

COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE at work

A multimodal discourse analysis of positioning and identity work in a leadership development practice. A combined dialogicality and small story analysis

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Abstract

The paper shows an example of how interaction in a leadership development forum can be analyzed from a narrative-in-use perspective through a combined dialogicality and small story analysis strategy. This entails that a multimodal discourse analysis is conducted of the positioning and identity work accomplished in a research- and dialogue-based leadership development forum in a university setting. A micro-generic positioning analysis of the participants' small story efforts is combined with an analysis of dialogicality involving other-orientation to show how storytelling takes place and how opposing discourses within organization and leadership studies co-emerge in multimodal interaction. Among other things the analysis shows how different sociomaterial interactional setups shape identity work in situ. The research contributes to the emerging study of organizational dialogical and narrative practices up close. It emphasizes both the broad (Discursive) and the local (discursive) dimensions together with sociomaterial aspects of discourse and storytelling, which are increasingly pursued and recommended within the fields of narrative, dialogue, and discourse studies.

Keywords

Keywords: Leadership development, Small story, Dialogicality, Multimodal discourse, Positioning, Identity work

1 Introduction

The research aims to study identity and positioning work in a leadership development setting from a discursive narrative-in-use perspective that takes the multimodal features of interaction and dialogue into account. The main contribution is to provide a methodological frame for analyzing positioning and identity work in organizational settings by combining analytical grips from *dialogicality studies* (Bager, 2015; Bakhtin, 1982; Linell, 2009) and *small story analysis* (Bager, 2016; Bamberg, 2004, 2006; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008). The former is represented by Linell's quadruple model based on Bakhtinian thinking and offers an analytical entrance to the study of how other-orientation comes about in interaction, that is, how interactants orient to a wide set of others (e.g., co-present, distant, and material others) in situated encounters. The latter has mainly emerged in the writings of professor Michael Bamberg within the field of cultural, narrative, and discursive psychology. The small story approach also takes its outset in Bakhtinian thinking and offers a "micro-generic" approach to the study of how storytellers work up stories in situ to

juggle claims about who they are. These stories can be hearable as both countering and supporting grander narratives and discursive formations (Bager 2015, 2016; Bamberg, 2004, 2016; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Together the two analytical lenses comprise an interesting analytical and methodological frame that gives directions on how to study issues such as social relationship formation, other-orientation, personal identity, and sense of self with an emphasis on how these phenomena are under construction in processes of social interaction. The lenses acknowledge that multimodal and embodied features play an important role when we co-construct identity in situated encounters (Bager, 2015; Bamberg, 2016; Linell, 2009). Nevertheless, neither of the analysis strategies provide careful concepts for a multimodal and embodied analysis (Bager, 2015) as to why I draw inspiration from Kendon's (1994) *gesture studies* and Goodwin's (2000) *contextual configurations* by adopting of a few carefully selected concepts for analysis.

In way of anchoring the analysis in organizational discourse studies (ODS) two methodological metaphors are applied: *zooming-in-and-out* together with *a toolkit-logic*, as proposed by Nicolini (2009a, 2009b, 2012). This entails that I *zoom-in* on the identity work accomplished in the leadership forum, showing how small stories and other-orientation together with counter/complicit discourses and stories co-emerge in the process of "doing identity." From there I *zoom-out* on broader Discursive and narrative formations to secure that the analysis is anchored in what actually takes place in practice. Furthermore, the toolkit logic entails that I switch theoretical perspectives as part of the zooming-in-and-out movements to reflect the multivoiced nature of organizational meaning-making. Unlike traditional discourse, narrative, and dialogue analysis, the presented approach studies discourses, stories, and dialogue as embodied place-bound activities. Stories and discourses are understood as action emerging in interaction as place-bound co-accomplishments drawing lines to broader narratives and Discourses. These are entangled and accomplished in interplay between the embodied, verbal, and material aspects of meaning-making (Bager, 2016; Iedema, 2007). The normative scope of the paper is that by studying how resistance and counter/complicit discourses and stories against broader Discourses and narratives are worked up in interaction, we can strategically become smarter at designing more egalitarian and plurivocal organizational practices.

The paper is structured into six parts: in *section one* the research is positioned against organizational dialogue, discourse, and narrative studies. This section outlines the Bakhtinian basis of the research. Thereafter the research is positioned against ODS. Furthermore, I display how a discursive approach to the study of organizational narrative and storytelling efforts differs from more traditional narrative approaches.

Thereafter, in *section two*, the multimodal discourse analytical framework is outlined.

In *section three* the leadership forum is briefly explained, which provides the contextual backdrop and the empirical basis for the following close-up analysis.

Then *section four* displays a close-up multimodal discourse analysis conducted of transcripts of video data showing how identity work is co-accomplished in interaction in the interplay between conflicting discourses, other-orientation, and multiple temporal features.

Finally, in *section five*, I will zoom-out and discuss what we can learn from the close-up analysis in organizational and leadership development settings. I claim that by paying attention to the small and multimodal aspect of meaning-making we can become smarter at designing multivoiced organizational leadership development and change processes. I further encourage organizational researchers/change agents to take a close look at their development practices to become more reflexive and ethically responsible and contribute to the design of egalitarian development practices.

2 Positioning within dialogue, discourse, and narrative studies

The analysis strategy reflects an eclectic synthesis of perspectives from Bakhtinian dialogicality and small story analysis, which are assisted by a few carefully selected analytical concepts to capture the embodied features. These perspectives and concepts all belong to postmodern and social-constructionist research traditions. They embrace the emergent, ambiguous, fluid, and ongoing character of discursive (re)construction processes. A common feature is a break with concepts that rely on universals, fixed subjectivities, and pre-configured essences (Bager, 2015; Bager et al. 2016). They also question the taken-for-granted assumptions about everyday (organizational) practices to improve the design of more egalitarian practices (Bager, 2015). Within organizational studies this way of framing communication is placed as *dialogic studies*, entailing that dissensus, conflicts, plurivocality, and paradoxes are immanent organizational features (Deetz, 2001). In such dialogic studies, complex and conflictual organizational characteristics are embraced as potentials to foster change and more multivoiced practices, which is in opposition to monologic approaches that strive for consensus and a common ground. The monologic perspectives tend to close down diversity in their quest to overcome and eliminate organizational conflicts and ambivalences (e.g., functionalistic and interpretative studies) (Bager, 2015; Deetz, 2001).

2.1 *Dialogue studies: An ethics of dialogue and organizational reflexivity*

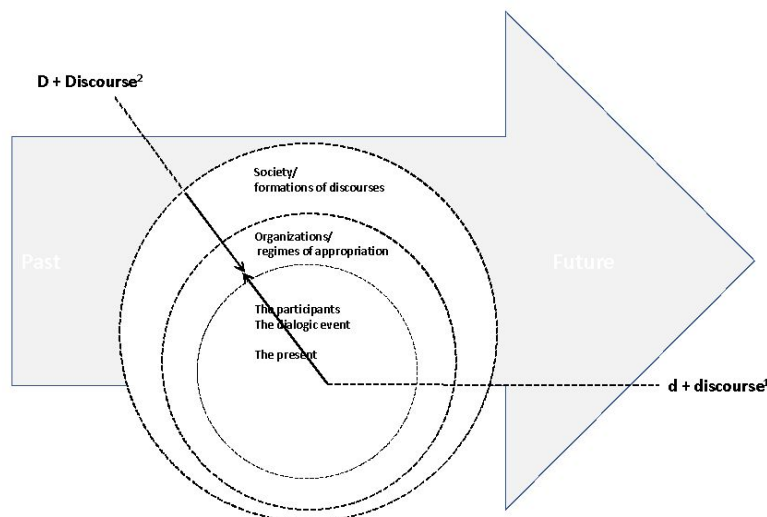
Bakhtinian thinking is the backbone of the research through which every (organizational) situation is viewed as plurivocal time-spaces that incorporate diversity, battles, and often opposing voices as premises. A Bakhtinian framing of organizational practices is evident within a growing body of organizational research (e.g., Bager, 2015; Barge & Little, 2002; Clegg et al., 2006; Shotter & Billig, 1998; Shotter, 2011). Following Bakhtinian thinking, a fundamental dialogic and participatory worldview takes shape as we shape and reshape consciousness, discourses, identity, and meaning through continuous, open-ended, messy everyday encounters. When we create identity and a sense of self, *otherness* is an important feature as we are always dependent on others in meaning-making (Bager, 2015; Bakhtin, 1982, 1993; Barge & Little, 2002; Shotter, 2011). It is obvious that this framing entails a dissensus view of organizational meaning-making, which opposes the mentioned monologic approaches to organizations where an idea of consensus linearity and pre-fixed identities is often foregrounded (Deetz, 2001; Bager, 2015).

