006). It is a "key dynamic in understanding management and organisations" (Taylor and Spicer, 2007, p.341) which needs to be brought "back in" to theorising (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004, p.1095). In management

and organisational learning generally, space is not an uncommon trope, particularly in terms of references to the need to create space for learning to occur (for instance Raab, 1997; Raelin, 2008b) or that people themselves need space in which to learn (Argryis, 1999).

What this means, however, is not always spelled out in detail. What is required is to go beyond the relatively superficial use of spatial metaphors so that space and place may be thought of more deeply in ways which can exploit their theoretical potential for enabling more imaginative modes of management learning (Beyes and Michels, 2011). When space is treated as central and given comprehensive conceptual focus in the literature, thinking varies. Some stress the "psychodynamic" aspects of learning as a space, proposing how different spatial "juxtapositions" may help uncover the emotional and political dynamics of managing and organising (Vince, 2011, p.337). Others theorise space as the potentially harmonising, but challenging, experiential "interface" between individual learners, their learning styles, and the organisational environment in which learning occurs (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Beyes and Michels (2011), following Foucault (2008), propose an understanding of management learning as a "heterotopic space" where "critical practice and reflexivity" may prosper, although these will be plural and contradictory practices (p.522) because, as Rowe (2013) writes, "learning involves contrary spatial-temporal experiences" (p.1).

That a spatial understanding of learning involves difference and plurality is highlighted in Antonacopoulou's paper (2002) on "learning as *space*" (emphasis in the original). She promotes a more integrative "cosmological view" (p.14) of learning, one which

accentuates it's relational, emergent and "symplegmatic" (complex, intertwined) character; a term meant to signify the idea that "learning is 'lived' in action and forms the basis for action and it is abstract and specific at the same time, because of the multiple possibilities it entails" (p.10). This has affinities with Fulop and Rifkin's notion of learning spaces (1997) as deconstructive spaces of "difference and diversity, multiple meanings and multiple realities" (p.59) which are revealed via a reflexive process of "mutual self-disclosure" between managers (Fulop and Rifin, 1997, p.60). Both these papers touch on some of the central themes of RML and the ideas they contain are developed in the framework presented below.

Space is still a relatively "neglected aspect" (Antonacopoulou, 2002, p.2) within RML theory and despite some notable exceptions from the field of management and organisational learning generally (for example, Antonacopoulou, 2002; Fulop and Rifin, 1997; Nonaka and Konno, 1998; Rowe, 2013; Vince, 2011), RML has not yet been theorised using an explicitly spatial lens. Spatial metaphors may be common enough in the literature but they are not always fully expounded. RML has been theorised dramaturgically as an "aesthetic space" (literally a theatre stage) where practical reflexivity can "emerge" (Pässilä et al., 2015, p.14); or from a cognitive perspective – echoing Baars' global workspace theory of consciousness (1997), or, to provide an RML correlate, Xing and Sims' "inner theatre of the manager" (2012, p.15) – as a "mind space" in which agents can self-spectate and then make imaginative adjustments to their current modes of practice (Collier, 2010, p.149). It has also been referred to variously as a "safe place" (Lawless et al., 2011, p.333), "haven" (Nicolini et al., 2004, p.91) or "container" (Vince, 2002a, p.63) within which managers may critically reflect together. Reflexivity itself is sometimes given spatial overtones, as when Segal (2010)

refers to the reflexive "space of resolve" (p.388) managers may be led towards in times of crisis; a theme continued in Zundel (2013) who adds that our ability to reflect itself "has to be understood from inside our enmeshing with space and time" (p.117).

Having considered RML through the lens of space and place, it is now possible to rethink a troubling theoretical problem already previewed in chapter one: namely, the empirically under-theorised tension between RML as space of freedom and potentiality, and RML as occurring in organisational contexts (places) where this potential is inevitably challenged and constrained in various ways, but not necessarily extirpated (as shown, for example, by Nicolini et al., 2004). In abstract terms this is the problem of the tension between place as security and space as freedom (Tuan, 1979). In relation to RML, and again as suggested by chapter one, it derives from the general lack of understanding of how managers respond to and make meaning from RML in workplace contexts; thus this thesis' research question, which is premised on the assumption that if more was known about this, the problem may be alleviated by the provision of a new theory of RML which might cope better with this tension, providing a way to think beyond or around it. The RSOA framework represents one such theoretical attempt. Because it is inspired by Hannah Arendt's concept of the "public space of appearance" (Arendt, 1998, p.199), this is outlined briefly next.

Hannah Arendt's public space of appearance

Venturing into other disciplines for theoretical inspiration can provide fresh perspectives on a topic (Miles et al., 2014). Thinkers who are "notionally outside [ones chosen] field" (Taylor and Spicer, 2007, p.326) can serve as alternative sources of

wisdom (Wheelock and Callahan, 2006). Alvesson and Sandberg (2014) advise researchers to "borrow ideas" (p.984) from outside their discipline in order to challenge their field's assumptions and encourage conceptual innovation. Oswick et al. (2011) recommend that to aid theory development, researchers should not just borrow from, but blend with transdisciplinary sources. Taking such guidance at face value, the theoretical contribution made by this thesis is inspired by the work of political theorist Hannah Arendt, especially Arendt (1998).

With one notable exception, which concentrates on Arendt's theory of evil (Kerwin, 2012), Arendt is not often cited in management learning scholarship. When she is, it has been more in passing than in depth (for example, Carlsen and Sandelands, 2014; Tsivacou, 1997; Vince, 1991; Zundel, 2013). The main part of Arendt's work utilised in this thesis is her political "theory of action" (d'Entreves, 1994, p.84); namely, her conception of the "public space of appearance" (Arendt, 1998, p.199). This was chosen because it can challenge, but also has affinities with, theories of organised or public forms of RML (Raelin, 2001; Reynolds and Vince, 2004a; Vince, 2002a) important to this thesis. This aspect of Arendt's thought is also focused on because, as stated in the section on theory construction above, data on the phenomenon under study (a workplace RML programme) 'afforded' a theorisation (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) which blended with this idea (Oswick et al., 2011).

Arendt best expounded her idea of the public space of appearance in her 1958 book *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1998). She conceived it as a point-in-time political space with a distinctly relational geography (Jones, 2009). When we act in the public space of

appearance we act "into the web of human relationships", giving action a "revelatory character" which in turn allows narratives to be spun together, historicizing to occur, and ultimately "meaningfulness" to be co-constructed between interlocutors (Arendt, 1998, p.324). The public space of appearance is thus a stage (Villa, 1999) or a "scene of action and speech" (Arendt, 1998, p.204) where deeds can be performed and remembered thereafter. Remembering is vital: it provides the shared human world of action with the continuity it requires for stability and permanence, without which it would hardly be a human world at all. As Arendt writes:

> "The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfilment…the living activities of action, speech and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they had never been."

> (Arendt, 1998, p.95)

Arendt's reference to reification and remembrance here "implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the world" (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p.106). Remembering, then, represents an integral political act of collective reflexive agency undertaken by a "community of memory" (d'Entreves, 1994, p.80) in which each bears witness to the action of "one's peers" (Arendt, 1998, p.49). This relational dimension is crucial. It requires that participants in the public sphere "are *with* others and neither for

nor against them – that is, in sheer human togetherness" (Arendt, 1998, emphasis in the original). If this reflexive attitude of relative disinterestedness (Arendt, 2006, p.237) or "impersonal sociability" (Villa, 1999, p.154) is lacking, then the space cannot be not truly political but may settle more reductively at the solely adversarial level of "sheer ideological dogma" (Villa, 1999, p.126).

Arendt believed that it was only insofar as people came together in sight of one another to discourse and deliberate that they could be said to be free and be powerful – "to be free and to act are the same" (Arendt, 2006, p.151) - because these phenomena only exist (appear) when enacted between people: that is, they have a relational ontology. Like Foucault (1994), whose work in places aligns with Arendt's (Allen, 2002), power for her meant people acting together in concert. She rejected with Foucault any so-called property conceptions of power (Knights and Willmott, 1989) where power is seen as something possessed by individual power holders (Sturm and Antonakis, 2015). Power, she wrote:

"…corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."

(Arendt, 1972, p.143)

Here again is the emphasis on the ephemerality of the public space of appearance and the temporal nature of what is enacted within it. It is a space where human freedom and

power become manifest as action, but only exist for as long as they are enacted between people, and "no longer" (Arendt, 2006, p.151). The "space of appearance comes into being wherever men are gathered together in the manner of speech and action" but it disappears, along with the power it has generated, with their "dispersal" (Arendt, 1998, p.199). The public space of appearance, then, has a distinctly spatiotemporal (Schatzki, 2010), processual ontology (Whitehead, 1978); it only exists whenever and wherever it is. However, the deeds performed there can be remembered and kept alive by those who will speak of and 'story' them (d'Entreves, 1994) beyond the space itself.

What is the potential relevance of Arendt's public realm theory (Villa, 1992) to the theory and practice of RML in contemporary organisations? Aside from how the idea blended serendipitously (Merton and Barber, 2004) with the results of empirical data analysis, at least four overlapping points of affinity can be drawn with RML scholarship. First, its strong collective and participatory dimensions resonate with calls for RML thinking to turn away from individualistic characterisations of this learning approach (Raelin, 2001; Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds and Vince, 2004a; Vince and Reynolds, 2009; Welsh and Dehler, 2004); second, its strong spatial dimension (Allen, 2003; Liska, 2013) foregrounds this often neglected but important aspect of learning (Antonacopoulou, 2002; Fahy et al., 2014; Fulop and Rifin, 1997; Vince, 2011); third, because Arendt is regarded as a major contributor to theoretical debates on power (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009), her work can illuminate a much-needed perspective on this topic as it relates to RML. This relation of power and politics is of central significance to RML (Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Vince, 2004) and not just according to critical scholars (Boud et al., 2006b); fourth, and finally, Arendt's concept of the public space of appearance is premised on plurality and the complex recognition of difference

(d'Entreves, 1994). This speaks to the experience of those few researchers who have operated and researched RML in practice settings and found its operation to be pervaded by such challenges (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Brooks, 1999; Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Vince, 2004).

Now that it has been generally introduced, Arendt's work will be conceptually blended (Oswick et al., 2011) to help produce the RSOA theory. The sections which follow will perform this task. This is done by dividing and explaining Arendt's public space of appearance into its three "principal components [of] natality, plurality and disclosure" (d'Entreves, 1994, p.9). These components are matched with the three meta-themes developed from the data analysis phase of this study: action, difference, and openness, respectively. Synthesised with Arendt's thinking, these themes are reconfigured into the three dimensions of the RSOA: space of new beginnings, space of critique, and space of honesty. These dimensions intersect in complex ways, which, in line with how Arendt conceptualised action itself (Arendt, 1998), give rise to emergent and unpredictable properties matching the "emergent nature of learning" in organisations (Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer, 2013, p.5). When enacted together they form the conceptual framework proposed. Figure 2.0 below displays the RSOA theory in "symbolic" diagrammatic form (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2010, p.28). Underneath this, Table 4.0 shows the linkages between Arendtian themes, the analytical meta-themes developed from data analysis, the related RSOA aspect, and finally, the action enabled and expected within this spatial dimension. The next section explains each aspect of the RSOA in turn.
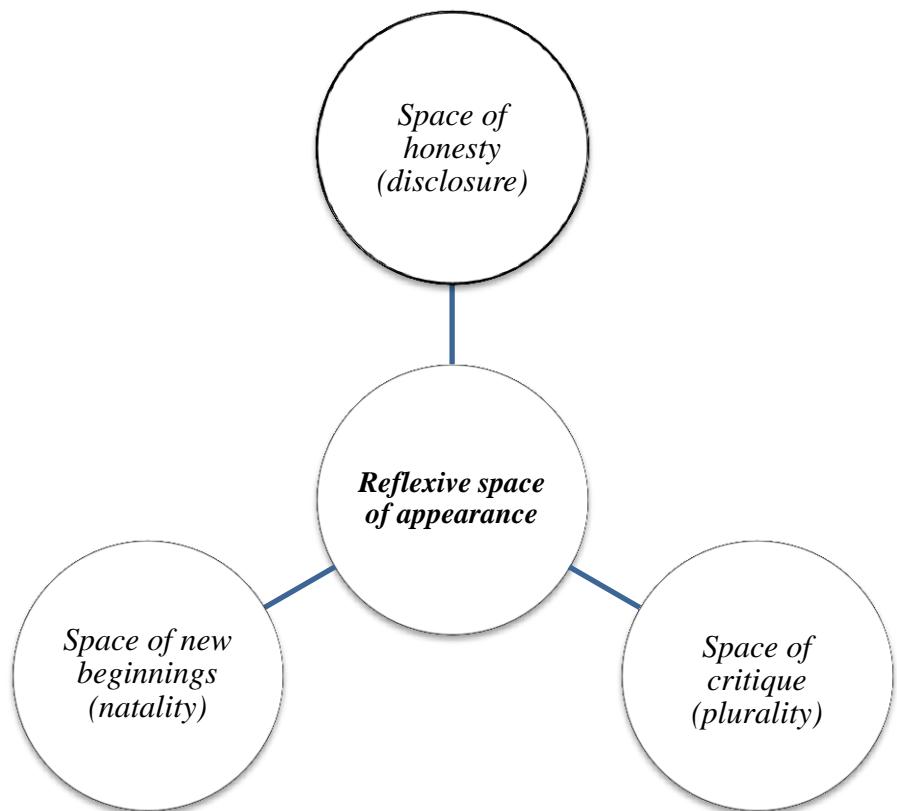
Figure 2.0 The Reflexive Space of Appearance framework

Arendtian theme	Analytical meta-theme	RSOA aspect	RML action
Disclosing	Openness	Space of honesty	Reflexive appearing
Plurality	Difference	Space of critique	Reflexive critiquing
Natality	Action	Space of new beginnings	Reflexive initiating

Table 4.0 Linking Arendtian and analytical themes

The space of honesty

This aspect of the RSOA is linked to Arendt's notion of disclosing (Arendt, 1998). RML is theorised as a reflexive space of honesty where managers disclose *who* rather than what they are, and have this witnessed by others. The who/what distinction is one which distinguishes between the "unique personal identities" revealed through action (as words and deeds) in a public space, rather than any pre-existing "…qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings" which managers may possess in common as human beings (Arendt, 1998, p.179; Williams, 2014). Disclosing in the context of RML means the way in which managers 'show up' or reflexively appear in such a learning space; how they will "be seen, appear, and be recognised" (Taminiaux, 1997, p.83) by others in order to make RML a space of praxis (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Raelin, 2006) where organisational and individual learning can conjoin and potentially "push the boundaries of institutionalised assumptions and practices beyond the current reality" (Antonacopoulou, 2002, p.13).

Disclosing requires courage (Fuss, 1979) and honesty as a form of integrity with oneself and others (Noelliste, 2013). This entails a critical self-reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2004; 2002) performed in the public presence of one's peers (Sennett, 2003; Villa, 1999) and facilitated by the building of trust in a group (Arendt, 2013; Vince, 2004). Trust, however, is a complex human interaction (Skinner et al., 2014) which cannot be assumed a priori but is instead "built over time" (Boud, 2010, p.36). Whether trust features during RML depends to an important extent on the willingness of the facilitator to also reflexively act into RML as part of a "polyphonic community" (Ramsey, 2005, p.229).

By disclosing who they are too, and by engaging sensitively with learners, facilitators open up the possibility that their own taken-for-granted assumptions will also be subject to critical reflection (Currie and Knights, 2003). Disclosing is acting and as such it is an uncertain, relatively risk-laden "venture" in which "one exposes oneself to the light of the public, as a person" (Arendt, 2013, p.37). Just as risk is immanent in all human action (Arendt, 1998), disclosing is uncertain – it entails vulnerability and leaves the actor open to potential manipulation (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004). Vince (2004) makes the point unambiguously: "creating learning spaces means running risks" (p.148).

Disclosing in the space of honesty does not mean managers being authentic as in theories of authentic leadership development which would privilege the enhancing of "self-awareness" as the focal point of learning interventions (Avolio and Gardner, 2005, p.334). Nor does it refer primarily to individual displays of "self-exposure" (Berkovich, 2014, p.252) or "transparency" by managers "who are [thus being] true to themselves" in the sense meant by Sparrowe (2005, p.420), or Groysberg and Slind (2012) who recommend that managers reveal their "true, unadorned face" (p.112) to subordinates. Like Ford and Harding (2011), but for different reasons, Arendt would reject any expressivist notions of leadership and leadership development (Cullen, 2009). Thus disclosing in the sense meant here does not seek to "engage expressive ways of knowing the classroom" (Taylor, 2009, p.11), nor does its main purpose reside in "releasing people to achieve their highest level of self-expression and personal freedom" (Raelin, 2012, p.18). Any talk of the "externalisation of an inner potential" (Villa, 1999, p.140) is tempered in order that RML be sufficiently praxical and politically reflexive; that is, so that it may be concerned less with any supposedly 'true'

character behind a manager's acts (George and Sims, 2007; Raelin, 2006) and more concerned with the acts themselves and what these actually disclose in the eyes of others about the one who speaks and acts (Villa, 1999). Self-identity in the RSOA theory of RML is "attained through action" (Honig, 1988, p.83). On such a practice model of action leaders "*are* their leadership" (Antonacopoulou, 2012, p.50, emphasis in the original) and it is "the relation of acts, not the persons assumed to be making the acts" (Ramsey, 2005, p.223) which is pivotal. The point is that disclosing is more about praxis (doing, or acting) than poiesis (making). This type of reflexive learning is triggered by acting out towards and with others (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), supported by an open-minded, dialogical attitude comprised of the "willingness to listen to multiple points of view about a given subject" (Berkovich, 2014, p.252).

In the space of honesty a managers reflexive self is not, contrary to contributions such as Eriksen (2009), something to be achieved or self-authored; rather it is the enactment of a more public, intersubjective self (Mead, 1977) which aligns with the 'social complexity' (Antonacopoulou, 2006b) of RML in organisations and posits learning "engagement as an active process of collaboration between agents" (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007, p.288). Action in Arendt's theory is always, and only, something done *with* others. This gives it its distinctly political meaning; an enlarged meaning which recognises the potential for politics to be a productive and not only a negative organisational force (Jones, 1987), which is often how theorists conceive it (Hochwarter and Thompson, 2010) and how managers themselves may also primarily perceive it (Buchanan, 2008). But RML, once it is adequately conceived, can be treated as a politically constructive learning approach, in the way Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) suggest. Thus disclosing in the space of honesty is theorised as a collective, political

process which honours the direction in which many RML scholars would steer new conceptualisations (for example, Vince and Reynolds, 2009). The politically reflexive idea of RML proposed here, does not seek to make or mould managers into certain ways of being - critical, productive or otherwise. Nor does it posit them (tacitly or explicitly) as persons in need of 'transformation' via critical reflection (as in, Cranton, 2002; Sambrook and Willmott, 2014). Although at some level disclosing during RML may involve the open assertion of one's "assumptions, thoughts and feelings" and managers, as Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004, p.41) point out, must be willing to do this. The honesty enacted in the space of honesty, however, is not of any therapeutic (Swan and Bailey, 2004) or narcissistic kind which would reduce to "the quality of confession" (Lasch, 1991, p.28). Rather it would seek to sublimate any such "quest for individual authenticity to the quest for collective autonomy" (Spicer, 2011, p.61). Thus it is concerned more with practicing the kind of impersonal "sincerity" Raelin (2003) proposes when he emphasises the need for leaders to learn to:

"…display an unguarded sense of identity that has no hidden motives or intent...[to] display caring toward people and to the community as a whole, often relegating their self-interest as second to the needs of the whole."

(p.230)

The Arendtian meaning of honesty in the reflexive space of appearance reaches back to the word's etymological root as 'honour received from others' (Lobis, 2007). Disclosing in the space of honesty reveals a 'who' that is ultimately judged by and "visible only" to

others (Arendt, 1998, p.180). It is not so much that a manager's sense of individuality is discarded – made 'abject', as in Ford and Harding's concern (2011) - in a collective realm, but more a necessary relational and political distinction is made between a manager's private and public self (Sennett, 2003); a distinction that is not deceptive or hypocritical, but which focuses attention away from personality per se and onto actual "words and deeds" (Villa, 1999, p.8) performed in a public space with others who can witness and thus narrate them. Honesty in this sense discloses "the agent together with the act" (Arendt, 1998, p.180) and this allows a far more politically accountable version of "public power" (Arendt, 1990, p.245) to be enacted during RML, in the manner in which many RML theorists, such as Vince and Reynolds (2009) call for, and in a way which theorises RML itself as a more politically potent learning activity (Antonacopoulou, 2006b; 1999a; Coopey, 1995; Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000; Vince and Martin, 1993).

The space of critique

This aspect of RML as reflexive space of appearance draws on Arendt's notion of plurality. Plurality for Arendt was "the condition *sine qua non* for that space of appearance which is the public realm" (Arendt, 1998, p.220, emphasis in the original). It is the "basic condition of action and speech" in this arena and has "the twofold character of equality and distinction" (Arendt, 1998, p.175). Plurality for Arendt thus has a paradoxical character. It conveys how all human beings are simultaneously both similar and unique (Knauer, 1980): similar in that we all share the aspect of uniqueness; unique in the way in which we express or disclose this and how this irreducibly unique identity is then attributed to us by others as we act together in the realm of human affairs (Arendt, 1998; Villa, 1999).

Plurality, though it inevitably makes action and politics more difficult (Arendt, 1979), was for Arendt the necessary constitutive condition required for these activities to exist at all. To vanish plurality – in the case of the present topic, for example, to seem to lament it as a barrier to RML (Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Sinclair, 2007) – would be to vanish the space of appearance itself and with it free political action which can only be manifested within this realm (Arendt, 2006). Thus plurality in relation to RML is embraced and expressed in the RSOA framework as a space of critique. Making this conceptual move works with the understanding that reflexivity itself is an inherently critical idea (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Hardy et al., 2001; Holland, 1999). It makes the practical, plural articulation of this critical principle of reflexivity (Sandywell, 2005) and reflexive learning more explicit and thus potentially more likely to appear in practice. This is because it conceives of the political as immanent in RML not as a by-product of it (as, for example, in Lee, 1997) or something which needs to be superimposed upon its operation.

Critique is meant here as Antonacopoulou (1999b) describes it, stressing the "power *of* critique" (p.8, emphasis in original) and how it can operate as a form of praxical insight which makes possible "the power to have choice…the power to think and be responsible for one's own actions" (Antonacopoulou, 1999b, p.8). This notion of critique is non-prescriptive and non-dualistic - no "black or white" is involved (Antonacopoulou, 1999b, p.8). Critique is "a vital element" of RML (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.48); a form of "reflexive praxis [which is] best pursued in community, than in isolation" (Antonacopoulou, 2008b, pp.60 -66). The space of critique is "where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them" (Arendt, 1998, p.180, emphasis in the original), a statement which mirrors Clegg et al's (2006) anti-ideological wish for

118

critique to be "more open, more fruitful and more productive"; less about being "against" or judging others and more about acting with them (Clegg et al., 2006, p.23).

Plurality in RML as reflexive space of critique foregrounds "more complex understandings of plural subjects integrated more fluidly into their environments" (Fenwick, 2005, p.35). This understanding of plurality as something which pervades organisational life makes critique during RML as a spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991) all but inevitable: there will be multiple stakeholders" involved in RML in practice (Rigg and Trehan, 2008, p.382) and so, there will be diverse and at times competing interests in play (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, Welsh and Dehler, 2004). Insofar as this is true, RML will be a contested, political learning space (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b); a kaleidoscopic prism through which "multiple perspectives, interests and ways of representing the world" can appear (Nicolini et al., 2004).

The RSOA framework in its aspect as a space of critique, stands in contrast to RML approaches which, whether critical or mainstream, seem to try to transcend or too quickly and presumptuously harmonise plurality, taking it to stand merely for competing personal or "affinity group" interests (Villa, 1999, p.153) rather than a constitutive condition of RML as a political space wherein a "common world" appears amongst managers derived from "the plurality of [their] perspectives" (Denneny, 1979, p.250). It also seeks to work in a space beyond forms of ideological RML. These may be transparent and well-intentioned enough but, whether by design or not, they are often still avowedly adversarial (rather than agonistic) spaces where ideologies are deterministically calibrated to compete rather than converse. This is ultimately inimical

to learning as political praxis (Burbules and Berk, 1999; Ellsworth, 1989; Fay, 1977). For example, when Brookfield (2009) pits critical theory versus what he calls "hegemonic" corporate managerialism and purports to make his particular form of critical reflection (Tully, 1989) the referee, this, in light of framework being propounded here, is a reductive rather than productive move which lacks political reflexivity even as it shows some signs of this in terms of pedagogical openness.

Critical forms of RML (for example Cavanaugh and Prasad, 1996; Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Sinclair, 2007; Welsh and Dehler, 2004) sometimes appear to require something akin to the conversion of managers, or their 'transformation' (Cranton, 2002; Sambrook and Willmott, 2014), even "emancipation" (Welsh and Dehler, 2004, p.19). Although the latter is a problematic (Reynolds, 1999b) and disputed notion (Perriton and Reynolds, 2004) which has been defended in both stronger and weaker terms (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012), the fact that it is still a topic for critical scholarly discussion (Boje et al., 2001) is telling. But approaching RML like this only smoothes over plurality, attempting to fuse it in the service of poiesis (making) rather than praxis, or acting with others (Taminiaux, 1997). Put another way, it seems to express a desire to make managers critical rather than to act in critique with them, a key distinction in this dimension of the RSOA framework.

Critical RML as poiesis rather than praxis possesses what could be called a 'will-to-making' impulse which may more or less explicitly apparent - compare, for example, Willmott (1997) with Sambrook and Willmott (2014). As Wray-Bliss (2003) has written on critical management scholarship generally, it is often inclined towards the

"*construction* of subject positions" (p.318, emphasis added). Critique in such forms of RML is theoretically predestined to occur in prefigured forms which may not be sufficiently reflexive (Ellsworth, 1989, Fenwick, 2005). It is not just critical theorists who propound RML as a form of poiesis: glimpses of it in can be spied in more mainstream sources. For example, Paton et al. (2014) write of RML which would "*create* new mindsets" amongst managers (p.12, emphasis added), promoting a pedagogy which works at "the *instilling* of complex causal thinking among participants" (p. 17, emphasis added). Theorising RML as a space of critique goes beyond this by making possible a more praxical and politically reflexive learning modality which relationally shapes RML as a learning space (Antonacopoulou, 2002; Raelin, 2006) where critique is still by no means avoided, defanged or necessarily co-opted, which is Reynolds' fear (1999b). This will inevitably entail the "rivalry of opinions" (Hill, 1979, p.286) and the acknowledgement rather than the "avoidance of difference" (Vince, 2012, p.216). This articulation of "difference and dissent" (Vince and Reynolds, 2009, p.95) is key to operating RML as a free and open space of critique, because freedom "always implies freedom of dissent" (Arendt, 1972, p.221).

Finally, plurality in the space of critique refers to something deeper than just the "identity politics" of competing interests and "affinity group cultures" which press for their own parochial political gains (Villa, 1999, p.153). For example, it does not merely mean that managers may desire different things from RML and as a result it does not reduce the political dimension of RML to just the instrumental achievement of these different ends. Rather, in the space of critique plurality is engaged – in spite of the "enormous problem" it poses (Arendt, 1979, p.313) – for what Arendt labelled amor mundi, or 'love of the world' (Young-Bruehl, 2004). In general this refers to a common

concern for our "sense of being at home in the world, and with that, our identity, our sense of reality, and the possibility of endowing our existence with meaning" (d'Entreves, 1994, p.53). This common world is a "space for politics" (Arendt, 2013, p.28) which is imbued with human plurality because it is always seen and experienced "from different points of view" (Canovan, 1992, p.111). But it is still one which interests us all equally in terms of its durability or permanence (Arendt, 1998), which we wish to preserve and for which political action serves as the means by which this can be accomplished (Villa, 1999).

In relation to RML as a space of critique, this idea of worldliness or a "feeling for the world" (Villa, 1999, p.134) may be minimised by the business context in which RML occurs but it is still a relevant and important notion. The idea of sustaining and preserving a common organisational world holds the key to understanding how worldliness in RML may have relevance and practical purchase for plural stakeholders in organisational settings – the nexus of the problem which has so far stymied RML in empirical contexts (Nicolini et al., 2004; Rigg and Trehan, 2008). For this to be actualised, it needs first to be assumed that a commonality of interest, even if unequal and perhaps even inequitable, exists between plural organisational actors who are concerned with learning and change – at least in theory, if not always in practice (Vince, 2002a) – for the sake of the sustainable success of the enterprise albeit from different and sometimes competing perspectives. Worldliness, then, in an organisational setting would mirror this fundamental principle of common interest, potentially giving rise to a shared common sense cultivated and worked for in a plural, reflexive space of critique which may "relate and bind [people] together" (Arendt, 1998, p.102) in an overarching way. In this way, RML theorised as a space of critique could also connect at a higher

level with the increasingly urgent discourse around organisational sustainability (Mohrman and Worley, 2010; Smith, 2012; Wals and Schwarzin, 2012; Wankel and Stoner, 2009), contributing to the way in which reflexive development approaches - which are both critical and productive (Boud et al., 2006b) - might serve as the learning correlate to the theoretical and practical agendas of those promoting 'mindful' organisational sustainability (Becke, 2014), whilst avoiding any excess optimism or naivety about what this may actually entail or hope to achieve (Fyke and Buzzanell, 2013).

The space of new beginnings

The third aspect of RML as a reflexive space of appearance blends with Arendt's concept of natality. By natality Arendt meant the human "capacity of beginning something anew" (Arendt, 1998, p.9). It is the "fundamental political feature" of human existence (Canovan, 1992) and all human action is "grounded" in this ability to initiate something new (Fry, 2014, p.30). If plurality is the condition of political action which makes it possible, but also very difficult - a "slow powerful drilling through hard boards" as Weber (2004, p.93) said - then natality is it's potentially redeeming feature: "the miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs…is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted" (Arendt, 1998, p.247).

Like disclosing and critiquing, initiating something new is a relatively unpredictable venture undertaken with others. It is heavily reliant on trust as when we start something new "we weave our strand into a network of relations. What comes of it we never know" (Arendt, 2013, p.38). Natality means "to embark on something new" (Arendt,

1972, p.179) by acting into the common world with others in our human capacity as both 'beginnings' and 'beginners' (Arendt, 1998). It is an intrinsically unpredictable capacity; a "gift" (Arendt, 1972, p.179) which "interrupts what otherwise would have proceeded automatically and therefore predictably" (Arendt, 1972, p.133). It is a creative act with an externalist impulse (Villa, 1999) close in spirit to Shotter's Wittgenstenian theory of managerial practice (2005) in which "we find ourselves invited to act – not out of our own inner plans or desires – but *into* a context shaped by another and thus to act creatively in new ways" (p.153, emphasis in the original).

Demonstrating the importance and relevance the idea of natality has for RML, the literature is replete with references to this way of learning as a means by which managers can be taught to understand their reflexive capacity for new beginnings. This typically involves managers being taught to think reflexively, then encouraged to act on this basis; critically reflecting, not only retrospectively (Vince, 2002a), but prospectively, oriented towards future action (Rose, 2013). Sometimes, however, it appears that reflexive thinking is as far as RML can go. This is evidenced by the limited success reported by empirical researchers in this regard (for example, Crossan et al., 2013; Eriksen, 2009; Gutiérrez, 2002; Nicolini et al., 2004; Rosier, 2002; Waddock and Lozano, 2012). RML can enable managers to think differently – a good in itself (Gold et al., 2002) and by no means an easy achievement (Sinclair, 2007) - but it has not always led to change and new action beyond this, which is the intended outcome.

Hoyrup (2004) recounts a case where RML translated into action in the workplace, but this is rare and the "optimal conditions" he attributes success to (p.453) are not, as

Nicolini et al. (2004) found, always available (see also Vince, 2002a). There is no necessary link from reflexive thought to reflexive action (Rigg and Trehan, 2004) - from RML to "practical reflexivity" (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004, p.30) - and critical thinking alone, no matter how reflexive, is a "necessary but insufficient" condition of praxis (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012, p.24). Whilst thinking can, of course, have an influence on action, on the Arendian account presented here it remains (along with judging) a distinct enterprise (Villa, 1999) and it cannot constitute, or have the same political force as natality, which actualizes our human condition, through speech and deeds, as unique agents acting in a shared common world (Arendt, 1998).

This, I claim, is why RML needs a theory of natality such as the RSOA as a space of new beginnings contributes: so that praxis can be initiated both during and after an RML intervention with the potential that it may sustain thereafter in a manager's practice. Theorising RML as a space of new beginnings, founded on disclosure and critique in a "thoughtful" learning space (Mintzberg, 2004, p.3), provides the conceptual tools for reconceiving how reflexive action may be both initiated within and then extended beyond the RML space itself. In its aspect as a space of new beginnings, both managers and facilitators enter RML as a space of "multiple possibilities" (Antonacopoulou, 2002, p.10). RML as a reflexive space of new beginnings is "both determinate and open to determination" (Brennan and Malpas, 2011, p.49); a space for reflection in which the unknown, rather the certain is implied (Daloz Parks, 2005), and in which a healthy scepticism on the part of managers (Fulop and Rifin, 1997) and a readiness to 'not know' on the part of facilitators (Raab, 1997) can combine as co-constitutive factors which can lead to "new experiences…new learning…new meanings and new ways of seeing the world" (Antonacopoulou, 2002, p.13). Thus can RML can

be a natal space where "new ways of seeing and being" (Barge, 2004, p.92) come into focus and "alternative views [can] emerge" (Zundel, 2013, p.122). It can be a space where action is a "joint production" (Ramsey, 2005, p.222) and reflexive learning, enacted through speech and deed in a shared space of appearance, is imbued with creative "performative potential" (Ramsey, 2005, p.227). As already suggested, natality is a latent concept in much current RML theory; hinted at but not fully fleshed out. "Future choices" can appear differently during RML say Welsh and Dehler (2004, p.20), implying that new paths for action may appear if managers are reflexively engaged with the process (Zundel, 2013) and sufficiently motivated to remain open to this happening, which is not a given (Antonacopoulou, 2004a). How RML will unfold is never entirely clear. As a space of new beginnings it is by definition inherently unpredictable (Cressey et al., 2006; Gray, 2007; Rigg and Trehan, 2004). Rigg and Trehan (2004) say that "once begun [it] is not readily predictable" (p.162).

Cressey et al. (2006) make RML seem like natality itself, saying: "Refection is always in a state of becoming. It is never frozen; it is always in transition or movement" (p.22). It can help managers to understand their experiences in "new and novel ways" (Paton et al., 2014, p.18). It can help them to realise "new ways of talking and acting in [their] everyday experience" (Cunliffe, 2002, p.44), providing them with "alternative patterns of management" (Brooks, 1999), "new possibilities" (Boud, 2010, p.33) or "new insights about their behaviour, thinking and environment" (McDaniel and DiBella-McCarthy, 2012, p.667). According to Collier (2010), "the place of the imagination and creativity in the reflection process is rarely discussed" (p.146): the novelty, potential, imagination and creativity encouraged by theorising RML as a space of new beginnings rectifies this. But in practice these phenomena do not appear by themselves. In theory,

RML can be a "social space which allows fresh actions to occur" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.73), but these must be helped along; acted into existence by those involved.

The next three chapters will flesh out the RSOA framework empirically, providing evidence to support the conceptual claims made in this chapter (Seale, 1999; Wallace and Wray, 2011). These empirical portraits of the RSOA display a far more complex and nuanced picture than the conceptual one drawn here. All the risks and contingencies referred to abstractly above, which arise when actualising RML as an RSOA in real world contexts, will be unpacked using rich "ethno-data" (Stablein, 1999, p.265), detailing both the difficulties and the promise made possible by theorising RML as a "space of learning praxis" (Antonacopoulou, 2002, p.5).

CHAPTER 4   THE RSOA IN PRACTICE: SPACE OF HONESTY

This chapter presents the RSOA framework in action in its aspect as a space of honesty. This aspect is further broken down into two interactive parts: honesty with oneself and honesty with others. The reason for this is that despite the strong public turn in RML theory (Raelin, 2001; Reynolds, 2011; 1998; Reynolds and Vince, 2004a, Vince and Reynolds, 2009), taking RML "beyond the individual" (Hoyrup and Elkjaer, 2006, p.29), the idea, and as will be shown, the reality of the individual manager is still a powerful conceptual and practical element in this learning process. As such, what follows contributes support for Fook's contention (2010) that when it comes to RML "the individual and the social realms are linked" (p.38). It is unwise to separate them too sharply (Hoyrup, 2004; Marsick, 1988) or to think that "the focus must either be individual or collective" (Fook, 2010, p.38).

Following this, the idea of the space of honesty is problematised in terms of how such spaces operated or were prevented from operating beyond the ephemeral space of the Worldlife RMP itself which served as a "temporary organisation" (Vince, 2011, p.334) where disclosing could be enacted and experimented with. Data on disclosing before others outside as well as inside the RMP is included in order to contribute new understanding of how the dynamics of practical reflexivity operate within an organisational context (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004). This is also done in order to illuminate, using new empirical evidence, how 'organising reflection' (Vince, 2002a; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) is attempted beyond formal reflexive learning interventions and how the latter can inspire these, albeit in socially

complex ways (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007) which - like disclosing itself - may lead to unpredictable consequences (Williams, 2014).

The chapter concludes with a section on the role of honesty in RML and beyond. Data is used to demonstrate that the role of honesty with oneself and others during RML is to surprise managers (Jordan, 2010) by providing them with an unexpected, and unexpectedly revealing, learning intervention which reconnects them to the relational aspects of their practice (Antonacopoulou, 2008a). In the process, this helps managers to learn about themselves and their peers via self and public reflection which discloses their unique identities and provides the opportunity for these to be storied by others (Ramsey, 2005). This leads them both to a greater recognition of their shared "mutual commitments and common interests" (Williams, 2014, p.6) and to a new understanding of themselves as politically reflexive actors and learners (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000).

Honesty with oneself

Honesty with oneself is a form of reflexive "two-in- one" dialogue which acknowledges our "inner plurality" (Arendt, 1971, p.442), paving the way for "independent judgement" (Villa, 1999, p.106) to be exercised. A good way to grasp the distinction being made here between honesty with oneself and honesty with others, is to view it through the lens of Cunliffe's interrelated concepts of self and critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2009a; 2009b; 2003). Self-reflexivity enables a manager to "know *who* to be [and to] bring *who* we are to what we do" (Cunliffe, 2009a, p.94, my emphases). It involves a "dialogue-with-self about our fundamental assumptions, values and ways of interacting" and opens us up to "the possibilities for new ways of being and acting"

(Cunliffe, 2009a, p.98). Critical reflexivity is a more "political task" (Cunliffe, 2009b, p.413) and so, has a more public as opposed to private character: it means managers acting "in more responsive ways and [engaging] in dialogue that is critical and open" (Cunliffe, 2009a, p.99). It even extends to challenging others to "question their assumptions and actions and their impact on the organisation and the community at large" (Cunliffe, 2009a, p.99). In this way managers can, through their own disclosing in the presence of others, "reveal opposing and multiple perspectives [and find] alternative ways of thinking" (Cunliffe, 2009b, p.414).

Honesty with oneself on the Worldlife RMP

Most Worldlife managers spoke about the self-reflexivity the programme engendered, both during and after the event itself. Sandra, a middle manager, called the RMP a chance "to go away and forget about your work environment for two days". But the self-reflexivity which the programme cultivated caused her some anxiety and confusion; even discomfort. She spoke of how "surprised" she was that:

…my mind didn't wander, because normally at these things my mind is wandering. That didn't happen and I was surprised at that. It didn't happen once and I think it was because it was very engaging.

(Interview 1 with Sandra, middle manager)

She went on to describe how difficult she found introspection during a self-reflexivity exercise where managers were asked to reflect on their values (Waddock and Lozano, 2012):

Some of the self-reflection exercises were hard because you don't like the answers you put down. Not because they were bad answers but because of priorities – it was hard to decide! I felt it was hard at times because you're trying to be true to yourself. You've got a home life with kids and you've got a work life. You have to balance the two and that can be hard. The values list, that was conflicting. You know what you should end up with but, other things; you want them in there too; those more professional ones pulling against what ultimately is more important.

(Interview 1 with Sandra, middle manager)

During our second interview I asked Sandra to elaborate on why she found this exercise hard. Her answer speaks to the synthesising potential of reflection (Rose, 2013; its ability to bring disparate parts of an individual's identities together had heretofore been "compartmentalized" (MacIntyre, 1998, p.235):

The balance of family and work, that's two very distinct areas of your life. If you think of them separately that's very simple. I know how to reflect on work; I can reflect on that very clearly. At home I can reflect on that very clearly too. It's when you mix the two, which you have to do, that it becomes very confusing.

Compartmentalisation challenges any potential integrity of the self because "as individuals move between home, school, workplace…they find themselves cast in different roles and required to express different and even sometimes incompatible attitudes" (MacIntyre, 1998, p.236). This became a self-reflexive realisation for Sandra on the RML as a space which made room for honesty with herself to "show" up (Zundel, 2013, p.122). As MacIntyre (1998) might have predicted, for Sandra coming face to face with her compartmentalised self was "conflicting" and "confusing". She was able to reflect from within the separate boundaries of home and work (Nippert-Eng, 1996) but something about the RMP space brought all of this together, synthesising it in a not untroubling way. As another Worldlife manager put it, compared to the traditional management development they were used to, the RMP was an "underpinning" learning experience (Interview 1 with, Joan, middle manager). It seems as though for Sandra it was, as she said, the "time to go away and forget" that paradoxically helped her to remember "what ultimately is more important", making her self-reflexivity a process of the attentive remembering (Xing and Sims, 2012) of some things, in a space where she could temporarily forget others.

This example also shows that honesty, as a meeting with one's "inner plurality" (Arendt, 1971, p.442) does not necessarily arrive pleasurably or non-problematically. As a critical engagement with experience, it can come relatively anxiously instead (Gilmore and Anderson, 2012) in the form of an "interruptions in [a manager's] practical ongoing practical engagement" with the world (Zundel, 2013, p.109);

132

moments during RML when they may be "struck" by something which troubles them or makes them wonder anew about something (Cunliffe, 2002, p.42). When managers are being honest with themselves in a reflexive space of appearance they may, like Sandra, get "answers I didn't quite like". For others, the self-reflexive parts of the programme did not cause any inner discomfort per se, they were more like welcome respites from the "hectic" day-to-day at Worldlife as Jason, a middle manager said:

The self-reflection part was important. As a manager you don't get so much time to self-reflect on how you could get better, or how maybe you've done things wrong in the past. That to me was very important. We plough on so much in our work, we have our meetings, we have our performance reviews, we have our one-to-ones; you know it's nearly like confession! Every day staff are coming up to you, relying on you; you're giving out advice but you don't reflect on yourself as to whether what you're doing is right. Should I be doing it in a better way? It can be too hectic to do that, to have that inner conversation. It's very important to talk to yourself and to say "Well, how are we doing?" - having *that* conversation.

(Interview 1 with Jason, middle manager)

For Jason, the space the RMP afforded for self-reflexivity; for "two-in-one" dialogue (Arendt, 1971, p.442) and the chance to think "how are we doing", as he put it (see Arendt, 1998, p.5). It was less about existential "breakdown" (Zundel, 2013, p.117) than it was about simply having rare time to think as a manager (Raelin, 2002); time in which to introspectively and retrospectively question his own practice from within (Antonacopoulou, 2006b); time even perhaps to self-confess for a change. The RMP

also afforded Jason the space and time to potentially learn about something that he may have overlooked in his practice (Matsuo, 2012):

I think your own reflexive dialogue is one in which you can actually question yourself, you can doubt yourself, you can actually pat yourself on the back…its only when your reflect on things that you can see that they're important. That talking to yourself and re-affirming to yourself 'Am I doing things right?' It was actually after the programme more so than during it that I could reflect a bit more on this.

(Interview 1 with Jason, middle manager)

Here Jason touches on an important epistemic characteristic of self-reflexivity: the scepticism if endows. Although it can include "re-affirming" it can be just as much about questioning and doubting oneself; about entering a space where "not knowing" (Raab, 1997, p.161) becomes, temporarily at least, acceptable and necessary, even as this induces "possible anxiety" (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009, p.19). This shows that the RMP created in Jason not merely "self-assurance" but also, and to a greater extent, the kind of "self-awareness and self-questioning" RML is supposed to achieve (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.59), "in the form of retrospective questioning" (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004, p.36).

That RML stimulates the critical questioning of "taken-for-granted assumptions" (Reynolds, 2011, p.8) was an important theme across all interviews. Next, Declan, a senior Worldlife manager with over twenty years' experience, describes the self-

reflexivity the RMP engendered in him; he describes it as something he knew but had forgotten, and again the theme of being 'struck' during RML (Corlett, 2012; Kempster and Stewart, 2010) appears:

The programme certainly struck a chord with me. How can we be leaders if we haven't reflected on our own practices? This is not a new idea but I'd forgotten about it because you just get swamped. You operate outside in the external world on the basis of this internal dialogue but you don't do so in work. By internal dialogue I mean constantly looking at things, and your position, and asking 'is this just?' It's easy to forget that internal voice in work because of the biases and prejudices we all carry: I'd lost that thing about stopping and reflecting; it was great to refresh it.

(Interview 1 with Declan, senior manager)

During our second interview Declan picked up this theme again, this time adding something on the anxiety which can accompany self-reflexivity (Gilmore and Anderson, 2012; Vince, 2004; 2002a) and, just as Jason had, hinting at the self-reflexive scepticism the RMP induced:

It goes against all the things you've learned; you're jettisoning all the stuff you've learned that has gotten you to a certain point: that part of the programme was about vulnerability - you and you alone. People don't like that: "I'm Declan Ryan and I'm vulnerable! My ideas are rubbish!" Isn't that what it's about? Putting it out on the table – you're

135

vulnerable. I'm exposing myself. I'm saying "This is what I think". Now, this is an internal debate that's going on in your head.

(Interview 2 with Declan, senior manager)

In both the excerpts above, an experienced senior manager describes how he experienced a complex and simultaneously felt range of internal responses to self-reflexive learning during the RMP. He stresses the vulnerability which came with what Keevers and Treleaven (2011) refer to as "not knowing in the presence of others" (p.12) and the exposure a manager can feel when learning reflexively even if this is, for now, privately rather than publicly experienced. Declan also alludes to the risks attached with self-reflexivity and the potential threat it poses to a manager's position, a point which will be revisited below in more detail in the section titled 'the trouble with honesty'. In the first excerpt Declan also demonstrates how reflection can have a moral aspect (Cunliffe, 2009b), causing a manager to ask himself what is "just" in terms of how they practice their role, an element of self-inquiry that is important, "especially [for those] in positions of power" (Raelin, 2013, p.829). This demonstrates the ability RML has to 'unmute' the voice of a manager's conscience (Bird, 1996), something which is enabled via self-reflexive dialogue (Arendt, 1971). Tellingly, however, Declan also added how easy it is for managers to forget this self-reflexive faculty. He gave two reasons for why this happens: because managers are busy and do not have or make the time to reflect (Raelin, 2002), and because they find it hard to see past the "biases and prejudices" of habitual ways of thinking (see Dewey, 1998). Both of these factors can thus conspire to "crowd out reflection about the future" (Jackall, 2010, p.84).

That self-reflexivity can disclose to managers the moral dimensions of their practice was borne out in virtually all of the interviews conducted with Worldlife managers, though managers often placed different emphases on what this meant. Two examples of this will now be unpacked, shedding light on the potential connectedness reflection and morality can have; a topic which, according to Moberg and Calkins (2001), deserves more research attention. When I asked Robert, a supervisor of some twenty years' experience at Worldlife, directly about this, here is what he said:

Researcher: Did the programme have a moral dimension for you?

Robert: "*I* have a moral dimension, not the programme, but *me*. I found myself questioning my own conscience. And I often do that outside of the programme, in my work. But everything comes back to logic. As a manager I have to rationalise my decision: what's the 'good' here? The goal is getting the job done. Sometimes you have to draw a line; you have to park your conscience in favour of doing the job that's expected of you. The programme was about *who* I am. What am I here to do, and can I do that effectively and yet not be socially compromised?

Researcher: Socially compromised?

Robert: Not become an arrogant bastard. But it's very hard to keep between the two themes, no doubt about that. Having rules makes it easier though. If you have rules and you're applying yourself and working within the rules; rules are there, [pauses], they're designed to protect you as well as the company. There are ways to treat people, to treat customers, and by controlling what you can and cannot do there's a common platform. If everybody has a common set of rules they'll understand their job better.

Robert doesn't just exist in the moral economy (Sayer, 2008), or moral universe (Harper, 1987), that is Worldlife - he embodies this. The self-reflexivity engendered by the RMP made him more aware of this fact. It also surfaced the tension this can involve as a manager juggles the "pragmatic, rational objectivity" managerial roles normatively demand (Jackall, 2010, p.153) with the importance of their own need to see themselves in a certain moral ways (Oshana, 2010). Robert also hinted at the ongoing reflexive work maintaining this balance requires (Koot and Ybema, 2000), using a suitably spatial metaphor as he expressed how "hard" it was to "keep between the two themes".

In the next example Tim, another Worldlife supervisor with over twenty years' experience, provides a different response. Self-reflexivity on the RMP appeared to him in the form of affirmation more so than questioning. I asked him if he felt the moral issues the RMP surfaced were relevant to his managerial practice:

Tim: Yeah, I do. I would always treat everyone in the way I'd like to be treated myself; that's my upbringing. I shouldn't be different in work that I am with my kids at home. I may have to deal with certain issues here on a more regular basis, but as a manager that's part and parcel of the role that I have.

Researcher: Do you mean that that doesn't change who you are as an individual?

Tim: It shouldn't. I don't think it should. That's the type of philosophy that has gotten me to where I am now. I mean, I've been here twenty years and I can count on one had the number of heated discussions I've had or the types of people I haven't gotten on with in the company. I couldn't even think of three confrontations. People are individuals. I know there are rules but I don't always follow them to the letter. I can be flexible, even if 'technically' I'm not supposed to be. We do have black and white managers but I'm not one of them. But I'm not a soft touch either. We do have managers that will only go by the rules but to me that's fear, or lack of confidence in themselves. They're only confident in the rules; we have to manage *people* though. Those managers get there because they think they want it, but then they realise that they don't and the only thing they have to fall back on is the rules; outside of those they're afraid. I don't think you can teach that judgment or confidence; that ability to manage; that fairness. The programme only compounded that in me, but it's in me, it's who I am as an individual. Of course, I'm conscious that I have some power as a manager but I wouldn't use it like a stick. There are times when you have to call someone in and say "that's not good enough", but this power, you have to use it correctly.

(Interview 2 with Tim, supervisor)

There is little sign of the discomfiting compartmentalization referred to earlier in any of Tim's responses. Rather, an assertive commitment to reflexive integrity is evident; one which the RMP did not create, but "compounded" for Tim as he introspected on his way of managing during the programme and his personal identity disclosed itself to him in his psychological, "private realm" (Honig, 1988, p.82). Neither, contra Jackall (2010), do we get any strong sense of how the institutional bureaucracy of Worldlife has shaped

Tim's moral consciousness in any particularly impactful way. In fact, this is a trap which he implicitly accuses – perhaps too harshly - other managers of falling foul of.

Instead, evidence of a phronetic management style (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014a; 2014b) comes through in Tim's answers; the willingness and the learned nous and ability to make "situated judgements [in the] co-emergent, unfolding process" (Keevers and Treleaven, 2011, p.8) of his practice, depending on the particular individuals and circumstances involved; his "exercise of judgment" amongst rules and, if necessary, sometimes in spite of them (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014a, p.226). Judgement entails the "ability to exercise initiative" (Vickers, 1968, p.14). It always particular and contextual (Arendt, 1971) and Tim's understanding that "there are rules, but I don't always follow them to the letter" differentiates him from Robert in this reflexive regard. Rules for Tim erase autonomy and stymie his ability to be himself in his role. For Robert they make it easier to avoid autonomy so he can act more from within his formal management role, doing rationally and logically what it takes to get "the job done".

Like Shotter and Tsoukas (2014b), Tim doesn't believe that phronesis, as "the exercise of judgement and practical wisdom" (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014b, p.2), can be taught in a traditional management learning classroom. But having now experienced the RMP and labelled it, as he said elsewhere in our interview "a new form of training, not the usual 'ABC' approach", he might believe along with these authors that the self-reflexivity so important to phronesis (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Holt, 2006) can be facilitated and developed there via the "reflective insights" (Eriksen and Cunliffe, 2010,

p.98) which appear to managers during RML as a space of honesty with oneself; or at least, to use his word, that it may be "compounded" where it already exists.

As this analysis shows, self-reflexivity in the space of honesty with oneself appears in diverse ways to managers. It can disclose in the form of unsettling compartmentalization; it can disclose as doubt in oneself, and self-questioning about one's knowledge; it can reveal vulnerability and a potential threat to one's position; and finally, it can provide a "wider moral space" (Blanc, 2014, p.474) which in turn enables the moral dimensions of a manager's practice to appear: in one case revealing a rational reliance on rules, in the other disclosing a confident trust in phronesis: the "practical judgement" to apply rules reflexively as events emerge from within a manager's practice (Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer, 2013, p.4).

Honesty with others

Honesty with others in the RSOA refers to how a manager discloses who they are in front of others (Arendt, 1998; Zundel, 2013), in this case their management peers. Unlike the inner disclosing of self-reflexivity, where the "private inner voice" of a manager (Koot and Ybema, 2000, p.136) dominates and the focus is attitudinal and behavioural, predicated on a manager's so-called "inner work life" (Amabile and Kramer, 2007), honesty with others has an outwards (but not expressivist) trajectory making the witnesses of a manager's action more important in terms of their 'who' (Taminiaux, 1997), than the acting manager themselves (Arendt, 1998).

In contrast with another public realm theory of RML (a more Habermasian one), whereas Raelin (2001) would say "we realise ourselves through civil discourse and intersubjective recognition" (p.17), the RSOA theory would amend this to say "we reveal ourselves for realisation by others", or "we trigger this happening via our disclosing before them". At first glance this kind of disclosing might seem overly concerned with impressions or appearances in a superficial sense. In fact, it is crucial because it brings home a political point about action and identity in a praxical learning space (Antonacopoulou, 2002), as opposed to say, a psychodynamic one (Vince, 2011). The key point is this: in the political sense appropriate to a public learning space like collective RML, ultimately a manager's peers will have the final say on who that manager is, but the manager themselves will have the *first* say on how they disclose this before them. Conceptualising it this way does two important things: it cedes to the "unpredictable consequences of the actor's self-disclosure", and secondly, it reveals the way in which a manager's disclosing concomitantly creates the "responsibility for the world" which arises from action itself (Williams, 2014, p.2).

Responsibility here refers to the responsibility to act (Goldoni and McCorkindale, 2012; Williams, 2014), and for acting, but not necessarily responsibility for the consequences of one's action (Honig, 1988), which, owing to the contingency of human affairs, can never be fully known in advance (Arendt, 1998). Contra Raelin (2001) managers cannot quite "realise" themselves (p.17) during RML because how they are realised, as individual, unique identities, is not up to them but to others (Arendt, 1998). But in support of his overarching pedagogical project, managers can take on the responsibility to act in such a learning space and in the process achieve "an identity attainable through the performance of actions worthy of being turned into stories" (Honig, 1988).

Given this interdependency – action needs both an actor who discloses, as well as spectators to witness, and later narrate this event (Honig, 1988; Villa, 1999) - in the space of honesty with others a "fundamentally interpersonal" (Andersen and Chen, 2002, p.638) or relational managerial self (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Gergen, 2009b; Hosking, 2011; Smets and Jarzabkowski, 2013) is disclosed in shared deed and dialogue, making RML, accordingly, a relational space (Jones, 2009) which promotes the "communal nature" of action (Ramsey, 2005, p.233). The most important distinction between honesty with others and honesty with oneself, then, is that the former is action the latter is not, although critical self-reflection or of course its lack, can have "consequences" for acting itself (Arendt, 1979, p.309).

Honesty with others on the Worldlife RMP

After lunch we're discussing assumptions and how, as lenses on the world, they can influence how we think as managers and how we practice the job. I explain how reflexive learning is aimed at examining these and, if necessary, adjusting them. Kate speaks out, mentioning the "ideal" of the "common lens" which she sees as important for managers to share. But then she adds a further point about the difficulty of accommodating different assumptions into this, however important it might be. Then Andy chips in: "I think different lenses are healthy; it's good to have diversity in teams". I see Declan listening intently as I describe how assumptions underpin how we think about things, for example the assumption we have as managers about whether people can change or not (I've been detecting a strong sense from the group that 'you are what you are, you can't really change' and I want to press them on this) when suddenly he interjects politely, but firmly: "Why should I change my assumptions, Richard?" he says, "If I'm comfortable in my own skin?". "Fair question" I reply. I acknowledge the importance of motivation, adding

that sometimes, however, we mightn't know our own assumptions very well, or as well as we think, and that it's possible that new motivations can also be found, maybe by involving others in our reflection. "But can you turn on a sixpence?" says Finn (and we all get what he means: we're back to whether people can change or not, whether we're in control of how we act, and so on – this is a recurring theme on the programme). Now Gerard speaks out: "Are the management board doing this programme?" he asks in a sceptical tone, half-smiling as he speaks. Before I have time to respond, he adds quickly, "You could sell tickets to that". Everyone bursts into laughter.

(Field note from RMP, senior manager programme, November, 2011)

This ethnographic vignette (Contu, 2014) reveals how some of Worldlife's senior managers disclosed in public as "acting and speaking agents" (Arendt, 1998, p.181) during the RMP. Before it dissolved into laughter a more itinerant rather than linear dialogue took place, which flowed from point to point albeit with a common thematic thread the facilitator was trying to weave, namely, that as managers we should critically reflect on our taken-for-granted assumptions (Cunliffe, 2002) and there is value in doing so. There was challenge to this idea. Not everyone accepted that people could change as fundamentally as the idea seemed to imply. Two examples from the field note will now be examined in more detail: Kate's and Andy's interjections. Kate spoke of the tension between the "ideal" image of managers who see things through a "common lens" and the reality and "difficulty" of this in the face of the perspectival reality which constitutes plurality and can make it such an "enormous problem" (Arendt, 1998, p.313) in public settings. She asked how can different assumptions, embodied in diverse individuals, with diverse interests and abilities, be accommodated into a commonly shared

management view of the organisation. Fittingly, then, her reflection was an inherently political one. Ironically however (and this may have been lost on her, or at least if it wasn't she didn't articulate it) the RMP itself, from within which she was disclosing, was precisely the space in which such a political answer to that question could potentially be formulated. In truth, it was probably the only space in Worldlife where anything like that could have been attempted. As Jason put it: "[the RMP] was the place to have discussion, if we weren't gonna do it there it'd be very hard to do it otherwise" (Interview 2 with Jason, middle manager). Perhaps Kate was blind to this because like many managers she holds a negative, 'backstabbing' view of organisational politics (Buchanan, 2008) Thus she had difficulty conceiving of the RMP as a non-reductive political learning space where Worldlife managers were "free to engage in politics" (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000) of a different - hardly non-agonistic - but still ultimately more constructive and dialogical rather than tactical kind (Cell, 1998). Kate disclosed herself as a senior manager who, like many experienced managers (Mintzberg, 2009; Tengblad, 2012), understands the difference between the normative rhetoric of management and the concrete realities of actually existing management in organisations (Jackall, 2010). In this narrow sense she is politically reflexive but in a fuller, more praxical sense meant in this thesis, perhaps she is not.

This analysis is supported by studying interviews carried out with Kate after the RMP where she described internal politics in Worldlife in almost exclusively adversarial terms like "lobbying", "opposing positions", "getting the outcome you want"; and where she spoke of secret rather than public disclosing between small coalitions of managers who abided by the "unwritten rule" that "if I say it you in the corridor it's not

necessarily something that we will then find ourselves discussing in a wider forum"
(Interview 2 with Kate, senior manager).

Andy defended plurality, disclosing himself as a manager who saw value in difference.
This was a theme he returned to when interviewed and he also spoke of how the RMP
made him consider his own practice more reflexively (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith,
2004). When asked for his general response to the RMP, he answered as follows:

> To step away from the busy office to think about these concepts was useful. The
> programme gave me food for thought. It made me think about things; to think about some
> of the relationships I have with some of my managers, things like that. A few things came
> out of it in term of self-reflection, thinking about particular people that I might do some
> things differently with. They're quite different personalities my managers. It made me
> think about that a little bit, especially in terms of one of the more problematic ones, and
> trying another approach with them.

> (Interview 1 with Andy, senior manager)

Andy also spoke about how he perceived disclosing, or honesty with others, to have
operated during the senior management RMP:

> I suppose there's a wall of cynicism in some people, so it depends on whether they engage
> with it or not. I think you have to engage with it on a personal level. It's a mindset really. I
> suppose if others see their peers engaging, maybe that helps bring them across, seeing

other people engage. We had a reasonable room in terms of engagement. There were some open-minded people, nothing too cynical; the likes of Declan – a good open mind. I think if you have a few people like that in the room, I think it gets people going.

(Interview 1 with Andy, senior manager)

Interestingly, after mentioning the importance of someone setting a revelatory leadership example, he went on to suggest that the facilitators could "plant" someone on the programme to perform such a role:

Even if you had to plant someone on the programme [laughs] just to get the ball rolling, that might be one way you could stimulate openness. You could just ask someone [lowers his voice to a whisper] "Hey, listen you wouldn't mind just…" Sometimes that's what you need. I mean ideally it would happen organically but you might need somebody like that as a catalyst, a change agent. And if you have to seed it, then that's what you do. You just need somebody who can do it convincingly [laughs].

(Interview 1 with Andy, senior manager)

During our second interview, Andy raised some doubts about whether the senior manager RMP was a safe enough space for disclosing, also hinting at the need to preserve and sustain this learning space in order to make it safer, in time, for more honesty and openness:

147

Andy: I did wonder if people felt it was a safe enough room. I think the benefit of having the programme was very good in the sense of building a bit of senior management morale and opening up the door a little bit. But, you know, would it be slightly more successful next time? Because maybe they'd feel there would be more trust then? The few people who got it were fundamentally interested; the likes of Declan. Others were more defensive. Others would know each other well through committees. Others don't work closely, or there may be conflict due to the nature of their roles. A couple of senior managers - this isn't a great phrase but I'll use it anyway – would be seen as a stone in the shoe of other people's objectives. Maybe it was only at the end of the programme that people said "That was actually okay, it was safe to open up". But there was an element of keeping the armour on and they might not say that because that might show vulnerability that they wouldn't want others to see.