A central feature of Bakhtin's thoughts is that the multivoiced social world is made up in battles between two forces: the centrifugal force (dialogism), which opens up for diversity and brings about surpluses of seeing, and the centripetal force (monologism), which unites and uniforms as it closes down for diversity and strives for unity and common ground. Both forces are constantly present with varying intensity in any utterance and act (Bakhtin, 1982). Historically the centripetal force tends to be stronger than the centrifugal as the social world through time is socially ordered into *authoritative discourses* that direct cultures, professional languages, subcultures, work cultures, the acquirement of certain organizational techniques, etc. Each subculture carries its own norms and recognizable discourses, narratives, norms, and actions/practices that members more or less consciously follow. Bakhtinian thinking is clearly normative as he warns about the dangers of monologizing forces and authoritative discourses and endorses dialogism in the contestation of monologism and authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1982). Present research supports an *ethics of dialogue*, as suggested by Bager, Jørgensen, and Raudaskoski (2016), as it aspires to zoom-in on the situational consequences of organizational dialogue and practicing as a means to create organizational reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2003) as a basis to support a new, more plurivocal, and desirable future.

2.2 *Organizational discourse studies*

The research embraces a multi-layered understanding of embodied meaning-making, self, and identity work as dependent on various entangled discursive dimensions. Situated organizational practicing is affected by surrounding layers of organizational simultaneity, such as that of more formal organizational and societal structures. Within discourse studies this discussion is reflected in the division between approaches that take either "smaller" and/or "larger" d/Discursive elements into account (cf. discourse with a "d" vs. "D" [Gee, 2005] or discourse¹ and discourse² [Iedema, 2003]) when studying (organizational) matters. Figure 1 below illustrates how perspectives that spotlight Discourse tend to focus on the historical and broader aspects of discourse, such as Foucauldian studies that strive to uncover how *formations of discourses* emerge through time (Foucault, 1969, 1980; Jørgensen, 2007; Moelholm & Vetner, 2016). Alternatively, approaches such as dialogicality studies and small story analysis are preoccupied with studying the smaller aspects of how discourse and meaning-making take place within situated practices such as the leadership forum. The model in Figure 1 is inspired by Blommaert's (2005) understanding of layered simultaneity.

Figure 1: Multiple layers of organizational meaning-making



The figure displays the understanding of organizational practices as embedded in multiple D/discursive layers and temporal multiplicity.

The analytical strategy in present paper is mainly engaged in studying the small aspects of discourse as they emerge in the leadership forum (middle layer of Figure 1). Nevertheless, the strategy allows me to reflect the close analytical findings against broader Discursive and narrative contextual dimensions. Thereby the analysis strategy has similarities to other discourse perspectives that involve and oscillate both d/Discourse dimensions, such as Fairclough's (1995a) *critical discourse analysis*, Scollon and Scollon's (2001) *nexus analysis*, and Latour's (2005) *actor network theory*.

Figure 1 further stresses the dialectical relationship between the participant/self, the dialogic event, and layers in the embodied social world. The layers are dialectically interdependent. Nevertheless, the model serves as a theoretical construct as it helps me visualize and explain how, starting from the interaction situation in my analysis, I *zoom-in-and-out* between the layers, switching theoretical lenses and "trailing connections" (Nicolini, 2009a). In accordance with Bakhtinian ideals for dialogue analysis (Bager, 2015; Bakhtin, 1982; Linell, 2009) and Nicolini's methodological metaphor of "*zooming in and zooming out*," one must start with the situated encounters (inner layer in Figure 1) and then, according to what becomes relevant in situ, foreground particular aspects of practice and bracket others. In doing so, I am inspired by Nicolini's attempt to bridge the chasms that often exist between practice-driven theorizing of what people do in their workplace, on one hand, and academic theory-driven theorizing about it, on the other (Nicolini, 2009a, p. 1391). This methodological approach suits my view of discourse as practice emerging in and from situated interactions (Bager, 2015; Bakhtin, 1982; Iedema, 2007; Linell, 2009). On this note I frame discourse as action encompassing material and multimodal aspects together with diverse "levels" of organizational meaning making—I find that discourse co-emerges with materiality and manifests a certain situated type of organizational life (Bager, 2015; Iedema, 2007). As I will argue, the use of video data allows me to study and reflect on the multimodal aspects of organizational (re)constitution in the leadership forum, such as how organizational meaning-making/culture is (re)shaped through language-use, technologies, material settings, and gesture work together with other modalities (Horsboel & Raudaskoski, 2016).

The central idea is to bring focus on the material-discursive communicative processes and practices that are acknowledged to constitute organizational life and from there theorize on organizational matters and form the basis for reflexive organizational change. The aim is to create opportunities to transform monologic organizational practices into more desirable, ethical, and egalitarian ones. Thereby the research further contributes to the field of ODS, in which scholars are actively involved in dealing with local organizational challenges fostering organizational change from discourse insights (cf. Grant & Iedema, 2005; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011).

Figure 1 further displays how organizational meaning-making is housed in a time-space continuum recognizing how *temporal multiplicity* plays an important role when we (re)create identity, stories/narratives, and discourses (Bager, 2015, 2016; Bakhtin, 1982; Cunliffe et al., 2004). Voices, discourses, and stories are made up by participants in situated

practices that draw on a diversity of voices/discourses/narratives from outside and inside of dialogic events—from the past and the present and in anticipation of the future (Bager, 2015; Bakhtin, 1982, 1993). I will return to this in the section on the analytical framework and in the analysis.

2.3 *Narrative studies and small story analysis*

The combined methodology aligns with a discursive understanding of narration and storytelling as important daily activities that (re)shape reality and identities with certain local and future consequences (Bager, 2015, 2016; Bamberg, 2005, 2011; Czarniawska, 2015; Taylor & Van Every, 1999; Cooren, 2015). Storytellers co-author stories and discourses in local settings (inner layer in Figure 1) that involve a plurality of voices and often run counter to more crystallized narrative and Discursive structures, such as political organizational and societal structures (outer layer in Figure 1) (cf. Bakhtinian heteroglossia; Bager et. al, 2016, Bager, 2015; Bakhtin, 1982, 1993). Furthermore, the research distinguishes between the concepts of narrative and story. Narrative refers to monologic and retrospective organizational sense-making often represented in solidified organizational modes, such as found in strategy work (Boje, 2008) and/or a diversity of organizational texts (Jørgensen, 2011), often strengthened by the management group. Story refers to the here-and-now story efforts playing out between participants in situated interaction (Bager, 2015; Boje, 2008; Jørgensen, 2011). Thereby the distinction aligns with the discursive levels reflected in Figure 1, where narrative representations reflect the outer Discourse dimension, and story reflects the inner discourse dimension.

This take on (organizational) narrative and storytelling differs from more traditional approaches that tend to focus on fixed narrative entities and structures, such as bibliographic approaches that zoom-in on canonical and big stories as more coherent and linear (Bager, 2016; Bamberg, 1997). Instead of searching for linear and coherent narratives worked up by consistent subjects with pre-fixed identities, the analysis *zooms-in* on stories and discourses as they emerge in multimodal interaction.

Narratives and stories are increasingly popular within organizational research (Boje, 2014; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Czarniawska, 2004; Cooren et al., 2014; Gabriel, 2004; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Vaara, Sonenshein & Boje, 2016). Rantaki and Varaa (2017) outline four narrative perspectives: *narrative representation*, *narrative construction*, *narrative deconstruction*, and *narrative agency*. The approach in the present article mainly aligns with the fourth perspective—narrative agency—that concentrates on the agentic/performative role of narratives/stories in organizational processes and follows the so-called strong process view by offering an ontological view of narratives.