Researcher: I picked that up; others did too and told me as much offline, now you're telling me you did as well. So this wasn't concealed as such, just unspoken – is that right? It was hidden but it was *obviously* hidden, so to speak…

Andy: …exactly, exactly. It comes back to self-awareness. Self-awareness is too hard, you just don't want to buy into this and you either don't care and so, the defensive shell is up, or you're not self-aware enough to realise that it's that obvious: we're not all great poker players you know [laughs].

(Interview 2 with Andy, senior manager)

Several interpretations of the Worldlife RMP as space of honesty with others are made possible by Andy's responses. His comments about the potential mimetic quality of

148

disclosing during the RMP reveal his opinion on how reticent, or even cynical managers, might be led to disclose by the example of peers who were less afraid to do so, or who could not help but do so because they were natural reflexives - "open minded people" as he called them, who already "got it [and] were fundamentally interested [anyway]". According to Andy, their example might coax their more reluctant peers into speaking and acting in a revelatory manner, just as it might potentially drain the cynicism from others who may then follow suit. Surprisingly, Andy then proposed that such an example, if it wasn't naturally forthcoming in a group, could be administered. A participant could be pre-arranged to act as a "catalyst" or a "change agent" for disclosing. Although "ideally it would happen organically" there is no need to take the risk that it wouldn't, he seems to suggest. A "plant" could be inserted into an RML group to encourage disclosing because, "if you have to seed it, that's what you do. You just need someone who can do it convincingly"

For Andy, then, honesty with others in the space of appearance could be encouraged by a kind of dramaturgical learning performance (Berkovich, 2014; Ramsey, 2005) rehearsed prior to the space itself and then triggered (if necessary) in the service of a worthy end: encouraging engagement as revelatory action during RML and combating cynicism which, as previous studies show (Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Sinclair, 2007), detract from such a space. Andy's idea of planting a discloser in the group raises interesting procedural and possibly ethical questions. It also sails close to the kind of instrumental disclosing which would go against Arendtian thinking (Williams, 2014). But it does speak to theatrical notions of the public sphere (Villa, 1999) which contend that "playacting" (Sennett, 2003, p.37) need not necessarily constitute insidious pretence (Ibarra, 2015) or reduce to the sort of cynical "façade" Berkovich (2014,

149

p.250) warns against. Instead it could be a necessary mode of political (as opposed to personal) expression in a civic management learning space where the operating of convention is more important than any subjectivist expressions of a manager "acting in accord with [their] true self" (Caza and Jackson, 2011, p.353). The convention or protocol in this case would be the acting out of a fictional role (revelatory peer) by someone who agreed to this beforehand and could do it "convincingly" if called upon, thus potentially setting off an process of informal and mimetic, social learning (Billett, 2014; Lave, 1996) during RML, making it a performance learning space (Ramsey, 2005); a political stage which, as such, may require a politically reflexive performance (Alexander, 2010; Willis, 2014).

The trouble with honesty

There is a dark side to disclosing that is often mentioned in the literature but not always fully explored. Much is rightly made of how difficult this act of "making our experiences and insights public" (Bjerlov and Docherty, 2006, p.98) can be (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004); the vulnerability it engenders (Raab, 1997) and the risk and feelings of fear that can be involved (Brooks, 1999; Hoyrup, 2004). One problem with self-reflexivity or what in this thesis is being referred to as honesty with oneself, or inner disclosing, according to Janet, a middle manager at Worldlife, is the brooding melancholy it can induce. She explained it as follows:

> I think people are afraid to reflect because they will run into a spiral of depression. This is
> something I talk about in myself. I try not to look over my shoulder but instead, just to

carry what has happened and not be dragged down by it. And sometimes reflection drags

you down.

(Interview 1 with Janet, middle manager)

Jack, another Worldlife middle manager, spoke in a somewhat similar way about his

tendency to over reflect, or "wonder", as he put it. He even described the RMP as a

"wonderer's paradise". When asked about the self-reflexive aspects of the RMP, he

responded as follows:

I do probably talk to myself a fair bit anyway. I don't struggle with myself but I do

wonder a lot, loads in fact. I wonder about bloody everything. I sometimes wish I had a

wondering "off" button. I have ten theories on everything. My head is going non-stop.

(Interview 1 with Jack, middle manager)

Leaving aside the 'curse' of being a reflective human being (Leary, 2004), which Janet

and Jack both in their own ways seem to allude to, from a learning perspective the most

troubling problem with honesty with oneself might be that reflection is prone to self-

deception (Kemmis, 1985). Tom, a middle manager at Worldlife, seemed to understand

this instinctively. When I asked him about the difference between reflecting alone and

with others he said:

151

We do need that. It's lonely to do this on your own. It's very difficult to on your own; you'll only get so far. You do need that shared aspect, in a secure environment.

(Interview 1 with Tom, middle manager)

He went on to describe the dynamic nature of his own self–reflexivity about his practice and his career in general; thoughts which he said were inspired by his participation on the RMP:

Tom: In the short time since the programme I've asked myself do I really, really want to change things? Or am I quite happy where I am? It depends on the day: the answer changes. Maybe I want something I don't really want? I think I want it but I don't actually want it. You start to think are we really that adjustable as human beings? Maybe we're not, or maybe I'm not up for the concept of reflexivity? It's fine, but maybe it's just not for me?

Researcher: Are we sort of fooled by reflection, is that what you mean?

Tom: Reflection brought me to a crossroads. It brought me to two views which I've flipped over and back on since the programme, and depending on that day or week that's in it: that reflection reinforces your view that what you are is better than you think it is, you're just not giving yourself the kudos, so stop being so hard on yourself - that's one view, the comfortable one. The other is, well, stop being a wimp! Try a bit harder, don't give up. It depends on the day.

Notwithstanding the confusion and conflict solitary self-reflexivity caused in him (Rigano and Edwards, 1998), and the oscillation he underwent between praising and then scolding himself, Tom also experienced a heightened potential for self-deception during self-reflection. This potential for self-deception is one of the reasons managers are encouraged to disclose before their peers: so they might lessen the chance for, or impact of self-deception by soliciting feedback from those around them in a dialogical process of development (Berkovich, 2014). Therefore, entering into RML as a reflexive space of honesty where "the world comes to light" (Van Der Walt, 2013, p.63) can counteract this, helping a manager to challenge what they know and how they have come to know it (Cressey, 2006) in mutually beneficial ways with others (Bjerlov and Docherty, 2006).

Yet such honesty with others poses its own particular set of problems. Even if it can be initiated, which is not a given, then there is no guarantee it will not backfire. Janet touched on this during the RMP programme she attended. As the following field note taken from there shows, it sparked a lively reflexive discussion among participants on the dangers of public honesty. This evolved during a general discussion, after Nicolini et al. (2004), on whether Worldlife is a structure that reflects:

"If there is criticism in the team on a certain issue", Martha says, "I bring it to Gerard (her boss, a senior manager). Gerard and I then go over it and we can talk about it openly.

Then he goes to Ray (Gerard's boss, a management board member) and tells him everything's fine! Janet intervenes: "There's a lot of politics and power struggles, can this idea of collective reflection ever be incorporated into a company's culture?" She seems to be asking this rhetorically, as if she has more or less made her mind up on it. Now Sam speaks up, "But say Ray has a paper on something and he's relying on it and there are issues in the team which may potentially affect certain things and he's not aware of them, well, that's a problem isn't it?", he warns, suggesting that Ray could be open to and needs to hear about such things. "Well, we do accommodate each other at Worldlife" says Sandra, "And I think that's a good thing". She says it in a tone which to me suggests she wishes to smooth over a peer discussion which is getting a little heated. As facilitator, I want to keep the heat where it is for now, so I ask her "Okay, but is it always a good thing?" Before she has a chance to answer, Janet comes in again "But why should I stick my head above the parapet?" she asks, "There's a fear of doing that in here, its politics with a capital P". Now Sandra gets to respond, this time though, in answer to what Janet has said: "It's political", she agrees.

(Field note from RMP, middle manager programme, November, 2011)

When he was interviewed, Gerard, the senior manager mentioned above, had illuminating things to say himself about disclosing in Worldlife. These may help explain Martha's perception as to his alleged reluctance to disclose to higher managerial levels. When asked why managers are Worldlife so rarely got together to reflect, he said:

Gerard: I don't know why it doesn't happen. But it's not, I mean, it doesn't appear to be encouraged. If anything it's kind of discouraged. I don't know why, I don't know. I just

get that feeling. We have lots of meetings and committees where we get together, but those are different. Often we go through other departments to get to each other you know? For example, certain departments will go to HR instead of coming directly to me – talk to me directly! Its silos. We don't talk to each other.

Researcher: Is there scope for any sort of group reflection in any of the meetings you mentioned?

Gerard: Typically there are pre-meetings where everything is straightened out. You don't get arguments at the sales and service board, for example[5]. A lot of these things are sorted out beforehand and there's nothing necessarily wrong with that. It takes the element of surprise out of it.

(Interview 1 with Gerard, senior manager)

In our second interview Gerard returned to this theme. This time he gave more detail on why in his view public reflection was culturally avoided in Worldlife:

Gerard: We don't like confrontation. We don't want arguments around the table. Introducing that [as public RML] would be difficult. The danger then is you get into a blame culture. It would have to be done very carefully; you don't want to get into public hangings; that's no good either. It'd have to be done very carefully.

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[5] A monthly senior management forum at Worldlife for discussing new business. It is attended by relevant senior managers and management board members.

Researcher: Could it happen just at senior management level maybe, between you and your peers?

Gerard: Probably, yeah. Not with the management board there though. Even then it'd be difficult. It'd have to be done very, very carefully. I think there would be merit in it. To learn properly you have to be upfront. It's supposed to be about how we can work together. It's just, I don't know, anytime you need to get anything done in another area, you've no bloody chance! Two or three management board members involved? Give up!

(Interview 2 with Gerard, senior manager)

When asked to elaborate on how public reflection (beyond the RMP) might be embedded into existing work structures, at least between him and his peers, he said:

Gerard: People would have to be prepared to be open and not be defensive about things; not take things personally. It has to be set up like that because if I'm having a go at say, Declan, or Andy, they have to be able to see what I'm doing and fine, have a go back at me, I don't care! You'd have to do this outside the management board though. You'd have to forget them.

Researcher: You mean don't tell them that you're doing it?

Gerard: Well, I don't know, of course you can't *forget* about your management board member. I'm not gonna say something there that Ray's gonna chew me for months over. I still have to work for him; he's still my boss, so why would I do that?

Gerard's perception of Worldlife as a relatively closed and siloed managerial culture which challenges any prospects for embedding public reflection and disclosing - even though in his view it would likely be meritorious – resonates with the experience of Saul. Saul is a middle manager who after the RMP programme (in a case that will be revisited in more depth in chapter six) tried to organise collective reflection sessions amongst his middle management peer group. But how Saul's senior manager responded to this idea is revealing:

Researcher: You say you came up with your 'Managers' forum' idea after attending the RMP; did the programme give you this idea?

Saul: Yes, I have to say yes. I've heard it before, people saying we never have time to talk, so when people on the programme spoke about how good it was to talk together and how little time we have for it, and when we were all wondering whether it would just stop now, I said to myself "This shouldn't stop so let's take the bull by the horns and do it". I told Denis, my manager, that I was doing it and I said "I'm not inviting you". He was fine with it. To be fair he was supportive but he told me not to cross over management board boundaries. That's what he was worried about, he openly said that. He didn't want other senior managers coming to him asking why one of his managers was causing meetings with one of their managers. I think that's naïve. It's petty, to be honest with you.

(Interview 1 with Saul, middle manager)

As examples like this illustrate, one problem with organising RML as a reflexive space of honesty with others in Worldlife, was a fear of the potential repercussions that disclosing in such spaces might bring; there seemed to be a general fear of "rocking the boat" (Zerubavel, 2006, p.76). Similar to Vince's findings (2004), there was anxiety over the perceived conflict that engaging in new reflexive practices, either across or up hierarchical lines (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011) would generate. Whether this fear was founded or was simply an untested assumption (Kegan and Lahey, 2001), it was nevertheless felt as such by Worldlife managers, as Gerard's response makes clear.

The prevailing reductive and conservative sensitivity to politics and power relations (Buchanan, 2008) at Worldlife, seemed to breed a sort of fearful conformism in some managers – as one senior manager said, the organisation sometimes resembled "a mutual admiration society" (Interview 2 with Kate, senior manager). Ultimately this works against attempts to introduce reflexivity into organisational structures (Nicolini et al., 2004). Untested assumptions aside, however, given the real potential for material loss involved such conservatism is not unreasonable (Marris, 1974). Nor is it without empirical substance. It can in fact be founded in a manager's historic experiences. Natalie, a middle manager, had a negative experience of disclosing before others which is instructive here:

> **Natalie:** I learned to mind my p's and q's after a research and development forum I attended a few years back. All the senior managers were there, plus the management board and a mix of managers from other levels. It was the only time I was myself in front of them; my total self. They brought this guy in from the outside to speak to us on the

topic and after he finished I put my hand up and said 'this is a load of bullshit'. That was me being me – to hell with the consequences. My hand went up and I said this, and then it just erupted into others dissenting. Obviously, they'd been thinking the same thing. Then in my head I just went "Oh no, what have I done?" The whole thing just turned into a small disaster.

Researcher: Small disaster?

Natalie: Yeah, they'd brought in this person to speak about R&D but I wasn't a nodding sheep, I vented. But I obviously started something, I kicked off a negative vibe that just became a kind of "Where do we go from here?" moment. Ray got up, he actually stood up and brought some order back into things but in my head I was thinking 'This is ridiculous'. But I realised after I'd done it, in front of everyone, in front of [names various Worldlife senior managers and management board members], [pauses], looking back on it now I wouldn't do the same thing again. Natalie now is different, it's all "How are you [names Worldlife management board member]? Yes we can do that, absolutely no problem".

Researcher: Does learning to be political, then, mean we learn not to tell the truth? Is that what you mean?

Natalie: If I was in that situation again, this time I wouldn't have, [pauses], I was under a lot of pressure at the time. A lot of the frustrations I was feeling were nothing actually to do with the company. I would do it differently now. Now I'd have said what I said in a nicer way. I've also learned you don't necessarily tell *all* of the truth, especially to those higher up. I don't know them; I don't work with them every day. Now I just think "What

is it they are looking for?" so I can give it to them the way it needs to be. But if it was a very serious issue I would stand up and say no.

(Interview 2 with Natalie, middle manager)

Power relations at Worldlife are viewed by managers predominantly in terms of hierarchical status (Jackall, 2010; Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Politics is mainly seen negatively (Buchanan, 2008) and one-sidedly; only its darker dimensions (Griffin and O'Leary-Kelly, 2004) seem to have much force. Such as they were, the "politics of learning" (Antonacopoulou, 2006b, p.466) at Worldlife got in the way of transparent reflection, blocked or limited new action and learning and, as the examples show, in general worked against honesty with others from appearing. Interestingly, managers themselves saw this and often knew what could be done to change things. This is evident, for example, when reading Gerard's thoughts on what public reflection between senior managers should look like, or from reading Saul's castigating assessment of the parochial boundary his manager wished to put on his plans for organising reflection (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b) within his own managerial peer group. Managers thus understood the status quo in reflective rather than "unreflective" terms (Antonacopoulou, 2006b, p.468). They were typically political realists (March and Olsen, 1989) who could describe the situations they faced, understand their own roles within these, as well as the roles of others, and imagine how things could be different.

In the main however, and for a complex mix of individual and institutional reasons, the senior managers involved did not always wish to act on such awareness, preferring instead to maintain the status quo (Antonacopoulou, 2006b; 2004a). Senior managers seemed more wary of reflexive action than their more junior colleagues perhaps because, as Declan alluded to above, they have more at risk from disclosing – "You're jettisoning all the stuff you've learned *that has gotten you to a certain point…you're more vulnerable*" (Interview 2 with Declan, senior manager, emphasis added).

Those who did try to challenge the culture by disclosing before others, encountered resistance, and despite their own willingness to interact and potentially learn in this way, organisational politics and power relations (as they perceived these) served to limit the scope of what might have been achieved (Vince, 2012). Those who did not challenge in the examples provided, chose to do so because they could not find a strong enough practical reason to take the risk of disclosing. Nor were they compelled to by any external stimulus which could have helped to change their minds. In the case of Saul, his senior manager Dennis did receive external stimulus from him, but this came from below and in a formal hierarchical culture (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011) like Worldlife's where - although it does not necessarily characterise or determine all interactions - at core "people are superior or subordinate" (Diefenbach, 2013, p.7), the direction requests come from is important. Supporting this interpretation is Natalie's use of the phrase "higher up". Offering more general support is a related metaphorical remark made by a middle manager during one RMP programme: "It's like a game of dominoes in here, nobody will move unless their management board member gives it the okay first" (RMP field note, middle manager programme, February, 2012). Thus whilst Saul was partly supported, his senior manager did not permit him to broaden the

scope of organised RML beyond his own operational borders, thus reinforcing what many saw as Worldlife's siloed culture and cutting off any potential for strategic organisational learning (Vince, 2004) through workplace learning as practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004).

Based on the evidence discussed in this section, which other data not reported suggests is representative of how openness is perceived in Worldlife's culture generally, the main trouble with honesty with others would seem to be twofold: firstly, just as disclosing is a conscious reflexive act, so too is not disclosing: it is a choice (Knott, 2013). But some managers clearly viewed it as a risk not worth taking. This is less true in terms of disclosing inside the space of the RMP - where, although as Andy proposed not everyone may have been forthcoming, there was still more freedom and safety to do so - but more outside it, in the 'place' of organisation where issues of security and perceived material risk come more to the fore. Second, and this of course is linked to the preceding issue, outside of the RMP, Worldlife itself lacked spaces where disclosing could be enacted relatively safely within managers' everyday practice, even if the risk of doing so could never be disappeared because risk and uncertainty - the "unreckonability" of disclosing (Williams, 2014) – are inherently part of this process.

The case of Natalie supports this reading. Whilst she may have lacked the skill needed to disclose "tactfully" (Jackall, 2010, p.55), when she did it "erupted into others dissenting", which then had to be quelled, tellingly by a senior organisational figure. Subsequently, she resolved never to disclose again. In fact, unless it was "a very serious issue", she resolved to dissimulate instead. This is suggestive of two interpretations:

firstly, though by her own admission she did so awkwardly, via her honesty before others Natalie opened up a dam of dissent because the need to disclose had built up in a culture which did normally permit openness to occur; secondly, the ensuing rush to quell the dissent indicates the uncomfortableness of those involved, suggesting in turn a lack of familiarity and practice with disclosing which triggered the need to close it down rather than rest in the anxiety induced in order to learn collectively from it (Vince, 2001).

Overall these analyses connect with two broader questions in the RML literature: how are reluctant managers persuaded to engage sincerely with reflexive learning efforts (Cunliffe, 2009b)? And how can organisations be made structurally safe for, and amenable to, reflexive learning (Nicolini et al., 2004)? Whilst no definitive or simple answers are provided here, a contribution to understanding has been made by relaying the responses of managers to reflexive honesty or disclosing with both themselves and their peers in a workplace setting. This illuminates the way in which reflexive learning attempts can be stymied in real organisational settings and reveals some of the interpretations and motivations of the actors involved.

The role of honesty in RML

Two constructive roles for honesty, or reflexive disclosing, within the Worldlife RMP are identified and unpacked in this section: to surprise managers and to relate them more deeply to one another. First, the role of surprise is discussed. One of the roles honesty with oneself and others can have is to surprise managers by reflection (Jordan, 2010). By disclosing who rather than what they are during RML, or by doing so within the

practically reflexive (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004) spaces of appearance and possibility (Antonacopoulou, 2008a) which unfold or present themselves within their everyday practice, managers can be 'struck' (Corlett, 2012) in certain ways which give them pause for thought or which enlighten them as to new ways of viewing self and others. Natalie was surprised at how open collective reflection was on the programme she attended:

The interaction with people was very good. I was expecting it to be more negative. I don't know why, just from the type of people that might have been there.

(Interview 1 with Natalie, middle manager)

Neil, a supervisor at Worldlife, whose RMP programme included management peers from his own area, was surprised at the way the session disclosed discussions that would not normally have formed part of how managers interacted in their regular work lives:

I work with these guys and we don't talk about the stuff we talked about on the RMP. We meet every week but that's different, that's more a team update.

(Interview 2 with Neil, supervisor)

Another supervisor, Bill, expressed surprise at how relevant the RMP was to his practice in comparison to other management development programmes he had attended

in the past. This seemed more a case of the learning space disclosing to the manager; opening out or 'revelating' (Paton et al., 2014) to him in a way which allowed him in turn to better understand his own management practice:

Bill: It was one of the few courses that I thought was directly relevant without exception. It wasn't that the first hour was relevant, or that a certain part only was relevant – it was relevant all the way through. It was easy to relate the content to my day-to-day experience and that was unusual, that doesn't tend to be the case. It usually tends to be more 'pick n' mix', take what you can and leave out the rest. I thought it was consistently relevant.

Researcher: Were you surprised at how relevant it was?

Bill: Yeah, I was. It was relevant because it moved the conversation on from "You're a manager therefore you manage and that's your job": actually, there's more to it than that; there's a lot more going on. The RMP took it past the "I put buttons in a jar, that's me managing that jar" (taps his finger firmly several times on the table), to "Well, hold on, why and I doing that? Am I doing that the best way? And what's the impact of doing it that way on someone else?"

(Interview 1 with Bill, supervisor)

At first, Bill's manager Mary was caught off-guard by the RMP, expressing surprise at how it challenged her pre-conceptions of what a management development programme was and could be and how, in particular, the "intimate" and unstructured space of disclosing differed from programmes she had previously attended:

My pre-conception was that this would be a follow-on from programmes we had done before. That it wouldn't be too different. It was an awful lot different to what my pre-conceptions were. It took me a while to get into that. It is very, very different. It is a little bit unstructured and it takes your mental juices a little bit more time to warm up to that. It was a more intimate kind of discussion as opposed to prior programmes which are more structured and its 'workshop this', 'do that', 'read this', you know? So it was a little outside the norm; outside the general comfort zone of management training.

(Interview 1 with Mary, middle manager)

Like Mary, Vincent, a middle manager, was surprised by the RMP's ability to draw him into a learning process which, owing to its honesty and openness, made for a different pedagogical experience than he was used to:

It was good, it was definitely deeper and different to courses I have been on before. It was a total shift in direction. Two weeks before the programme I was thinking "I need this like a hole in the head". By the time we were actually into it, it couldn't have come at a better time because sometimes when you're in the thick of it you need to actually step away, get into the room with a group of peers and talk about the kind of stuff that we all come across on a daily basis; the stuff that we struggle to manage within teams, or whatever. I found that good.

(Interview 1 with Vincent, middle manager)

Surprise then, as these examples demonstrate, was an important feature of many Worldlife managers experience of the RMP. Being surprised, or 'struck' as Cunliffe (2002) and Corlett (2012) put it, triggered reflexive thinking and learning (Jordan, 2010). This was made possible in the RMP by the space of honesty with oneself and others which the programme provided. Disclosing allowed for surprise to occur and for reflexive learning to accompany it. As shown above, surprise appeared for managers in at least five identifiable ways. It appeared when the RMP was a more positive interaction than they had expected, confounding the cynicism they anticipated, cynicism which was presumably based on previous experiences (perhaps like Natalie's above) where attempts at public disclosing in Worldlife had not gone so well. It also appeared when it allowed room for managers to discuss things which are normally not discussed with their managerial peers in their day-to-day interactions, demonstrating to them that there are learning spaces of possibility (Antonacopoulou, 2008a; 2002) within their organisation where topics, revealed through reflexive disclosing, can be surfaced which do not appear for discussion in the everyday realms of their practice.

Surprise also appeared when managers found that the RMP was relevant to their practice in a way which no other development programme they had experienced prior to then could match, thus changing their perceptions of what management learning is and can do (Antonacopoulou, 2002). It appeared when it challenged managers' pre-conceptions of how open and intimate management development could be and how much it forced them to adapt to reflexive learning in ways which were not required by their historic, more traditional management learning experiences - the "ABC" (Tim), "pick n' mix" (Bill) and "pro forma" (Declan), kinds of interventions they had been habituated to up until this point.

Finally, surprise appeared when it drew managers into a new and different learning experience which disarmed them by not being the waste of time they were worried it might be, finding instead that the RMP was a "deeper and different" pedagogical experience which they needed perhaps more than they could have anticipated. Building on the work of Jordan (2010), five ways in which RML surprised managers as a space of honesty are offered by the analysis above. These are listed in Table 5.0 below:

Dimension of surprise	*Reflexive learning result*
RMP was a positive interaction	Confounded cynicism regarding management learning
RMP made room for discussion	Allowed the normally unspoken to be said
RMP was relevant	Renewed belief in the value of management learning
RMP was an intimate, open space	Challenged conventional preconceptions of management learning
RMP was deep and different	Met a needed, but unknown management learning need

Table 5.0 Five dimensions of surprise in the space of honesty

The second constructive role disclosing has is to connect a manager with the relational quality of their practice (Antonacopoulou, 2008a). Disclosing before others de-atomises a manager as an individual and isolated unit of mere psychology and reactive behaviour (Shotter, 1975) in the workplace, connecting them instead as active human parts of a complex ecological system of practice in which they are reflexively embedded as agents

(Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011) with a distinctly "relational being" (Gergen, 2009b). Jason alluded to this aspect of the space of honesty:

Prior to attending I won't say I was jumping for joy. Nobody ever feels like they're looking forward to a particular course. But actually when I was there I was really enjoying it because, getting feedback from others, I think that's really important to me because sometimes you feel like you're in isolation with what you're doing. But when you see that others have the same issues, and you can share problems with them, you start to think "Hey, I'm not the only one, I'm not an island" We're all rowing our own boats, to a certain extent. The RMP was the first time some of us have gotten together to discuss these issues. We have the same issues we just never discuss them together. Reflection together is good, it's good to have an open dialogue so that we can discuss things and so that we can relate. Once we have that open dialogue we can relate with one another a lot more.

(Interview 1 with Jason, middle manager)

Martha, a middle manager, also discussed relating and how the RMP as a space of honesty opened her up more to learning from others. As she describes this she refers to the example of Sandra (whom she attended the RMP with), discussed above:

Martha: The programme was deep. It made you look at yourself and you got more from other people as well. Look at Sandra, she just let everything go; everyone [there] just sort of said 'here's who I am'…

169

Researcher: …we had honesty, do you mean?

Martha: Yeah, it was complete honesty. Sometimes people would hold back, but [pauses] I just felt I learned lots from people. I definitely felt I was in a room full of people I could learn from.

(Interview 1 with Martha, middle manager)

This type of relationally reflexive (Donati, 2011) approach to learning, in which managers are moved away from any over-individualised sense of themselves and their practice, and more towards "ways of being in relation" (Hosking, 2011, p.62), was a new experience for Martha:

We're not used to this kind of training in Worldlife. It's usually more 'tick-a-box', that's what managers are more used to. This is deeper. It's a leap of faith – but one we should try! If you put us all in a room and asked us what five things we learned it would be very hard to answer. But I think we'd all say things like happier; more camaraderie between us; and realizing that everyone is experiencing the same problems but we have no forum where we can talk about them.

(Interview 2 with Martha, middle manager)

As managers disclosed 'who' they were on the RMP, the shared world of work which they inhabited together appeared as it was enacted by them during the programme. Through disclosing, they closed the relational distance which seemed to characterize

170

how they typically practiced their roles. By opening themselves out towards others in reflexive space of honesty, in turn they invited reciprocal revealing in others. In the process they learned something about themselves and their peers, contributing to their own mutual development in ways which were new to them. This sense of managers realising they inhabited a shared managerial world, one brought into view by disclosing during the RMP, and more importantly one which they could reflect upon and potentially change through praxis, was eloquently captured by Ciara, a Worldlife supervisor:

Sometimes you get caught up in your own problems. You feel your problems are your problems, but your problems are everybody's problems. You realise their concerns are your concerns. It was good to hear others talking about their problems and how they deal with them. Sometimes the problem that you have or the situation you're in isn't what you think it is and you get a different view of the world; that's the world as it is at the moment, but that's not the way the world has to stay.

(Interview 1 with Ciara, supervisor)

The space of honesty is the first overlapping aspect of the tripartite theoretical framework for RML presented in this thesis. This framework provides RML with a theory of management learning as a spatial form of praxis (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003; Nonaka et al., 2014) where "praxis-driven dialogues, reflexivity, and open-space sharing" are privileged (Trott, 2013, p.471). In RML as a reflexive space of honesty, the world of work which managers share is disclosed to them as they disclose before each

other, rehearsing their practice in new ways together (Antonacopoulou, 2004b). The common world of interest which lies between them (Arendt, 1998) is the mutual concern they possess for the organisation which they and their teams have an existential stake in sustaining. This mutual concern can be realised and cared for by engaging in collective, productive reflexive learning practices (Boud et al., 2006a). The contribution made by theorising RML as a space of honesty then, is to emphasise and to show that reflexive learning is not just political in the sense that it surfaces and discusses topics like power relations and politics (Vince, 2001); rather, RML itself is a political act undertaken with others; a process of enacting power and politics with them in a space where disclosing and witnessing generates the moral and praxical responsibilities (Williams, 2014) attending such a paradigm.

The empirical data presented in this chapter supports this theorisation, but it also challenges it. It is important not to romanticise any communal theory of learning in organisations (Reedy, 2003) and as this chapter has shown, there is often as much trouble with disclosing as there is potential for it to enable reflexive learning amongst managers. Indeed, as the next chapter will address, managers may critique the idea of disclosing itself and further, they may question the nature of, and even the need for RML to occur at all.

CHAPTER 5   THE RSOA IN PRACTICE: SPACE OF CRITIQUE

Reflexivity is inherently critical (Holland, 1999; Sandywell, 2005). Part of being reflexive is to engage in critique and this can take many forms (Antonacopoulou, 2010). The same is true for reflexive learning. Critical RML in particular, albeit to varying degrees of radicalness, accentuates the potential RML possesses to enable managers to perform critique both during and after such a learning intervention. As discussed in chapter one, for critical scholars this mode is usually privileged over others – such as, for example, RML's productive potential, although this too must contain an element of criticality (Boud et al., 2006b) - so that through an avowedly ideological form of RML, managers might be made more critically reflective, sceptical and self-determining, rather than wholly reliant upon authority structures (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012). Such approaches are valuable but for reasons already discussed, they are also problematic (Fenwick, 2005; Perriton, 2004). Although critical RML can be reflexive, and promote reflexivity (Reynolds, 1999b; Vince, 2010), for example in how it is cognisant and accepting of the likelihood that managers will have their own ideas regarding the warrant for critical claims (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012), no one critical approach has a monopoly on stating how critique should unfold during RML, or to what ends it should be deployed in a manager's practice, presuming it is deployed at all.

The contribution of this chapter is to show how RML can be critical without being ideological and without being necessarily co-opted by the organisational status quo (Reynolds, 1999b). This claim is supported using empirical data showing how managers developed critically reflexive understandings of themselves and their organisation during the Worldlife RMP programme as a politically reflexive space of critique. Thus

this chapter answers calls to rethink the notion of critique in management learning generally (Antonacopoulou, 1999b; Clegg et al., 2006; Fenwick, 2005) and more specifically, it responds to calls for more studies and theorisations of RML which will take into critical account the related topics of organisational politics and power relations (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince and Reynolds, 2009).

Following scholars like Antonacopoulou (1999b) and Clegg et al. (2006), critique in this chapter is conceptualised as a complex activity which must proceed reflexively; open to the plurality of organisational actors yet also capable of challenging them in terms of what they may assume too easily and unreflectively. This is an agential and relational idea of critique which "provides the power to think and to be responsible for one's actions" (Antonacopoulou, 2004a, p.60). Connecting critique to thinking, acting and plurality in this way, adds a much needed political modality to RML. This modality does not operate on the basis that power and politics are viewed reductively and practiced negatively (Buchanan, 2008, Jones, 1987); rather, politics and power both are seen as necessary and potentially constructive dimensions of learning in organisations (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000), assuming that plurality is accepted (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997) rather than seen, for example, as a troublesome barrier to RML (Rigg and Trehan, 2008) as opposed to a condition of its effective operation. Within RML as a reflexive space of critique, plurality is embraced (Antonacopoulou, 1999b). Space is created for learning which allows and encourages "broader thinking and critical reflexivity" (Paton et al., 2014, p.15). As a result, practice tensions which may be potentially constructive are to be expected because "unitarist representations [are resisted] in favour of multiple readings of a situation" (Huxham and Beech, 2003, p.87).

174

Just as two related forms of honesty or disclosing were distinguished in the previous chapter, so, two related forms of critique are covered here: self and public critique. If critique is seen as a form of power (Antonacopoulou, 1999b), then this distinction is relevant because, as Vince (2012) says, power is a dynamic which is generated and exists "within the individual [and] between the self and others" (p.210). Thus, this chapter is structured in the following way. The first section covers how managers engaged in self-critique by confronting their own "inner plurality" (Arendt, 1971, p.442) during the RMP in ways which motivated them to think differently about how they perceived and could enact their managerial roles. The second and third sections cover how critique operated during public reflection (Raelin, 2001) on the Worldlife RMP and how managers responded to, and interpreted this both during and after the intervention itself.

In these sections, one specific and lengthy ethnographic vignette detailing a particularly challenging critical incident from a Worldlife RMP programme is focused on. This is done in order to highlight the complex and aporetic dimensions (Derrida, 1994) of public critique in practice and to frame the challenges which plurality can present for critical and collectivist forms of RML. Finally, the chapter closes with some concluding thoughts on how to rethink the role of critique in RML theory and practice. This section argues that the concept of critique as currently theorised in RML scholarship, particularly in critical variations, could be more politically reflexive. Theorising RML as a reflexive space of critique advances this idea, supplying new conceptual dimensions which may enrich thinking and practice on this topic.

Self-critique: inner plurality

Whether one wants to minimise individualism in RML and conceive it instead as a primarily relational (Ramsey, 2005), organised (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince, 2002a) or public affair (Raelin, 2001), even within these social forms of RML individuals still persist (Fook, 2010). So do their inner, reflexive worlds which are phenomenologically perceived (Cunliffe, 2009a), however imperfect, partial, and in need of others for relational coherence these may be (Gergen, 2009b). Indeed, it is this individual uniqueness which gives rise to the fact and often to the problem of plurality (Arendt, 1979); to the realisation that "human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of *unique* beings" (Arendt, 1998, p.176, emphasis added). The paradox is that all managers are unique and this is why they are similar. This matters to RML. Every manager is a unique individual, distinct from and other than any other manager. Thus they engage in private, internally reflexive conversations (Archer, 2007) which they can – if they choose to (Knott, 2013) - report on. From these reports it can be gauged, both by themselves and by others, how this "two-in-one dialogue" which expresses their "inner plurality" (Arendt, 1971, p.442) mediates their relationship to the world around them which they help to shape and which they are shaped reflexively by in turn (Maclean et al., 2012). Plurality, then, has agential consequences which help to construct a manager's world, affecting those around them.

This inner plurality can be expressed as self-critique, enabled by RML as a manager becomes willing to "question [their] ways of being and acting in the world" (Cunliffe, 2009a, p.93). Self-critique is thus a form of "prosoche", or paying critical attention to oneself (Hadot, 1995). It matters because it can initiate praxis or action with others. Ultimately this is the point of critical reflection (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012) - helping

managers to somehow change and reconstruct, for the better, the institutional arrangements they are embedded in, which are socially constructed (Seo and Creed, 2002). As Cunliffe (2009a) puts it: "being critical and changing practices, structures, or systems, occurs from within" (p.93). In a similar vein, Fook (2010) writes that engaging in critical reflection on one's assumptions "can provide a platform for transformative action" (p.40). How and why managers engage in such reflexive self-critique during and potentially after RML, and what kind of learning and praxis this can actually lead to, are topics which require more empirical elucidation. To begin with, self-critique is difficult. Here is how Frances, a supervisor at Worldlife described it:

Frances: It's hard to look at yourself all the time. To a certain degree you can say "Yes, I did that well", but from a personal point of view I find it hard to look at myself and say "Right, did I handle that well, or am I doing this well from a relationship point of view?"

Researcher: So you think this feedback should come from the people you're managing?

Frances: Yeah absolutely, because being detached from the group, my manager doesn't see me and what I do, she doesn't have that visibility on what I do and that can be a bit hard.

(Interview 1 with Frances, supervisor)

Frances admits to finding self-critique difficult and implies an understanding of the limitations of introspection for self-critique (James, 2000). As Bateson (1980) said, we are often "wrong about the self" (p.150) and need others to guide our own internal

processes of self-knowing. Miller et al. (2002) write that "reflection…is not enough, true self-knowledge demands action and experimentation" (p.50). Frances has a relationally reflexive (Hibbert et al., 2014) perspective on self-critique which matches Cunliffe's assertion (2009a) that "it is important for leaders to consider *how* they relate to others" (p.96, emphasis in the original). Part of what it means for a manager to have a critical perspective is to be more responsive to the plurality of others. Seeking feedback from others is a reflexive way to enact self-critique (Schippers et al., 2007) beyond the mental confines of a manager's lone reflection. It enhances "self and other awareness" (Waddock and Lozano, 2012, p.274), demonstrating relational leadership (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Asked for an example, Frances described this process of reflexive self-critique in action:

At the performance reviews recently I said to each of the team "Is there anything you want to say to me? I'm not going to take it personally, I just want to be the best manager I can be for you so if there are any critiques of me, or if you want to give me any feedback". No one gave me anything but obviously they knew then that if there were issues they could say them.

(Interview 1 with Frances, supervisor)

This is an example of practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004) or "outsight" (Ibarra, 2015) in operation: the acting out towards others of a "pluralistic view" which realises that "multiple interpretations of situations exist" (Barge, 2004, p.71) and a manager can learn from them if they actively seek out the plurality of others. Frances' willingness to do this with each individual member of her team demonstrates

her commitment to engaging with the plurality of others in order to solicit critique from them, potentially weaving their "multiple narratives" (Ramsey, 2005, p.219) into her own learning in order to develop her practice.

Granted, there may have been issues which people were not prepared to present, or critiques they felt they could not disclose; however, the point is by using reflexive management dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002) Frances attempted to create an invitational relational space where this could occur and "alternative views [could] emerge" (Zundel, 2013, p.122). Like Tim, Frances doesn't wield her management power "like a stick" but instead she operates it "correctly" (Interview 2 with Tim, supervisor), which in practice they would both interpret to mean relationally, treating power as "an embodied force [which] we carry with us in our relations" (Vince, 2012, p.210).

Frances alluded to another difficulty with self-critique: a spatial one. She mentioned being "detached from the group". This refers to how she and her team are located away from the business unit they belong to. Her team was set up to service a new product line for Worldlife. As there was no space available for them within the parent unit, they were placed away from them, at the opposite end of the building, separated by two sets of security doors. This "social distance" (Hall, 1990, p.15) meant Frances' manager could not physically observe her managing and thus, in her eyes, wasn't in a position to support her willingness to reflexively critique her practice, something she found difficult. This distance may be one of the reasons she turns to her team more for feedback. If this is true, space - which "relates to everything" (Hall, 1990, p.ix) – played a role in how she practiced self-critique. What also mattered was the type of person she

perceived herself to be (Oshana, 2010) and the type of manager she wanted to become. This emerged in the following response:

Frances: Outside of work I would be self-critical anyway. I'm conscious, maybe too conscious (laughs) of how everyone is feeling on the team. Because I'm so new to managing I want to do a good job. I want to be a good manager for these people, someone that they can come to. And I want to get the results my manager needs from me, but in a way that works for everybody, so that nobody feels they've been asked to do too much, and it's fair.

Researcher: Is this in tension sometimes? This need to get results and this need for fairness you're emphasising?

Frances: No, because our manager is not asking the world of us. I would be very self-aware anyway, self-conscious, so that part of the programme I found good. I'm always critical. I constantly criticise myself inside and outside of work.

Researcher: Do you talk to yourself a lot, in your head?

Frances: Yes, a constant dialogue. I suppose everyone does that though.

(Interview 2 with Frances, supervisor)

The combined reasons Frances gave for engaging in reflexive self-critique were as follows: the social distance between her and her manager in the workplace; the fact that

180

she was - compared to her peers and in relation to management tenure profiles at Worldlife generally - relatively new to managing; and most strongly, the type of person she was. As she said elsewhere her "open mind" was "both due to my personality and the fact that I'm new to management; this makes me open to challenging my own opinions" (Interview 2 with Frances, supervisor). The RMP as a space of self-critique helped to bring this to light for Frances. But, interestingly, by giving her space to reflect with herself and others, it also tempered her tendency for what she came to realise might be an excessive tendency to self-critique:

Researcher: What did you learn about yourself on the RMP?

Frances: Not to be so hard on myself. I'm very self-critical. I realised I was doing a good job. I can be my own worst enemy; I have to stop doing that. The programme gave me the space and self-awareness to realise this.

(Interview 2 with Frances, supervisor)

In what sense was self-reflection on the RMP critical? Not perhaps to the extent that some critical RML theorists would prefer. It did not assume, as some of these scholars do, that commercial organisations are hegemonic (Brookfield, 2009) sites of dominance in which those in management positions of power need to be "*forced*…to act justly towards others" (Griffin et al., 2014, p.16, emphasis in the original). Or that managers are in need of the "emancipatory potential" of critical RML (Welsh and Dehler, 2004, p.27); or that emancipation – even in a deflated "micro" form (Alvesson and Willmott,

2012; Spicer et al., 2009) - is a relevant (Antonacopoulou, 1999b; Clegg et al., 2006) or even a coherent concept (Armstrong, 2009) in this context.

Emancipation was not a word that was used during, or presumed to apply to the RMP as a space of critique. What, if anything, could or would be called emancipatory would come from an "epistemologically emic" standpoint which privileged "the perceptions and world views of the members of the culture under study" (Raelin, 2008a, p.533). As the example of Frances shows, however, reflexive self-critique on the RMP did follow the critical meaning given to it by Boje and Al Arkoubi (2009): it meant a manager being "critical towards oneself [in order to] develop awareness about others" (p.112). Managers were not forced to self-critique via reflection (Hobbs, 2007) nor were they expected to become conformist reflective subjects who could then be controlled by the organisation for narrow performative ends (Elmholdt and Brinkmann, 2006). The purpose of the RMP was not to 'make' managers; constructing managerial subjectivities was not the HRD goal (Townley, 1999). Rather, a critical but non-ideological approach was taken as to whether anything was to be critically judged good or 'bad, or anything in-between, and to what criteria could possibly apply to such pronouncements.

This did not mean that the RMP lacked a critical learning edge. But the principle of critique enacted in this space was non-judgemental and therefore potentially more productive (Clegg et al., 2006). Critique was more about praxis, or acting with managers (Antonacopoulou, 1999b), rather than poiesis or trying to make, or mould them into pre-figured critical shapes (Clegg et al., 2006; Wray-Bliss, 2003). Issues like politics and power relations were not avoided - they were intrinsic to the way in which

the programme itself operated. Theorised as a reflexive space of critique, RML itself is a political act and an enacting of power relations between those participating.

As such, the RMP provided a critical learning space for "empowerment, reflection and praxis", (Reynolds, 1997) in which Worldlife managers were encouraged to question "established assumptions, [and to bring] power relations into view" (Vince, 2002a, p.74). The managers who participated felt this and they recognised it as a new and different approach to their development. Tom was asked directly about the critical dimensions of the RMP. In his answer he provides insight into the process of critique on the RMP, touching on how Worldlife's culture shaped this notion, how it engendered self-critique in him and finally, how this in turn overlapped with the topic of the next section: critique with others:

Researcher: Was the programme critical?

Tom: Not critical as in criticising. There was no verdict or judgement; it wasn't in any way judgemental.

Researcher: But there was critical challenge?

Tom: Yes, there was. There was "Why do you think that?", "Why is that a given?" So it made me say to myself "Hmm, be careful", because now I've got to think through what I say before I say it and I tend not to do that too often. I'll be comfortable in my prejudices every day of the week until someone says "What the hell does that mean?" That's

uncomfortable. Now I have to think in front of others too, people can see the wheel's running and there's this challenge – I don't want my trousers around my ankles in front of my friends! We don't do that, we're trained *not* to do that. Conflict is not something we embrace at work; we're supposed to be a team and people are supposed to gel and get on together, they don't go "Hold on a second, what the hell do you mean by that?" To be critically reflective is a skill. It's a powerful tool – a dangerous one. I can be critical in my own head, but I might not say it. We lack the skill and the practice. There's also the courage aspect and the unpredictability of it – where will critical reflection lead? I don't know, it's a space I haven't been to and one we don't normally go to. We're conditioned to conform, we're conditioned to consensus build; it's not just Worldlife, its society. We do have that critical faculty though.

(Interview 1 with Tom, middle manager)

In this rich response, by questioning his own assumptions and the assumptions of the organisation, even the society he lives in, Tom displays critical self-reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2009a). As he admits, this is not necessarily his default position but the RMP fostered and mobilised this "critical faculty". Following exposure to reflexive ideas and language during the RMP - which he described elsewhere as a "thought-provoking" and "mature development experience", filled with "good challenges on how we saw things and how we interpreted the world we're in" (Interview 1 with Tom, middle manager) - Tom was able to understand and offer his own perspectives on critical reflection and what this meant both for him and by implication for Worldlife more generally. His response is insightful regarding the challenges involved with RML as a space of critique, touching on the discomfort which can accompany reflexive self-critique (Daloz

Parks, 2005; Hedberg, 2009), the unpredictability and uncertainty this method of learning can induce (Cressey, 2006) and some of the potentially challenging relational factors which might go into making self-critique difficult on the programme and indeed afterwards. For example, he mentions the fear of being exposed in front of colleagues and the possibility that critique might have conflictual repercussions. This is a reasonable concern if critique and being critical is conflated with criticism and being negative, which can be the case in organisations (Jackall, 2010).

Many Worldlife managers, including Tom, admitted this was their perception and was also how it would typically be viewed in Worldlife. As Tom said above "we're conditioned to conform; we're conditioned to consensus build". This in turn leads to conformist learning which limits managerial agency (Antonacopoulou, 2006b). But as his response also shows, the RMP challenged this trend, enabling Worldlife managers to realise – sometimes by remembering, as Declan said in the previous chapter – that they have a "critical faculty" and this can be brought to bear on their learning and their management practice. The anxiety and discomfort, even the fear of reflexive self and other critique which Tom alludes to was phenomenologically felt and expressed by him in the private, inner plurality of his own "two-in-one dialogue" (Arendt, 1971, p.442); the internal reflexive conversation (Archer, 2007) he conducted with himself on the programme. Like the managers in Antonacopoulou's study (2006b), Tom also alluded to the fact that Worldlife managers were not encouraged to critically reflect on themselves or their practice during typical development interventions, evidence that prior to the RMP Worldlife managers were not (at least not relatively formally and in a public and organised fashion) learning reflexively. Showing an intuitive understanding of the risks of courageous disclosing (Foucault, 2010) in a space of critique, Tom

185

characterised critical reflection as a dangerous skill in which Worldlife managers lacked practice; a skill which he believed managers were "conditioned" not to enact, both by the culture at Worldlife and, according to him, by society overall. As Tom said, without "passing verdict or judgement" on managers, the RMP as a reflexive space of self-critique challenged this, allowing the "power of critique" to cultivate managers' "power to think and to be responsible for [their] own actions", thus assigning critique an imaginative and constructive rather than condemnatory meaning (Antonacopoulou, 1999b, p.8).

The next section turns to the external direction of critique, travelling away from a focus on a manager's inner plurality and reflexive self-critique, into an analysis of critique as a social phenomenon on the RMP and the way in which the plurality of unique and distinct others (Arendt, 1998) affects how critically reflexive learning occurs in practice (Cunliffe, 2002). A challenging example of plurality in action is used to illustrate this. The section opens with an extended field note taken from within an RMP programme. This field note is supplemented by a comprehensive reflexive analytical memo (Emerson et al., 1995; Saldana, 2009) recorded after the event in my research work journal (Dalton, 1964). This memo unpacks and tries to understand and reflexively interpret this critical research incident (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). The section ends by looking at how other managers who witnessed the event narrated it afterwards, and what the conceptual implications of this for RML as plural space of critique with others might be.

Critique with others: plurality-in-action

During group reflection on the topic of the psychological contract at work and how it is changing - we have been linking this to the notion of reflexive managerial practice; the connection being that, amongst other factors, changing attitudes to work are calling for more adaptive, self and critically aware ways of managing teams and employees - suddenly Philippa interjects, her voice raised aggressively. Glaring at me, she says "So in your new culture we'll be mollycoddling staff! Staff are paid to get results! That's it - producing results: isn't that the focus of the manager? This is just theory, this is just, [trails off], you should go down and manage my team for two weeks, see how you get on; you should hit them over the head with this 'theory' and see how that works! This sounds good but it's not reality". I tell her calmly (though I don't feel calm, I feel my heart beating faster) "Okay, that's your experience and I think we've got to take that into account, but I think as well that theories do influence practice, and sometimes we might not always be aware of this – what do you reckon?", "I think you're up in the sky with this" she replies, shaking her head slowly from side to side to emphasise her disagreement. "Well, do you want to go into it more?" I ask. She doesn't reply. I shift my attention to the group: "Does anyone want to talk about this?" I ask. I notice that many of their heads are down, as though deliberately avoiding eye contact. Nobody is exactly riding to the rescue here, I think to myself. After a few more (long) seconds, I make a call not to press it any more than I already have. Not knowing where to turn, I switch the subject, moving onto the next discussion topic, written in thick black marker pen on the flipchart we have just been debriefing: 'Communication silos at Worldlife'…

(This was a very difficult moment. It really felt like a chasm had opened up in the group. The tension was palpable. As I responded to Philippa's critique I could see heads go down in the group and people exchange nervous glances. It was an awkward interaction. In the moment, as I look back now, I was fighting off emotions myself; anger, frustration -

187

mostly at her for interrupting a good discussion. Plus, she personalised the critique too –
"your culture". Maybe I was pressing it too much? I don't think so. That certainly wasn't
my intention. Nobody else seemed to think so. I'm glad I kept it together, but it was hard.
My attempt to delve deeper was shut down by her not by me. What can you do when a
reflexive invitation is refused? Reflexive dialogue is a space which can ultimately not be
occupied alone. It requires reciprocity; what if this is not forthcoming?

To have a democratic, participatory classroom you need people to participate
democratically. It would have been ideal if she did want to discuss her critique, but she
wouldn't allow it. What does that mean? I remember thinking at the time "should I talk to
her at the break? Try to get behind what's on her mind?" I left it though. At the end of the
day, what has she done? She's done nothing wrong. She's critiqued a concept is all, she's
entitled to her opinion. But I think the way she did it was wrong, it was too aggressive.
Plus, is it fair to open up something then not finish it? She was prepared to make a
critique but not to work it through with me or anyone else on the session. That doesn't
seem to be sincere critical reflection – there's no accountability; the critique is just fired
at someone without any relational back and forth.

Nonetheless, Philippa wasn't censored or chastised and she remained on the programme.
Interestingly, although at the time the group did not get involved, throughout the rest of
the morning I noted a hint of antagonism towards Philippa by others in the group. For
example, at one stage she made a comment and Bill, visibly irritated, said "You're
digging a hole for all of us here" I wonder what that meant. Later again, when Philippa
contributed to another discussion on managerial coaching as an opportunity to enact
reflexive practice, Annette said to her, quite sharply as I recall, "That's not how I see it,
it's not 'mollycoddling' the team to coach them". I note here her use of the same word

Philippa used earlier ("mollycoddling"). This suggests that Annette perhaps had something to say at the time but didn't say it.

Could I have done more to bring the group into the discussion? Maybe I moved on too quickly? I was calm but I was uncomfortable too. Maybe I was rushing out of that chasm that opened up, instead of staying in it a bit longer? I don't know. I feel I did leave time for others to respond, and I did try to bring them in, they just didn't seem to want to go there and at the time I felt picking someone out might have been unfair on them.

(Field note from RMP supervisor programme and reflexive journal memo, March, 2010)

As this field note and reflexive memo shows, the invitation to participate in the RMP also extended to the invitation to critique within its spatial boundary, an invitation which Philippa, an experienced and long serving supervisor at Worldlife, availed of during the programme she attended. Hers was a strong example of public critique in practice during RML. It demonstrates the challenge which plurality can pose in a public space (Arendt, 1979) where rival opinions may sometimes clash and compete (Hill, 1979). In this episode, the Worldlife RMP was tested as a sincere learning space of critique (Antonacopoulou, 2002; 1999b) an agonistic but potentially formative development space (Fischer, 2012) where critical protest of a sort could occur (Callahan, 2013). This is a political aspect of learning which was not denied to managers, as is often the case (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000) when they are performing more instrumental versions of management learning which rely on conformity rather than dissent (Antonacopoulou, 2006b).

Philippa's critique was a strong example of the dissonance which can arise during critical reflection (Rigg and Trehan, 2008). To summarise what she said: reflexive practice was irrelevant to the job of a manager, constituting a 'soft' approach to people management in which the process of reflexively managing a team would somehow detract from what should be the main focus - getting "results". She also critiqued what she perceived as the overly theoretical nature of reflexivity, an idea which for her was too abstract and "up in the sky". It sounded good, she admitted, but it wasn't "reality".

In terms of how the critique unfolded, Philippa's interjection created an aporetic moment: a difficult impasse calling for reflexive endurance as the way forward – how to 'go on' in the situation, in the relational sense meant by Shotter (1996) - seemed temporarily lost or unclear (Derrida, 1994). Time slowed down and the space itself seemed to contract and become disorienting. For lack of relational sustenance the critique was not explored but abandoned, making the RMP (at this particular juncture) a decidedly *non-reflexive space of disappearance*. This shows that the RSOA, like any theory, exists primarily in an abstract state of potentiality; like Taylor and Van Every's description (2000) of emergent organisation, it is "immanent-dormant" (p.326). The RSOA describes what RML could be, but only if enacted this way, which requires reflexive reciprocation. In this instance despite the facilitator's attempts to dialogically author (Cunliffe, 2001; Shotter, 1993) some relational room in which the critique could have been interrogated, others, including the instigator, were unwilling to play a part, thus the space of critique could not be fully actualised.

Overall, this episode challenges what Owen (2008) asserts, demonstrating that not all difficulties in a learning space will just work themselves out, becoming "celebrated and

integrated in the total experience" of those involved (p.126). Philippa's critique came as a surprise, demonstrating that a reflexive space of learning is unpredictable (Cressey et al., 2006). It seemed to come from nowhere. There was no evidence up to that point of how she felt or what she thought about what was being discussed. When her critique did come it was delivered swiftly and with no little aggression. She was certainly struck by what she heard but not in the sense which theorists like Corlett (2012) and Cunliffe (2002) normatively intend. Philippa seemed to be more struck instinctively at how irrelevant and unrealistic to her the idea of reflexively managing was. The "(long) seconds" referred to in the field note portray the slow aporetic silence where nobody came "riding to the rescue". Not to save the facilitator, as such – although it is clear from the journal memo that some emotional support would not have been unwelcome at that point – but more to save the critique by branching it out into one of public critical reflection (Raelin, 2001) on what was said.

This could have ushered in alternative critical perspectives, opening up the debate to new interpretations. For example, beginning a discussion about why exactly reflexive management might not be such a good idea at Worldlife. Philippa's critique might have been reiterated by someone else, now stated perhaps in a different way so that the group could understand where it came from and learn from this. But there was no such argumentation that might have enabled this kind of learning (Gold et al., 2002). No public reflection ensued after Philippa's critical interjection partly because she herself refused to elaborate on it and partly because the rest of the group would not join in, thus the aporia which followed.

Clearly, emotional dynamics were involved (Vince, 2011) at this time in the space of critique, but not quite political ones, demonstrating that the two do not necessarily run together. I say political dynamics were ultimately missing because these would have depended on speech and dialogue between plural actors with rival opinions (Hill, 1979). But despite the invitation to encourage "reflection on resistance to learning" (Vince, 2011, p.345), this was not forthcoming. Because reflexive critique is intrinsically relational, the facilitator could not carry and sustain the critique alone. Later, however, on reflection I worried if I had done enough to try to do this, in hindsight doubting my own reflection-in-action at the time (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009) and the phronetic judgement made as I tried to show reflexive leadership in the group (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014a). The incident demonstrated at least, however, that the RMP was a space where plurality could exist and be articulated, even if this potential was not fully realised.

At times critical reflection is bound to be plural and contested rather than consensual (Fenwick, 2004). Within the RMP as a plural space of critique with others, the facilitator's responsibility was not to silence or censor critique (Grey 2002) but conversely, to encourage critical reflection on it (Vince, 2011). That this was attempted – whether successful or not - demonstrated that the RMP could, if tested, be an agonistic space (Miessen et al., 2012; Mouffe, 2013) for critical reflection which both "relates and separates" individuals (Fry, 2009); a space where normal structures of authority could be temporarily suspended, not in terms of this being a fantasy holding unconscious sway over participants - though this could well be the case (Vince, 2011) - but more as a serious, sincere and agreed upon "playacting" in a public space (Sennett, 2003) in order to perform politically reflexive learning in its aspect as the free speaking of plural

opinions. This could include even those opinions which question the premises upon which critique itself is forwarded, which is vital if a reflexive space of critique is to be politically credible (Fay, 1977; Tully, 1989).

As this incident shows, within the RMP as space of critique plurality was not silenced (Ellsworth, 1989). No attempt was made to "minimise antagonism and conflict" and no "denial of difference" occurred (Vince, 2011, p.337). Hierarchically the facilitator outranked Philippa in a culture where this is taken seriously: in a culture where, as one manager put it, "when you go up the line, how you are dealt with changes" (Interview 2 with Bob, middle manager). Philippa rightly saw that these reified forms of power relations in Worldlife were malleable and did not have to rigidly apply within the spatial boundaries of the RMP.

This speaks to the potency of the space and the sincerity with which she took this. In one sense Philippa was the ideal critical RMP candidate: a reflexive, critical reflector who meta-questioned the need for and value of reflexivity at all, at least in the form (Tully, 1989) the RMP presented it to her. Like all managers participating, Philippa was encouraged by the RMP's facilitators to try not to apply hierarchical considerations within the RMP so she was playing by the reflexive rules of the space. Paradoxically, the apparent failure of critical reflection here may actually represent success at some level, even if it constituted only aporetic rupture without any hope of praxical results arising.

Still, by choosing not to develop her critique when invited, Philippa shut down the possibility of critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2009a) with her colleagues and facilitators. Her interjection can then be critiqued from the same ethical position she was entitled to make it from: that is, the way in which she exercised her right to criticality on the RMP and how she refused to develop this relationally, in "togetherness" (Arendt, 1998) with those she was sharing the space with, can be viewed from this perspective as a negative and ultimately non-political form of RML participation. As already stated, reflexive critique is an intrinsically relational activity which creates both reflexive rights and responsibilities for all concerned. Doing it well, on these terms, involves more an ethical way of being than a cognitive mode of sheer criticality (Cunliffe, 2009b; 2004; 2002; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Gergen, 2009b; McPherson, 2005; Zundel, 2013). The case of Philippa's critique shows how managers may reject critical reflexivity, proving Gray's (2007) point that "managers do not necessarily automatically engage with critical reflection" (p.512) and supporting Antonacopoulou's finding (2004a) that a manager's motivation to engage with reflexive learning cannot be assumed a priori.

Witnessing public critique: narrating plurality-in-action

Public critique occurs before others, so even though at the time they did not engage with the process, it is instructive to hear how Philippa's colleagues responded to this episode after the event. Some of them were asked directly about it. Unprompted, others brought it up themselves, seeming keen to discuss it now in a more private space. This section presents what some of these managers, as witnesses in the reflexive space of appearance and storytellers of the action which unfolded there (Arendt, 1998), had to say. First, Tim's response is presented. His perspective contributed to the analysis above which suggests that this critical incident was a reflexive test for the RMP as a space of critique,

194

one which he believed it passed. Tim segued into the topic himself whilst answering a question about how the RMP as a learning experience compared with a more orthodox management development programme which all Worldlife managers had attended two years previously:

Tim: That previous programme was more of your 'ABC' training. I wouldn't say the discussions were as open as what we had on the RMP. The discussions there were, well, as you know, they were fairly frank, as you've seen.

Researcher: Reflection on the RMP was supposed to be critical, did you think it was and how did you feel about that aspect of it?

Tim: Challenge was certainly a feature of the programme. Our group was particularly vocal; there were some quite challenging debates. But I think it was constructive and that any criticism was meant in a constructive way, there was nothing personal. I have no problem with constructive criticism, either about my own management style or about the company as a whole. If somebody is saying something, perception is reality - if that's what they believe and its opened up to the floor and people can then say "Well, no, actually, I see it differently", that's fine, and I think that should be encouraged. In some of our discussions it was borderline and it could have intimidated some people in the group not to say anything, or not to say something back if that individual had started to talk again…

Researcher: …there was one point where I could see that borderline in front of me - were you surprised we were in that space during the programme?

Tim: No, not knowing some of the people that were in that room. When you open out something for debate like that, there are people who come from different generations, shall we say, who will say it exactly how they see it. She [Philippa] had no agenda, no more than I had going in there. It was borderline where it was going to go but it was stopped from taking over the whole course and it's certainly not the thing that I would remember most about the two days. Actually I think it was an actual proof that the whole programme was about reflection – "let's reflect, let's open it up, let's talk about it"; that was the actual moment for me that said, you know what? This is the proof of the pudding .You've actually sat down with somebody negative within the group and you've opened the point up. I thought that was proof of the concept.

(Interview 2 with Tim, supervisor)

Tim recognised the RMP as a space of critique where, as he said, "frank" discussion could take place in a safe critically reflective environment (Vince, 2004). He also hints at the impersonality that was achieved through critical disclosing on the programme, a principle which is essential to the effective operation of reflexive action in a public space (Raelin, 2003; Sennett, 2003; Villa, 1999). Perhaps most interestingly and importantly of all, Tim acknowledged how plurality was "encouraged" on the RMP and he saw the incident with Philippa as "proof of the concept" of reflexive learning and facilitation - critique is not brushed aside but instead, a reflexive attempt is made to deal with it honestly and if possible to fan out the critique into a wider process of public deliberation (Raelin, 2001). Even if such an attempt fails (as it did in this case) RML may still pass the critical litmus test of being a learning space which invites and is capable of withstanding internal reflexive critique on, and indeed of, the programme

itself; a reflexive space where diversity isn't silenced (Ellsworth, 1989), multiple narratives can co-exist (Ramsey, 2005) and "more than one reality" appreciated (Brooks, 1992, p.331).

Tim suggested that Philippa's critical interjection might have intimidated others in the group from speaking out. This is corroborated by Neil, who attended the same programme. When asked why he didn't join in when the incident occurred and the facilitator tried to open up Philippa's critique out to the group for reflection, he said:

Neil: I could have argued or disagreed more with what some were saying but I just thought no, I wouldn't. I'd be like that anyway - non-confrontational. For me to get involved it would have to be something [long pause]…

Researcher: …it would have to be a matter of principle, is that what you mean?