Furthermore, it places attention on the situated and multimodal dimensions of organizational storytelling, which is increasingly stressed within organizational narrative studies (Boje, 2008; Rantaki & Varaa, 2017). This is opposed to the more traditional narrative analysis of texts, documents, and organizational members' accounts and retrospective sayings of practice often acquired through interview techniques (Boje, 2008; Rantaki & Varaa, 2017; Bamberg, 2011).

The research approach adopted will be familiar to interactional analysts and researchers in organizational studies who take postmodern and social constructionist perspectives on narratives, discourses, and storytelling (Fairhurst, 2008; Heath et al., 2006; Iedema, 2003, 2007; Jørgensen & Boje, 2010; Shotter, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 1999).

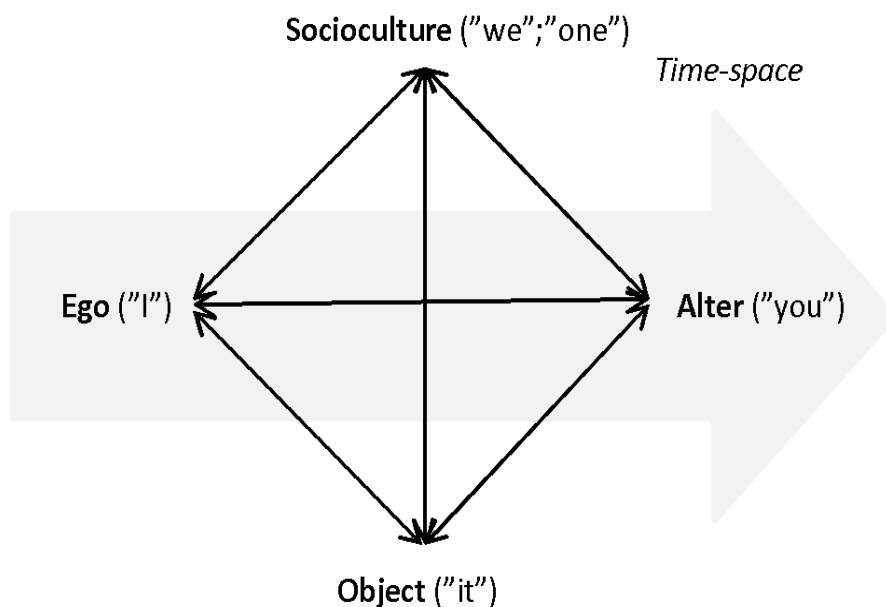
3 Analytical framework for close-up analysis: other-orientation and small story accomplishments

I will now elaborate the analytical framework. In effect, I *zoom-in* on the inner layer in Figure 1: the dialogic event.

3.1 *Dialogicality, other-orientation, and third parties*

On the basis of Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia and addressivity, and with the aim of capturing the intrinsic complexities of dialogue (Bager, 2015; Bakhtin, 1982), Linell proposes a quadruple model consisting of four coordinates:

Figure 2: Linell's quadruple model for interaction analysis



Linell's quadruple for interaction analysis (after Linell 2009, p. 95).

The four coordinates that should be considered when analyzing situated interaction are I=ego, you=alter, it=object, and we=socioculture (Linell, 2009, pp. 93-95). The quadruple housing in the time-space continuum follows the ideas of temporal multiplicity that are central to the notion of addressivity: that any word, utterance, or discourse is “directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 272).

The coordinates “I” and “you” are the co-present interlocutors/others. The coordinate “we” (socioculture) is particularly interesting for the analysis of other-orientation as the *third parties* and *generalized others* invoked in the interaction situation can link up to voices and discourses from outside the creative event (past, present, and future). The third parties can vary from co-present overhearers to abstract ideologies and can encompass embodied features that affect the interaction situation (Bager et al., 2016; Linell, 2009).

3.2 *Small story accomplishments*

When the coordinate “we” is analytically combined with notions from *small story analysis*, the result is a potent frame that combines a focus on other-orientation and on how people work up stories to juggle claims about who they are that are hearable *both* as complicit with *and* as countering dominant discourses. These analytical aspects can reveal elements of positioning work and identity creation that would otherwise have remained unnoticed (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Linell, 2009).

According to Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), small story analysis offers a window “into the micro-genetic processes of identities as ‘in-the-making’ or ‘coming-into-being’” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 3). Bamberg’s interest in counter and complicit discourses is closely tied to power and hegemony, and he presumes that if we get to know more about how and when in interaction such discourses that run counter to hegemonic discourses emerge, we can strategically become smarter at designing processes that challenge more hegemonic discourses. He does this to create more egalitarian reciprocity and universal morality (Bamberg, 2004a). The frame offers sensitivity toward other-orientation and how the participants position themselves through talk to work up positions that comply with or counter dominant discourses. In line with Bakhtin and Linell, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) have in recent work noticed that these complicit and counter discourses (voices) fluctuate and are not always clearly separable (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Bamberg, 2004). It brings the possibility to study how the interlocutors/narrators/participants position themselves in relation to a multiplicity and often contradictory set of discourses (voices) (cf. Bakhtinian

heteroglossia) by which they are positioned through storytelling efforts. Bamberg thinks of the construction of counter claims as the flip-sides of master narratives that go hand-in-hand in interaction with complicity and cannot always be clearly distinguished (Bamberg, 2004). By the same token it is noted in dialogicality that communication is pointed toward shared knowledge and dialogue as a site for identification as well as differentiation from others (co-present, generalized, and distant). This implies taking the perspective of the other but also interpreting and responding on one's own terms (Linell, 2009, p. 86). It is through intense, entangled interactive struggles between positions, discourses, and voices that identity work is accomplished. He also emphasizes that counter narratives are not something we "have" that pop up in for instance certain situations such as research or therapeutic settings and that can be taken as reflective of people's authentic selves. They become real in interactive situations. Identities emerge in the data as a part of "doing" complicity and resistance as interactive co-accomplishments. Thereby identity is framed as a continuous and constant process that should be studied in its naturally occurring and situated practices.

So, in both dialogicality and small story analysis, identities emerge in the data as an aspect of "doing" complicity and resistance as interactive co-accomplishments. It is through intense, entangled interactive struggles between positions, discourses, and voices that identity work is accomplished (cf. heteroglossia) and to which the following analysis is oriented.

3.3 Positioning model: A certain way of asking questions about interactional data

The questions asked in the following analysis (represented in the headlines) are inspired by Bamberg and Georgakopoulos's positioning model (Bamberg, 1997; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). The division into three levels attends to the messy and ambiguous features of d/Discourse.

Level one pays attention to how characters in the storyline are positioned in relation to each other and in space/time. This involves an explanation of the contextual and sociomaterial circumstances of the leadership forum.

In level two questions are posed about the sequential aspects and the interactive accomplishments of interaction. Furthermore it pays attention to the scene as a research setup together with the joint interactional engagement between all participants. Here analytical moves are derived from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, where interactional aspects such as *turntaking patterns* are investigated to see how the tellers link up to previous accounts/turns and what happens next in the interaction. In sync with Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's analyses I draw on additional conversational analytical concepts such as *minimal response*, *overlap*, *gaps*, and *alignment* as they becomes relevant. This allows an analytical orientation toward the sequential and embodied co-creation of identity and struggles of meaning that takes place. It allows the investigation of how the participants orient to each other and to the co-present multimodal features of the scene through looking at embodied gestures as an integrated part of the story efforts.

Level three centers on how the participants/narrators establish certain kinds of persons through their story performance by linking up to broader and often contradictory set of Discourses. Following the steps in small story analysis creates the opportunity to see how the small story efforts and local identity work draw trajectories to broader and more manifest narratives and Discourses.

So, paying analytical attention to other-orientation and small story efforts allows me to study how discursive aspects of broader interactional layers are invoked, how they become relevant in situ, and how they are managed and potentially transformed.

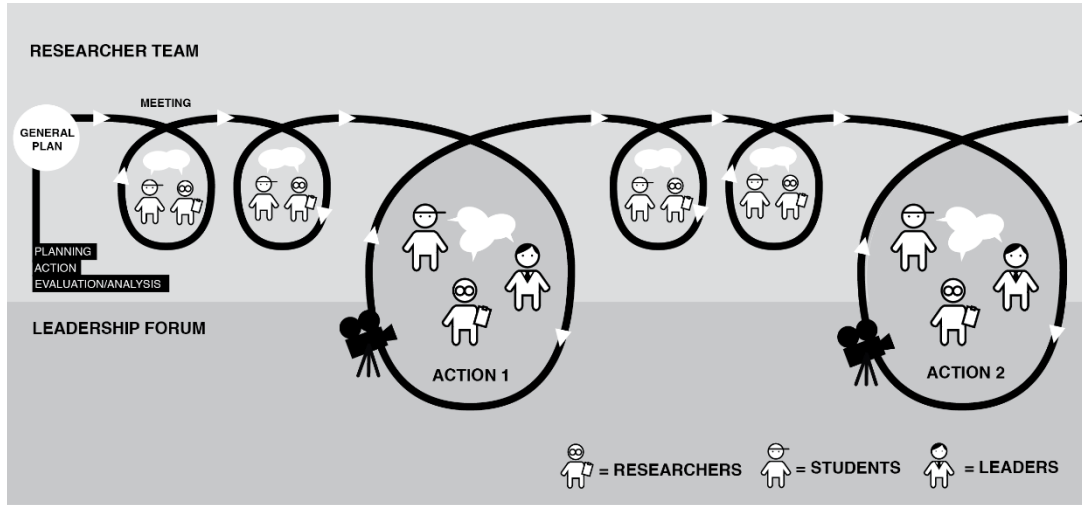
The data are drawn from an interdisciplinary research project as part of a participatory leadership forum in university settings. The forum was situated in the Department of Communication and Psychology at the University of Aalborg (AAU). The project and its sociopolitical circumstances emanated from AAU's agenda of enhancing the collaboration between business, education, and research. The forum involved 10 professional leaders from a variety of public and private organizations in the North of Jutland. The author was one of the initiating researchers in the research group involving scholars from the fields of communication, philosophy, and learning. In addition, there was sporadic participation by postgraduates studying organizational communication and leadership. The scope of the forum was to co-produce knowledge on leadership communication based on the participants' experience and living stories. Furthermore, the forum experimented with new procedures for doing leadership education together with the aspiration to involve students in actual research activities.

The methodological basis was focused on local empirical situations with the aim of producing practical knowledge that can disrupt the established order and co-create a provisional order in which new insights contribute to the ongoing production of knowledge and change (Cf. dialogic studies; Deetz 2001).

Inspiration was drawn from the dialogic tradition of action research (AR) as it has emerged in Scandinavia. This branch was found suitable as its ideals seemed to match those of the forum: to draw on the participants' work

experience and bring various voices and diversity into play (for further elaboration see Frimann & Bager 2012; Gustavsen, 2004). The Scandinavian version offered tools for setting the scene in combination with Lewin's (1946) principles for AR processes, as sketched below.

Figure 3: The leadership forum



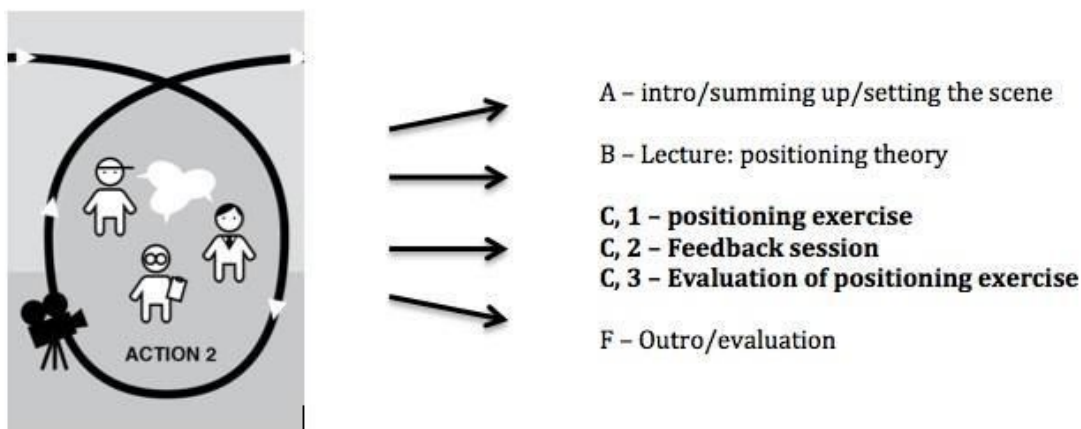
The leadership forum. The figure illustrates the processual dimension of the forum and the different types of participants.

Figure 3 depicts the research process as a series of spiraling “decisions” made on the basis of ongoing cycles of multi-voiced *planning*, *action*, and *evaluation/analysis* in accordance with the general and always modifiable plan (Lewin, 1946). As the aim of this paper is to undertake a multimodal discourse analysis and *zoom-in* on what actually took place in dialogue, I will not go into further detail about the methodological choices of the leadership forum. The data for analysis in the present article are drawn from video recordings of the second workshop in the leadership forum (Action 2 in Figure 3)

4 Analysis of a positioning exercise in the leadership forum

The analysis involves three data extracts from a positioning exercise that were initiated as part of action 2, which consists of four different interactional setups, as highlighted in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Action 2 and its four interactive designs



The figure illustrates four different interactional setups.

4.1 Level 1: Who are the characters, and how are they relationally positioned?

First, I explain the overall characteristics and purposes of the embodied research setup to answer the question asked at the first level of the positioning analysis. Subsequently, I will tap into the interactional particularities of each of the three setups.

The *positioning play* was pre-scripted by the research team on the basis of requests that emerged earlier in the forum, where dialogue dealt with leadership as a complex process depending on good communicative skills and on the ability to interpret and master a multiplicity of contexts and interests. The leaders' wishes for personal development were to gain communicative insights and tools for handling what I interpret to be the multiplicity of embodied voices and discourses that inhabit their organizations and call for reflexive skills (both communicatively and analytically). On this basis the research team decided to deliver a lecture and initiate a *positioning exercise* based on assumptions and concepts from positioning theory in the field of discursive psychology.

The purpose of the exercise was twofold. On one hand, it was to create a space in which some of the leaders could participate in dialogue about their role as leaders and their communicative challenges. On the other hand, the aim was to use feedback to activate concepts from positioning theory for here-and-now analytical purposes. The exercise was designed to further the participants' *knowing how* as a supplement to the theoretical dimension of *knowing that*. (Ryle, 1945) This is in accordance with the ideal processes within AR, where training often plays a crucial part in combining theory and practice (Frimann & Bager, 2012).

The exercise consisted of three parts:

1. The actual *positioning exercise* (C, 1) consisted of a conversation between three leaders, in which they talked about their role in terms of points from the lecture on positioning theory.
2. A *feedback session* (C, 2)—in the light of positioning theory, the co-present audience gave the three leaders feedback on what was accomplished in conversation.
3. An *evaluation round* (C, 3) on the exercise and a feedback session about potential learning points.

There were 10 co-present others in a rather complex setup. The 10 co-present others were five professional leaders, four researchers, and one postgraduate. They partook in three different types of activity positions: *position players*, *feedbackers*, and a *mediator*.

We will now move on to the moment-to-moment specifics of the first data clip, which is drawn from the actual *positioning exercise* (C, 1 in Figure 4). The main co-present interlocutors are three leaders, and all verbal action takes place between them, which is seen as a central semiotic resource in the clip. The rest of the participants are peripheral co-present others; they are fairly inactive during the positioning exercise. Consequently, the analytical focus will mainly

be on the leader trio in the middle of the scene as the primary co-present interlocutors. Nevertheless, it is important to take the whole embodied setup into account; as we shall see, it has consequences for the situation.

Figure 5: Contour picture of the positioning exercise



The contour picture displays the participants as they were positioned in the room. The triangle's apexes point to the leader-trio that comprises the central participants.

The institutional specificities of this interactional setup in a university classroom are apparent from the arrangement of tables and chairs in a horseshoe formation; from the papers, laptops, and pens on the tables; and from the blackboards in the background. The configuration of tables and chairs is a semiotic resource that plays an important role in positioning the research participants in relation to the room and to one another. We can see one table placed in the middle of the horseshoe formation. The three leaders are placed around the table, positioned at the center of attention (this includes non-human actors such as the cameras and audio recorders). The contour picture indicates that the three leaders are oriented toward each other and that the surrounding secondary co-present others are either oriented toward the trio or gazing downward at the tables in front of them, some of them holding pens and writing on paper.