Neil: Yeah, probably. Personality also plays a role in these things. It always does. There's always someone who talks more than others.

(Interview 1 with Neil, supervisor)

Frances, who also attended the same RMP programme, provided her own reason as to why she did not engage with Philippa's critique when the opportunity to do so presented

itself. Answering a general question about her response to public critical reflection on the programme, she referred (unprompted) to the incident:

Researcher: How did you find the group critical reflection? Did you feel you could challenge others safely during it?

Frances: People definitely had different opinions, which was good. But could I challenge them? No. That dialogue you and Philippa had, I said to myself then, "I am *not* getting involved in this one, no way". I'm not even putting my two cents worth in here at all. She was a very strong character, you know? Fair enough, I could see her point of view, which I think was good. Not that I agreed with it, but I wasn't getting involved in that.

(Interview 1 with Frances, supervisor)

Here are two managers who could have become involved in public critical reflection but consciously chose not to, suggesting that even if RML does not limit human agency in the way orthodox management learning interventions can (Antonacopoulou, 2006b), it does not necessarily follow that managers will avail of the potential freedom afforded them by this kind of learning space. They make the choice to disappear – that is, the choice not to disclose, or reveal what they honestly think before others - for various practical reasons, contingent on their personal motivations to do so and their internal judgements on whether such involvement is likely to be efficacious (Bandura, 1982).

In this case, both Neil and Frances witnessed a relatively primitive public critique which they could have helped to develop. But as it unfolded, they chose not to play a role in its potential sublimation into one which could be learned from by all participants. Incidents like this are problematic for critical theories of RML which conceptualise reflection as a "relational, political and collective process" (Reynolds, 2011, p.12), something it cannot be if managers who could, but who choose not to become involved when the critical opportunity arises in a space which, as Tim's response above shows, clearly legitimised it. There is thus arguably a tacit, normative sense in which critical RML needs a certain type of idealised critical management learner who will be devoted to self and social critique undertaken with others and who will be comfortable and confident enough to "persistently invite [their] critical commentary" (Raelin, 2004b, p.xii). However, the actual plurality of real world RML situations challenges this idea, as was revealed in the reasons managers gave for not extending Philippa's critique.

Admitting that he "could have argued or disagreed more" (which suggests he recognised the potential the space contained), Neil said he didn't because of an unwillingness to engage in what he feared would turn into a confrontation. He put this unwillingness down to two things: firstly, his personality type, which makes him uncomfortable with and so, averse to confrontation; and secondly, the fact that the content of the critique in question was not important or meaningful enough for him to want to publicly disclose and take part in the collective critical reflection he might have helped to generate. As his answer shows, the process of 'weighing up' is an internally reflective one of judging, which takes the form of a self-to-self dialogue (Archer, 2003; Arendt, 1971). The outcome of Neil's internal judgement (enacted publicly as silence) was to decide against a dialogue with others, thus limiting the plurality involved to an inner rather than a

public expression and denying the chance for it to potentially converge in a sublimated political form through critically reflexive dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002) with others.

Frances also provided reasons for choosing not to engage in public critical reflection and she too alluded to this process of reflexively judging or weighing up whether to do so or not. First she says that she did not engage with Philippa's public critique simply because she did not feel it would have any effect:

I'm sure if I had intervened Philippa would have said "Yes, I see your point of view" but in her head go, "I'm still right; I'm going to do it my way anyway".

(Interview 1 with Frances, supervisor)

She then elaborated on this by way of another example from the RMP in which she also decided not to engage in public critique with another colleague; this time because she didn't feel strongly enough about what was being critiqued. This came up when she was asked a general question about whether she felt the RMP was a critical learning experience:

Researcher: Did you feel there was a challenge element to the RMP?

Frances: Absolutely, yes. For example, I remember when Donna disagreed with something that someone else said. She can be quite aggressive in her tone, even if she's not conscious of it.

Researcher: Does that make it less likely that you would challenge someone like her, as in the way you spoke about not challenging Philippa, for example?

Frances: No, that was an extra special case [laughs] but maybe as well it was because with Donna, I wasn't strong enough in my own opinion. I thought "She may be right, and do I have anything to add here that's going to be constructive? Is it worth me getting involved? Do I think my opinion is strong enough to dilute the situation, or put a new viewpoint on it?" That's what informs my decision on whether I get involved or not.

Researcher: So you're weighing up the usefulness of whether to join in the critique or not? And despite the strength of the person involved, if you did feel strongly enough about it you would get involved, is that right?

Frances: Yeah.

(Interview 1 with Frances, supervisor)

Similar to Neil's response, Frances says she would be willing to engage in public critical reflection with a colleague only if the issue was important enough to her and if she felt she could make a useful contribution to nuance or "dilute" the critique, or else add a new perspective on it. She came to such decisions on the RMP via an internally reflexive weighing up process which, as she said, "informs my decision on whether I get involved or not". But Frances also admits that Philippa's critique was "an extra special case". She might have had something to add but she made a conscious choice not to engage. This was because of the strength of Philippa's delivery and the fact that

Frances believed it would be futile to disclose her own perspective by offering a counter-critique. This resulted in a lost opportunity where the initial individual critique could have, but didn't, graduate to public critical reflection.

This is suggestive of two interpretations which are especially pertinent to collectivist and critical theories of RML: firstly, as the responses above show, strong personalities or aggressively articulated critiques can deter others from critiquing even when they may have critique to offer; secondly, no shared or common rule can be assumed for if, and/or when, managers will engage in public critical reflection with their peers even when the opportunity is afforded to them. Instead, individual proclivities may conspire to prevent this. Managers weigh up the risk of critically engaging with others, adding to this the likelihood of success (in terms of critically persuading someone) then deciding on this basis - a process which, against the very notion of critical public reflection itself, may take place in an internally reflexive way (Archer, 2007) which is hidden to others. This poses an obvious challenge to solidaristic conceptualisations of RML (Raelin, 2001; Reynolds, 1998) which theorise "critical reflective dialogues" amongst managers who can "take the role of the other, develop shared values, and subject their reasoning to public scrutiny" (Raelin, 2001, p.27). It also illustrates how the influence of management plurality during such interventions may be underestimated in such theories.

Yet, more encouragingly for critical theories of RML which following scholars such as Antonacopoulou (1999b) and Clegg et al. (2006) are willing to adopt a more politically reflexive critical approach, the analysis provided here also demonstrates that meaningful critique is possible during RML and that challenge between peers, and between peers

and a facilitator, can be a viable and legitimate part of RML in practice. In the interview excerpt below, Bill, who also participated in the same programme as Philippa and the other managers mentioned, spoke to this point at some length. His response offers subtle insights into the operation of public critique during RML, as seen from the perspective of a manager involved. Bill thought that the critique Philippa made was legitimate but the way in which she made it was not. More importantly from a learning perspective, he also touches on how Philippa's interjection helped him to critically orient himself in terms of his own perspective on RML and managerial reflexivity: the ideas to which Philippa seemed so vehemently opposed. When asked whether he felt group reflection on the RMP had a critical dimension, he said:

Bill: Absolutely, absolutely, and some views on the RMP were aired more strongly than others. My whole take on the Philippa thing was that the level of aggression was uncalled for. That individual was basically putting their hand up and saying "This is a load of nonsense and I don't believe it". I actually think that that view is as valid as the next persons but I think the level of aggression was way off the chart.

Researcher: I wanted to ask you about that: what did you think of how it was handled? The RMP was designed to be critical; to welcome all types, cynical or otherwise.

Bill: I think it's no harm. It's like my father said to me once, "Always listen to someone's argument even if you don't agree with them". The point being, when Philippa decided to criticise, a lot of people around that table went well, hang on, if that's the, admittedly extreme alternate view, then whatever scepticism I have about it I'll be happy be with that because I know I'd rather be on this side of it, because I feel more comfortable with *this*, you know what I mean?

Researcher: So it allowed you to better coordinate your own critical position, is that it?

Bill: It did, it calibrated it. Everything is a spectrum, you know? I've been on management programmes where it's becomes this kind of [adopts faux-robotic voice] "I love the leader!" It becomes almost like this thing where we should be shaving our heads and wearing white robes. That makes me shut down; I go right, just tell me when it's over, because I know this is nonsense. There is no element of you being able to disagree or have your own view on it; instead it's "This is what it is, this is what it does".

Researcher: But you felt you could criticise on the RMP?

Bill: Totally, totally. Very much so – and I did. I remember saying to you a couple of times during the session "Well, hang on a second…" And later on I did say to Philippa that she was digging a hole. Like I've said, her view was valid, but even leaving aside the aggression, it calibrated my view and it calibrated the view of others who, like me, said to themselves "if that's what being really dismissive of the idea looks like, then that's not for me". To be honest I thought she was playing the provocateur and that's not fair on others in the group. Then the penny dropped for me: this is an individual who thinks being critical is all about opposition, about playing devil's advocate. The problem is that's disrespectful and it's counterproductive. It was as though she was saying to the rest of us that we've all fallen for this and she was the only "sane" person in the room; it was dinosaur stuff.

(Interview 1 with Bill, supervisor)

Bill's rich response adds to the many interesting responses managers provided as to how the process of critical public reflection actually unfolds (or doesn't) in the space of a workplace RML and the interpretive work managers do to make meaning from this. Perhaps the most important lesson which can be drawn from his interpretation is one that has already been stressed in this chapter: namely, that reflexive critique with others is a relational activity. Plurality itself during RML may make it so, meaning that because managers are different and share different perspectives, it behoves them ethically to act reflexively when critically disclosing this difference before others, should they decide to so. Myopic and solely oppositional modes of critique (Clegg et al., 2006) will be seen for what they are by practicing managers: cynical attempts at deliberately disrupting or discouraging sincere critical public reflection, which, to use Bill's words, are ultimately "disrespectful" and "counterproductive" attempts at provocation rather than genuine action with others. Metaphorically speaking, they are non-reflexive acts of relational violence, and violence, while it can destroy power between people, can never create it (Arendt, 1990; 1972).

Yet even cynical critique (Karfakis and Kokkinidis, 2011) - if Philippa's can be labelled like this - has its learning uses. At least two can be mentioned here: firstly, the fact that it was tolerated rather than censored on the RMP demonstrated to others the critical credentials of the programme and thus the legitimacy of the RMP as a bona fide space where the power of critique (Antonacopoulou, 1999b) could be safely exercised without fear of repercussion. This was a rare case of permitted and encouraged parrhesia (Foucault, 2010) on a management learning programme in Worldlife; free speaking without the risk, but not without the responsibility to exercise this reflexive disclosing

before others ethically, making the way the critique was expressed in an important sense, as if not more important than its content.

As their responses highlight, this was a highly unusual learning situation for the managers involved. They were not used to being in such spaces at Worldlife nor were they used to having them facilitated by critical HRD practitioners (Vince, 2005) from a department they would have traditionally perceived in a more managerialist mould (Townley, 1993). Secondly, cynical critique can be useful in terms of helping managers to critically orient themselves in relation to a learning idea such as managerial reflexivity (Barge, 2004). In a pluralistic space of learning (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997) criticality will, as Bill said, exist and be articulated along a "spectrum" of perspectives. The critical views of others, even if cynical and expressed non-relationally, can help a manager to find their own position on such a continuum, therefore representing the type of social and cultural learning (Cook and Yanow, 1993) made possible during RML. As Gold et al. (2002) say, when a manager comes to "recognise a plurality of perspectives [it can help] them to realise the value of their own position" (p.383), which was Bill's experience.

Organised critical reflection (Vince, 2002a) must be enacted relationally to have legitimacy in a group and there is an ethical responsibility which accompanies critical disclosing before others. The reflexive critical facilitator stands firmly inside this andragogical relation (Currie and Knights, 2003; Ellsworth, 1989). What does this mean in terms of how public critique with others is currently conceptualised in critical (for example Welsh and Dehler, 2004) and less ideological, but still critical (for example Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Boud et al., 2006b) scholarship on RML? The final section

reflects on this question and in doing so expands on some of the insights provided above.

RML and politically reflexive critique

Management learning scholars have called for the idea of critique to be rethought to reflect more complex, non-oppositional, and ultimately more praxical and productive modes of this activity (Antonacopoulou, 1999b; Clegg et al., 2006). Just as some critical forms of RML have been criticised for being insufficiently reflexive and thus potentially unethical (Fenwick, 2005) – not to mention largely ineffectual (Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Sinclair, 2007) - orthodox forms of management and leadership development are taken to task for not being critical enough; for not taking proper account of how power and political dynamics can ultimately undermine development and change efforts, and how "practical value" can be realised by critical stances willing to surface and seek to reside in - however anxiously (Gilmore and Anderson, 2012) - the aporias and contradictions which often pervade sincere attempts to learn in organisations (Vince, 2014, p.417).

The practical value Vince refers to above is that being critical in this way can "help organisational members *to be more realistic* in the development of action" (Vince, 2014, emphasis added). This relates to what in this thesis is being called praxical or politically reflexive RML; RML which seeks to act in a clear-eyed critical way with managers in a space of critique which, unlike forms of RML which simply "seek to create better leaders" (Vince, 2014, p.413), or managers who might be emancipated

(Welsh and Dehler, 2004), does not try to "control others [whilst pretending] to facilitate them" (Vince, 2014, p.417).

The contribution to knowledge made by this chapter is to have shown how such a realistic and politically reflexive mode of critique operates in a real world RML programme, in terms of both the reflexive self-critique it engenders and the critique before others it makes possible, even if this might not always be relationally enacted. In terms of the latter, the case of Philippa is especially instructive. It highlights the reflexive dynamics of RML in context (Antonacopoulou, 2004a); how emotions and power relations can conspire to complexify RML; the processes through which these dynamics are realised; and finally, the effects on those involved. The "learning inaction" (Vince, 2014, p.414) which resulted was not because the space 'failed', as such – indeed as one manager later admitted, this failure was in fact a critical test of legitimacy the RMP had passed - but because participants, including not least the facilitator who could perhaps have done more in this instance to kindle critique, in a way, failed the space. Although they could have, managers decided not to exercise the power of critique (Antonacopoulou, 1999) with others in a space where room was made for this to be relationally manifested.

Moreover, managers gave sometimes similar, sometimes differing, practical reasons for not doing so, demonstrating that even when difference and plurality is not avoided in terms of how an intervention is designed and facilitated (Vince, 2014), it may nevertheless be consciously avoided by the managers involved who are integral to the enactment of this critically reflexive learning principle (Cunliffe, 2004). As some the

responses presented in this chapter show, it may be reasonable for a manager not to risk being critical (Fenwick, 2005). More worryingly for theories of public reflection (Raelin, 2001) was the way in which these decisions were made in-the-moment, not in a dialogically reflexive way (Cunliffe, 2002), but instead, silently and introspectively within each manager's private plurality (Arendt, 1971) and thus, inaccessibly to others and unavailable for public scrutiny and discussion.

As the facilitator found, it is hard to publicly reflect on silence and it is impossible to sustain reflexive critique on one's own, no matter how well-intentioned. But even as this critique in this particular temporal instance was abandoned and the group moved on, the space of critique was not destroyed and remained immanent between the managers involved. Thus other opportunities could and would subsequently appear in this reflexive learning space of possibility (Antonacopoulou, 2002) and this time they would be constituted by the enactment of collective and relational reflexive dialogue and critique. The reason for this is that the RMP as space of critique maintained political reflexivity, meaning it was always open to the plurality of the managers involved and thus to the problems as well the opportunities this gives rise to (Glynn et al., 2000).

One way to rethink critique in RML then is to conceptually cast it in a more praxical and politically reflexive mould, as a reflexive space of critique. This chapter has shown how this operates, and analysed what it means through the interpretations of the managers involved. Operating critique during RML in this way does not downplay, but instead embraces the plurality which seems largely underestimated in current

scholarship. Although the challenges plurality poses may be reflexively acknowledged (for example Raelin, 2008a; Sambrook and Willmott, 2014) or else implied in passing in the literature (for example Cunliffe, 2009b), it is not always given the sustained attention it warrants as the unavoidable basic condition for any kind of human action (Arendt, 1998), including the act of reflexively learning with others in a workplace context. If the problems are underestimated then so too, I claim, are the possibilities. This is detrimental to the development of critical RML theories which strive for praxis in management and organisational learning.

Conceptualising RML as a politically reflexive space of critique helps to address this problem. The problem itself, I contend, stems from a twofold source: firstly, because it is not conducive with the will-to-making impulse of much critical RML, rather than being seen as constitutive of critique and so, of learning by and from critique, plurality is often ignored or treated as a problem to be overcome; secondly, the lack of empirical studies of RML in context, and in particular the lack of emic insight (Raelin, 2008a), means that the problem of plurality has not been fully encountered, so it is not yet theoretically well known, at least in terms of practice-based ways of knowing (Gherardi, 2012b; Nicolini et al., 2003; Raelin, 2008a). Even when valuable empirical critical RML work has taken place, and acknowledging the insights this work has contributed, the conclusions often strike a relatively fatalistic chord (for example, Brookfield, 2009; Rigg and Trehan, 2008; Sinclair, 2007) suggesting that an impasse of sorts may have been reached and a new paradigm for critique is required which may have both critical and productive value for RML (Boud et al., 2006b; Vince, 2014). This chapter has provide one such paradigm via the theorisation of RML as a reflexive space of critique, part of a wider framework which conceptualises RML overall as a politically reflexive

learning space of appearance. A politically reflexive critical RML is politically constructive (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000), mutually productive (Boud et al., 2006a), and not naively susceptible to co-option by the status quo, or slavish to reductive performative norms (Callahan, 2007; Reynolds, 1999b). Unlike much current critical RML, it does not seek, whether explicitly or implicitly, to "construct and mould" managers (Clegg et al., 2006, p.10) but to act with them in reflexive critique as a form of learning praxis (Antonacopoulou, 2010). Being politically reflexive in RML as a space of critique means, as Clegg et al. (2006) write, being oriented towards:

"…the possibilities for a more politically influential and ethically responsible way of being critical without being so resolutely opposed to management. This is a form of critique that seriously entertains the possibility of being both critical and being 'for management'"

(p.9)

This thinks of critique as the "disclosure of possibility" (Kompridis, 2006, p.196), defining "critique as reflective disclosure" (Kompridis, 2011, p.1063) between actors who share something fateful together in a common context of action (Juarrero, 2002). As Boud et al. (2006b) argue productive forms of RML are not incompatible with a critical stance reflexively operated. They will, however, be incompatible with radical critical stances which seek to undermine management (Clegg et al., 2006) and thus by association, threaten and undermine managers themselves who will then - as researchers such as Rigg and Trehan (2008) and Sinclair (2007) found - retreat from such advances

recognising them reasonably to be "over-demanding situation[s]" (Crozier, 1964, p.199).

The empirical material presented and analysed in this chapter shows that critique can be a meaningful part of RML in the workplace. Responding to the question posed by Rigg and Trehan (2008), it is difficult but not impossible. But the meaning of critique is plural and managers will see the purpose of critique through the lens of their own learner desires (Boud, 1987), something which should not be forgotten, and which must be adequately theoretically accounted for. Critique during RML has been presented and analysed in this chapter in two ways: self-critique and critique with others, or public critique. The former has been shown to be an internal, phenomenologically felt process taking the form of an introspective reflexive conversation in which a manager privately addresses their inner plurality. The results of this are diverse and flow from plural motivations: in one case it led to a manager critically self-questioning their practice and resolving to reflexively solicit feedback from members of their team as to how they are performing their role; in another it engaged a manager's critical faculty, causing them to reflect on their prejudices and taken-for-granted assumptions, but not necessarily directing this new awareness towards any tangible expressions of reflexivity in their practice. In both cases, but with different outcomes, RML enabled reflexive self-critique to occur and to be recognised as such in a learning space which was new and unusual for the managers involved.

Critical reflexivity was also manifested on the RMP as public critique in front of, but not necessarily always with others. The case of Philippa demonstrated this. It

showcased the problems plurality can cause during RML in a workplace context. But in another surprising and unexpected way, it also highlighted the promise of plurality and the hope for a politically reflexive critical RML in practice. This can be said because of the way in which the witnesses to this critical incident storied the event later during researcher interviews. Their responses show that the fact that plurality was allowed to unfold even in a cynical form, legitimised the RMP as a bona fide political critical space where critique was immanently possible, even if managers chose sometimes not to join in and make it more collective; choices which were made for plural practical reasons. From this a central lesson was drawn: to be reflexive, public critique must be relational, and further, if others are to be coaxed to join in with critique as a relational activity, the form critique takes may be as if not more important than the content it carries.

Advancing now to the third and final dimension of the RSOA, the next chapter explores how RML can lead to new learning, as well as new action in a manager's practice; the kind of practical reflexivity which is the intended agential outcome of RML (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004). The Worldlife RMP is analysed next as a space of new beginnings.

CHAPTER 6   THE RSOA IN PRACTICE: SPACE OF NEW BEGINNINGS

The two preceding chapters analysed empirically the first two of the three dimensions of the RSOA: space of honesty as disclosing with self and before others, and space of critique as private and public plurality. This chapter explains the third and final spatial dimension of this new tripartite theoretical framework for RML: the space of new beginnings. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first two sections examine the familiar forms of management learning Worldlife managers were accustomed to, as informal and mimetic management learning experiences, and formal business school and consultant programmes, respectively. Doing this provides important context for understanding and analysing managers' subsequent response to RML as a new learning experience, the subject of the third section. There, RML itself is explored as an example of a natal act, as through a new reflexive form of learning Worldlife managers learned how to learn (Bateson, 1980) anew and started to envision themselves and their practice in novel ways. As the fourth section then demonstrates, this new learning was sometimes able to motivate new managerial action with others beyond the RML space, something which extant empirical studies of RML have not always been able to fully explore. The fifth and final section of this chapter provides new evidence as to how RML becomes organised in a workplace setting (Keevers and Treleaven, 2011; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince, 2002a; Vince and Reynolds, 2009), surprisingly, by a manager inspired to do so by attending the Worldlife RMP.

The contribution to knowledge made by this chapter is threefold: firstly, as they compare RML to more familiar management learning methods, the normative hope and promise of this approach – particularly as it stands in critical relation to more orthodox

methods (Cunliffe, 2002; Raelin, 2009a) – is empirically informed through the voices of the managers who would constitute its practical audience; secondly, the processes of how RML becomes practical reflexivity in the workplace (Cunliffe, 2009b; 2004; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004) and the reasons given for this translation are illuminated; thirdly, fresh light is thrown on how structures of work are made more reflective (Nicolini et al., 2004) using an exceptional case of organised RML (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b) initiated by a practicing manager.

Informal and mimetic management learning experiences

A common theme in how managers learned to manage at Worldlife was the informal (Marsick and Watkins, 2003; 2001) and mimetic (Billett, 2014; Lave, 1996) quality of this. Managers typically valued learning from the "lessons of experience" (McCall et al., 1988) more than any formal management training and education they received. Karl, a middle manager with over twenty years' experience at Worldlife, spoke to these points on the RMP and later during interview. Describing how he facilitates reflective dialogue amongst his team (Raelin, 2013), he reported his use of what he called a "knowledge sharing circle", instigated by him as a space for peer reflection in the workplace which, as he put it:

…brings people up the food chain in a safe environment. They feel safe but they also feel pushed as well. They feel challenged but they have the safety of having colleagues there; of having a big table from which they can then step away from with new ideas about things. It's open and challenging, but it's safe: it's not a critical environment.

Interestingly, although Karl initiated this practice in his own team, it wasn't his original idea. It was a "learning practice" (Billett and Newton, 2010) he adopted from two "notable people" (Kempster, 2009, p.7) in his work life; namely, a manager and a senior colleague he had worked with previously:

I saw somebody do it in here before. Not quite in the way I'm describing it but I was the subject of it - without knowing, I was the subject of it. But a few years later it dawned on me that that was what was happening to me: I was totally outside my comfort zone, continually. But I realised after there were two particular individuals who were powerful influencers on what I was doing. They were giving me the confidence to do it and were available almost any time of the day or night to help me. It was only later, looking back, that I realised what they were up to. I was too busy at the time to notice but you know you're always learning I always say, you're always learning, you'll never know it all, you're always learning. Every day there's something new, there's something different. You're always learning no matter how experienced you are; it's a cliché, I know, but it's true.

(Interview 1 with Karl, middle manager)

Karl is describing the kind of incidental, informal (Marsick and Watkins, 2001) and mimetic workplace learning (Billett, 2014, Lave, 1996) managers typically accrue throughout their careers, though often more accidentally than by reflexive design

(Kempster and Stewart, 2010). As Karl alluded to, such learning is picked up tacitly (Eraut, 2004) and without the conscious involvement of managers who may not call it learning, or realise it as such until reflecting on it retrospectively (if at all); sometimes even years later (Cheetham and Chivers, 2001). As Jason said:

I've learned best from my own mistakes, and from observing others. I mean, by seeing how other managers have dealt with situations and by learning from that. I probably wasn't conscious if it at the time but its only when you have to do something like that yourself that then you realise it.

(Interview 1 with Jason, middle manager)

The mimetic learning of Worldlife managers was not only of a positive kind. Sometimes negative role models (Gibson, 2004) provided as much, if not more, learning for managers. John, a senior manager at Worldlife, described how he learned *not* to be a manager from a senior figure he reported to when working for another organisation:

This was a senior manager I reported to in [names a Worldlife competitor].I didn't realise it at the time but the environment was one of a bullying nature. The manner in which he dealt with people was completely inappropriate, to the extent that you could see the human toll it was taking; you could see it in other colleagues, in their disposition. They were being subjected to extraordinary pressure which they weren't used to and it was manifesting itself in terms of their health. This guy would deliberately keep people back on Friday evenings. Just as we were about to go home he would pull us all into his office to rant at us. This office

217

had glass walls - we were literally like canaries in a cage. He would cut you off in meetings, talk down to you, shout, it was awful. Looking back on the experience, I think you look at these things instinctively: would you like that to be done to you? Or would you contemplate doing that to someone else? No.

(Interview 1 with John, senior manager)

As this example shows, informal and mimetic workplace management learning can be generated from negative examples as managers learn to "avoid certain attributes or behaviours" (Gibson, 2004, p.136) they have witnessed in "toxic" leadership examples, harmful to a manager's "occupational well-being" (Pelletier, 2010, p.387). The mimetic learning John spoke about was of an inverted kind: the manager learns to do the opposite of what they observe; they learn to become inverted copies of what they see. This experience reinforced in him the normative belief that people should not be managed this way. Again as with Karl's more positive case, in John's example the retrospective aspect of experiential mimetic learning is evident. In the case of both Karl and John, the RMP animated (Boud and Miller, 1996a) this reflexive learning by stimulating them to recall previous experiences which were tacitly known until tapped, surfaced and made more explicit by conscious reflection.

This supports Cressey et al's contention (2006) that RML "has a generative rather than an instrumental focus" (p.21). It also shows how RML acts as a space of remembrance, or reflexive anamnesis (recollection). The temporal aspects of the reflexivity involved (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002) are evident, demonstrating the phenomenological

218

(Schipper, 1999) and rhythmic quality (Rowe, 2013) RML can have, as managers move back and forth through time-space (Schatzki, 2010) in order to synthesise their experiences (Rose, 2013) in ways which can help them to "go on" (Shotter, 2006, p.587) in their current practice worlds. Formal programmes also played some role in how managers developed, but as the next section explains, these were far less influential than informal experiences.

Formal business school and consultant programmes

One of the ways Worldlife managers articulated their response to the RMP was to contrast it with their experiences of more formal, structured management development programmes. This section elaborates on this using three typical examples of such interventions. Two relate to business school programmes, the other to an in-house management development programme conducted two years prior to the RMP by external management development consultants. Joan, a senior manager at Worldlife, was asked to compare the RMP with the MBA she had recently completed:

> Well it was definitely complementary. The content of the MBA was great and it was very valuable. Not a huge amount of it was new to me because I'm a business graduate anyway. But you're over assessed on the MBA; it's so intensive and sometimes that's to its detriment. It's relentless and that relentless element obviously exists to engender some sort of discipline in you, and to really pressurise you, [long pause], I don't know whether that's helpful. I don't know whether that's helpful and I had to cope with that and that was difficult. At times I was in a constant state of panic and stress on the MBA, whereas the RMP allowed me to remove myself. There was no "You have to do this by twelve

o'clock" or "I want ten pages of self- reflection by Friday", and so on. On the MBA I *had* to write reflection papers and they had to be of a certain word count - usually two and a half to three thousand words - but it's prescribed, you know? There's only so much you can write about yourself.

(Interview 1 with Joan, senior manager)

Much of what Joan says about her learning experience on the MBA resonates with Mintzberg's seminal critique (2004) of this degree's educative methods. She speaks of the intensity of the experience and wonders, on reflection, if this was really "helpful". This agrees with Mintzberg's complaint (2004) that rather than being spaces to reflect, MBA classrooms are instead more akin to "boot camps, intense examinations, and classrooms designed to put pressure on the student that get in the way of learning" (p.270). This is in stark contrast with how Joan was struck (Corlett, 2012; Cunliffe, 2002) by the reflexive writing exercises of the RMP which she said "brought a lot of things into focus" and made her more "conscious" of her responsibilities as a manager and the "interactions [with others] that you take from granted on a day to day basis":

"That struck me as a really interesting process; [the writing exercise] was more of a reflective thing for me. I was hiding what I was writing because it was very personal. I wouldn't have shared it – I didn't want people to see it".

(Interview 1 with Joan, senior manager)

She didn't have to share it. Although self-reflexive exercises did feature, the RMP was not a "pursuit of the personal" in the negative sense critiqued by scholars like Perriton (2007, p.156). It was more a pursuit of the public (Sennett, 2003) and the critical and social dimensions of reflection (Raelin, 2001; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b); a social space of management learning which enabled Worldlife managers to "reconquer the lost territory of commonality" (Knott, 2013, p.40), a territory they had forgotten they inhabited together and which they greatly valued.

On the RMP Joan took reflection more seriously, meaning less instrumentally than during her MBA. This suggests it is not reflection itself which managers avoid or denigrate but the way this is pedagogically positioned with them. Other Worldlife managers spoke about their business school learning experiences. This time not as MBA graduates but as participants on a three day introduction to management programme designed by a business school and delivered offsite there by academic faculty. The programme was called the 'Introduction to Worldlife Management Programme' (hereafter IWMP). Ciara attended and she spoke about the difference between this programme and the RMP:

Well, the IWMP was good but it was kind of at a higher level. You could take yourself out of it and say "Some of that doesn't apply to me". We did some case studies but they weren't relevant. In contrast, everything on the RMP was relevant. Also, there wasn't as much time for talk and interaction on the IWMP as there was on the RMP. On the RMP the time flew, there was a lot of interaction. With the IWMP there were some colleagues who might as well not have been there - they didn't open up.

221

Frances also participated on the IWMP and she too compared it with the RMP:

The lecturers were all academics and they were brilliant so it was good, to a certain degree. But it was more theoretical. I mean, they presented on 'The Art of War', that was mentioned a lot. It was okay; they gave their perspective but it was a bit, [pauses], I thought it was more directed at senior levels at some big corporation, you know? Where they have massive targets. I'm a supervisor in a call centre so that didn't apply to me. I came out with lots of notes but they're all in a folder somewhere now with dust piling up on them. In comparison, the RMP was more specific to Worldlife and more specific to the role I'm in. When you're learning under the Worldlife umbrella it's so different. I think that was beneficial.