The transcribed extract below occurs approximately 1.5 minutes into the positioning exercise. At the beginning of the positioning exercise, Jan (back to the camera) starts by suggesting that they take turns. He then takes the first turn. He explains some of the current challenges in his organization, as they are about to begin a major organizational change. This has created many uncertainties and questions about his and his employees' future positions in the organization. The following transcripts¹ are translated from Danish into English: Participants: Johannes (JS), Jørgen (JØ), Mikala (ML), My (MY), Janne (JA), Mikael (MI), Malene (MA), Jan (JAN), Bjørn (BJ), Bente (BE).

Figure 6: Transcript 1. Extract from the positioning exercise

1	Jan:	(..) and and [you should take your staff by the [hand so: (..) help them across this (..) [river (..) and (.) into
2		((Moves his right arm in front of him))
3		((grapping gesture with his right hand))
4		
5		((three outward pulling gestures with his right arm))
6		
7		((Bente and Bjørn gaze at Jan, both sitting with their arms resting on the table))
8		[the new (.) landscape (0.5) and in this I have eh (??) Ψ launched [launched narrative (..) it fills of course
9		(((right arm back on the table))
10		(((Bjørn leans back, fiddles with his shirt sleeve, gazing toward Jan, crosses his arms))
11	Be:	yes
12	Jan:	(??)
13	Be:	yes
14	Bj:	[it's about language and it's about attitude (2.0) that is [language how you articu articulate it and then
15		(((Bente gazes from Jan toward Bjørn, Jan moves his head toward Bjørn))
16		(((outward spiralling gesture with his right hand))
17		[its about [attitude how you (.) you respond to it
18		(((sweeping gesture with his right hand toward the table))
19		(((right hand fiddling his shirt sleeve))
20	Jan:	[-yes- (.) o: [and eh]
21		(((moves his arm a bit))
22	Bj:	[and] the attitude is up to oneself to decide (.) this you really decide for yourself=
23	Jan:	[=Yeh=
24		(((sweeps his right hand outward))
25	Bj:	=you decide for yourself if you are happy or if you are angry if you are mad or you are hot-headed
26		(((fiddles with his shirt))
27	Jan:	It is [fun[ny]
28		(((sweeps his right hand outward))
29	Bj:	[[in] relation to such changes then it is (0.7) a good idea to have an attitude called (2.0)
30		(((outward sweeping gesture with his hand))
31		[this we will damn find [out]
32		(((gazes toward the camera and back at Jan))

I will now turn to the content dimension of the story effort as accomplished by the trio. In the first utterance, Jan invokes the distant third parties: “*your staff*” (l. 1). This represents employees in general as he uses the pronoun “*your*” to refer to an unspecified group of employees. The “*staff*” have to be taken “*by the hand*” (l. 1), helped “*across this river*” (l. 1), and led into “*the new landscape*” (l. 8). By the same token, he refers to an unspecified leader through the use of the indefinite pronoun “*you*” (l.1). He thus creates a narrative in which he classifies a leader as someone who “*should*” (l.1) help and guide her employees. Similarly, he classifies employees as belonging to a group of people that need a leader to guide them. In line 8 he brings this generalized picture into his own organization: “*in this I have eh (??) launched narrative*” (l. 8), which “*fills of course*” (l. 8). This positions his employees as needing help, and he positions himself as the leader who should help and guide them. Jan’s body language supports his narration; for example, he unfolds the embodied gesture of taking the employees by the hand. He thereby supports the taking-by-the-hand movement by “enactment” (Kendon, 1994), making grabbing movements with his right hand.

After this, Bjørn takes his turn, saying that “*it's about language and it's about attitude that is language how you articu- articulate it and then it's about attitude how you you respond to it*” (l. 14-17). With the strong modality of “*it's about*” (l. 14), this creates a storyline in which he determines what Jan’s previous narration was about.

After overlapping utterances (l. 27-29), Bjørn continues his narration, emphasizing how, in times of change, “*it is a good idea to have an attitude called this we will damn find out*” (l. 29 - 31). He thereby invokes indefinite distant third parties, referring to a general idea of employees. His use of the plural personal pronoun “*we*” positions him as advocating shared fronts and unity with employees in general. Jan further creates a storyline about cost savings, stressing the importance of making employees feel “*secure*” with the changes that are about to happen.

Before levels 2 and 3 of the positioning analyses, a second piece of transcription is displayed from the positioning exercise (approximately three minutes later than transcript 1). The leader-trio has just talked about *language* and *power*, and Jan refers to Pia Kjærsgaard, a controversial Danish politician who is well known for her hostile opinions about immigrants. He refers to her as a good example of how good positioning work can be staged through

“*rhetorical smartness*,” “*down to earth language use*,” and “*authentic appearances*.” Despite her controversial political stances, this has brought Kjærsgaard a large number of followers. He emphasizes the ability of leaders to talk in an “*understandable*” and “*clear*” way so that people listen and understand. He states that the message and language use do not have to be particularly sophisticated but should be understandable and delivered through “*clear messages*.” Moreover, he stresses that the leader has to “*appear charismatic*.” After this, Bjørn takes a turn:

Figure 7: Transcript 2. Second extract from the positioning exercise

1 BJ: well some of what [I take with me in relation to this overview and positioning aight' (.) what I take with
2 [((gazes toward the centre of the room, raises his left arm and points outward toward his left side
3 of the room))
4 [what I hear [what sticks in my brain (..) eh this is something to do with eh: (1.0) is the way you can use
5 [((touches his glasses))
6 [((circling downward gestures with his left arm in front of his face))
7 language (.) you can actually help to [draw people to you (0.7) you can be part of embracing people (0.7)
8 [((outward pulling gesture with both hands in front of him))
9 and you can f::: (0.5) use language to get (.) people (.) to (.) to get (.) a [direction (0.8) but you can also
10 [((sweeping gesture with both hands
11 leftward))
12 use language to the [opposite (..) right (.) you can use language to eh (0.5) eh create us and them (..) and
13 [((places both hands on the table))
14 [alienate (3.0) purely (1.0) as a leader (0.5) [I would believe that (..) it is (0.7) the task (0.5) it is my task (0.5)
15 [((sweeping gesture with his left hand))
16 to get people to (0.5) move in the same direction (..) get people to think that it is fun (..) and get people to
17 think that is it funny (1.0) so therefore I will as a leader when I talk (0.5) to my employees (..) always try to (..) [-
18 embrace (..) with language (..) and I will try (0.5) to [involve them (3.0) [and then in relation to such posi
19 [((tapping gesture with his right hand on the table)) [((inward pulling gesture with both his hands))
20 [((Jan leans back, places right hand on
21 his chin, Bjørn points his left index finger up into the air, shakes it back and forth, looks upward))
22 positioning (0.5) then I actually believe that once in a while [I do this=I switch perspective (2.5) and well I
23 [((leans rightward, moves left hand to the right))
24 will rather position myself somewhere else (..) than [they would have expected (..) that I will be
25 [((moves his left hand outward))
26 Be: for instance meet the staff (0.5) [??]
27 [((gazes at Bjørn, makes a waving gesture with both her hands in front of her
28 head))
29 BJ: ſt[yes in]stead of=in stead of [they think that eh: I think that eh this (??) is [round=
30 [((gazes at Be, leans toward Be, gazes to his right side))
31 [((reaches for a plastic cup on the table with his right arm))
32 [((smacks the cup onto the table))
33 Be: =mm=
34 BJ: Then I could think of saying to them (0.5) [this one is really damn [squared=It may be that the one you are
35 [((picks up the cup, holds it in his hand))
36 messing with is actually squared (??) [right (0.3) [so if you just keep on switching position in relation to (0.5)
37 [((puts the cup down))
38 [((grapping gestures in front of him))
39 eh::: (0.7) (?) (0.5) then [it is to widen the perspective(0.3) and to get many and
40 [((outward sweeping gestures with both hands))
41 more than one in use and from a point of view [that when you widen the perspective (.) or the different
42 [((circling gestures with both hands))
43 positions (.) [then you get different angles on what is possible in real life (1.0) get oneself [chewed in on what
44 [((moves the cup on the table, points at it with his right arm)) [((points at the cup))
45 is wisest to do (1.0)
46 [((gazes back and forth between Be and Jan))
47 Jan: is it (.) do you use it deliberately (..) playing [eh:
48 [((Be gazes at Jan and toward BJ, BJ gazes at Jan))
49 BJ: [ye::s] I believe that [I do]
50 Jan: [and create] provocative assumptions [[to the scene]
51 [((BJ leans toward his right side))
52 BJ: [we:ll:: no need to] [to position myself somewhere else than where people immediately think I will be (0.3) if
53 [((leans back, folds his hands, places his left elbow on the back rest))
54 there are some things we should have discussed (.) and it can be significant to discuss it and: (2.0) find the
55 best solution aight' (1.5) well our job it (.) ..
56 [((fiddles with his hands))