(Interview 2 with Frances, supervisor)

As these examples show, when compared with the RMP, Worldlife managers evaluated their business school learning experiences as variously more (unhelpfully) intensive, less practice-relevant, more spatiotemporally controlled, and more content prescriptive. Managers spoke about their development experiences with external consultants in similar terms. Kate spoke about her experience of a modular programme rolled out over three months to all managers in Worldlife two years prior to the RMP. The programme was called 'Managing into the future' (hereafter MIF):

Kate: The contrast I would make between the RMP and the MIF is that the MIF was much more structured. It was a programme that we had to 'get through'; we were more ticking and bashing our way through that one. I don't think it helps to be too prescriptive with our level of management and that, perhaps, was what happened on the MIF.

Researcher: Why do you say "not too prescriptive"?

Kate: Because we get it, at so many levels. You'd prefer to be exposed to what you think you don't know rather than what you definitely do know. Stating the obvious is not helpful; being brow-beaten with the obvious is not helpful.

(Interview 1 with Kate, senior manager)

Sam, a middle manager at Worldlife, also hinted at the prescriptive element of the MIF programme, comparing it with the discursive autonomy of the RMP:

Compared to the RMP, the MIF was more [pauses] I wouldn't quite say being told what to do, more being given direction and examples in a certain way. The RMP was more unstructured. People had the opportunity to say what they wanted to say.

(Interview 1 with Sam, middle manager)

The intentionally airy and agile structure of the RMP created the space for managers to "say what they wanted to say", as Sam put it. Such disclosing could now stem, not from

223

prescriptive content - which, as this data shows, often patronises and potentially antagonises managers; disciplining their responses and limiting them to certain relatively pre-determined interpretive options - but from a related ability to think for themselves within a management learning space (Levine, 2002); to think, as it were, without "bannisters" (Arendt, 1979, p.314) rather than through prefigured and often tired, sometimes faddish conceptualisations (Gibson and Tesone, 2001) of phenomena managers have first-hand familiarity with; a familiarity which can graduate into more reflexive knowing (Cunliffe, 2004) but only if space is provided for this in the way learning programmes are designed and facilitated. The RMP was thus, a thought-provoking space where time slowed down and a manager could, as Joan said above "remove" themselves in order to learn anew. As Bob put it:

Compared to my previous learning experiences the RMP was interesting. It was different and slow paced. It wasn't an "answers" type of programme; there was no punchline, no end point, just a view of myself that dawned on me slowly.

(Interview 1 with Bob, middle manager)

Unlike the MIF, which managers described variously as less engaging, more structured, more patronising, less discursive, less interesting and, once again, more prescriptive, the RMP allowed Worldlife managers the space and time to reflect (Raelin, 2002), something which positively opposed the effects described above. Overall, the contrasts between the two familiar forms of management learning discussed in this section and the less familiar and novel experience of the RMP seem clear and telling: the former

were somewhat useful but they were more instrumental rather than reflexive learning experiences (Antonacopoulou, 2006b).

New learning

What does it mean to say that the RMP was new learning for Worldlife managers? Although ultimately it meant different things to them individually, in terms of the learning process and the form this experience took, it was also new for managers in some common ways. Naturally, managers knew what reflection was; that wasn't new to them. As Janet remarked, "reflection doesn't switch on and off at five o'clock when we leave work; it's knitted into the fabric of managing" (Interview 2 with Janet, middle manager).What was new was the fact that reflection was now being recognised and legitimised by the organisation through the provision of a learning programme which was self-consciously devoted to the approach. Up until then, more familiar and traditional forms of management learning had dominated. Also new was the depth of managerial reflection involved and its critical (Reynolds, 1999a) and holistic character. Conor, a middle manager at Worldlife, spoke to these points:

> Was it all new? We've had programmes here before with some reflection, dialogue and group discussion, though certainly not as much as on the RMP. The RMP was more intellectual, it required more deep thought. Plus, as a facilitator you challenged us, which was good; it was challenge but in a safe environment. It was a course with a difference - it *was* different. It obviously wasn't skills or knowledge focused. I would say it was more whole person focused. That was the difference and I found that useful; that caught my interest; I think that's important.

The "whole person" focus of the RMP which Conor mentions was also referred to – notably in spatial terms - by Sam as "learning to be wide" (Interview 1 with Sam, middle manager). Vincent also touched on the depth of the RMP and the novelty of the approach for Worldlife, offering his own explanation for the change in approach to management learning in the company:

> Compared to the courses I've been on before the RMP was definitely deep and different. It was a total shift in direction and I enjoyed that. Like I said, it was certainly different to anything I've seen before in here. I wouldn't have thought Worldlife would have focused so much on the "soft" side of management as much: we're traditionally a conservative and quite serious organisation and those two things by their nature would tend more towards the "tick-box" approach, you know? The "doer-manager" as opposed to the influencer. But maybe commercial realities are forcing organisations and managers to think differently, so I think RMP has a place. But it was a change in direction from the previous programmes we've done.

To say the RMP was new learning, then, refers not only to the ideas and the processes of critical reflection and reflexivity, but also to their deliberate introduction and legitimisation into an organisational environment which had traditionally not featured them so heavily in how managers learned, or emphasised them as strongly as the RMP would. Studying one of the briefings held prior to the RMP is a good way to understand

the programme itself as new learning because it was here where managers were first introduced to the concept of reflexivity. The following field note comes from inside the briefing for the first Worldlife middle manager RMP programme:

It's just before ten o' clock in the morning. Conference room one on the sixth floor of the Worldlife building is set up for the briefing of our first middle manager RMP programme taking place next week. This room is the only one where a programme like the RMP could be facilitated in this building. One of the reasons for this is that it's the only big enough room with an oval shaped table (all the rest are small, and have square or rectangular-shaped tables). The plan is to make the space look and feel different to our managers, who are more accustomed to training in a u-shaped table design. We want to encourage group reflection and dialogue.

This morning the table is set with colour copies of the short presentation slides we will use for the briefing. Bottles of water and glasses have been laid out. On another corner table, tea, coffee and biscuits have been left by the Worldlife catering team: standard practice for in-house programmes. The slides are also up on a large screen at the end of the room: in large white letters against the corporate red Worldlife background, it says 'The Worldlife Reflexive Manager in Practice: Programme briefing'. On cue, at ten o'clock sharp, managers file into the room. It's quiet, and as they settle down with cups of tea and coffee there is a palpable sense of anticipation in the air. As water bottles are opened and poured into the crystal glasses provided, the sound this makes is noticeable – "time to break the ice" I say to myself. I start talking but I stay seated (I deliberately don't want this to feel like a presentation, I want to stay close to them at the table). Beside me, and at the middle rather the top of the table, sits Elaine from the HRD team who is observing today and who will co-facilitate the RMP with me.

227

"Welcome to the RMP briefing" I tell them. I explain why we're here: "To learn about the programme; what it is, how it works and how it might be of use". I begin to work through the four briefing slides prepared. The first one explains what reflexivity is and contains an image which models this visually. I know this word is new for them. I also know we will cover it in more depth and nuance on the programme itself, so for now I only offer a brief explanation: "Reflexivity is a heightened, critical and social self-awareness of ourselves and of the impact we have on those around us, and the environment in which we manage" I tell them, adding that "some of this might be different to what we're used to, and trust me, we're not using words like this just to sound clever [polite laughter ripples around the room] – "but, still", I say, "we shouldn't be afraid of introducing and using new words for familiar things because sometimes these can provide us with new ways of thinking and acting around these things, like managing".

As I continue speaking, the silence continues in tandem. Some smile as I catch their eye, others look at the screen or the hard copies of the slides provided. "Are they avoiding my eye in case I ask them something?' I wonder. In the middle of what I need to say, I stop and ask if anyone wants to come in or ask any questions: nobody replies. I continue through the slides, slowly, thinking to myself that we may not need the time allotted. I finish and ask one final time: "Does anyone want to ask or just to say anything?" Again, only silence and smiles. Nobody replies so I end by saying "Thanks for coming, looking forward to seeing you next week". With that, they get up and leave and only then does some chatter break out amongst them. Elaine and I stay behind to debrief the briefing.

(Field note from RMP briefing for middle managers, November, 2011)

This field note highlights a number of points of interest: the need to prepare managers for such new learning approaches; the considered attention which should be paid to

space (Vince, 2011) and language (Cunliffe, 2001; Shotter, 1993); and the reflexivity required of those facilitating, which in this case was shown by the conscious and atypical design efforts made. For example, the use of purposely truncated materials (just four short briefing slides) and the fact that the facilitators sat rather than stood up, and moreover, sat amongst the group rather than at the top of the room – the traditional pedagogical positioning. Both of these, on the face of it minor, but actually spatially significant (Vince, 2011) and signifying (Yanow, 2006a) design features, were unusual for Worldlife managers and facilitators and thus contributed to the newness of the RMP experience overall, of which the briefing was one component.

The response of the group is revealing - polite quietness. Not a hostile silence but more a quizzical one, as though the group was trying to understand what was for them an unfamiliar process. The novelty of the space and of the ideas being previewed there also played a part, as will be explained next. Quietness was a theme of all the RMP briefings but it dissipated quickly once the RMP programmes themselves began. Tim gave one explanation for the largely silent reception which characterised the RMP briefings. In doing so he also gives an insight into what it was like to be a manager at these briefings. This arose from a generic question asked of all managers in the study:

Researcher: What did you make of the programme?

Tim: I was impressed. Initially the prospect of having to sit there and reflect was a little bit daunting. I mean, I thought it would be very vague but it wasn't, and truthfully I was very impressed. There was a huge amount of dialogue around the table, with everyone involved.

Researcher: You say you were concerned about reflecting, what was it that concerned you?

Tim: Just that it sounds very vague, it sounds very "wishy-washy"; you're not - as we're more used to doing - going through a flipchart and saying "here's step one, here's step two, now we're gonna go to step three" and so on, then when you're done, its "there's your certificate, you've passed that, off you go". And when I saw the word reflexive at the briefing I said to myself, again, "It's just too vague"; the word just didn't sit right for some reason, mentally it just didn't sit right. I think it was the word itself. When I heard it I said to myself "I don't know if I wanna go on this programme". I was more worried about the course than anything else. It heightened the anxiety for me - sorry but it did! And I don't think it reflected at all what the course experience was like; but then you did have to get it across to us that this was a different style of training. I think you were preparing people for that.

(Interview 1 with Tim, supervisor)

Tim seemed to expect individual rather than group reflection. The former may not have been be all that common but, as already stated, neither was it completely new to managers. The latter, however, as organised (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b) and public reflection (Raelin, 2001) was certainly less familiar, if not entirely unknown to Worldlife managers. It's also clear that the prospect of reflection, over the more traditional 'talk and chalk' approaches (Kiggundu, 1991) he and his peers were used to, caused Tim some anxiety (Gilmore and Anderson, 2012); anxiety which was alleviated when he discovered what group rather than solo reflection entailed, which was mainly

230

dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002; Ming Tsang, 2007; Vickers, 2011), thinking aloud and disclosing before and with others. Whilst this was at times challenging and anxiety-inducing for some, the RMP was not a solipsistic affair nor was it one which required any therapeutic or personal (as opposed to impersonal) revealing (Perriton, 2007; Swan and Bailey, 2004), which may have been Tim's worry. His response also highlights the fact that although the briefing groups were quiet, nonetheless, internal reflexive conversations (Archer, 2007) were taking place. This was true for the facilitator too, as the field note makes clear.

As already stated, the briefings were held to prepare managers for the new learning of the RMP. Next, some of the forms this new learning took will be examined. One such form was how the RMP helped to generate a new sense of agency and thus responsibility amongst participants. This began with the emphasis placed on the importance of language at the briefings, specifically the social constructionist message managers received which suggested they were "practical authors" of the social realities they managed within (Cunliffe, 2001); that they were not "absolute" (Tourish, 2013, p.11) but relational leadership (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011) agents in Worldlife, a key reflexive theme which carried over into the RMP programme itself. Pauline, a Worldlife middle manager, spoke to these points:

One thing that struck me is the overall responsibility you have as a manager. I don't think that comes across to us enough. Maybe we don't remind ourselves enough or your manager never reminds you because they feel they shouldn't have to - and they *shouldn't* have to. The overall responsibility we have, it's a big ask. It's amazing how words, and the way you say them, impact on and form another person. I don't mean "form" but more

route them down a certain direction. We definitely have that impact. Words, and the way you say them, are important: the programme made me more aware of that. The scary part is you just have to worry about what you say all the time.

(Interview 1 with Pauline, middle manager)

For Pauline, new learning on the RMP consisted in being reminded of her responsibility as a manager. When broken down, this referred to the interlaced themes of: the impact she had on others around her; her understanding of her own managerial agency; and the power of her words and language to shape the relational realities she was embedded in in work (Shotter, 1993). In short, it consisted of all of the elements one would expect reflexive awareness to entail. Pauline wasn't alone in responding this way. Bob responded similarly. After describing the RMP as "strange and different" type of learning he spoke of the responsibility the programme engendered and the sense of agency which accompanied this:

It made me feel more responsible. Because the programme didn't provide any set answers, I felt a real responsibility towards others. This responsibility is a good thing. It made me realise what is inside and outside of my own control. This made me more positive about what I could influence. I think a lot of those boundaries are purely in the head sometimes. The programme was challenging because it was different. I think people expected a toolkit, so what we did get out of it was unexpected. Despite the briefings, I don't think we realised what we were getting into.

(Interview 1 with Bob, middle manager)

232

As Bob admits, reflexive learning was an "unexpected" experience for him. Like his colleagues, he was more used to what Mintzberg (2004) calls the "functional structure" (p.282) of management development which privileges the receiving of "toolkits" and "set answers", in Bob's words. Managers were unprepared for, and seemed almost disarmed by, the responsibility generated by the RMP as they remembered they could be active and reflexive, rather than simply passive agents in their organisational worlds (Maclean et al., 2012). As RML itself can be construed as a form of reflexive "learning practice" (Billett and Newton, 2010), this finding offers support for Barge's (2004) point that when acting reflexively managers experience "an increased sense of agency" (p.90). But learning reflexively was also challenging, as Bob mentioned. This challenging, even hostile nature of the learning induced by the RMP was another novel form the learning took. As Neil explained:

It just made you think. We would say something and then you or Elaine would ask us why we thought that; it was really getting down to the nitty-gritty, that's what it was all about. It made me think about how I am as a manager and how the team might perceive me. I have to say I was exhausted after the first day of the programme, absolutely exhausted.

(Interview 1 with Neil, supervisor)

"Learning is deeper and more durable when it is *effortful*" say Brown et al. (2014, p.3, emphasis in the original) and this seems to fit Neil's RMP experience. The hostile element referred to is how the programme "made" him think; forcing him to reflect, but not in a negative or coercive sense (Hobbs, 2007). Many managers alluded to this. Jason talked about how the RMP made him think normatively about his role:

The programme made me think a bit more about how I am as a manager in work; how I can do better in terms of my managerial practices. It made me think more in terms of myself and what I should be doing: for example, listening a bit more.

(Interview 1 with Jason, middle manager)

Jack also alluded to a hostile dimension of reflexive learning but like others he accepted this as a constructive aspect of the experience and like Conor above, he hinted at the holism of the RMP's approach and the particular cultural relevance of this for Worldlife:

Making people think, putting them through the thought process, the reflection and all of that, that's a very worthwhile process which you would hope would develop people's all round management nature, particularly in a company that is dominated by numbers.

(Interview 1 with Jack, middle manager)

In developing self and critical-reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2009a), then, the RMP had necessarily hostile aspects. But these were typically perceived positively by managers who understood that this meant the learning was deeper and more engaging; that, as Pia, a senior manager put it, the learning was "better":

The concept of reflexive learning was difficult to grasp the first time around, but you learn – the programme forces you to learn as you go; its reflexive, as the title suggests, but it's better for that.

234

The RMP was new in challenging, unexpected, and even hostile ways, but as Pia and most other managers admitted it was a "better" learning experience because of this. Rather than 'spoon-feeding' participants the RMP took a practice-based learning approach (Raelin, 2009a). This meant the programme was directly relevant to managers in a way which was also new to them and as a result the learning generated was of a more proprietary kind. As Bill said:

It was easy to relate the content of the programme generally to my day-to-day experience and that was unusual; that doesn't tend to be the case.

Traditional didactic forms of formal management development do not make sufficient room for reflection and dialogue (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002). Thus they eschew the creation of space where relevance could be generated, as managers' experiences are disclosed and brought into contact with any content which is included, but only in order to guide or stimulate critical reflection and discussion, allowing a potentially productive dialectic between experience and theory to be forged (Mintzberg, 2004). Nor do traditional didactic approaches purposefully broach "issues of power, anxiety, uncertainty, conflict and difference" (Vince, 2011, p.333) in the way RML does. Therefore, when managers are actually faced with a learning intervention like the RMP,

which is premised on the creation of reflexive space for learning in these ways, and on these issues, it surprises and disarms them and is thus a novel learning experience.

This may be why many Worldlife managers referred to reflexive learning as a kind of remembrance - habituated to "banking" models (Freire, 1996; Mintzberg, 2004) of management education and development they had forgotten what it was like to learn. The RMP was a natal space in which they could begin to learn anew. This interpretation is supported by those managers who hinted at the need to learn how to learn (Argyris, 1991) reflexively on the programme. Karl hinted at this when discussing the relative lack of structure of the RMP, compared with other management programmes he had attended:

> On other management courses it is hard to keep your attention; you drift in and out of them. Relative to those, the RMP was a different approach, which was good. It was relatively unstructured so initially you're kind of saying to yourself "where's the direction on this? Do we have to take control of the direction? Do *I* have to take some control of the direction?' On my programme I probably did, but it took a while; it took about half an hour to see how it was going to go, then someone says something and you say "Well, that's interesting, let's throw that one open" and then after that you're picking up on comments and passing remarks.

> (Interview 1 with Karl, middle manager)

Learning to learn reflexively on the RMP meant learning to learn dialogically (Corlett, 2012; Ming Tsang, 2007; Raelin, 2012) and with far less structure and pedagogical

control than managers were used to. This took a little time to adapt to, as Karl alluded to above. In this sense, the RMP was new in terms of being more a process (Reynolds, 2009), or a form of management learning rather than a programme which came readymade with its content and structure tightly determined. As Vincent said:

It doesn't really feel like you're learning 'stuff'; facts are not being thrown at you, or theories aren't being thrown at you. The learning comes from the thinking and from the conversations with others.

(Interview 1 with Vincent, middle manager)

The above analyses suggest three main ways in which RMP constituted new learning for Worldlife managers and these in turn had three accompanying effects. Table 6.0 below displays this:

Novel learning element	Effect
Heightened awareness of agency	Led to an increased sense of managerial responsibility; focused managers' minds on the importance of language and words to shape and influence others, and ultimately, social reality overall
Hostility	Forced managers to think and learn, but in a challenging, non-authoritarian and ultimately more constructive way than spoon-feeding or banking approaches
Relevance	Led to proprietary learning, owned more closely by managers because generated from a practice-based pedagogical approach which necessitated the involvement of their lived work experiences

Table 6.0 Three novel elements of the Worldlife RMP

New learning is one thing and, of course, RML itself can be a form of praxis or acting with others. But whether this translates into reflexive practice (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Maclean et al., 2012) or practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004) beyond the ephemeral learning space of an RMP is another matter. The following section explores how this occurs and how the Worldlife RMP led to new managing.

New managing

How could the new learning of the RMP actually translate into new managing beyond the space of the programme itself? At first glance it might seem difficult to see how this could be the case because, as the above section has shown, the RMP made a new, meaningful, and significant, but still often largely intangible impression upon Worldlife managers. Pauline spoke for many of her peers when she said "it's difficult to say what the 'top five' things we learned on the programme were: it was more reflective" (Interview 1 with Pauline, middle manager). Similar to the participants in the study by Nicolini et al. (2004), Worldlife managers couldn't always easily point to anything concrete or specific they learned over the programme's two days. Many spoke instead about reflexive learning as a process of realising, remembering, or being struck (Corlett, 2012; Cunliffe, 2004; 2002) by things that happened in the space; things that were said by others, or to them; or things managers said to themselves on the programme during self-reflexive conversations (Archer, 2007) - the inner thinking of our private plurality which, unless we choose to disclose it, is "invisible" to others (Arendt, 1971, p.433).

The learning which occurred on the RMP was unexpected, even improvised. It caught managers unawares as they "provoked the organisation's [as well as their own] status

quo" (Cunha et al., 2014, p.11). Although the programme was highly practice-centred (Raelin, 2009a), this did not preclude, in fact it necessitated, managers reconceptualising managing as a way of "being-in-relation-to-others" (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011, p.1430).

But primarily the learning generated by the RMP was of a strong and distinctly political (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000) and social kind (Elkjaer, 1999; Wenger, 2000; Woodall, 2006). It left a marked impression on managers who were used to attending learning programmes together but, paradoxically, unused to learning in the kind of "sheer human togetherness" (Arendt, 1998, p.180) allowed and encouraged by RML as a reflexive space of appearance. Like managing itself, learning during the RMP was largely an "activity at the level of the group, not at the level of the individual" (Cook and Yanow, 1993, p.383): it was an act undertaken with others in a space which promoted public over private reflection (Raelin, 2001).

Because of the form it took, as well as the topics discussed, which discussed "areas of management experience" like power and politics which are typically not proactively surfaced during didactic development approaches (Vince, 2011, p.333), learning on the RMP was tangible and centred on the experience and practice of the managers involved (Raelin, 2009a). This meant it was easily relatable to their work lives, and as managers came to understand themselves more as reflexive rather than passive agents, they also came to understand managing and learning itself as forms of praxis (Seo and Creed, 2002). This section, and the one which follows, will each analyse an empirical example of this newly remembered agential awareness (Billett and Newton, 2010) in Worldlife

managers, as new managing and new organising respectively. They both demonstrate how the RMP acted as a space of new beginnings which led to initiated new action beyond the space of the programme itself.

These examples of reflexive natality will be told through the voices of the managers involved who were willing not just to learn reflexively on the RMP but also to experiment (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013) with reflexivity in their practice afterwards. In this section the experience of Lucy and reflexive natality as new managing is recounted. Lucy is a Worldlife supervisor who came to the RMP with a difficult people management challenge involving a member of her team. After the programme, she spoke of how she found the RMP a safe and supportive space for reflection (Vince, 2004), where she could bring this challenge up with other managers:

> Sometimes when you're in your day to day work you're just constantly [pauses], you've got targets and you're trying to meet them, and you don't actually have time to think about the bigger picture: but management is, I think, one simple message: how to bring the best out in people, and different managers have different ways of tackling that, so to sit around a table and to share experiences with others was valuable.

> (Interview 1 with Lucy, supervisor)

Like many Worldlife managers, Lucy felt she didn't usually have the time or the opportunity to reflect (Raelin, 2002). The RMP gave her the space to "think about the bigger picture", as she put it. Also, like many managers, Lucy is a practical theorist (Watson, 1994a), meaning she has her own normative stance on what managing others

240

means. But she also recognised that others might think differently and that she could learn from the 'wisdom' of plurality (Mannes, 2009). This was made more likely due to the space of honesty created during the programme:

"Around the table of the RMP it was easier to admit things you might not otherwise admit in other work environments: I felt I could be one hundred per cent open on the programme"

(Interview 1 with Lucy, supervisor).

As mentioned already, during the RMP Lucy raised for critical reflection a challenging situation she was having with a team member whose recent performance and attitude had been severely disrupting the team and causing Lucy herself no little anxiety. She spoke of how she subsequently tried to handle this team member in a new way following her RMP experience. What she says contains important insights into how RML can be a space of new beginnings for a manager who, through dialogue with peers in a reflexive space of honesty and critique, can begin to understand and enact their practice in novel and reflexive ways pertaining to real and difficult workplace issues which may seem to evade orthodox resolutions. Lucy explained how she moved from a traditional to a more reflexive way of dealing with the problem:

With this person, initially I took the 'softly, softly' approach. That didn't work. Then I tried a 'hard' approach and that didn't work either. I just saw them go back into themselves, completely. Then I tried a change of tack. I stopped to think "How am I coming across here?" This now was at the highest point of intensity in our relationship. I

just stood back and said to myself "This isn't working". Getting no acceptance from this person made me think "How would I feel in their shoes?" You just keep going back to how you would feel yourself – what makes *you* work for somebody? So I just sat this person down and said "Let's just be honest and upfront with each other, let's start afresh". You know, we're all human at the end of the day. I had to go through this. I had to see it for myself.

(Interview one with Lucy, supervisor)

A reflexive approach to people management is neither soft nor hard HRM, as these concepts and practices have been traditionally understood (Truss et al., 1997). It is more akin to a middle way, requiring both empathy and courage; a more subtle and relational approach to managing and motivating individuals which emphasises "a sense of connectedness and interdependence" between manager and team member (Liu et al., 2013, p.1035). In the excerpt above Lucy described experiencing a breakdown in her practice (Zundel, 2013) which led her to reflexively re-envision her way of managing a difficult relational issue, as she was struck (Corlett, 2012) aporetically within a situation where, to use her words, neither a "hard" nor a "softly, softly" approach was proving effective.

Thus she "tried a change of tack", switching into a more reflexive empathic mode of relational leadership (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Tried is the operative word, however.

Reflexive natality refers to action attempted with others - in order to be achieved it requires reciprocation; without this, the action will be initiated but not achieved (Arendt, 1998). It is relationally-intended praxis rather than "mere behaviour" (Arendt, 1972, p.133). The latter is something which Lucy could have done individually *to* the other person involved. That is, as the hierarchical superior in the relation, she could have instructed her subordinate to improve and simply awaited the results – success or failure on the part of the individual who would have either complied or not with the managerial order received; an order which would have constituted an attempt to make the person do something, typically by the use of some or other motivational means (Clark, 2003). It would, in short, have been management poiesis by Lucy, not management praxis. Praxis, or action, is trickier because it is attempted with another. It is more complex, risky and unpredictable and thus the outcomes are less certain.

Reading this case through Arendt's theory of action (Arendt, 1998), which is intrinsically relational, throws fresh light on why management and leadership behaviour generally may be more popular in practice than management and leadership reflexive action: the former is easier, more convenient, more predictable (and thus more manageable), and for many organisations and managers it may be effective enough. Another reason is that subordinates themselves often see their role subordinately rather than reflexively. Being passive rather than active within the management relation (Hollander, 1992) they lack the resources, including perhaps the willingness, to engage with "relational mechanisms" (Freeney and Fellenz, 2013, p.1438) which would enable management and leadership to be enacted in shared forms in the workplace (Raelin, 2004a).

Reflexive natality, such as that attempted by Lucy, is such a relational mechanism and it carries potentially more productive rewards for all the stakeholders involved. As Lucy demonstrated, reflexively managing means sharing the accountability for management as a phenomenon which happens between people. Arguably given their role managers must initiate the action, for example, by disclosing who they are in honest action before the other involved. This is a lesson which the RMP imparted in its aspect as a space of honesty. Inevitably though, if it is to be achieved action requires others to enter relationally into the space created by an initiator so that co-action (Gergen, 2009b) can ensue. This is another lesson which the RMP helped Lucy to formulate and she turned it into praxis attempted in her management role. As she explains below, this required her to re-conceive power relationally rather than authoritatively:

Lucy: With that person and that particular issue, I tried to deal with it by leaving power aside; by trying to talk to them on a one-to-one basis, saying "What's going on? Can we sort it out?"

Researcher: When you say you left your "power aside", what do you mean?

Lucy: Yeah, I did. I mean, when I was doing this I wasn't telling this person, I was asking them "what's going on?" I told them that's what I was really interested in.

Researcher: Do you mean you stepped out of your authority role?

> **Lucy:** I did, a little bit – no, in fact I *totally* did. I was trying to get to the bottom of things. I just did it. I thought it was the best way of doing things. It worked for a while, but then it reverted.

(Interview 1 with Lucy, supervisor)

Practical reflexivity requires that a manager steps beyond their hierarchical role with its vertical space relation (Dale and Burrell, 2010), and the formal authority invested in this, into a new space of power relations with others; a space where power resides between actors and new possibilities for relational political engagement become available (Allen, 2004). Lucy manifested this by leaving her "power aside", as she said. She uses the word power when what she really means is authority. It is not unusual that managers conflate power and authority, seeing "power as a thing" (Clegg, 2002, p.190). But in this case it is clear she left her authority aside, temporarily relinquishing the command function invested in her hierarchical status, representing her ability to make a subordinate do something, in favour of an attempt at a more dialogic and relational remedy (Powley et al., 2004) to a difficult, aporetic situation which called for a new approach.

Power and authority are two different concepts (Arendt, 1972). The first alone can be related to human action because power itself is relational (Gherardi and Poggio, 2006). It stands in need of a legitimacy which cannot be provided by mere job title or hierarchical status alone. However, power is more difficult to perform than authority so reflexive managing, just like reflexive learning, is difficult. Even if a manager exercises

new managing as reflexive natality it may not work; things might instead "revert", as Lucy admitted. In situations like this even the reflexive manager may be forced to fall back on their authority to deal with an issue.

But at least they will have tried to enact a power relation, a political acting "in concert" (Arendt, 1972, p.143) with another, who may or may not be willing (or able) to make a reciprocal move. This need to fall back on her managerial authority to deal with the situation she described had two interesting ramifications for Lucy: the first was temporal, the second, emotional. The temporal one relates to the fact that the reflexive approach she attempted was of a certain duration. After having worked with the other person on the relationship for almost a year eventually, as Lucy said elsewhere "I had to resolve it in a shorter time" (Interview 1 with Lucy, supervisor). From this it can be inferred that one of the reasons practical reflexivity is difficult is that it is time consuming; more time consuming than simply requesting compliance from team members. Managers who want to act reflexively may not always have the opportunity to do so, owing to certain organisational constraints. In this case it was a performance issue which Lucy could not allow to continue indefinitely, lest it reflect on her own performance and her standing within her team, her department and even the wider organisation.

The second ramification was emotional, as Lucy described how the experience caused her anxiety; how she eventually ran out of patience; and how, overall, it left her feeling more sceptical about managing people:

I believe you can try to help everybody but maybe I'm just getting slightly sceptical about that now - I'm only human. I gave this person so much leeway and I tried to talk it out; I didn't give her the whole "I'm your manager thing".

(Interview 2 with Lucy, supervisor)

To sum up, reflexive natality as new managing can be manifested as an experimental approach (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013) to managerial reflexivity (Barge, 2004) that sees practical reflexivity itself as a form of experiential workplace learning (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004); a practice-based way to learn (Strati, 2007) which proceeds as new creative action from which new understanding and knowledge emerges (Ford and Ogilvie, 1996). Theorising and operating RML as a reflexive space of new beginnings enables managers to understand their practice in this way and to learn, with the help of peers, how to go about "improving work practices [and] addressing moral and ethical dilemmas" (Brooks, 1999, p.69).

The way Lucy approached a challenging relational issue in her practice displayed the hall marks of a reflexive management approach: she critically reflected (Mezirow, 2000) on and challenged the norms and assumptions behind [her] reasoning and action" (Van Woerkom et al., 2002, p.375); this in turn led to a new mode of thinking (Closs and Antonello, 2011) and eventually, a new mode of praxis as attempted action with another within a difficult situation with material stakes for those involved. By leaving aside her authority, moving beyond it into a space of power rather than authority relations with another, Lucy was 'framing' (Fairhurst, 2005) a relational space (Eriksen,

247

2009; Gergen, 2009b) into which she as a critically reflexive leader (Cunliffe, 2009a), took the first step. But this move was not reflexively reciprocated. Thus it led – inevitably, because issues like this must ultimately be resolved in one form or another in the workplace - to Lucy reverting to using her authority to resolve the issue.

This finding throws up a surprising conclusion: the need to include non-managerial employees in RML. The logic here is that if RML is intended to translate into practical reflexivity on the part of a manager, and if this type of practice is relational and so by definition impossible to fully achieve if not reflexively reciprocated (as the case of Lucy shows), then it follows that non-managers in the management relation need RML too. In fact, if the word 'management' in reflexive management learning is taken seriously, that is, relationally, then they must be involved and RML now becomes less about managers and more about managing itself, involving all the relevant relational agents, if not quite equally on hierarchical terms, certainly on moral and potentially productive (Cressey et al., 2006) ones.

New organising

Organising RML, according to advocates of this approach (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince, 2002a), takes "a view of reflection as an organising process; one that takes account of the social and political processes at work in the organisation" (Vince and Reynolds, 2009, p.97). It also places "more emphasis on creating collective and organisationally focused processes for reflection" (Vince and Reynolds, 2009, p.98). There is a need for more empirical understanding of how such active and dynamic processes of organising collective reflection actually proceed in practice (Jordan et al., 2009; Vince and Reynolds, 2009). To date, some studies (for example Keevers and

Treleaven, 2011; Nicolini et al., 2004) have revealed how such efforts fare when supported by external facilitators, acting as either consultants or researchers within an organisational setting.

But less is known about what happens when managers themselves, acting upon their own initiative, decide to try to organise reflection in their own context with their managerial peers. This section presents and analyses a rare empirical case of such an experience. The case centres on Saul, a Worldlife middle manager who was inspired by the RMP to try and organise public reflection with his peers after the programme had ended. I first heard about this when I met Saul on my way to interview another Worldlife manager, as the following field note explains:

This afternoon on my way to interview Vincent, I walk past Saul who is at the photocopier on the fourth floor. As I walk towards him he sees me coming and when I reach him he stops me to say "How are things? I need to tell you something". "Okay" I reply, "but you'll need to walk with me I'm going to meet someone". He nods his head in assent and follows me out onto the stairwell. We walk and talk as we make our way up to the sixth floor for my rendezvous with Vincent: "I've arranged a manager's forum for next Wednesday" he tells me, "I was thinking about the RMP afterwards, and I thought this would be a good idea". "Oh, really?" I reply (I'm genuinely surprised, I didn't expect this). "I think it'll be good" he says, "I've invited people from Operations. It's because of the programme; we just don't do this enough so I said I'd do it". We're walking up the second flight of stairs and I ask him "Will you let me know how it goes?" "Of course" he replies, then he turns around to go back down the stairs and I continue on my way to Vincent.

When we met later Saul had by then organised and run his inaugural reflective forum with his peers, so I asked him about it. First I asked him to explain what he meant when he said he did this "because of the programme":

Researcher: You said the RMP made you think about doing this?

Saul: Yes, yeah, I have to say it did. I've heard it so many times before that "We never get the chance to talk", or "we never get the time to talk to each other" and people on the programme were saying "this is good, we're getting to talk, we have the same issues", so I said to myself as the programmed ended, "Is this all gonna stop now? Well, no it shouldn't stop now, so let's take the bull by the horns and just do it".

(Interview 2 with Saul, middle manager)

Some of the managers who attended Saul's forum confirmed that the RMP played a role in motivating this organised reflection. For example, Jason said that the forum happened "as a result of the programme" (Interview 2 with Jason, middle manager). I asked Saul how he actually went about putting the forum together, and what was running through his mind as he did so:

Saul: I spent about twenty minutes jotting down things we could discuss but I also wanted an open agenda. I thought doing it was important. Initially I restricted it to a cohort of Gerard's (Saul's senior manager) managers. Then other people heard about it and asked if they could join. I then spoke to each manager individually. I said "We had the RMP programme, and I think we all agreed that it was good to chat, now I'm proposing that we all meet, I'll set it up and chair the first one: are you on for it?" Everyone said yes.

Researcher: Did they ask you why you were meeting, or what you were going to do?

Saul: No, I just said to them "It's good to talk". It worked very well. The first one went very well. I sent an invite around saying "Here's a list of topics that we can discuss but let's keep it open-ended; I'm just throwing these out on the table for now".

Researcher: Can you tell me what those topics were?

Saul: Yeah, staffing issues, absenteeism, staff reviews, the service we're getting from other departments, cross-departmental projects that some people may not be aware of, synergies that we might be able to get from each other. Where I was going with it was for people to say to each other things like "I deal with absenteeism or constant lateness in this way - what do you do? How do you deal with that? Are we all dealing with it in the same way?"

Researcher: So you sent that invite out and…

Saul: …everybody jumped at it. Others then wanted to come to it. They e-mailed me and rang me; they had heard about it from other managers. I was very surprised at the

response. I wasn't sure how it was going to go, you know what I mean? How is this going to go? Are we gonna sit there looking at each other? I was anxious; I wouldn't say I was nervous, I wanted it to work. At the first session I said to the group "I don't know how this is gonna go but I think we need to give it a chance. We need to meet two or three times and then decide". I was thinking how often would we need to meet? In my own head it would be about every six weeks, otherwise its gonna be overkill. At the end of the first meeting, which went very well, I said "When will we meet next?" and the response was like a chorus – "Two weeks!"

(Interview 2 with Saul, middle manager)

This is an uncommon empirical example which provides insight into how a practicing manager, motivated by public reflection during an RML programme, goes about organising something similar amongst their peers in their workplace context. In the language of the RSOA theory, Saul is demonstrating learnt reflexive natality; he is initiating something new in his practice motivated by his participation on the Worldlife RMP as a space of new beginnings; a catalytic space where he was exposed to new learning in the form of concepts like reflexivity, reflexive practice and praxis. By organising a new forum for reflection which would engage the "collective experience" of his peers (Raelin, 2004b, p.xi), Saul was enacting reflexive initiative to make something new happen in his managerial environment. In his own words, he was taking the "bull by the horns".

It is clear from what he says above that this reflective forum was not intended to be particularly philosophical (Cunliffe, 2009a), existential (Zundel, 2013), emancipatory

(Raelin, 2008a) or ideologically critical (Welsh and Dehler, 2004) in nature. It does not then seem to align much with these normative theories of what collective RML should be. Instead, it had a far more productive tenor (Boud et al., 2006a). As his list of potential topics for reflection shows, Saul's reflective forum was set to be an inherently pragmatic dialogue concerning everyday issues in these managers' work lives.

This supports Cressey et al's contention (2006) that RML in a workplace context will inevitably be geared towards productive ends and "reflective practices cannot be considered apart from the situation and organisational purposes for which they are used" (p.20). That the reflection was pragmatic – an existential RML theorist might say too "calculative" rather than "contemplative" (Zundel, 2013, p.121) - should not surprise. As work-based studies of management have consistently found, managers are pragmatic actors (Mintzberg, 2009; Watson, 1994a) working in complex, and from a moral perspective, many-sided organisational worlds which are "geared towards pragmatic accomplishments" (Jackall, 2010, p.59), more so than existential or critical ones, and the 'philosopher leader' (Cunliffe, 2009a) may be hard to find in practice.

Indeed, although as the very existence of the Worldlife RMP itself demonstrated, one or two relatively 'tempered radicals' (Meyerson, 2001) or sufficiently critical HRD practitioners (Vince, 2005) may be willing to incorporate some such elements into how a management learning intervention is designed and operated, it would be unusual if an autonomously initiated managerial effort at organising collective reflective practice were to adopt this stance; that is, it would be unusual for such an initiative to not be primarily calibrated entirely towards practical goals, as was the case with Saul's forum.

This did not mean that Saul intended his reflective forum to be acritical or apolitical, as will be shown. As his emphasis on dialogue (he gives it the colloquial designation: "chat") shows, reflection in this forum was set to be reflexive; a "dialogical and relational activity" (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004, p.31) which was productive in a holistic sense (Boud et al., 2006a), or "open-ended" as Saul said. This theme of open-endedness was confirmed by another manager who attended the forum and said it was a space "to reflect together on "day-to-day issues, or ethical issues, or whatever; the agenda is quite open" (Interview 2 with Jason, middle manager). As the next interview excerpts show, the forum did entail a level of challenge amongst participants, and political and emotional dynamics (Vince, 2011; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) were not absent from the reflection which occurred. This emerged as Saul explained how the forum operated:

Saul: It was an open discussion on relevant topics that affect all managers and their staff. The purpose was to improve things; to get a consistent approach going.

Researcher: Did everyone participate?

Saul: Yes

Researcher: Was everybody comfortable with challenging each other now and then?

Saul: I set a few ground rules at the start. I said to them: 'this is a discussion meeting, no single person is to take over the session and I will chair it that way. Nobody is to be offended if I ask them to back down a bit or cool off but it has to be fair and we're here to

challenge each other and get what we believe to be best practice out of it". I told them that I'd told Gerard I was doing this and I'd be reporting back to him. Then somebody asked me "Are you some sort of spy?" I told them I took offence at that - Gerard was my manager and he deserved to know what I was doing with my time at work.

Researcher: You're not afraid of the sessions being critical then?

Saul: I *want* them to be critical; I'll agree with you, I'll fight with you, I'll argue with you – it's about improving things for us all in the long term. I said at the sessions that I didn't want them to become witch hunts. But if issues come up and if we all take them back to our senior managers and say "We need your help on this", then they'll have to act on that. Now, you have to be careful about how you do that sort of thing too, but I know one manager who joined because she felt isolated in her area in relation to certain issues.

(Interview 2 with Saul, middle manager)

Saul's forum made space for critical reflection then, but in a productive rather than ideological sense which sought "practical value" (Vince, 2014, p.417) from this activity in the form of tangible work life improvements for managers and their teams (Boud et al., 2006b). Interestingly, Saul told the group that action in the forum could even lead to further action outside of its boundary, as any tasks which emerged for the senior managers of those attending would be brought to their attention; a move which he suggested these more senior management figures would then be obliged to act upon. Saul said that one manager "joined" the forum in order to elicit such support because "she felt isolated in her area". The forum presumably would offer her communal

support, a measure of fellowship and security, and perhaps even the hope that "in relation to certain issues" she may get the help she seemed to require, which presumably was not forthcoming within her own local management system.

Saul was seeking "best practice" which he felt could be gleaned by peers pooling their collective experiences and knowledge together in a form where the reflection would be productive and if necessary critical and argumentative (Gold et al., 2002). But the reflection would not be "just an end in itself" (Cressey et al., 2006, p.18). It would be purposive critique: critical if necessary rather than critical in "nature" (Raelin, 2004b, p.xi). Reflecting critically when criticality is relevant - and this is judged by the actors involved, not by external arbiters, and certainly not by theory - is a pragmatic rather than ideological stance which treats critique instrumentally as a means to an end, potentially a plethora of ends. These must matter to the stakeholders taking part (see Flyvbjerg, 2001) and matter sufficiently enough so that collective reflection may successfully navigate their plurality and the multiple rationalities and justificatory schemes in play (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). This is relevant to RML because managers like those who attended the RMP, or participated in Saul's reflective forum which was inspired by it, are "real people who have a future together" and thus also have a need to learn together (Yorks et al., 2003, p.113).

An important lesson from this finding is that the pragmatic organised reflection of practitioners does not necessarily abjure critique nor does it shirk the exercise of reflexively challenging underneath the surface of existing understandings and taken-for-granted assumptions. But neither will it simply perform this critique without good

reason, and what constitutes good reason will be defined by the actors involved with an eye to local concerns (Docherty et al., 2006), as opposed to normative theoretical ones, devised and propounded from outside their particular "community of fate" (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013, p.22).

In the end, after just one more run, Saul's reflective managers' forum petered out. According to him it did so for two main reasons: firstly, because some participants lost interest and stopped attending, complaining now that the topics did not motivate them; secondly, because in his words, "it got a bit moany and pernickety". This development seemed to make Saul himself lose heart:

Our second reflection session went well but I don't think it was as good as the first. Some declined, saying that the list of topics I sent around this time didn't interest them. Well, if that's the way it's gonna go you could have sessions with just one person there - you're either a part of it or you're not a part of it, you can't pick and choose. You might think there's nothing there to excite you, or that affects you, but you might still learn something; and anyway, we might have something we can learn from you! Also, this second session got a bit moany and pernickety. I thought we got down to too granular a level on things. We were talking about the HR handbook, what the policy is for this and that - it's supposed to be peer-group training even peer group pressure to some extent, where someone reflects and realises "Maybe I'm doing this wrong", but not everyone is willing to do that. Others thought it was a good session - I didn't. They asked me to organise it again in two weeks' time and I said no. I might chair it for them going forward, we'll see.

(Interview 3 with Saul, middle manager)

257

To the best of my knowledge Saul's forum never did convene again and so it proved ultimately to be as ephemeral as the RMP itself. Ephemeral or not, however, the RMP made enough of an impression on Saul that he initiated collective reflection with his peers. Even if this eventually petered out, the attempt remains of value and it helps to show that some managers are willing to translate the lessons of RML into their practice. When I asked him why he did it - why him and no one else - he simply repeated "I thought it was important, I thought it was important" (Interview 3 with Saul, middle manager).

As with the case of Lucy, Saul's reflexive natality suffered in the end from a lack of reciprocity. The initiator of the action then lost interest himself as others began to self-interestedly "pick and choose" when to participate, rather than act in the pro-social, communal spirit Saul had originally intended for these sessions. Ideally, in this spirit his peers would have been reflexive participants playing the role of as givers as well as takers (Grant and Dutton, 2012) in the public space, adding to as well as benefiting from the advantages the forum could provide. Interestingly, Saul also lost interest when the reflection became "too granular", lacking the critically reflexive element of challenge and "peer group pressure", an aspect of the space which he - like some RML researchers (for instance Sinclair, 2007) – found others were not always ready or willing to engage with.

The reflexive natality the RMP inspired in him, and presumably to some degree in those who participated with his forum, is a political faculty of action which "enables [us] to get together with [our] peers, to act in concert" (Arendt, 1972, p.179). It is a political

modality of managing which views action as "always a joint production" (Ramsey, 2005, p.222). Saul's reflexive natality, cultivated during the RMP programme, opened up new vistas for agency in his practice (Fook, 2010); new possibilities for action (Boud, 2010) which he took it upon himself to experiment with initiating (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013), thus going from enabled to enacted practical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004). The case of Saul provides empirical evidence that RML can trigger managerial praxis and encourage managers to become more reflexive change agents in their organisations. This, in fact, is the hypothesis forwarded by McDaniel and DiBella-McCarthy's (2012) cognitivist form of RML. What these authors do not discuss however is the frustration and complexity associated with the emotional and political dynamics of organising reflection (Vince and Reynolds, 2009), and the way these can interfere with normative ideals of how reflection should and can work in organisational contexts. Theorising RML as a reflexive space of new beginnings ensures that these dynamics are acknowledged and accepted as part of how RML is conceptualised and practiced. It caters to the pragmatic, political, and contextual considerations which are critical to understanding how RML operates in practice (Boud, 2010; Cressey et al., 2006; Seibert and Daudelin, 1999), providing RML with a much needed theory of action. Modelling RML praxically is what the RSOA overall does, and what the reflexive space of beginnings especially emphasises.

This chapter has theorised the Worldlife RMP as a space of new beginnings; a space where reflexive natality is learned and potentially then enacted beyond the programme itself. In a way which previous empirical studies of RML have not always been able to show, it has unpacked how RML can lead to reflexive praxis (Antonacopoulou, 2010). But it has also explored the difficulties of sustaining this in an organisational context

259

which was paradoxically both a "supportive and restrictive structure" (Vince, 2011, p.336). A lack of reflexive reciprocation towards those who would initiate action with others does not only stymie RML itself, it is also a barrier to reflexive managerial action beyond such boundaries.

The RMP programme was a space of new beginnings for Worldlife managers in two main senses: firstly it was a pedagogically radical move away from orthodox learning approaches, constituting a new start in terms of how managers perceived and experienced learning more reflexively rather than instrumentally (Antonacopoulou, 2006b); secondly it was a space which could inspire new beginnings in the form of new action with others beyond the programme itself, as the cases of Lucy and Saul show. This is a contribution to knowledge which responds to calls for understanding on how RML gets organised in workplaces (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b; Vince and Reynolds, 2009). It is also a contribution in terms of explaining how RML itself can motivate a manager to enact the lessons of RML in ways which matter to them; that is, it illuminates the actual processes behind how managers become more reflexive practitioners (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004). Both Lucy and Saul's examples were reflexive attempts at action which ultimately either did not fully work (Lucy) or worked but then would not stick (Saul), adding empirical support to Cressey et al's remark (2006) that reflection is "always in a state of becoming. It is never frozen; it is always in transition or movement" (p.22).

The pragmatic intent behind the reflexive natality Lucy and Saul enacted, displayed its "problem-driven" character (Gherardi, 1999, p.101), suggesting that drawing too sharp a distinction between learning as problem-centred and instrumental, and learning as

relational may be misguided (Gherardi, 1999) - in practice, reflexive learning and managing means both. Learning is instrumental insofar as managers are typically learning and acting in order to try and solve real problems in their working lives; yet in order to do so most effectively and sustainably, they must consciously choose to act relationally and reflexively with others. If this fails (because others cannot or will not reciprocate) authority rather than power is enforced as a reductive non-reflexive substitute, as the case of Lucy demonstrated. In real terms, if Lucy did not solve the problem facing her it would have become a problem *for* her; her formal accountability was in a sense hovering over her reflexive attempts to deal with the issue, and this accountability put a temporal boundary on things. Even though she exercised patience in her reflexive attempt, it could not continue indefinitely and she was ultimately constrained in how far she could take a reflexive solution. There is also a moral point to make: Lucy had a responsibility to herself not to be continually let down by someone who was not investing as much as she was in a relational solution to the problem; a problem which included them both.

The case of Saul showed how power dissolved when others began to falter in relation (literally) to his attempts to institutionalise collective reflection (Nicolini et al., 2004). When this happened he had no formal authority to bring peers together and they had no hierarchical obligation to comply with his requests to attend. This speaks to something crucial about practical reflexivity in action: to be 'full' – to close the reflexive circle as it were, which necessarily implies a social self (Gergen, 2009b; Mead, 1967; Shotter, 1975) - it must be relational. In both of the cases discussed here, action was ultimately stymied owing to a lack of reflexive reciprocity on the part of others: in the case of Lucy, one other; in the case of Saul, many others. In the wider Worldlife organisational

261

context, reflexive practice proved to be more difficult than it was in the RSOA itself. This was an ephemeral space (Arendt, 1998) where reality could be re-shaped anew in dialogical form by managers (Cunliffe, 2009b) but not necessarily practically experimented (Adriansen and Knudsen, 2013) with beyond those spatial confines. Yet, it was in this space where managers remembered their capacity to act creatively together (Collier, 2010) in more "imaginative and political" modes (Keevers and Treleaven, 2011, p.14) and "to make sense of their experience in new and novel ways" (Paton et al., 2014, p.18) which could, at least in some cases, lead to new reflexive management action.

CHAPTER 7   CONCLUSION

This thesis' main research question was how do managers respond to RML in the workplace? This is ultimately a question about what RML means to managers and how they make this meaning - individually and collectively - in context (Mishler, 1979). Empirical studies of RML are relatively rare and where they do exist, this question has not always been uppermost in researchers' minds. The original contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is to have answered this question via the provision of a new theoretical framework for RML as a reflexive space of appearance. This way of conceptualising RML has generated new understanding and insights into the challenging, but also the promising political and relational dynamics involved when operating this learning approach in a workplace context. The result is a theory of action for RML which offers conceptual and practical value to existing scholarship.

As already stated, the main research question centred on what RML means to managers and how this meaning is reflexively accomplished by them in real life settings where the stakes involved are real and actually matter to those involved: this was a study of RML in managers' "world of concern" (Sayer, 2011, p.1). As this thesis has continually emphasised, context matters to RML, so this research angle, and the methodological stance it required, was chosen because how managers construe the efficacy and value of RML, and how the workplace setting helps to shape for better or worse their response to this learning approach have to date been largely underexplored lines of inquiry. This thesis has generated empirical clarity on these and related matters.

Specifically, it has expanded insight into a further important sub-question implied by the primary research proposition (Miles and Huberman, 1994): how does RML translate beyond the classroom into the practical reflexivity promoted by proponents of the approach (Cunliffe, 2009b; 2004; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004)? Moreover, these questions have been illuminated through the creation of new theorisation of RML, constructed using the kind of emic methodology called for by scholars (Raelin, 2008a) who have asked directly for more workplace examples of RML in action in the workplace (Vince and Reynolds, 2009).

The findings reported in this thesis are amalgamated in this concluding chapter where the potential importance and the wider relevance of this study are suggested. These conclusions show that the importance placed on the need for more contextualised studies of RML (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Boud, 2010; Vince and Reynolds, 2009) is both relevant and timely. Relevant because normative theory, concerned with what RML ought to and "might be" (Suddaby, 2014, p.408) for managers and organisations, has come to a point where to dialectically progress (Vermeulen, 2005) it now needs to be buttressed by work-based studies (Barley and Kunda, 2001) capable of adding more contextual nuance (Antonacopoulou, 2004a; Boud, 2010) to an idea and a way of learning which is philosophical enough to be prone at times to excessive idealisation; timely because this study has indirectly affirmed something many scholars have been saying generally about management learning: that theory and practice around this phenomenon requires reflexive redirection (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Raelin, 2009a) and even, that a paradigm shift is necessary (Delbecq, 2009).

Time after time throughout this study, managers either explicitly stated or implied through their words and actions, that traditional approaches to their development are in many ways outdated; as unsuited to an increasingly reflexive world (Beck et al., 2004; Gherardi, 1999) as RML is suited to it. Of course, this does not mean that RML should, or can, simply replace all traditional forms of management learning. But it may help to make them more reflexive and RML itself can play an important complementary role in supporting orthodox approaches that remain relevant. This thesis has advanced the debate on how this can happen and enriched the discourse surrounding RML; particularly, but not necessarily exclusively, RML as it applies to workplace contexts.

Previous empirical work has shown how deeply challenging RML can be for managers and the organisations they work in. This work is valuable and whilst at times is has been necessary to challenge some of this scholarship, it has nonetheless been the central source of critical inspiration for this study. This thesis in part affirms, and does not gloss over, the very real difficulty of RML for managers and organisations. Crucially, it adds managerial voice to this debate, explaining in their words, and from their practice perspectives, why and how RML is so challenging. But the key contribution of this thesis has been to build upon and to try to think beyond the difficulties and the challenge of RML showing how, if conceived in a politically reflexive way, RML can be more than just a disruptive and antagonising learning force.

The originality of this thesis' contribution stems from the depth of empirical detail and "thick description" (Geertz, 2000, p.3) supplied by what is an uncommon methodology for RML research: a reflexive insider ethnographic approach. This is manifested in the findings provided. Through a crafted research process (Cunliffe, 2010; Watson, 1994b),

which constituted a reflexive learning journey for me as a researcher and as a practitioner, these findings have enabled the creation of a new theoretical framework for RML titled the 'reflexive space of appearance'. What follows in the rest of this concluding chapter will flesh this contribution out more. To begin with, using the research questions as headings, empirical findings are reviewed and what has been established in previous analytical chapters is weaved into a set of interconnected themes. These are then distilled and presented as theoretical and practical contributions to scholarship. Following this, future research directions are proposed. These are partly derived from the limitations of this study, which are also covered here. The final section provides a closing statement which ends the thesis.

How do practicing managers respond to RML in the workplace?

The answer here is somewhat paradoxical in that managers responded similarly but also differently, displaying the fundamental plurality involved when operating RML in context. First, the similarity: without exception, all the managers who took part in this study and the vast majority of those who participated with the programme it was based upon, positively valued RML for one simple but cardinal reason: its ability to bring them together and then bind them together as individuals who shared a common role (and who thus had much in common); but also as individuals whose sense of self was bound up in relational ways (Gergen, 2009b) with their peers, their own managers and the people in the teams they managed. This is the central reflexive lesson of RML and managers learned it anew, or remembered it more so than learned it for the first time during the Worldlife RMP. This lesson flowed from and was repeatedly reinforced by the reflexive operation of this unique learning intervention which carved out space and time for managers to engage in a work-based form of public reflection (Raelin, 2001),

facilitated from a holistic productive perspective (Boud et al., 2006a). Theorised as a reflexive space of appearance, the Worldlife RMP enabled and allowed managers to disclose honestly before themselves and each other in a safe space which simultaneously encouraged the delicate developmental balance between care and critique (Nicholson, 2011) to be articulated. This made possible the enactment of new thinking and action in relation to management which in some cases, even went on to be translated beyond the boundaries of the learning space itself into reflexive praxis (Antonacopoulou, 2010) in managers' working lives.

As for the difference, more challengingly for many normative conceptualisations of RML, especially collectivist and critical ones, each manager also responded in their own unique way to RML and although useful and insightful general patterns could be, and subsequently were profitably generated from these responses, ultimately it was neither possible nor desirable, either from a scientific (Packer, 2010) or a praxical perspective (Antonacopoulou, 2010) to try to smooth out or homogenise these into any one essential conclusive shape. Simply put, even though they recognised shared values in RML (for example, the values of dialogue and togetherness) and came up with common responses to the approach (for example, surprise, novelty and challenge), ultimately each manager had a different and unique take on what RML meant and this difference resisted easy reintegration into any single normative frame.

This difference in fact was one of the driving factors behind the theorising of RML as a reflexive space of appearance because such a conceptualisation can work with rather than avoid the difference and plurality which characterises RML when it is operated in context with working managers. Just as this difference was not avoided there because it

would ultimately lead to learning (Vince, 2014), neither could it be avoided when theorising RML – theory must make room for difference and plurality; embracing this perspective is a political good which in practice provides a pragmatic credibility to RML, meaning managers may then better accept rather than reject it into their practice. To date, the latter has been more the empirical norm. This thesis claims that this is because, by and large, RML has not been adequately politically (as opposed to ideologically) theorised. The RSOA framework is offered as one potential way to think around or beyond this problem.

Managers responded to RML differently firstly because, although they share similar roles they are fundamentally different and original persons. Just as it should not necessarily be theoretically decisive, neither should, or can, this individualism be diluted even when working with collective forms of RML (Fook, 2010). In any event it is not, I contend, an either/or issue: collective forms of RML are not a priori mutually incompatible with a view which preserves the individuality of a manager; in fact, I claim they are dependent on such a paradigm. Managers embody the sheer plurality of RML in practice. They lead similar but simultaneously irreducibly unique working lives and the politically reflexive and relational theory of RML argued for in this thesis never strays from this point. In contradistinction to RML research which when it encounters plurality seems to highlight more its more challenging aspects, which are often then accordingly negatively conceived, the reflexive space of appearance framework theory presented in this thesis acknowledges and accepts plurality as both the condition for the effective operation of RML in workplace contexts and the basis from which praxis can proceed because of such learning, remembering that *praxis is the point*. Plurality, in

other words, is both an opportunity as well as a problem for RML and this cannot, other than by something approaching quasi-totalitarian means, be avoided.

It must be constructively and politically worked through with managers, with more or less reflexivity on the part of those charged with researching or operating RML in practice. Thus RML researchers would benefit from embracing plurality more. This thesis contends that it is the key to theorising RML adequately and operating it well in organisations; 'well' meaning productively, critically and morally, in the holistic sense intended by scholars like Boud et al. (2006a).

How does RML translate into reflexive practice?

Extending the findings of previous workplace studies of RML, which reported some minimal success in terms of how RML can enable managers to think differently about their practice, the results reported in this thesis demonstrate how RML can lead to actual change in a manager's practice once a programme has passed. Conceived, designed and facilitated in a politically reflexive way, RML is capable of having a powerful enough effect on managers to motivate them to reflexively attempt new action in their practice. This is a motivation they need not necessarily enter RML with, but can discover when they are in this learning space. But this is not a given. In fact, in the present study RML seemed mostly not to have this effect. But it should be remembered that reflexive learning is itself a form of reflexive practice and thus, managers who learn in new ways are *de facto* practicing their roles differently; that is, their role as management learners. Even within a relatively confined and ephemeral learning space, which is more or less carved apart from managers' everyday work lives, this is important. It is important

because RML, as this thesis has shown, can be significantly and directly relevant to how managers manage and to how organisations, more importantly, allow and encourage them to do so.

Therefore, as managers get more used to learning reflexively and more exposed as a matter of course to RML methods, it seems reasonable to assume that the chances they will practice managing more reflexively will increase. Of course, this implies the need to sustain RML and to continue the difficult (social) construction work of fostering "optimal conditions" (Hoyrup, 2004, p.453) for RML and reflexive managerial practice; the need to build and thereafter mind and continually reproduce and reinforce organisational "structures that reflect" (Nicolini et al., 2004). This thesis has argued that these are both goals which are conceptually better serviced by theorising RML as a politically reflexive form of praxis, or acting with managers, rather than on or unto them, as some RML research appears to attempt. Indeed, this may go some way towards explaining the often negative responses reported by such work and subsequently the faint tones of fatalism, even disappointment, which can sometimes be detected therein; a trend which I hope this thesis will help to reverse.

At the very least, what the Worldlife RMP delivered was new critical learning and thinking on the part of the managers involved. This can seep into a manager's practice in less obvious ways, and given the critical link between thought and action (Arendt, 1998), this in itself is a potentially significant finding. It takes on even more salience when taking into account the reference made earlier regarding the perceived current status of management learning generally and the potential role of RML in helping to

treat what is currently thought to be ailing this wider field of theory and practice: namely, that managers are often poorly served by mainstream didactic methods (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002); that what they learn is often inadequate and irrelevant, even harmful (Ghoshal, 2005); and that these approaches miss the critical learning point that embracing rather than suppressing issues such as power relations and political dynamics during management learning, hinders rather than helps managers and organisations (Vince, 2014) to become more holistically productive (Boud et al., 2006b). When development interventions take such lessons on board, RML can translate into a manager's practice. But to last, this requires reciprocation by others and further, it will likely only happen to begin with if a manager has compelling practical reasons for doing things differently; for example, as with the cases reported in the preceding chapter, if they are frustrated with the lack of space for peer reflection within existing organisation structures and possess an impulse fostered by RML to do something about this (Saul); or if they are experiencing a difficult aporetic performance situation which calls for a more reflexive management approach, learnt and given form during RML and subsequently experimented with in a managers practice (Lucy).

This need for a practical reason or imperative to actually manage reflexively after learning reflexively is a finding which affirms previous studies such as those by Antonacopoulou (2004a) and Seibert and Daudelin (1999). Where this imperative exists, RML may be enacted as reflexive practice beyond the programme; where it doesn't, and where such an imperative cannot be discovered during RML itself, it likely won't and indeed, as one manager in this study asked - why should it? This may be an inconvenient, but it is an astute counter-normative question and it should be taken seriously by RML scholars. Empirical studies of management since Dalton (1959) and

Stewart (1963), have consistently reported that working managers are harried by competing demands on their time and energy (Mintzberg, 2009; Tengblad, 2012). If anything, this phenomenon is intensifying (Hassard et al., 2009). Unless they are compelled by circumstance or by their superiors, or some combination of both, managers are often satisfied with enough rather than more or even better learning and performance.

This is because whereas the former requires maintenance alone; the latter demands new effort which will likely be difficult, time consuming, critical, unpredictable, risk-laden, and which will come with no guarantee of success. Managers are usually inured to avoiding, or at best containing such effects; they are not normally predisposed to inviting them, which is what RML demands and which managers are perceptive enough to understand. As already mentioned, even when enacted beyond an RML programme by a willing manager, practical reflexivity may not be reciprocated by those they encounter who may, or may not, turn out to be the kind of self and critically reflexive partners (Cunliffe, 2004) required for such interactions. As the present study found, this sort of interpersonal deficit can be fatal to further reflexive practice because of the fundamental importance of reciprocity to reflexive action, which is necessarily a relational endeavour.