Bjørn points at a semiotic resource outside the camera's scope (l. 2-3): his utterance of "*overview and positioning*" (l. 1) coincides with his pointing at a blackboard that was used earlier when one of the researchers was summarizing what happened in action 1. On the blackboard, Jørgen then draws a model (Deetz's quadrant; Deetz, 2001) that was presented as part of action 1 and which is therefore a shared reference for all the participants. He thereby invokes a third party or a *virtual semiotic resource*, drawing in voices from both Deetz (theoretically), from action 1, and from the introductory part of action 2. He positions the model as representing an "*overview*" and as belonging to the same category as the theoretical lecture on positioning theory.

Bjørn has a rather lengthy turn (l. 1-25), after which Bente interrupts him (l. 29), but he gets to continue his narration. His storyline is oriented toward what he got out of the positioning lecture—"what sticks in my brain" (l. 4)—and he thereby invokes the distant third party of the lecture. He refers to "*how you can use language*" (l. 9), and, by continuous use of the indefinite pronoun "*you*" (l. 4, 7, 9, 12), he gives a generalized picture of how the leader, through the use of language, can "*draw people to you*" (l. 7), "*embracing people*" (l. 7), and "*get people to get a direction*" (l. 9). Moreover, he opposes these relational features to "*create us and them*" (l. 12) and "*alienate*" (l. 14). Then, in line 14, he switches to the first-person singular pronoun "*I*" and repeats it in his storyline on how he sees his task as a leader as being to "*get people to move in the same direction (...) get people to think that's it's fun*" (l. 16-18) and how he will "*always try to embrace*" (l. 18) and "*involve*" (l. 18). He thereby switches from generalized ideals about language use and leadership to invoke his employees as third parties, thus directing the content of the storyline toward his own organizational reality. Subsequently, he changes the content as he starts narrating how "*in relation to such posi- positioning*" (l. 22) he will "*switch perspective*" (l. 22) and "*position myself elsewhere*" (l. 24) than where his employees would expect.

Now he grasps a plastic cup, and a *semiotic field* (Goodwin, 2000) emerges: he uses the cup as a semiotic resource to report the position switches: "... *instead of they think this is round*" (l. 29), "*I could think of saying to them this one is really damn squared*" (l. 34). He plays on the contrast between the actual and imaginary forms of the cup, using it metaphorically to describe how he communicates with his employees to switch perspectives/positions: "...*if you just keep on switching perspective*" (l. 36) you get to "*widen the perspective*" (l. 39) and "*get different angles on what is possible in real life get one chewed in on what is wisest to do*" (l. 43-46). Thus, he uses the object to underscore the content of his storyline about his way of communicating with his employees. This positions the cup as representing tasks in his organization in relation to which he, in his leader position, challenges the staff to see other perspectives and angles (square instead of round). Jan then asks a question that prompts some overlapping utterances and increased intonation. Jan asks, "*do you use it deliberately playing eh*" (l. 48) "*and create provocative assumptions [to the scene]*" (l. 51). Bjørn provides an interesting response: "[*we:ll:: no need to*] *to position myself somewhere else than where people immediately think I will be*" (l. 52). Bjørn's *we:ll::* is typical of the start of a dispreferred and non-straightforward answer, which indicates that there is something problematic in Jan's turn (Schegloff & Lerner, 2009). In this case, Bjørn seems to contest Jan's way of interpreting his switching perspectives. Bjørn rephrases it to be about positioning himself somewhere else than people would expect when discussing issues at work. Bjørn can be said to re-position (Davies & Harré, 1990) Jan's attempt to position his actions as *playing* and *provocative*.

4.2 Level 2: How does the narrator position self (and how is the narrator positioned) in the interactive situation and in relation to the audience? How is the relation between the participants managed?

Jan narrates how he perceives a leader's role as guiding employees, which positions him as the person who starts the "*positioning exercise*." Bjørn interrupts Jan's narration effort to interpret what it is about. He thereby positions himself as someone who can take over the turn and interpret others' turns. Jan gets to continue the turn. In extract 2, Bjørn has a rather lengthy turn, which is interrupted first by Bente's utterance (l. 26) and then by her use of the minimal response "*mm*" (l. 33). In line 48, Jan asks a question, after which we see some occurrences of overlapping speech between Jan and Bjørn before Bjørn "wins" the turn. Thus, the interactional pattern in extract 1 puts Jan in the speaking position, whereas the interactional pattern in extract 2 positions Bjørn as the main speaker. Bente and the others are in listening positions.

Altogether, the situation can be said to be rather neat, and this seems to be a polite and well-structured conversation. Nevertheless, at times in the last part of the transcript, Jan seems to contest Bjørn's account of how he switches perspectives in relation to his employees, and Jan offers a reading of his actions as *playing* and *provocative*, which, in turn, Bjørn seems to reject. This indicates that the interactional pattern leaves space for disagreements, re-positioning, and contestation of each other's perspectives.

It is difficult to see precisely at whom the gaze and orientation of the three leaders are directed, but when silent they seem to orient toward the speakers, and the speakers' gaze alternates between the other two leaders in the middle, leaving out the verbally inactive co-present others. The whole embodied narration (verbal actions, gesture work, table formation, audio recorders, and cameras) constitutes or positions the leader-trio in the middle as the primary actors and the other participants as their audience.

4.3 *Level 3: How do narrators position themselves to themselves? Who am I in all this?*

I will now investigate how the participants establish particular kinds of persons (cf. identity work; Bamberg, 1997). In the introductory part of the first extract (Figure 6), Jan positions himself as a leader who guides his staff according to a set of ideals about leading employees into *new landscapes*. He also positions himself as someone with ideals regarding the “good” leader who has actually launched “*narrative*” (l. 8). He thereby positions himself as an intelligible leader who has already worked with narrative, even though his utterance appears slightly cautious with its downward intonation and with a restart of the utterance, as if he has to “taste” the word and feel his way around the term “*narrative*.” In the first extract (Figure 6), Bjørn interrupts Jan's narration and seems to be translating what it is about.

In the second extract (Figure 7), Bjørn also positions himself as an intelligible leader; he describes the perspectives he has acquired from the lecture, and he orients them toward his own organizational reality. In both extracts, he also seems to position himself as an experienced and knowledgeable leader who can interpret Jan's storyline and teach Jan something about it.

In this sense, they both enact a position of being “good students” in that they relate to the perspectives presented by the researchers and teachers. They also position themselves according to the audience and the research purposes, enacting the position of “the good research participant.”

Jan taps into a dominant “hard” and functionalistic discourse in the leadership literature: the leader has to set the direction and guide his followers (cf. the charismatic and direction-setting leader; Yukl, 1989) At the same time he invokes a “softer,” more emotionally charged discourse about making the employees feel secure and taking them by the hand to lead them safely into new landscapes (cf. the leader as shepherd, coach, or caretaker; Thyssen, 2007).

Bjørn talks about leader *attitude*; one can freely decide to be *happy*, *angry*, *mad*, or *hot-headed*. This draws on a deterministic, cognitive, and conscious discourse on the subject's ability to decide her own mood. This discourse positions the individual as capable of consciously and rationally determining what state of mind to be in. It rules out the influence of emotions and the impact of contextual constituents. In extract two, Bjørn talks about the leader that can use terms such as “*embrace*” and “*involve*” and can get employees to “*get a direction*” and “*think it's fun*” rather than “*alienate*” them. He describes how he always tries to “*embrace*” and “*involve*” his own employees through language. In continuation, he deploys a slightly mechanical discourse about how he easily switches positions and challenges his employees to see new (imaginary) angles and perspectives. Bjørn thus seems to invoke a deterministic discourse about the leader and the leader's ability to rationally determine what state of mind she wants to be in. This involves a functionalist view: the leader is able to lead through others and make them do certain things through language use, thereby positioning language as a tool one can use mechanically to make people do specific things. Jan responds to Bjørn's storyline and seems to contest it, characterizing it as *playing* and as being *provocative*. Both invoke dominant and contesting discourses within the leadership literature, to which I will return.

The peripheral co-present others are verbally inactive. Some of them are writing, thus positioning themselves as good research and workshop participants who seem to be taking notes for the following feedback session—just as they were encouraged to do.

4.4 *The feedback session*

To supplement the analysis, I will examine the last data extracts from the feedback session, thereby foregrounding what is of interest in terms of other-orientation and positioning, leaving the level of analysis somewhat less detailed.

4.4.1 *Level 1: Who are the characters, and how are they relationally positioned?*

In the extract below, Jørgen (researcher) takes a turn, and his speech is addressed to the leader-trio.

Figure 8: Contour picture of the feedback session



The contour picture shows Jørgen in the front with his back against the camera. Again, the triangle's apexes point to the leader-trio.

The data extract below is approximately 1.5 minutes into the *feedback session*. In the first minute of the session, nobody speaks. Several participants look around, and, as the picture indicates, everybody seems to orient toward the right flank of the horseshoe. Jørgen (in the front) is asked if he would like to start giving feedback, and he agrees. Some of his response is captured in the following transcript:

feedback orients back to situations in which Jan seems to be contesting Bjørn's *changing perspectives/positions* to match his employees and his storyline about using communication mechanically and *consciously all the time*. This implies positioning battles between them. It is interesting to notice that Jørgen's feedback and Jan's response trigger laughter (l. 19, 32), which can be interactionally accomplished to loosen things up if a conversation touches on potentially risky aspects (Speer & Potter, 2002).

Jørgen clearly invokes issues of positioning and identity: "*if you touch identity then I believe that there is a positioning of someone that could use some help*" (l. 42-44). Here, Jørgen uses concepts from positioning theory to support an interpretation of Jan as a leader that could use some help. In other words, dialogue adds another meta-level of positioning in that the conversation links up to what was said about the lecture on positioning.

Jørgen is almost the only one who is verbally active. His turn is interrupted/supported by laughter and in two instances of minimal response (l. 38, 41) and when Jan says, "*I can comment on that afterwards*" (l. 28.). Quite obviously, Jørgen is positioned as the interactant who is allowed to interpret the leader-trio and their performance in the positioning exercise. This positions him as an expert speaker who knows about the topic (positioning) and the remaining participants as his listeners. The audience acquiesces by not interrupting and through their seemingly observant and listening attitude.

4.5 Evaluation round

To nuance the analytical findings, I provide a summative analysis of the subsequent evaluation round (c, 3 in Figure 5). Jan explicitly affirms the interpretations and the analysis, saying that he was actually *skeptical* toward Bjørn's utterances in both cases as he *does not* perceive (personal) *communication as a tool that one can use mechanically and consciously* but, on the contrary, as a phenomenon that *is dependent on context and emotions and difficult to handle* and with which he might need some help. Jan further describes how he was *impressed* by how much the researchers were able to detect in the feedback using a positioning approach. He states that he *got a lot out of it* but was also *puzzled* by the insights into just how *person-, emotion-, and context-dependent* and how *complex* communication actually is. He states that he had *gotten a lot for him to think about on his daily leadership practice* regarding how communicative efforts and choice of words can prompt another person's response and vice versa. The evaluation round suggests that we have tapped into something that is relevant and needed for leaders in their daily practices. This is discussed elsewhere in my research.

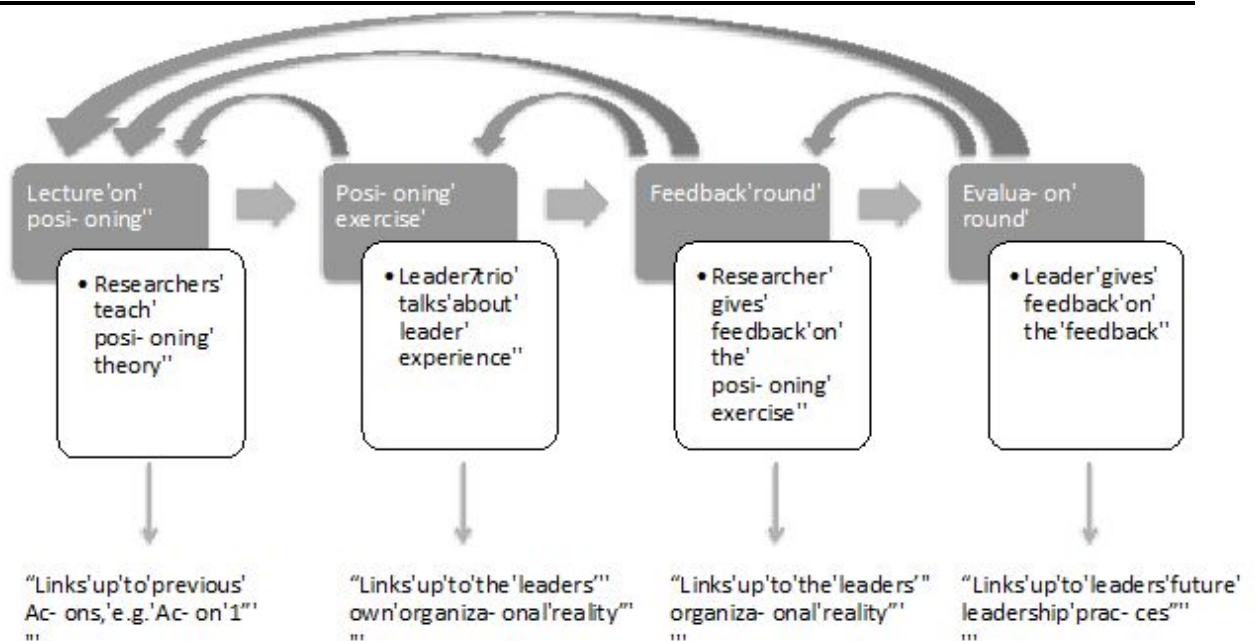
4.6 Summary of the analysis

The interactive flow of turns constitutes a rather polite and well-structured conversational pattern with an imbalanced verbal activity distribution as some of the participants are verbally active in pre-defined parts. Throughout action 2, however, all participants are verbally active from time to time. This sometimes positions the leaders in speaking positions and sometimes the researchers, thereby placing the remaining participants in listening positions. This decides who the experts are in certain dimensions of the setup. In this sense, the pre-defined activity agenda can be said to hamper the centripetal forces of interaction and thus block spontaneous flows of activity that might otherwise break with what has been decided in advance. However, the interactional patterns allow the co-emergence and conflict of counter and complicit discourses within organizational, leadership, and language studies. This means that the participants can contest and re-position each other's perspectives as well as refine their own views as the participants accommodate surpluses of seeing through interaction. In short, it creates a space for the centripetal and diversifying forces of interaction and the accommodation of otherness.

The pre-determined activity positions and the material setup play important roles in constituting the situation as active participation in a task, thereby enacting the intended principles in the *positioning exercise* as a part of the research setup. All participants seem to maintain this interaction order (Goffman, 1983) and thereby position themselves as good research participants.

It is worth noting that the audience setup implies that there is a lot at stake in terms of identity in keeping up appearances and doing suitable face work (Goffman, 2005). For instance, the interlocutors who are positioned in speaking and expert positions not only have to keep up good appearances toward one another but also toward the co-present others and in relation to the embedded research aims and anticipatory events. This may partly explain why the interactional pattern remains relatively polite and well-structured.

What we have seen from the interaction analysis is that the embodied setup prompts complex trajectories according to meta-levels of positioning, other-orientation, and temporal multiplicity. Some of these are visualized in the model below.