This point about the reciprocal nature of reflexivity is also stressed by Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004), who emphasise it using student data collected in an educational setting: this thesis has discovered it using contextualised workplace data based on practicing managers' responses to RML. In the current study, where RML did lead to

practical reflexivity it was contingent on managers' having a problem to solve in their work lives. Thus the learning was inherently problem-driven (Gherardi, 1999) and instrumental (Antonacopoulou, 2006b). This suggests that above all other a priori considerations (moral, ideological or philosophical), RML in a workplace context will be directed by managers themselves towards productive ends in mind; that is, towards things and people that matter most to them in their organisational worlds.

In this vein, however, and as the results presented in this thesis also demonstrate, practical reflexivity can indeed be inspired by RML. This can take the form of new managing where a manager tries to heal a work relationship using a novel reflexive approach, or more surprisingly, it can take the form of new organising, where a manager themselves instigates the social construction of reflexive structures of their own volition. Taking it upon themselves to organise (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b) and try to embed structures of reflection (Nicolini et al., 2004) in their work environment, managers can take responsibility for, and show personal and public leadership around, the need to regularly reflect with their peers in forums which are inspired by RML participation.

Here, once again however, the relational caveat of reciprocity appears: if peers do not return in kind the level of reflexive effort (especially the risk) required to organise such structures, the initiator can lose heart and thus the nascent reflexive structures dissolve. This supports what Nicolini et al. (2004) say about the need for organised rather than individual effort in terms of making work structures more reflexive. But this thesis' results go further than these authors do in terms of showing how individuals alone,

inspired by RML, can make a start on this social construction work; how the reflexive leadership which is required to do this actually proceeds in real world settings; and finally what effects ensue, political, emotional and otherwise when this is attempted. This finding also raises a new question as to what role HRD practitioners can play in supporting such individual reflexive leadership on the ground. This point is picked up again below in the section on future research directions.

Theoretical contributions

The primary contribution to knowledge provided by this thesis is the provision of a new theoretical framework for RML called the reflexive space of appearance. This is an ethnographically crafted (Watson, 1994b) spatial theory of action, or praxis for RML which aims simultaneously at theoretical and practical utility (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2010; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). It provides new "illumination, insight, and understanding" (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, p.1267) into what RML means to managers and how it proceeds in a workplace context. It does so via a theory which narrates and explains the process (DiMaggio, 1995) of how RML unfolded as a "learning practice" (Billett and Newton, 2010, p.52) in an organisational setting. This theory was created using a reflexive insider methodology (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Aull Davies, 2008) which treated data generation, data analysis, and to some extent even theorisation itself, as a socially constructed and participative practice of inquiry (Packer, 2010). This approach to theory construction is new to the field of RML and therefore theory and practice in this scholarly domain can now benefit from insights drawn from a practice-based, emic perspective (Morey and Luthans, 1984; Raelin, 2008a) which provides an in depth understanding of how managers themselves perceive

and interpret RML; a critical voice in the debate which up until now has been largely silent.

As this thesis contends, the reflexive space of appearance framework helps to make RML theory more politically reflexive. This is a potentially important conceptual contribution because it can help researchers and practitioners to think beyond the rather provincial and sometimes competing ideological debates surrounding RML – its methods and its purpose – which, ironically, are not always conducive to the aims of all RML proponents, no matter their ideological affiliation: namely, to see that RML is deployed sincerely in organisations and used by managers who may learn from it and even perhaps let it guide and inform their practice beyond the learning space. Praxis is the point of RML theory but ironically theory has not always been praxical enough to reflect this normative goal. The reflexive space of appearance theory acts as a corrective in this regard.

Why the focus on praxis? Because, it is worth repeating, ultimately all proponents of RML want the approach (or at least their version of it) to be actually adopted in practice. In this thesis I took this to be a challenge for how RML was being theorised rather than how it was being conducted, per se, by those few researchers who have to date made the attempt to introduce it to managers. The sincerity and seriousness with which previous RML researchers set about empirical studies is not in doubt; but why then was success - either on the terms defined by those running the programmes, or those articulated by managers and stakeholders on the receiving end of such interventions - typically so elusive?

Any answer to this question would inevitably be complex and incomplete; indeed it would be better to speak of 'answers' for it would also be sharply contested. However, one militating factor, I claim, is that RML overall has to date lacked a theory of action which could adequately encompass the variegated, and sometimes internally contradictory calls to think and practice RML more politically, with power relations and context more firmly in mind: the RSOA framework supplies such a theory. In doing so, it contributes a new conceptualisation of a difficult and challenging, but also increasingly relevant and important way of management learning, which can enhance its purchase with practicing managers who will have no a priori or logically necessary reasons for adopting its lessons and tenets in practice.

I am not, of course, suggesting that the RSOA is a unifying theory of RML (whatever that would mean). I am suggesting it is a holistic one which, because of its political but non-ideological and so, empathic and non-judgemental modalities, has a chance to capture and cope with plurality, to free up room for reflexive critique, and to cast the problem of action more constructively as the challenge of new beginnings during a more inclusive RML practiced in contexts containing content which matters to the managers involved. The reflexive space of appearance framework offers a politically reflexive conceptualisation of RML which seeks praxis with those involved; it seeks to act with rather than unto them. This is a theorisation which, because it is political, and because it works with a definition of power relations as existing between participants in the learning space, expects and entails compromise, challenge, conflict and negotiation during RML in practice. It does not expect only to cope with such tensions or even to resolve them, but to learn from them (Vince, 2014). What RML should mean to those involved and how this should cash out in terms of learning and practice during a

programme and beyond, can be easily normatively specified in advance by theorists. But this will not always map neatly onto the practical reasoning of managers. At best it will serve as a more or less useful guide to initiating learning and dialogue which may or may not translate into practical reflexivity thereafter. The contribution of the RSOA theory is to acknowledge and work with, rather than against the grain of this understanding. This thesis has presented research which shows the challenging but also the constructive and promising empirical results which can ensue when RML is conceived and operated in this way.

This can help to advance the scholarly debate on RML in relation to calls for a more critical, holistic and ultimately more productive form of this learning approach in organisations (Docherty et al., 2006). Conceptualising RML in this new politically reflexive way adds nuance to current theorisations and has the potential to increase the purchase RML has in practitioner environments. The reflexive space of appearance framework contributes a contextually drawn (Pedler, 2001) example of the sort of spatial and political theory of action called for in management and organisation generally by scholars such as Coopey and Burgoyne (2000). It is also a direct response to the request for more contextualised (Boud, 2010) and spatial conceptualisations of learning from RML scholars (Vince, 2011). It offers a way to think about how to make space and time for RML in organisations (Docherty et al., 2006; Raelin, 2002). This means space not just in the physical, but more in the relational sense of a space between people (Raelin, 2002). In this way, the framework offers a way to think of how space and politics can be profitably deployed as concepts with high relevance for RML in organisations (Vince, 2011).

Space is something which managers crave but do not always get. It is also an idea which needs to be complicated for them so they can understand it's meaning in more social phenomenological (Arendt, 1998; Schutz, 1972), rather than purely material terms. And politics is a fact of life in organisations which cannot be avoided. But it is often too negatively construed and thus understood and practiced as a reified rather than a relational phenomenon. The reflexive space of appearance framework offers a new conceptual corrective to such paradigms as they apply to RML in context.

In addition, this thesis contributes to debates concerning how to think about and practice RML as a public rather than an individualised activity (Hoyrup and Elkjaer, 2006; Raelin, 2001). It does this by offering a model of RML which is fundamentally premised on a collective and public understanding of this phenomenon, and of the reflexive practice it would inspire and generate beyond the learning space itself. At the same time, it is conceptually sensitive to scholars who warn against taking this collective aspect too far. Fook (2010) rightly reminds us to view collective RML as involving individuals in their social contexts; individuals who cannot simply be homogenised into faceless group agents, or necessarily solidaristic communities of practice (Reedy, 2003). Fook (2010) has called for theory which will enable this reflexive dialectic between individual and group in RML to be theorised with the kind of nuance and sophistication which the complex circumstances of learning in organisational contexts demand (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007). Theoretical calls like this are answered by the RSOA framework in two ways: firstly, as was said earlier, the framework embraces plurality whilst encouraging and enabling political power and action which it treats as shared and relational phenomena; secondly, because it posits managers as individuals situated in social learning and action contexts which they can

reflexively shape, but which also in turn shape them (Nicolini et al., 2004), it constitutes a theory of RML which recognises that neither managers nor the contexts in which they operate predominate: both are reflexively revisable, the one helping to construct the other (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Sandywell, 2005).

The RSOA framework advances the debate on how individual reflection intersects with collective reflection by going into detail about the way in which self and context (including others) commingle in dialectical ways when RML is operated in practice environments. Thus it picks up and develops a theoretical thread found in the work of scholars such as Cunliffe (2002) and Eriksen (2009) who theorise RML relationally, emphasising the importance of shared dialogue to such learning. In the framework provided, both self and public disclosing are theorised and the relations between the two have clear implications for the structures in which action unfolds. Both self and organisational critique are also considered and no sharp distinction is drawn between the two - managers are encouraged to reflexively realise how change in one often depends on, and is inextricably linked, to change in the other. Finally, new action is theorised in a way which understands that individuals may initiate reflexive action, but that ultimately it depends on others to reciprocate this if it is to sustain in relational ways which can change institutions at a structural level (Nicolini et al., 2004). This is a theoretical contribution to scholarship because it offers a theory of RML which facilitates and privileges collective action without losing sight of its individual dimensions.

Practical contributions

This thesis offers a practical contribution to organisations interested in experimenting with introducing RML in their workplaces. More than this, it challenges organisations - and in particular HRD practitioners who may be willing to risk a critical and unorthodox approach to developing managers - to experiment with an approach which has the potential to produce more critically sincere and holistically productive management learning results. Perhaps an obvious question they would is why should they do this? Given the myriad risks and difficulties involved with operating RML (many of which this thesis has underscored) it might be reasonably thought to be not worth the trouble. But as this thesis has also shown, trouble is not the whole story. Indeed, the perceived trouble involved with RML is in fact inherent to this way of learning. Theorised and practiced in a politically reflexive way, the productive value of RML is significant, especially when compared to familiar didactic approaches to management learning and development which are arguably becoming more outmoded in an increasingly reflexive world where lifelong and reflexive learning approaches are more relevant and more in demand (Jarvis, 2010).

To HRD practitioners and managers who, along with theorists such as Rigg and Trehan (2008) would ask if RML isn't too difficult to operate in a workplace setting, this thesis responds that it is difficult, but it need not be impossible. It contributes a framework for thinking about and operating RML in a workplace setting which has the potential to deliver on its strong productive promise. Some practitioners may balk at the word 'critical' – maybe HRD practitioners even more so than managers. This thesis challenges them not to and gives a reason why: for management learning to be more productive and directly relevant to managers' working lives it must become more

critical and RML can herald and facilitate this necessary turn. Relatively safe and thus critically and politically sterile mainstream approaches to management learning often seem to fear, and thus leave no space for, the learning and enactment of reflexive honesty, critique, and praxis during learning interventions Thus they often have little or no credibility with experienced practicing managers who encounter and have to deal with such complex phenomena on a daily basis.

As the managers in this study complained, mainstream management learning approaches, whilst somewhat relevant and useful, tended to lack the direct and more impactful and persuasive relevance RML possessed. This is because RML is capable of more accurately reflecting managers' experiences and bringing to light aspects of this experience of which they either may not be aware, or perhaps may not want to be aware but need to be. Therefore, I submit that HRD practitioners and the managers they work with should run with the "danger" posed by RML (as one manager in this study put it).

This is the kind of critically productive HRD leadership which can be performed - contra Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004) - without risking all, and this thesis provides practical guidance on how this might be accomplished. Further, I submit to practitioners that in order to learn more productively, critique and criticality must be shorn of any negative connotations and embraced as part of how managers learn more fully; that is politically and reflexively, in settings where both elements coincide and where they can, if supported by a sufficiently politically reflexive RML, be brought into relative phronetic (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014b) harmony.

If RML is critical in the ideological sense (for example Brookfield, 2009; Welsh and Dehler, 2004), it will probably, and reasonably (Clegg et al., 2006; Fenwick, 2005), be rejected by practitioners as practically irrelevant and existentially too risky. But as this study has shown, RML can be critical without being ideological; conversely, it can be critical without being co-opted by the corporate status quo, or by any attempts to turn RML into a means for objectifying people for narrow instrumental ends. A middle road is possible where RML challenges and changes things, whilst preserving what can be agreed as good or perhaps even inevitable – for example, some form of hierarchical system of authority (Leavitt, 2004) - in contemporary organisations. It is this constructively political form of RML which this thesis contends offers the most hope and value for embedding this learning approach in organisations.

Just as it was for Worldlife, RML will likely be new, difficult and unfamiliar for many organisations. But it can also provide a more sincere learning engagement with managers; one which has the possibility to actualise a range of often intangible, but also important productive benefits, such as more engagement, a better quality of working life, more critical thinking, more attunement to the emotional and moral aspects of organising, and a sharper sense of the importance of the social, and collective dimensions of work (Boud et al., 2006a). All of these factors are intertwined with performance, productivity and the change agility required of managers by modern organisations. RML can support them in a way mainstream management learning either cannot, or can only do in a partial and increasingly unsatisfactory manner. In short there is a practical role for RML in organisations and this thesis makes a practical contribution to enabling its effective operation where practitioners are willing to experiment with new approaches, or in circumstances where they may be forced to

critically evaluate the efficacy of existing management learning methods in solving contemporary workplace problems, or perhaps even re-defining them and creating new ones, where this is relevant activity.

Limitations

There are number of limitations to this research design and these inform the way in which this thesis' findings should be read. In terms of the "weaknesses that matter most" (Brutus et al., 2013, p.66) the three main limitations are as follows: that the research speaks from only one organisational context; that the researcher is an organisational insider; and finally, that a layer of management at Worldlife is missing from the study. Each of these is now dealt with in turn.

This thesis reports on RML from a single setting which could never stand as representative of all, or indeed any other organisation (Small, 2009). Although methodologically speaking, following Thomas (2010), generalisability outside of this case was not required nor was it sought or promised by this study, it is acknowledged that what is said about RML in this thesis and what is contributed in terms of theoretical and practical recommendations, is partial and may not necessarily apply to other contexts except in broad and imperfect terms (Tsoukas, 2005); terms which would risk saying both everything and nothing about RML across various empirical settings, being so generic as to be meaningful perhaps only at certain high and relatively abstract level of analysis.

Still, a theoretical framework has been contributed which might be (figuratively speaking) overlain on RML in different organisational settings and to this extent, if certain isomorphic features exist across these settings, which they often do (Maxwell, 1992), it could be the case – and I hope it is - that this study and the theorisation of RML it provides, may speak usefully to other workplace contexts. Managers and the organisational environments they relationally create, reproduce and sustain together (Gergen, 2009b) are always simultaneously both similar and unique. It may ultimately be the latter which matters most, but the spatial and politically reflexive theory of RML contributed by this thesis is adaptive enough, I claim, to have at least some prima facie warrant in other settings. This remains to be seen however, and I hope other researchers will feel it worth testing and exploring in future empirical RML research.

Although I strived for researcher reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2003; Johnson and Duberley, 2003) throughout this study, it is perhaps inevitable that my role as an insider has left out as well as added something important to the ethnographic story (Ellis, 2000) told about RML in Worldlife. Like Taylor (2011), I acknowledge the possibility of such omissions: both those which I was conscious of and which I felt were necessary from a diplomatic or ethical standpoint and perhaps more importantly those which I was not aware of. By definition, it is impossible to fully know the unconscious prejudices and biases one brings to insider research and, reflexive or not, not every one of these can always be brought to light. I traded on the trust and rapport I had with participants but I could have taken this too much for granted (Edwards, 2002) in ways which did not reflexively register. I hope to have minimised this risk via the reflexive methodology (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009) explained in chapter two. In the main, I hope that any

risk of romanticising my "insiderness" (Mercer, 2007) in the way Silverman (2011) warns against, was successfully avoided.

My relatively senior position in the Worldlife hierarchy may also have led me to misrecognise power relations and so perhaps to skip over or treat too lightly, critical issues which another researcher could have taken up and explored more deeply, perhaps, by certain lights, even more justly. It is impossible to fully tell, but to the extent that it cannot be told, it represents a limitation, albeit one which is practically unavoidable in insider research and which must be viewed in balance with the many advantages that such stances bring (Alvesson, 2009). A practical mitigating factor here could be to follow Leigh's lead (2014) and engage in further research this time as an outsider studying RML in a different organisational context. Such a stance might throw new light on and help to challenge, develop and extend the conceptual framework contributed by this thesis.

Finally, another potential limitation in this research design is that the managerial response to RML generated lacked the perspective of the most senior level of management in Worldlife: the Management Board. The reason for this was that this group was not fully part of the RML intervention and so were not in a position to inform the research question, either via participant observation during the RML, or by interview afterwards. Instead this cohort received a two-hour summary briefing on the RMP after all the programmes had occurred. During this briefing they received a truncated version of the topics covered and the learning process the programme followed.

Why was this cohort left out of the full RMP experience? It was not that as 'elites' they were difficult for the researcher to access (Williams, 2012). Neither was it because it was thought they would have been particularly reticent to get involved with the RMP as a research intervention (see Pettigrew, 1992). It wasn't a case either of the problem encountered by Nicolini et al. (2004) in their study of workplace RML, where the most senior level of management were invited but simply did not bother to turn up. Instead the decision not to include this group was a pragmatic one based on a judgement made at the time of RMP planning. The overarching decision not to mix managerial levels on the RMP was the main influencer here. This decision not to commingle managerial strata was taken because at the time it was felt that, culturally speaking, it would have been a step too far for Worldlife.

After reflection amongst the wider HRD team, it was decided that forcing a mixed-manager level format – which, incidentally, was the preferred HRD model and the one which this team would have chosen had they possessed free rein - would have backfired, causing more harm than good in terms of introducing what was predicted would be a new and challenging, critical learning approach for the organisation. To put it plainly: it was judged that RML would be challenging enough without adding the extra challenge of mixing management levels. The major concern was that groups would close rather than open up, and despite even the best reflexive facilitation efforts, the full potential power of RML would then not be actualised. Thus the tactic chosen was a pragmatic one, cut to the extant cultural cloth and based on the judgement and local understanding (Geertz, 1993) of these charged with planning and running the programme. Because the Worldlife HRD team also predicted that RML would need to be more than just a once-off intervention in the organisation, this afforded a staggered

approach which would involve the gradual introduction to this way of learning, and hopefully subsequently managing too, into Worldlife. In others words, all the risk did not have to be taken upfront; mixing managers during RML interventions could come later once they had first been introduced slowly and relatively safely to the approach amongst their own levels to begin with.

This decision had a knock-on effect in terms of the Management Board's involvement. At just six members this group was deemed too small to warrant a full two-day RMP of their own and because of the wider decision not to mix managerial levels, they could not be split up and distributed across other programmes. Thus they received the briefing mentioned instead. On reflection, this briefing was probably too short. Also, in hindsight, there were perhaps other ways they could have been included, for example by inviting them to attend the end of each RMP to join a reflective discussion on what was covered during the sessions. These are all areas for further exploration and indeed, promising lines for future research inquiry in Worldlife, should the opportunity become available. It is clear enough, I hope, that this limitation has not materially affected my ability to answer the research question. This is mainly because as stated above this cohort were not equipped to do so.

To return briefly to practical contributions. It is also instructive to consider the experience described above in this way. What has been explained above underlines the unique advantage of an insider approach to introducing and sustaining RML in organisations. In this case, the HRD team was able to make a measured, pragmatic decision around the introduction of a challenging new way for managers to learn in

Worldlife. One reason for this was they were dedicated to sustaining an approach which they knew they could gradually repeat, and repeat, moreover, in more evolving and gradually challenging ways into the future; a future which they could help shape and influence, because– unlike outsiders, such as consultants or academics working in organisational environments – they would be around to do so. Permanence is not only a boon to sustaining RML it is a necessary condition of it.

The lesson here is that managers should not be the only, perhaps even the main focus of RML. When externals are considering how to introduce RML into companies, the HRD team are an integral group who need to be involved and be persuaded of its value and potential efficacy, for who else will sustain RML going forward? Managers can hardly be expected to do so and if HRD teams are unaware of RML, or do not fully understand or believe in it, they will not show the reflexive leadership required to help build institutional structures that reflect (Nicolini et al., 2004). Thus HRD practitioners are key to RML and this, as I mention again below, is an area which requires more research attention.

Avenues for future research

Studies of RML in the workplace are relatively rare and this thesis has contributed another to that small, but hopefully increasing body of work. If other scholars or students were to pick up the threads provided here they would point to a range of possibilities for further inquiry. For instance, the conceptual framework developed in this thesis is new so it begs more empirical study. How would it serve other contexts in

which RML is practiced, for example educational ones? In theory it is operable and applicable there, but how does this transpire in practice? To put it in Ramsey's terms (2011), how does the RSOA "interplay" (p.472) with other organisational contexts in a way which may challenge and extend the idea? Also, this thesis has held to the belief that whilst all workplaces share some similarities ultimately they are all different in their own ways. Contexts differ and this affects concept formation (Gerring, 1999) and so, also potentially concept re-formation. The RSOA is a prescriptive as well as a descriptive theory, thus it is "future oriented" (Shotter, 2012, p.256) and aimed at providing a frame for potentially both operating and researching RML in other workplace settings. How then would the RSOA model actually proceed in other organisational environments? Does the framework have any conceptual and practical purchase outside of the particular context in which it originated? In theory it should, but it would be interesting to find out if and why this was, and it would certainly help to develop the framework, adding enhancements derived from its application in other settings.

Another promising research direction was one suggested by a manager in this study and referred to already above: to operate RML with mixed-level management groups. This is an intriguing prospect, especially given the political nature of the learning framework developed in this thesis. The Worldlife study encouraged disclosing, critique and reflexive natal action between peers – how would this work between peers and superiors? Potentially, it would be more difficult, especially given the challenging and relatively provocative nature of RML. On the other hand, the framework developed here assumes a view of power and politics as relational which may override this, provided there was some sincerely common learning goal in mind. In such a case RML may in

fact then be more productive amongst such a hybrid hierarchical cohort. It would be fascinating to find out if assertions like these were warranted.

RML in this study was conducted by an insider. This afforded certain important, even unique advantages, but it will have hindered other ones. Exploring how an external facilitator, with no ties to the organisation, facilitated RML as a reflexive space of appearance, and whether (in contrast with an insider) it made any difference to how managers responded would be valuable. This could help to establish how translatable the framework is across different contexts, or how much of its effectiveness is wrapped up in the need for it to be operated by an insider.

Finally, this thesis has found a reason to research how HRD practitioners can support and sustain both RML itself, and the practical reflexivity enacted by managers after such a programme. As was shown in chapter six, managers may decide to do things differently and more reflexively in their practice after participating with RML. But this sort of reflexive action needs to be reciprocated by others and by the general environment in which managers and their teams operate. HRD practitioners have a special responsibility to support this new action; studying why and how they do so in practice, following an RML intervention would tell us more about why RML is sustained or fails in workplace settings and where the accountabilities (not the blame) should lie for this amongst a network of reflexive actors who will all have a role to play in helping RML to sustain beyond the learning space itself. To this end, HRD practitioners should also be included in future RML research. Because they have a key role in supporting and sustaining such programmes, how they respond to RML and how

they feel they can work to introduce and sustain it in their organisations, is something which requires more theoretical elucidation.

Closing statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how RML was received in their place of work by managers who would exemplify the kinds of subjects intended by its proponents. This research angle was taken for a reason: RML, even in its most radical critical forms, is fundamentally aimed at practicing managers. It is supposed to be learnt by them, valued by them, and above all applied by them. In short, all RML theory is, in one way or another, ultimately a theory of praxis. Yet to date there has not been much empirical research on how managers themselves responded to and interpreted RML in context. If this thesis has done its job then, it will have performed an appropriately reflexive service for scholarship and practice alike.

For the latter it will have brought RML, with all its difficult and provocative ideas, and its inherent desire to problematise (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), but also its potent productive promise (Boud et al., 2006a), more pragmatically into view, in a way which can helpfully challenge practitioners to learn reflexively and to think critically about what they are doing and how they are doing it. For the former it will, to paraphrase Barley and Kunda (2001), have helped bring the workplace back into RML theorising; adding the much needed contextual sensitivity theory was lacking. This has given rise to a theory of RML which is by turns, complex, paradoxical, political, messy, plural, challenging, provocative, emotive, productive, individual and social - sometimes

simultaneously. But the picture of RML which emerges is no less promising for this. Indeed, it is in this all-too-human mix of challenge, difference and conflict that RML's learning and praxical promise resides and unless this promise is to be politically diluted, it cannot be disentangled from it. If RML can be continually re-enacted and so, refreshed and reinforced by managers themselves, and by those charged with supporting and sustaining this approach in organisations, who knows where this promise may lead?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A.   Overview of the Worldlife Reflexive Manager in Practice programme

Appendix B.   Interview request e-mail to participants

Appendix C.   Interview accepted e-mail to participants

Appendix D.   Member review e-mail invitation

Appendix E.   Consent form: organisation version

Appendix F.   Consent form: individual version

The Reflexive Manager in Practice: Organisation, Team & Self - DAY 1: Morning

<u>**Introduction**</u>

~ Welcome

~ About the programme: key terms explained; methods explained

~ Link to past interventions

<u>**Reflecting on our context**</u>

~ Collective critical reflection exercise: Worldlife Ireland in view

<u>**A reflexive model of managing**</u>

~ Reflexivity: from self to others/from others to self

~ Principles of reflexive managing

~ What does reflexive managing look like in practice?

<u>**Practicing power: initiative, autonomy and responsibility**</u>

~ What is power?

~ Power and politics in organisations

~ Empowered or not? Understanding agency

~ Self-refection exercise: how do I perceive my own power?

~ Collective critical reflection exercise: what is in our collective management power?

<u>**Values**</u>

~ What is a value?

~ Exploring the link between values and practice

~ Collective critical reflection exercise: Telling stories...

~ Self-reflection exercise: My relationships & me

The Reflexive Manager in Practice: Organisation, Team & Self - DAY 1: Afternoon

Balancing priorities

~ Thinking about time

~ Self versus time management

~ Prioritising effectively

~ Collective critical reflection exercise: choice and reflexivity

~ Self-reflection exercise: how I spend my time

Building sustainable relationships

~ Collective reflection exercise: trust and emotion

~ Ways of thinking about human interaction

~ Thinking sustainably

~ Case example: "Reading between the lines"

Review of Day 1/ Preview Day 2

The Reflexive Manager in Practice: Organisation, Team & Self - DAY 2: Morning

Reviewing Day 1

~ A quick tour of covered ground

~ Checking on progress

Listening

~ Empathic listening

~ Reflexive understanding

~ Listening as a relational investment

~ Self-reflection exercise: How well do I listen?

~ Collective reflection exercise: listening structures in Worldlife - how do we fare?

Leveraging difference and diversity in teams

~ Thinking through difference and diversity

~ The value of difference and diversity

~ Self-reflection exercise: Managing difference and diversity in teams

~ Collective critical reflection exercise: creating the conditions for difference and diversity to flourish

The Reflexive Manager in Practice: Organisation, Team & Self - DAY 2: Afternoon

<u>A holistic approach to development & well-being</u>

~ What does holism mean?

~ Reflexive learning and development

~ Collective reflection exercise: organisational dimensions of reflexive development in Worldlife

~ Self-reflection exercise: Personal well-being – 'Looking after ourselves'

<u>Reviewing the programme</u>

~ A reminder and review of the new concepts

~ A return tour of the whole programme

~ Collective reflection exercise: what does the RMP mean to us, and to our organisation?

~ Self-reflection exercise: what does the RMP mean to me?

<u>Wrapping Up</u>

~ Structured Feedback

~ Thank you/Close

Appendix B.   Interview request e-mail to participants

Dear [name]

As mentioned during our programme last week, I am carrying out doctoral research within our organisation on management learning. Specifically, I am interested in how managers respond, in context, to methods of self and collective reflection / reflexivity such as the one's used together during our *'Reflexive Manager in Practice'* programme. An important understanding of the response is of course gained during the facilitation and observation of the programme itself at work. However, to understand more I need to interview a selection of managers from each level of the company as the programme is implemented together with them.

I believe your input would be interesting and would enrich this study. The purpose of this mail is to ask you directly if you will consider being a research participant. In basic terms, involvement means agreeing to be interviewed twice, for approximately one hour each time, over the coming weeks. Participant confidentiality is guaranteed and this research is being conducted to the highest, external ethical standards. If you agree to consider being a participant I will explain this in more detail so you fully understand and are comfortable with these standards.

This research stands to potentially benefit how learning operates in our organisation and it also has the potential to be of value to individuals themselves who may profit from the process. I will call you very soon to follow up on this request.

Yours sincerely,

Richard

Appendix C.   Interview accepted e-mail to participants

Dear [name]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Please see attached the research consent form. This is a standard piece which assures important anonymity and confidentiality principles. Organisational consent has already been obtained.

At the interview I will ensure you have understood this important documents, answer any questions you might have, and then ask you to sign it (after which I too will sign). I look forward to our research conversations.

Kind regards,

Richard

Appendix D. Member review e-mail invitation

Dear [name]

Thanks a lot for agreeing to meet me for this member review. You've already given me a lot of time and I appreciate it. The purpose of this conversation (which should take approximately an hour), is to cover two things.

a) Give you an overall update on the research project.

b) Show you data from our two interview conversations and ask for your input on some of my current analyses and interpretations, and where these may be leading to.

Kind regards

Richard

Organisation Consent Form

Title of Project: Reflexive Management Learning in Context: An Ethnographic Study

Principal Investigator: Richard Cotter

Advisor: Dr. John Cullen

1. **Purpose of the Study:**
Explore organisational managers' response to a reflexive management learning when it is implemented in context with them, in their place of work.

2. **Procedures to be followed:**
Data will be collected using participant observation methods and following this, a qualitative interviewing procedure.

3. **Discomforts and Risks:**
No special discomforts or risks are anticipated. The company and the participants are protected by the standard ethical research procedures.

4. **Benefits:**
The organisation will have a deep understanding of how a potentially powerful management learning method is received by their management population. This has the potential to enhance how learning and development interventions at all management levels can better contribute to organisational development overall.

5. **Duration:**
The study takes place over (approximately) a 24 month period from late 2010 to late 2012

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:**
Organisation and participant confidentiality is assured in the research design and following standard ethical guidelines. These include (but are not limited to) privacy, anonymity and the guarantee that neither the organisation nor those participants directly, or indirectly involved in the study will be harmed by either the research process or output.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:**
As per standard ethical guidelines, right to ask questions are catered to and include the right to ask how the data will be used the right to see a version of the study when it is complete.

8. **Voluntary Participation:**
Managers must be 18 years of age or older to endorse this research study. If you agree, on behalf of the organisation, to support this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

_____

Participant Signature   Date

_____   Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Individual Consent Form

Title of Project: Reflexive Management Learning in Context: An Ethnographic Study

Principal Investigator: Richard Cotter

Advisor: Dr. John Cullen

1. **Purpose of the Study:**
Explore organisational managers' response to a reflexive management learning method when it is implemented in context with them, in their place of work.

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8. **Voluntary Participation:**
You must be 18 years of age or older to endorse this research study. If you agree to support this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

_____

Participant Signature   Date

_____   Date

Person Obtaining Consent