Figure 10: Trajectories of meta-levels, other-orientation, and temporal multiplicity

The model depicts how the interlocutors in the different setups in the positioning exercise orient toward third parties from earlier setups, from outside the creative event, and toward an anticipated future. Thus, the analysis unveils how a complex play of other-orientation and temporal multiplicity unfolds as a part of “doing identity” in the leadership forum. This also proves the importance of inquiring into contextual specificities in the analysis to understand the complexities at stake.

4.7 Discussion and zooming-out

As part of extending the zooming-out movement I will turn to the implications and learning potentials that the analysis gives rise to.

In terms of the leadership forum, insights from similar positioning analyses of video data were used throughout the process to alter the design of future actions. This involved ongoing refinement and the acquirement of dialogic techniques that furthered egalitarian and multivoiced interactional orders in accordance with the research ideals.

The analyses tap into trends and Discourses within management and leadership studies. In the positioning exercise, the leaders invoke two dominant and often competing discourses within organizational/leadership literature/studies: (1) the charismatic leader who is able to lead and make her employees do certain things through rather manipulative ways of communicating and (2) the considerate, cautious, and care-taking leader who nurtures her employees and coaches them to feel secure, for instance, in times of change and cost-savings and leads them into new landscapes, adjusted to the contextual circumstances and the mood and characteristics of the employees. The former relates to a rationalist, functionalist view of discourse, communication, and organization, which Deetz (2001) terms *functionalistic studies*, and the latter to the emergent, context-dependent, and ambiguous *dialogic studies* (Deetz, 2001). Close analyses support that these often-competing discourses are invoked throughout the forum, often as part of the same leader’s accounts. The leaders’ narration and small story efforts thereby picture leadership practices as complex and ambiguous phenomena in which small stories embodying counter and complicit discourses against broader Discourses on management and leadership communication co-emerge, struggle, and co-exist.

Within the organizational literature, this point is emphasized by a range of postmodern and poststructuralist scholars that either explicitly draw on a Bakhtinian view or perspectives that have affinities to similar pluralistic and conflictual ways of reflecting organizational meaning-making. For instance, Iedema (2003) shows how healthcare organizations are enmeshed in tensions between post-bureaucratic and more traditional work-life discourses. He pictures leaders as “discourse absorbers” that have to embody and encompass often contradictory voices, which reflects the heteroglossic nature of organizations (cf. Bakhtinian dialogicality). It also taps into what Renninson (2011) sees as polyphony and a multiplicity of organizational discourses and codes that co-exist and unite in problem-solving

processes. On the same note Majgaard (2014) talks of four historically created paradigms that collide in today's public organizations: the bureaucratic paradigm, the professional paradigm, new public management (NPM), and the humanistic paradigm. Clegg et al. (2006) also talk of the polyphonic organization as one that acknowledges differences and the possibility of others and suggest an analysis of who enacts them with what effects at a given point in time. Kornberger, Clegg, and Carter (2006) frame organizations as a polyphonic space consisting of different language games. Within narrative studies Boje (1996) talks about the polyphonic nature of organizations through the metaphor of a Tamara-play. Thereby he invites us to regard organizations as a meta-theatre, that is, an arena in which a multiplicity of simultaneous and discontinuous dramas occurs, the sense of which we make up as we go along, using familiar cues, props, and plots.

What ties these perspectives together is the recognition that organizations and organizational meaning-making practices (such as leadership practices) are made up of polyphony, conflicts, and paradoxes: organizational contexts are often characterized by contradictory voices, perspectives, and discourses and areas of tensions (cf. dialogical studies; Deetz, 2001). This opposes the mainstream trend in contemporary organizational theory assisted by everyday organizational practices that are increasingly exposed to functionalistic management tools and empowering techniques that accompany an advanced liberal state and NPM (Bager et al., 2016; Karlsen & Villadsen, 2008) through which organizational practices are increasingly being monologized, streamlined, and made more efficient, for instance, through a diversity of measurement and management techniques.

As such the polyphonic framing of organizations can be seen as a counter-discourse or -narrative within organizational studies and a practice that contests dominating monologic discourses and narratives calling for alternative understandings of organizations with attached polyphonic leadership and problem-solving practices.

Scholars point to how such a polyphonic framing of organizational reality requires a shift in traditional organizational attitude into an ecological approach that requires attention to the *particular*, the *local*, and the *timely*. This new mode of inquiry shifts the traditional focus from what goes on inside people to how people *go on* inside of specific surroundings and local circumstances (Shotter, 2011). On the same note Iedema talks of taking a position that furthers *a grand question* instead of a grand theory. The combined dialogue and small story analysis strategy is an example of how we can inquire into the polyphonic and complex aspects of meaning-making in organizational practices. This perspective adds focus on the material discursive aspects of organizational meaning-making as they unfold in situated practices. Furthermore, it gives direction on how practice and situated encounters are taken seriously as an outset of the analysis, securing that organizational theorizing is based on actual organizational situations (cf. the methodological metaphor of zooming-in-and-out).

In line with Deetz's framing of dialogic studies, the polyphony of conflicting organizational voices holds potential to foster more creative and egalitarian organizational practices. Paying attention to the multiplicity and its productive potential might enable a perspective on management and leadership that is sensitive to power without discursively reifying it. It would be a position that does not mean being anti-management as a matter of positive identity but instead would be sensitive to the different possibilities that management might have—not excluding these that are not negative. Scholars such as for instance Barge and Little (2002) and Bager (2014, 2015) argue that taking a Bakhtinian approach to organizational development practices requires a balancing of both the centripetal and the centrifugal forces of interaction together with the furthering of *dialogic wisdom*. There seems to be agreement that a polyphonic organizational mindset requires new analytical and reflexive (leader) competencies, such as the fostering of narrative and translative strategies together with the acquirement of abilities to embrace, master, and take advantage of the many voices and paradoxes (Bager, 2015; Barge & Little, 2002; Majgaard, 2014; Rennison, 2011; Iedema, 2003; Shotter, 2011).

5 Concluding remarks

The analysis is an example of how organizational identity work as small story efforts can be analyzed from a combined dialogue- and discourse-based narrative-in-use perspective, embracing the smallness and multimodal aspects of meaning-making. It shows how a complex set of voices/narratives/discourses are invoked from inside and outside the dialogic event as well as from the past, (re)configured in the present, and in anticipation of the future. Hence, the analysis reveals how the embodied interaction setup involves complex trajectories of meta-levels, other-orientation, and temporal multiplicity that affect the co-production of identity and knowledge. It provides insights into the dynamic processual and co-creative character of meaning-making, knowledge, and identity co-creation that would have been overlooked in more traditional monologic, linear, and lesser context-oriented analytical perspectives.

As such it contributes to new trends within narrative studies by paying analytical attention to the agentic/performative role of organizational narratives. It provides an example of how a narrative analysis of video data

can be made from a multimodal discourse approach, which embraces how the affordances of the material space and participants' gestures work together with the full social scene affect storytelling, knowledge, and identity co-creation.

The analysis strategy insists that we zoom-in on the multimodal discursive specificities and from there zoom-out and trail connections to broader Discursive circumstances, such as its relevance to support reflexivity and local change in the ongoing design of the leadership forum and requirements of more appropriate dialogue designs. Thereby the analysis strategy invites us to start with situated organizational encounters as a basis for organizational change processes and theorizing on organizational matters.

The analytical findings further support a polyphonic understanding of organizations as found in a growing body of research perspectives that draw on Bakhtinian thinking. This is obvious to further explore the potentials of the analysis strategy to support organizational reflexivity and foster ethical change processes as a way of enacting a polyphonic understanding of organizations and support the required change of attitude. It constitutes a good reason and an ethical invitation for researchers and change agents to scrutinize their own dialogic practices and their consequences. Thereby the analysis strategy is a way of bringing an ethics of dialogue (Bager et al., 2016) into action as it allows us to critically reflect on the consequences of dialogue designs as a basis for alteration into more appropriate and egalitarian ones

Endnotes

¹ Transcription conventions:

- [Overlapping utterances
- = Connects "latched" utterances
- (.) Indicates a pause that is less than 0.1 seconds
- (..) Indicates a pause that is less than 0.5 seconds and more than 0.1 seconds
- : Marks an extension of the sound it follows
- :: Marks a longer extension
- (?) Unclear speech
- ↑ Marks rising (upward) intonation
- underlining Indicates emphasis
- (()) Indicates editorial comments

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